

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Registration Form

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations of eligibility for individual properties or districts. See instructions in *How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form* (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If an item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories listed in the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Van Gelder Studio & Home

other names/site number Van Gelder Recording Studio

2. Location

street & number 445 Sylvan Avenue ☐ not for publication

city or town Englewood Cliffs ☐ vicinity

state New Jersey code NJ County Bergen zip code 07632

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I certify that this ☒ nomination ☐ request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property ☒ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant ☐ nationally ☐ statewide ☐ locally. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

Deputy SHPO Assistant Commissioner for Natural & Historic Resources

State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property ☐ meets ☐ does not meet the National Register criteria. ☐ See continuation sheet for additional comments.

Signature of certifying official/Title

Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that this property is:

Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

☐ entered in the National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined eligible for the
National Register.
☐ See continuation sheet.

☐ determined not eligible for the
National Register.

☐ removed from the National
Register.

☐ other, (explain:) _____

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

Van Gelder Home and Studio
Name of Property

Bergen County, New Jersey
County and State

8 Statement of Significance

Applicable National Register Criteria

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- ☐ **A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- ☒ **B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- ☐ **C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- ☐ **D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield, information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria considerations

(mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- ☐ **A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- ☐ **B** removed from its original location.
- ☐ **C** a birthplace or grave.
- ☐ **D** a cemetery.
- ☐ **E** a reconstructed building, object or structure.
- ☐ **F** a commemorative property.
- ☐ **G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years.

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References

Bibliography

(cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- ☐ preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 67) has been requested
- ☐ previously listed in the National Register
- ☐ previously determined eligible by the National Register
- ☐ designated a National Historic Landmark
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey
- ☐ recorded by Historic American Engineering

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

Performing Arts

Engineering

Period of Significance

1959-1970

Significant Dates

Significant Person

(Complete if Criterion B is marked above)

Van Gelder, Rudolph (Rudy)

Cultural Affiliation

Architect/Builder

Henken, David (designer)

Petterson, Eleanore (signing architect)

Giglio, Armand (architectural apprentice and carpenter)

Mowery Brothers (builders)

Eggert, Joseph (built isolation booths)

Primary location of additional data

- ☐ State Historic Preservation Office
- ☐ Other State agency
- ☐ Federal agency
- ☐ Local government
- ☐ University
- ☐ Other

Name of repository:

Van Gelder Studio & Home

Name of Property

Bergen County, New Jersey

County and State

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of property 1.02 Acres

Latitude / Longitude Coordinates

(Note to Preparers: NJ HPO will complete this portion of the Registration Form for all Preparers, based on the coordinates derived from the Site Map or District Map that HPO produces.)

1. Lat 40.876315 Long -73.951939

2. Lat 40.875824 Long -73.951073

3. Lat 40.875445 Long -73.951242

4. Lat 40.875848 Long -73.952062

Datum: NAD 1983 State Plane New Jersey

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet for Section 10.)

Boundary Justification Statement

(Explain, on the section sheet following the Verbal Boundary Description, how the chosen boundaries meet the requirements for boundary selection and are the most appropriate boundaries for the nominated property or district.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Jennifer Rothschild, Peggy Norris and H. Michael Gelfand, with Ashley Kahn, music historian, author, and professor at

Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, New York University, and Maureen Sickler, owner

organization Van Gelder Studio date January 2021

street & number 445 Sylvan Avenue telephone 201 567 4145

city or town Englewood Cliffs state NJ zip code 07632

Additional Documentation

(Submit the additional items with the completed form that are outlined in the "Standard Order of Presentation" that NJ HPO provides. Each page must contain the name of the nominated property or district, and the State and the county in which the property or district is located. Consult with NJ HPO if you have questions.)

Property Owner

(Either provide the name and address of the property owner here or provide the information separately to NJ HPO. Check with NJ HPO for other requirements. All owners' names and addresses must be provided, including public and non-profit owners, but their presence on the form, itself, is not required).

name Maureen Sickler

street & number 130 W. 28th Street, Second Floor telephone 212 741 1175

city or town New York state NY zip code 10001

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties and to amend existing listings. The proper completion of this form and the related requirements is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C.470 *et seq.*)

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

Direct questions regarding the proper completion of this form or questions about related matters to the Registration Section, New Jersey Historic Preservation Office, Mail code 501-04B, PO Box 420, Trenton, NJ 08625-0420.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 1

Summary

The Van Gelder Studio and Home ("VGSH"), located at 445 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey is a 2-story polygonal mixed-use commercial and residential building in a modern, Wrightian style. It was designed by David Henken and built in 1959 for audio engineer Rudy Van Gelder to serve as his professional recording studio and home. The building is constructed of custom integral-color concrete block on a concrete slab. It features a hipped asphalt-shingled roof over the square studio section and a gabled asphalt-shingled roof over the rectangular residential section, with one interior chimney. The building's deep overhanging eaves are edged with copper, and there are open trellis features constructed of cedar and lined with copper on the western and southern elevations. Two single entry doors are located on the western façade, one of which is accessed by a ramp and exterior stairs; a third entrance door is located on the southern façade under the terrace. A second story terrace services the residence on the southern elevation; under the terrace is an area originally used as a carport that now houses HVAC equipment and generators. All windows are single light and if not fixed, are casement style. The building is situated deep within the lot and is reached by a long asphalt driveway leading to the windowless northern facade. The driveway turns west into a larger parking area north of the freestanding 2-car garage. The lot is densely covered with trees and its landscape is naturalistic. There is a rear yard between the southern and eastern facades and the local road, Hudson Terrace. Rudy Van Gelder lived and recorded in this building until his death in 2016. The property was bequeathed to and is now owned by his long-time assistant, Maureen Sickler. She and her husband Don Sickler continue to operate the facility as a commercial recording studio. Very few changes have been made to the building over the years; a free-standing elevator at the southern end of the building was added in 2016 to provide wheelchair accesses the residence via the second-story terrace.

Setting

The VGSH is set on a one-acre wooded lot accessed from Sylvan Avenue (U.S. Route 9W) in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey. This highway is four lanes wide and is lined with commercial, office, and retail buildings. The VGSH building is in the northeast quarter of a level lot, set back from the highway about 150 feet and screened by trees. An asphalt driveway enters the property on the northern edge and curves into a parking area near the house. At the rear (southeasterly side) of the property lies a narrow strip of land owned by the Palisades Interstate Park Commission that separates the VGSH property from local road Hudson Terrace
(Photo 1).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetVan Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 7 Page 2

Rudy Van Gelder purchased the one-acre property from Penn Del Corporation on October 15, 1957.¹ The land had been a part of the Allison estate² and was owned by several realty and development companies before Van Gelder's purchase. Shortly after, the office building on the south side of the Van Gelder property was built, and it appears in a 1966 aerial view.³ This property (429 Sylvan Avenue) was purchased from the Penn Del Corporation by Kwasha, Lipton, & Clark, actuaries.⁴ The building they built prompted Van Gelder to add privacy screening to the south end of the terrace (Photos 4, 5, 8; Figures 8, 9, 10). To the north of the Studio at 452 Hudson Terrace (now 455 Sylvan Avenue) Volvo Imports, Inc. had built offices.⁵ Sightlines from the other end of the terrace look toward the Hudson River and were not affected by nearby development, so no privacy screening was installed there.

Location context

Englewood Cliffs is a 3.3-square-mile community of 5,400 people in Bergen County, NJ.⁶ It is bordered by Tenafly on the north, Fort Lee on the south, the Hudson River on the east, and the City of Englewood on the west. The area along the Hudson River is part of the Palisades Interstate Park and comprises a narrow strip of land at the water level and the Palisades, a 300 foot-high, nearly-perpendicular, rock cliff along the river.⁷ The developed part of Englewood Cliffs extends along the top of the palisades and slopes west toward Englewood.

Development today consists primarily of single family homes, local businesses, office buildings, and corporate campuses ranging in size from modest to the 27-acre site of LG's North American headquarters. Automobile transportation within Englewood Cliffs is dominated by two north-south routes, Sylvan Avenue (U.S. Route 9W) and the Palisades Interstate Parkway, a limited access highway. The main east-west route is Palisade Avenue, entering Englewood from Englewood Cliffs. The nearest rail station was about two miles away in Englewood (this railroad is no longer in use). The borough was incorporated in 1895 and had a population of 218 in 1900. The population grew slowly to 966 in 1950. However, between 1950 and 1960 the population more than tripled. It was the opening of the George Washington Bridge in 1931, enabling easy travel between New York City and Bergen County by car or

¹ Bergen County Deeds, Book 3901, p. 455, Bergen County Clerk's office, Hackensack, NJ.

² When William O. Allison died in 1924, he owned a large tract of undeveloped land in Englewood Cliffs.

³ 1966 aerial view of Englewood Cliffs, historicaerials.com/viewer.

⁴ Bergen County Deeds, Book 3947, page 452, Bergen County Clerk's office, Hackensack, NJ.

⁵ Advertisement for Volvo Import, Inc., *Boating*, Jan-Feb, 1960, n.p. Google Books.(retrieved from <https://books.google.com/books?id=MdlLv77FCBYC&pg=RA21-PA8&lpg=RA21-PA8&dq=452+Hudson+Terrace&source=bl&ots=AFqObXZKq4&sig=ACfU3U0JoVAcUkzz3GSqUh1VMrYK9yEsRQ&hl=en&sa=X&ved=2ahUKEwjLilfL687nAhUplXIEHa-PA3gQ6AEwBHoECAwQAQ#v=onepage&q=452%20Hudson%20Terrace&f=false>)

⁶ "Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey," Wikipedia, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Englewood_Cliffs,_New_Jersey.

⁷ "Hudson Palisades Trail Map 108" New York New Jersey Trail Conference, 2014.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 3

bus, that set the stage for this rapid development. Growth was at times delayed by the Depression, World War II, and Englewood Cliffs' resistance to development. The borough actively blocked apartment buildings and industry.⁸

When Prentice-Hall wanted to develop a 17-acre property with a large office building for distribution of books and eventually for its corporate headquarters,⁹ Englewood Cliffs saw the way they wanted to grow their community: single family homes, as well as office and corporate headquarters. In 1954, Englewood Cliffs approved a zoning ordinance that prohibited apartment buildings and increased the area for parks and streets. The area for business zones slightly increased, and several business categories were established, some of which provided for mixed use dwellings in professional or retail business areas. This was a "first step toward controlled development."¹⁰ Areas along Sylvan Avenue that had previously been zoned residential thereafter permitted business use.

The Van Gelder Studio & Home was built during this decade of rapid growth between 1950 and 1960. As single-family residential housing was being built for new residents, business development began on Sylvan Avenue. The Van Gelder Recording Studio was one of the first businesses established north of Prentice Hall and south of Palisade Avenue. Aerial photographs taken in 1954 show Sylvan Avenue mostly undeveloped.¹¹ The current aerial view of VGSH, taken via drone by photographer William Neumann in February 2019, shows its one-acre lot as a heavily-wooded, natural space that sharply contrasts with the developed commercial lots surrounding it (Photo 1). The property's integrity is more fully addressed below.

PROPERTY DESCRIPTION

Introduction

The footprint of this 2-story, polygonal building consists of a square intersected by a rectangular. The rectangle (32' x 36.31') intersects the corner of the 50.65' square so that the axis of the building is the diagonal of the square and the line bisecting the rectangle on its long axis (Figures 1, 2, 3). The square component contains the studio/performance space. The lower level of the rectangular area comprises the control room for the recording studio and space for utilities, storage, half bathroom, workbench space, and a laundry area. The upper level of the rectangular area is the living space. The total area of the building is 4700 square feet with 75% studio space and 25% dwelling space.¹² The walls are constructed

⁸ James Greco. *The Story of Englewood Cliffs*. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Englewood Cliffs Tercentenary Committee, 1964).

⁹ "Publishers Get Option on Acreage in New Jersey," *New York Times*, Mar 18, 1951, R1.

¹⁰ Greco, p. 145.

¹¹ 1954 aerial view of Englewood Cliffs, historicaerials.com/viewer.

¹² "Summary Report" (Tax Assessor), dated 4/26/96. Englewood Cliffs Building Department.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 4

of integral color concrete blocks and the roof is covered with russet red colored asphalt shingles (Photos 2, 4, 6). The outdoor cedar fascia boards and trellis elements are topped with a copper drip cap (Photos 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7).

Studio and Home: Exterior Description

Walls

The walls are constructed of custom-designed, integral color hollow lightweight concrete masonry units (blocks) in a burnt sienna hue, measuring 15 5/8" wide, 7 5/8" high and 7.5" deep set in a running bond pattern interrupted by a stretcher course of shallower blocks every eight courses. The stretcher course blocks are of the same width and depth as the larger blocks but are 3.4" high. The horizontal mortar joints are raked 1/2" deep, and the vertical joints are flush and are tinted to match the block. (Photos 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8)

Roof

There are both hipped and gabled roofs on the building (Photos 2, 5, 6; Figures 4, 5, 8, 10, 11). The hipped roof over the studio has 4-foot deep eaves on the northwest, northeast, and westernmost portion of the west sides (Photos 2, 3, 5, 6). There is a 5'9" deep open trellis over a portion of the western façade (Photos 2, 3, 4, 5). A gabled roof with 4' deep eaves covers the two-story portion of the building (Photos 2, 4, 5). The roofs are covered with asphalt architectural shingles in a russet red tone (Photos 2, 4, 6). A chimney penetrating the roof over the living area is composed of concrete blocks; it is painted gray and has copper flashing (Photo 2). There are four vents and one plumbing stack on the western side of the hip roof. (Photo 2).

Northwest Elevation

This is the first sight of the building one has when entering the property from the road, and it features a concrete block wall (block described above) with no fenestration and a four-foot deep overhanging eave (Photo 2; Figure 11). Security cameras and spotlights are situated in the corners under the eaves (Photos 2, 6).

West Elevation

On this side of the building there are two commercial steel single doors (replacements for the original solid wood doors) that are set flush with the walls under the overhanging eaves (Photo 2). The main studio entrance door at ground level features a band of four transom single light windows of various heights (Photo 2). The other entrance on this facade one single light transom window. It is accessed by a seven-step staircase from the north and a 22-foot ramp from the south (Photos 2, 3). This door opens to an interior landing with sets of stairs leading up to the living area and down into the studio (Photo 16).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 7 Page 5

The ramp and landing are faced with the same block as the walls. The landing is topped by a varnished cedar railing (Photo 2; Figure 9). Over this landing and ramp is a 13' 2" deep 30' long overhang (7'5" deep) with a cedar trellis (5'9" deep); it consists of three pairs of rafters, each pair being 2' apart with 6' between sets (Photos 2, 3, 4, 5). The wooden elements of the trellis are topped with a copper drip cap (Photos 2, 3, 4). Underneath the eave is a horizontal band of six narrow and three wide single light windows barely visible from outside but which provide light to the interior through the open trellis.

South Elevation

The south facade features a gabled roof with a floor-to-ceiling picture window wall on the second floor (Photo 7; Figures 4, 8, 10). A single wood-framed glass door in the window wall opens out to a poured concrete terrace with concrete block planters at either end (Photos 7, 8). A dramatic cedar trellis extends thirteen feet from the gable end of the roofline, creating a pyramidal shape; a copper drip cap covers the cedar rafters of this trellis (Photos, 5, 7; Figures 4, 8, 10). The original plan shows a carport under the cantilevered terrace (Figure 8). Due to water leakage and structural problems, this space was no longer used as a carport by the mid-1960s (Figure 10). Iron support columns were added in the late 1980s (Photos 4, 5). Horizontal, louvered wooden panels were added in the early 1960s to the western terrace wall to provide privacy from the adjacent commercial building that had recently been built. (Photos 4, 5, 8; Figures 8, 9, 10). The original solid wood entrance door under the terrace has a single light transom window (Photo 5).

East Elevation

The eastern facade shows the intersection of the square recording studio space and the rectangular living/utility space, and it provides a view of the terrace and its overhanging trellis (Figures 5, 8). The second floor living area has a continuous horizontal band of 3' 7" high wood framed single light windows (most are fixed; 2 are casement) under the 4-foot eave the length of the living area (Figures 5, 8). One 6' section has been filled with the same mahogany boards used for other siding above the masonry. The window openings alternate between 2' and 6' widths reflecting the framing; there is also a 3' 4" high horizontal band of five single light windows (3 fixed; 2 casement) at ground level which provides light to the control room (Figures 5, 8). This band of windows abuts the vertical band of five single light windows at the intersection of the studio space and control room. A 3' X 1' aluminum ventilation panel is situated above and to the south of the horizontal window band. The studio extends at a 135° angle to the right, and the intersection of the gable and the hipped roof can be clearly seen (Figure 5). A conduit pipe for the electric service is visible at the ground level.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 6

Northeast Elevation

The Northeast Facade, like the northwest facade, has no window or door openings. Utility meters are attached to this wall where electrical and gas service enters the building; security cameras and spotlights are also situated on this wall. (Photo 6).

Studio & Home: Interior Description

Studio

The recording studio performance space ("live room") features Wrightian Cherokee red integral color poured concrete floors laid out in 4' X 4' scored squares (Photos 16, 17, 18, 19). The walls are constructed of custom designed hollow integral color concrete block; the interior block is the reverse side of the block on the exterior walls (Photos 16, 17, 18, 21; Figures 13, 14). The ceiling is composed of tongue-and-groove cedar planks. The rafters are exposed in the four triangular sections formed by the arches under the hipped roof, which features a 30-foot apex (Photos 16, 17, 18, 19, 20, 21).

The ceiling is supported by four laminated Douglas fir arches (Photos 20, 21; Figure 7). Along the top of the masonry wall, between the exposed secondary framing members, there are perimeter lights directed upward toward the cedar plank ceiling (Photos 16, 17, 18, 19, 20; Figure 13). Functional drop lights from the ceiling were added later (date unknown) (Photos 16, 17, 19).

At the southerly end of the live room is an interior wall that separates the performing space from the control booth (Photos 16, 19). Outside the westerly end of the control room there is a hallway leading to a half-bathroom and utility area, and there is a set of stairs leading up to a landing that opens onto the exterior ramp; from the landing, there is a stringer of 2" X 14" mahogany steps leading up to the second story residence (Photo 16). The control room wall is constructed of the same custom integral-color concrete block as the exterior walls. This wall is interrupted by a ribbon of seven fixed wood framed double-paned glass windows, six measuring 40" X 36" and one measuring 17" X 36". The windows are topped by rectangular Philippine mahogany panels, then a steel beam, then more concrete block, then Philippine mahogany clapboard panels to the apex, with four rectangular aluminum air conditioning vents and one aluminum grilled air conditioning return panel in the mahogany wall near the apex (Photos 16, 19).

Isolation booths

In response to changing recording technology, four isolation booths were added ca. 1970 on the periphery of the studio to enable musicians to be recorded individually; a fifth, the piano booth, was

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 7

added in the 1990s.¹³ Two of these booths are located along the northeasterly wall, two on the northwesterly wall, one of which is large enough for a grand piano, and one on the western wall by the entrance. The isolation booths were built by local carpenter Joseph Eggert. All booths are freestanding and each, with the exception of the drum booth, have exterior staircases to access their roofs (which are utilized for storage). The vocal booth has fencing around the top constructed out of wooden shutters that were formerly used on the windows in the residence area of the building. All isolation booths have fixed single light, double-paned lucite windows which enable the musicians to see one another. Some of the windows are easily removable to allow for the moving and positioning of musical equipment. Each window is a unique size. The booths are accessed by single and double solid wood doors with windows (Photos 16, 17, 18, 19).

The **Percussion Booth**, built ca. 1970, is situated next to the studio entrance door and measures 97" from edge to edge on the front, 121" from front to back, and is 98" high (excluding trim). The south side has a single solid wood door with a 21" X 31" lucite window and a separate 42" X 31" Lucite window that is 36" from the floor; the east side has two windows measuring 52" X 30" that are situated 36" from the floor. The floor is covered with brown cut pile carpeting, and the walls are covered in orange shag carpeting; the ceiling is covered with white acoustical tiles. Track lighting illuminates this booth (Photos 16, 19)

The **Piano Booth**, built ca. 1990, is situated along the northwesterly wall and measures 14.5' wide, 10' from front to back and is 96" high (excluding trim). The west side has a wood-framed double-paned lucite door measuring 38" X 84" and two floor-to-ceiling fixed double-paned lucite windows measuring 28" X 76." This booth shares a common wall with the bass booth to the northeast, and there are two fixed double-paned lucite windows measuring 48" X 28" on this common wall and four fixed double-paned lucite floor-to-ceiling panels measuring 36" X 32" on the wall that faces the studio. The fixed lucite windows into the bass booth are removable, as are the lucite panels facing the studio's live room. The floor is the poured concrete studio floor that is partially covered with an area rug; the ceiling is covered with white acoustical tiles. Track lighting illuminates this booth (Photos 17, 18).

The **Bass Booth**, built ca. 1970, is situated along the northwesterly wall and measures 8' wide, 10' from front to back and is 8' high (excluding trim). It shares a common exterior wall with the piano booth as described above. There is a single solid-wood door with a 23" X 31" lucite panel and one 27" X 30" fixed lucite window on the studio-facing wall. The floor is covered with brown cut pile carpeting, and the walls

¹³ Maureen and Don Sickler, Interviewed by Jennifer Rothschild, Peggy Norris, and H. Michael Gelfand, various dates 2017-2020, Englewood Cliffs; William Clark and Jim Cogan. *Temples of Sound: Inside the Great Recording Studios*. (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2003), pgs. 205-206.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 8

are covered with orange shag carpeting; the ceiling is covered with white acoustical tiles. Track lighting illuminates this booth (Photos 17, 18).

The **Drum Booth**, built ca. 1970, is situated along the northeasterly wall and measures 8' wide, 10' from front to back and is 8' high (excluding trim). There is a single solid wood door with a 23" X 30" lucite panel on the south side of the booth facing the vocal booth. There are two removable wood-framed double-paned lucite windows (26" X 28" and 48" X 28") on the front facing the studio and two similar windows (29.5" X 30" and 26" X 30") on the north side facing the bass booth. The floor is covered with unfinished plywood panels, and the walls are covered with orange shag carpeting; the ceiling is covered with white acoustical tile. Track lighting illuminates this booth. (Photo 18).

The **Vocal Booth**, built ca. 1970, is situated along the northeasterly wall and measures 8' X 8' X 10' and is 8' high (excluding fencing and trim). It has one solid wood door with a 23" X 30" lucite window. There is a double-paned lucite window measuring 26" X 30" facing the drum booth. and two double-paned lucite windows measuring 31" X 48" facing the studio. The floor is covered in brown cut pile carpeting, and the walls are covered in orange shag carpeting; the ceiling is covered with white acoustical tiles. Track lighting and fluorescent lighting illuminate this booth. (Photo 17).

Control Room

The control room, located in the rectangular portion of the building, sits underneath the residence and behind the interior window wall facing the live room. The control room contains the engineering equipment (Photos 16, 19, 22). On the wall separating the control room from the live room, there is a ribbon of seven fixed wood framed double-paned glass windows, six measuring 40" X 36" and one measuring 17" X 36". Through these windows the engineer can observe the artists and the microphone placement. On the exterior wall (southeast elevation), there is a band of five wood-framed single-light windows; the first and third measure 21" X 36" each and contain replacement aluminum-framed casement window inserts. Of the remaining windows, there is one 21" X 36" fixed window, one 43.5" X 36" fixed window and one fixed corner window measuring 20" X 36" adjacent to the first window of the vertical band of windows that measure 22" X 36" each.

Utility Area

Immediately behind the control room is a narrow workbench area (Photo 24). Behind the control room and workbench area there is space for laundry machines, HVAC equipment and storage.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 9

Bathroom

A 72" X 80" interior half-bathroom with a ceiling height of 81" contains a toilet and single ceramic sink in a red ceramic-tiled countertop. This bathroom is in the hallway leading from the studio space to the rear of the building. The walls and ceiling in this room are clad in oiled Philippine mahogany.

INTERIOR: Second Floor

Residence

The entire upper level of the rectangular portion of the building is the residence (Figures 1, 3). It is reached by a stringer of 2" X 14" mahogany steps leading up from the studio, which can also be accessed via the exterior door off the landing on the west façade (Photos 2, 16), followed by a stringer of 2" X 12" fir steps. The modern-design handrail is composed of Philippine mahogany (Photo 16). The residence is divided into two 21' x 31' areas. The southerly half of the residence includes the living/dining area and a galley kitchen that is 7' 5" wide and 17' long (Photos 9, 10, 11, 12). The northerly half (18' X 32') contains two bedrooms, two baths, and a short hall with storage (Photos 13, 14, 15).

There is a floor-to-ceiling picture window wall (southern exposure) in the living area composed of wood-framed single light fixed windows of varying sizes (Photos 7, 10; Figures 4, 5, 8, 10). The outdoor terrace off the living area, accessed by a single wood-framed glass door, is 31.5' long and 9' wide (Photos 7, 8). Concrete block planters (measuring 27" X 40" X 14") at either end of the terrace appear to span from inside-out (Photos 7, 8). There is a large floating brick fireplace situated in the center of the living area constructed of sand-colored, textured brick (Photo 9). Attached to the fireplace is a room divider/shelving unit that separates the kitchen from the living area (Photos 9, 10). This unit also provides a laminate countertop surface in the kitchen as well as storage space (Photo 11). Like Wright, Henken designed custom furniture at the time of construction of the VGSH. This furniture, comprising kitchen cabinets, bookshelves, benches, and storage units was built by Henken's apprentice, Armand Giglio (Photos 9, 10, 11, 12, 13).¹⁴

The other half of the living quarters consists of a two-bedroom sleeping wing that is organized around a core of two stacked bathrooms (Photos 13, 14, 15). The master bathroom contains a custom concrete tub in the same red color as the poured concrete floors (Photo 15). The walls and ceilings are clad with in Philippine mahogany panels. Continuous bands of wood-framed single-light windows on the east and west walls offer light and views of the surrounding trees. Most of these windows are fixed, but two are casement. Access to the attic is via a pull-down ladder located in the ceiling of the guest bedroom. The attic measures 7' in height at the apex and is used for storage.

¹⁴Armand Giglio. Interview by Jennifer Rothschild, Don and Maureen Sickler, Brewster, NY, November 10, 2018. Audio recording and transcript, Van Gelder Studio Archive.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 10

Detached Garage

The detached garage on the southwest side of the property was added in the early 1960s as a single-car garage and was expanded to a two-car garage in 1973¹⁵ (Photo 4). No architectural drawings of the garage have been located; it is unlikely that this garage was designed by David Henken. The permit for the garage expansion notes the carpenter's name as "Joseph Eggert;" there is nothing in the building department files regarding the original garage.¹⁶ The garage is composed of the same custom integral color lightweight hollow concrete block as were used on the principal building, but there are no stretcher courses of blocks; the vertical mortar joints are flush, but none of the mortar joints are tinted (as they are on the principal building). The garage measures 10.7' in height at the gable end; it is 22' wide with a single vehicle door painted dark brown and measuring 16' wide. The solid wood side door measures 3' wide. The garage length is 21'. The roof is covered with asphalt architectural shingles that match those on the principal building. In June 2020, the garage roof was repaired where damaged and new russet red asphalt architectural shingles were installed to match what had been in place and those on the principal structure.

Integrity

The overall integrity of the Van Gelder Studio and Home is high. The setting within the one-acre lot is largely unchanged in that the lot is heavily wooded and naturalistic in style. (Photos 1, 2, 4, 5, 6). A small grass-covered area within the woods is still evident; it appears in a 1965 photograph that features John Coltrane (Figure 12).

Modifications to the original plan of the building include the early addition (ca. 1960) of privacy screening composed of cedar slats at the southern end of the terrace (Photos 4, 5, 8; Figures 8, 9, 10). A structural steel beam and supports beneath the edge of the cantilevered terrace were added after 1986 (Photos 4, 5). Below the terrace, a generator and HVAC equipment have been housed; the space was not used as a carport since approximately the early 1960s. Several changes to the terrace railing have occurred throughout the years (Photo 5; Figures 4, 8, 10). An exterior elevator was added in 2016 that opens onto the terrace to provide wheelchair access to the second floor living area (Photo 5); a section of the terrace railing was removed to accommodate the elevator (Photo 5). Roof shingles were replaced over time with similarly-colored asphalt shingles. The chimney was rebuilt using standard unstained gray concrete blocks; the original chimney had been built with the same custom integral-color concrete blocks that were used on the rest of the building. Skylights that were once located over the galley kitchen

¹⁵Application for Erection of Small Structures, Minor Alterations, Garages, and Repairs, Borough of Englewood Cliffs, NJ for "garage addition" for Dr. R. Van Gelder, 445 Sylvan Avenue, dated 7/6/73. Englewood Cliffs Building Department.

¹⁶ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio & Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 7 Page 11

were removed due to water infiltration and that open area was closed and covered by roofing materials (Figure 10). The freestanding garage was added in the early 1960s and expanded in 1973 (Photo 4).

In the interior, changes to the studio space include the addition of the isolation booths in 1970 and 1990 (Photos 16, 17, 18, 19, 20; contrast with Figure 13), and the removal of a built-in concrete block plant box that was once situated in the control room. The plant box was removed to accommodate more recording equipment.

After Rudy Van Gelder began using a wheelchair, many accommodations (in addition to the elevator) were made in the residence: hand rails were installed in various places, the kitchen counter was shortened to allow for space to maneuver, the door to the guest bedroom as well as the door between the guest bedroom and the master bedroom were removed. The original doors have been kept in storage at VGSH, and the owners are currently in the process of re-installing them, as well as removing the hand rails throughout the studio and home.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 1

Statement of Significance Summary Paragraph

The Van Gelder Studio and Home ("VGSH") is being nominated to the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places under Criterion B in the areas of performing arts and engineering and to the New Jersey Register of Historic Places under Criterion C for architecture. It is historically significant under these criteria as an individual listing. The interior as well as the exterior are significant. The VGSH is eligible under Criterion B for its association with renowned audio engineer Rudy Van Gelder (1924-2016) in the categories of performing arts and engineering. The Van Gelder Studio is among the most influential musical spaces in the world. It was the location where an extensive roster of internationally acclaimed jazz musicians recorded during the period from 1959 to 1970 for labels such as Blue Note, Impulse, Verve, CTI and others. The VGSH is also eligible under Criterion C for architectural significance as a modern, Wrightian structure designed by David Henken, a Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice who is well known for his role in the establishment of Usonia, New York. The VGSH was built primarily for use as a recording studio, with a modest residence on the second storey of the building; thus the name is "Studio and Home" rather than the more customary sequence "Home and Studio."

Period of Significance

The Van Gelder Studio and Home was completed in 1959. The engineering of significant works of jazz recordings commenced in July 1959, and recording sessions continued in this studio for the next fifty-six years. Although Van Gelder had done significant recordings at the studio he created in his parents' home in Hackensack, New Jersey, he had stopped recording there once the Englewood Cliffs studio was built. He lived in and recorded at the VGSH in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, from 1959 until his death in 2016, but the most celebrated period of jazz recording there was from 1959 to 1970. Therefore, the period of significance for VGSH under Criterion B is 1959-1970 and the period of significance under Criterion C is the date of completion, 1959.

Statement of Significance under Criterion B

Summary

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 2

The Van Gelder Studio and Home is historically significant under National Register Criterion B in the field of performing arts and engineering for its association with Rudy Van Gelder, who was recognized in the industry throughout his career as a leader in the field of audio recording. He received numerous awards and citations for his work, including the National Endowment for the Arts “Jazz Master” award in 2009. Renowned jazz musicians of the 1950s to 1970s did their recordings at the Van Gelder Studio on thousands of albums, some of which received critical acclaim including Gold Record status¹, and recording continued at this site throughout the following five decades.

Van Gelder had already achieved industry acclaim for musical recordings at his first studio in his parents’ home in Hackensack, New Jersey. Some of the most celebrated names in jazz recorded there, including Miles Davis and Thelonious Monk. This Hackensack house was demolished in the 1980s. Van Gelder and his wife lived in apartment in New York City briefly during the 1950s, but he never recorded there. He lived and recorded at the Van Gelder Studio and Home in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, from 1959 until his death in 2016. Thus, the VGSH property is the only extant property associated with Van Gelder’s productive professional life and is the property at which he lived the longest and made the largest number of significant recordings.

Artists who recorded at the Van Gelder Studio in Englewood Cliffs number in the hundreds. Pulling just some of the best-known names from a lengthy discography one finds: John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, Duke Ellington, Gil Evans, Art Blakey, Hank Mobley, Wayne Shorter, Bill Evans, Stan Getz, Etta Jones, Ron Carter and countless others. The discography of the artists who recorded at the Van Gelder Studio is deep and influential. In addition to John Coltrane’s “*A Love Supreme*” are major works by Herbie Hancock (“*Maiden Voyage*”), Eric Dolphy (“*Out to Lunch*”), Freddie Hubbard (“*Red Clay*”), and Wayne Shorter (“*Speak No Evil*”).

Biography: Rudolph Leon Van Gelder (1924-2016)

¹Recording Industry Association of America, www.riaa.com/gold-platinum/

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 3

Rudolph Leon ("Rudy") Van Gelder was born on November 2, 1924, at Christ Hospital in Jersey City, New Jersey.² He was the son of Louis Van Gelder and Sarah Cohen of 376 Thompson Street in Hackensack. Louis was born in 1895 in the Netherlands and came to the United States as a child. He had various occupations, including jewelry engraver, owner of a leather goods store, and owner of Henrietta Corset Shop in Passaic, New Jersey. Sarah Cohen, Rudy's mother, was born about 1902 in New York State. She and Louis married about 1923 and lived in Hackensack, New Jersey. She worked at the Henrietta Corset Shop with Louis. They had one other child, Leon, born May 15, 1929. The two boys were named after twin uncles who were musicians. Sarah died in 1981 and Louis in 1985.³

On June 5, 1955, Rudy married Elva Meyerovich (known as Elva Myrow) in Hackensack at his parent's home. She was a pianist who was born in Youngstown, Ohio, on September 26, 1917.⁴ For a time the couple lived in Elva's apartment in New York City. Later, they moved to an apartment in Hackensack near his parents' home and his studio at 25 Prospect Street. In 1959, they moved to their new home in the Englewood Cliffs studio building (VGHS). After Elva's death in 1979, Rudy established a piano scholarship in memory of Elva at the Manhattan School of Music.⁵

In 1982 Rudy married Janet Ruth Herrmann, who was born in New York City in 1937. She was an avid gardener and naturalist, belonging to the Demarest Garden Club, Palisades Nature Association, and the

² Birth Certificate of Rudolph Leon Van Gelder. Van Gelder Studio Archives, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

³ "World War II Draft Cards (4th Registration)," digital image, *Ancestry* (ancestry.com). Louis Van Gelder; citing *Records of the Selective Service System, Record Group Number 147. National Archives and Records Administration.*, 004135883 (image 1465 of 6032). Louis Van Gelder: obituary" Record (Hackensack) Sep 17, 1985.

³ 1940 U.S. Census, population schedule, Hackensack, Bergen, New Jersey, enumeration district (ED) 2-155, 16A (image 31 of 38), household 283, Louis Van Gelder. 1930 Federal Census, population schedule, Hackensack, Bergen, New Jersey, enumeration district (ED) 111, 14A, household 346, Louis Van Gelder. 1920 Federal Census, population schedule, Ward 12, Jersey City, Hudson, New Jersey, enumeration district (ED) 263, 3B (image 6 of 29), household 73, Harry Van Gelder. Digital images, *Ancestry* (ancestry.com).

⁴ New Jersey "Marriage Index, 1901-2016," Rudolph[h] Vangelder and Elva Meyerovich, Jun 1955, Hackensack, Bergen, New Jersey, cert 14328; "Dr. Van Gelder is Married to New York Girl," *Record* (Hackensack) June 7, 1955, 14.

⁵ Classified ad, *New York Times*, June 17, 1979, D24.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 4

Bergen County Audubon Society. Janet died in 2002.⁶ The Demarest Garden Club established the Bird Center in Davies Arboretum in her memory.⁷

Rudy Van Gelder never had children; he predeceased his brother, Leon, on August 25, 2016, in his home above the recording studio in Englewood Cliffs. He is buried in George Washington Memorial Park in Paramus, New Jersey.⁸

Van Gelder's Early Interest in Music and Sound Recording

Rudy played the trumpet in high school and was an avid collector of 78 rpm records. As a teenager, he showed enthusiasm for music and ham radio, which led him to develop a curiosity about audio recording, including microphones and basic recording technology. He had an affection for a wide variety of music including jazz, classical, and popular music, and he had an innate sense of recorded sound and musical performance that was further honed through listening to late-night radio and attending live concert and club performances.⁹

Van Gelder's parents suggested that Rudy pursue a professional path, and he chose to study optometry. On May 28, 1946, he received his Doctor of Optometry from Pennsylvania State College of Optometry in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania.¹⁰ After graduating, he set up an optometry practice in Teaneck, New Jersey.¹¹

Van Gelder pursued his passion for recording music in his parents' home. As a teenager, Rudy bought a Rek-O-Kut 78 rpm recorder to record jams with neighborhood musicians. In 1944 Louis Van Gelder

⁶ New Jersey "Marriage Index, 1901-2016," *Ancestry.com*, Rudolph Vangelder to Janet R. Herrmann, May, 1982, Tenaflly, Bergen, NJ, cert 13628; "Find A Grave," database, (*findagrave.com*), Janet Ruth Van Gelder died 2002, buried George Washington Memorial Park, Paramus, Bergen, New Jersey; Memorial ID 195721114.

⁷ "Demarest," *Record* (Hackensack), September 24, 1997, 21; "Demarest," *Record* (Hackensack), February 3, 1999, 65; "Demarest," *Record* (Hackensack), December 4, 2007, L8.

⁸ "Find A Grave," database, *findagrave.com*. 195721098; "Bergen Native Rudy Van Gelder, Sound Man for Jazz Legends, Dies," *Record* (Hackensack), A1, 26 August 2016; *America's Genealogy Bank (NewBank)*.

⁹ Skea, 54-76.

¹⁰ "Completes Optometry" *Bergen Evening Record*, 8 June 1946, 3.

¹¹ Skea, 57.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 5

bought two adjacent lots in Hackensack, at the corner of Thompson and Prospect Streets. On September 27, 1945, the Van Gelders started building their new home at that new address, 25 Prospect Avenue, where Rudy began recording musicians commercially. The house was an Art Moderne, U-shaped building. Supporting their son's penchant for sound recording, Louis and Sarah allowed Rudy to design the living room with the idea of having it also serve as a recording studio. The room had its own outside entrance (to keep public and private areas separate), a small control room with an interior window, and double-paned exterior windows to dampen extraneous noises.¹² Over the next few years, while still living with his parents, Van Gelder began investing in more sophisticated recording equipment, which allowed him to make more professional recordings in the living room studio.¹³

Van Gelder's Growing Reputation in the Industry

Word of Rudy's recording expertise in the 25 Prospect Avenue living room spread among musicians. Many independent musicians, not affiliated with record companies, took advantage of his services to make recordings. One single, Joe Mooney's "We'll Be Together Again," became the theme song of disc jockey Al "Jazzbo" Collins' WNEW radio show, "Collins on a Cloud."¹⁴ The record became quite popular. "[Collins] just loved that record, and he was on from, I think, four to six on WNEW every day."¹⁵

Because of this daily radio play, Van Gelder's "phone started to ring, and kept ringing."¹⁶ He began receiving more requests for recording sessions. In 1952, Van Gelder recorded baritone saxophonist Gil Mellé for a small startup label, Triumph Records. Mellé remembered:

We were one of the only ones that knew about Rudy Van Gelder. Believe me, he was unknown in the business. [Yet] all the stuff he had was stuff the world had never seen before: the microphones, the kind of reverb units he had. He had an Ampex, a type 300 monaural tape recorder. We recorded the

¹² Clark and Cogan, 195.

¹³ "Interview: Rudy Van Gelder (Part 3)", Marc Myers, *JazzWax* (blog) <https://www.jazzwax.com/2012/02/interview-rudy-van-gelder-part-3.html>, February 15, 2012.

¹⁴ Clark and Cogan, 195.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 6

whole date on tape and it was beautiful, the quality and the editing capabilities. Rudy always had the touch; not the friendliest guy in the world, but man, he sure knew what he was doing.¹⁷

Mellé later licensed his music to the Blue Note Records label. Alfred Lion, Blue Note's label head, discovered that he liked Van Gelder's recorded sound better than the sound out of the studio he had been using in New York City, so he decided to bring his sessions to Hackensack.¹⁸ Soon other labels like Prestige began to hear the difference in Blue Note releases and called on Van Gelder to schedule recording sessions.

For the next four years, Van Gelder was pursued more and more, as record producers and musicians discovered that they also liked his sound, his professionalism, and his competitive pricing. It was not far to get to Hackensack from midtown Manhattan or Harlem; the studio was only about a twenty-minute drive by way of the George Washington Bridge.

Van Gelder was also popular because he served as a one-stop shop: he would take the tapes from a recording and cut the master acetates on a Scully lathe in his studio. These acetates were then used to create stampers at the vinyl pressing plants where the albums would be made. Since the same trusted and talented set of ears both engineered the original session and manufactured the master acetate, the labels that contracted with Van Gelder did not have to worry about the master conforming to the sound of the session. To this day, vinyl collectors search out albums on Blue Note, Prestige, and other jazz labels that bear Van Gelder's handwritten initials or an "RVG" stamp on the vinyl itself, indicating that the stamper originated from a Van Gelder acetate.¹⁹

¹⁷ Gil Mellé (jazz musician, film scorer, and artist), interviewed by Carlos Kase, 2003, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

¹⁸ Richard Cook, *Blue Note Records: The Biography* (Boston: Justin, Charles & Co., 2001), 52-53; 67-68.

¹⁹ "Blue Note Vinyl: Van Gelder's Stamp", *London Jazz Collector* (blog), February 6, 2019. Retrieved from: <https://londonjazzcollector.wordpress.com/record-labels-guide/labelography-2/van-gelder-stamp/>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 7

Because the Hackensack studio was in a suburban family home, Van Gelder generally avoided nighttime recording.²⁰ By 1957 he was getting so much repeat business from labels like Blue Note, ABC, Prestige, and Vox that he decided to set aside one day of the week for each of them.²¹ The records he made with the reigning giants of modern jazz, such as Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, J. J. Johnson, and John Coltrane, began to reach a global audience, and his parents' living room earned an international reputation. Iconic mid-session photographs were taken there by Francis Wolff, Blue Note Records' art director.²² As Van Gelder recalled, these comfortable confines led to growing pains. By 1957 it was clear that it was time to move. Van Gelder said, "The pressure was on me to record into the evening, then into the late evening, more days per week, and of course, my parents were living there. There was also pressure on me to record larger groups . . . That was getting to be too much. So I had to get out of there."²³

The Need for a new Studio

Van Gelder located a lot in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, adjacent to the Palisades Interstate Parkway. This location was a quick ten-minute drive from Hackensack and a twenty-minute drive from midtown Manhattan. Van Gelder researched and helped design the building that would feature a large recording studio as well as living quarters for Rudy and his wife, Elva. After attending an exhibit of Frank Lloyd Wright's architecture at the Museum of Modern Art, they decided to pursue a Wrightian design for the new building. They chose designer David Henken, a former Frank Lloyd Wright apprentice, to create a design in "keeping with the master's latter-period, low-slung, concrete-block style" (modified to the needs of a recording studio) and true to the Usonian ideal of integrating buildings into their natural setting.²⁴

²⁰ Clark and Cogan, 199.

²¹ James Rozzi, "Bob Weinstock: The Man Behind Prestige Records," *Audio*, August 1994.

²² Michael Cucsuna. *The Blue Note Years: The Jazz Photography of Francis Wolff*. New York: Rizzoli, 1995.

²³ Phil Coady, interview with Rudy Van Gelder, 1995, for enhanced CD *The Ultimate Blue Train*, CDP 7243-8-53428-0-6, 1997.

²⁴ Clark and Cogan, 202.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 8

After Van Gelder purchased the land in Englewood Cliffs and chose Henken as the designer of the studio and home,²⁵ Henken produced preliminary architectural drawings dated February 17, 1958. Henken made further site maps and drawings on April 15 and July 17, 1957.²⁶ The process of readying the lot, building the foundation, ordering and setting the custom masonry blocks and massive wooden beams took less than eighteen months; the building was finished early in the summer of 1959. During the construction process, Van Gelder continued to engineer sessions in Hackensack, perform eye exams at his office in Teaneck, New Jersey and also supervise the progress of his new home and studio in Englewood Cliffs.²⁷

In mid-summer 1959, Van Gelder moved his recording operations into the new facilities, and he and Elva moved into their new home above the studio. Once settled in, Van Gelder ceased recording at his parents' home in Hackensack. In early July 1959, he made his first recording at the new Englewood Cliffs studio, the West Point Cadet Glee Club, in a session that yielded the Vox album *The Cadet Glee Club, West Point Sings "Army Blue."*²⁸ On July 20, 1959, he engineered three tracks by the tenor saxophonist Ike Quebec for Blue Note Records, marking the first jazz recordings to take place in the new facility.²⁹ Unhindered by the constraints that he had experienced in Hackensack, Van Gelder accelerated his work pace. He began to record from morning through evening and into the night, every day of the week.

Compared to the living room studio in Hackensack, the new performance space was voluminous. Van Gelder specified that the floor space of the studio be capable of accommodating Duke Ellington's orchestra, which at that time could be as many as 17 performers.³⁰ On the southwest wall inside the studio, Van Gelder situated the control room, enclosing enough space behind large glass panels for a full

²⁵ Agreement dated December 27, 1957 between Rudy and Elva Van Gelder and David Henken. Englewood Cliffs, Van Gelder Studio Archive.

²⁶ Plans and drawings, Van Gelder Studio Archive.

²⁷ Clark and Cogan, 202.

²⁸ Records and calendar entries, Van Gelder Studio Archive. VGS recorded other genres besides jazz, including classical music, polka and the recorded word.

²⁹ The JAZZ Discography Online. <https://lordisco.com/> (access to this information requires a paid subscription.)

³⁰ Rudy Van Gelder. Interview by H. Michael Gelfand, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, July 27, 2016. Ellington's 1958 album, "Sweet Thunder," had 15 performers and his 1956 album, "A Drum is a Woman," had 17.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 9

bank of recording equipment and affording himself the capacity to see the entire recording space. To create a comfortable ambience, he chose lighting fixtures that projected a warm glow upwards, and he had custom-made benches placed along the walls.

Upon entering the studio door from the driveway, visitors would be impressed by a vaulted, reverberant, cathedral-like space. Because of the soaring ceiling and exposed masonry block walls, many musicians and producers remarked that the studio radiated the feeling of a modern church. Van Gelder, speaking years later about the album *A Love Supreme*, John Coltrane's legendary foray into spiritual jazz that was recorded in his Englewood Cliffs studio in 1964, remarked:

While I was building the new studio, the neighborhood had no idea what kind of structure it was. As it came together, everyone assumed it was going to be a church with a peak in the center of the room. The look and feel was very church-like... as I look back and realize where [Coltrane's] music was going, I can see his music had a spiritual quality, which matched perfectly with the atmosphere of the new studio.³¹

The Van Gelder Recording Studio is often characterized as "the cathedral of jazz." Herbie Hancock describes it in his 2014 autobiography *Possibilities*:

Most studios had flat ceilings, but Rudy's had a cathedral-like spiral ceiling. Not only were the acoustics amazing, but the space was designed so that the musicians could play in a semicircle, without having to be in separate rooms or having high baffles between them. That unique design made it possible for the musicians to hear each other and for Rudy to control each musician's

³¹ Tom Wilk, "50 Years Ago, John Coltrane Recorded *a Love Supreme* in Englewood Cliffs", Inside Jersey, November 24, 2014. (retrieved from: https://www.nj.com/insidejersey/2014/11/50_years_ago_john_coltrane_recorded_a_love_supreme_in_englewood_cliffs.html).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 10

recording in the mix even though we were all in one room . . . I ended up doing a lot of records with Rudy, and he became like family.³²

On a visit to VGSH in February 2019, Hancock mused about the time he had spent there. When asked how the Van Gelder Studio compared to other recording studios, Hancock exclaimed "It was *the* place!"³³

The Age of High-Fidelity Recording

Van Gelder's evolution from hobbyist in the mid-1940s to a leader in the field of audio recording in the mid-1950s parallels the growth of the recording industry itself, from the days when studio performances were recorded primarily on glass-like, acetate disc masters using ribbon microphones (the "electrical era") of sound recording, to the predominant use of magnetic recording tape and cutting-edge microphone technology (the "magnetic era").³⁴ Germany had much to do with this general advancement in recording engineering: magnetic recording tape and tape recording machines had been two of the spoils of World War II that Americans seized. The U.S. company Ampex was built on this new technology, and it became the initial leader in the tape recording industry. In 1947, the German technology company Telefunken first introduced their groundbreaking U47 microphones. These microphones were the first high-quality condenser microphones to be able to switch from cardioid to omnidirectional patterns, and thus they were the first to give other high-end microphones serious competition.³⁵ U47 microphones were so popular that Savoy Records named one of drummer Kenny Clarke's 1955 albums (recorded by Van Gelder) "Telefunken Blues."³⁶

³² Herbie Hancock, with Lisa Dickey. *Possibilities*. (New York: Penguin Books, 2014), 45, 46.

³³ Hancock, Herbie. Interview by Jennifer Rothschild, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, February 9, 2018. Audio recording. Van Gelder Studio Archives.

³⁴ Steven Schoenherr, "The History of Magnetic Recording", presentation at IEEE Magnetics Society Seminar, University of California San Diego, on November 5, 2002. Retrieved from: <http://www.aes-media.org/historical/html/recording.technology.history/magnetic4.html>. The IEEE Magnetics Society is a leading international organization in the magnetics industry since 1964 dealing with the technology and application of magnetic devices.

³⁵ "Telefunken" (website), *Revolvy*. Retrieved from: <https://www.revolvy.com/page/Telefunken?cr=1>

³⁶ Skea, 61.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 11

By the early 1950s, almost all recording studios in America had switched over to tape and were utilizing the best of this new technology. The financial and production benefits were clear: acetate offered a one-time recording, whereas tape could be re-recorded. The process of editing and overdubbing with acetates was laborious and imprecise, but with tape these studio techniques became easier and more accurate. Significantly, recording long performances with extended improvisational passages became both possible and less expensive with recording tape, whereas with acetates, each disc was limited to either 3 minutes (7" discs) or 6 minutes (12" discs).³⁷

The advent of the long-playing record ("LP") was another new way to create and market recorded music in this period. Introduced in 1948 by Columbia Records, the 33-1/3 rpm disc held much more musical information and was perfect for long jam sessions that were the provenance of modern jazz. As it became easier to record longer musical takes in the studios, it became possible to include the full extent of those performances on the LP format.³⁸

The common goal behind all these innovations was a push to achieve the best recorded sound possible, preserved on tape, and, ultimately transferred to vinyl albums that would be marketed to the music consumer. The aim was to record music in full and accurate detail, from the highest to the lowest limits of the audible range, with little or no intrusion from the recording or playback process. As a result, the manufacturers of music playback - record player needles and turntables, amplifiers, home audio speakers and other components - were all pushed to a higher level of quality as well. The combination of these efforts helped move the entire industry to what is now looked upon as the golden age of high fidelity and the heyday of the LP.³⁹ When these innovations became a standard part of the recording practice, many major record companies brought the new technology into their studios. This technology is still used today to record music.

³⁷ Schoenherr, n.p.

³⁸ Andre Millard, "High Fidelity at Last," in *America on Record: A History of Recorded Sound*, (Boston: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 189.

³⁹ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 12

The Van Gelder Studio's Importance to Musical Performing Arts, particularly Jazz

Overview

The Van Gelder Recording Studio opened its doors at the height of the golden age of modern jazz, from the close of the 1950s through the 1970s.⁴⁰ This was a time when acoustic, hi-fidelity recording was at a crest. This era also paralleled the civil rights movement, with Black America at a crucial cultural and social pivot point. Classic jazz recordings that reflected the struggles and aspirations of that time, such as John Coltrane's *A Love Supreme*, Archie Shepp's *Fire Music*, and Max Roach's *Percussion Bitter Sweet*, were recorded in this studio.⁴¹

Rudy Van Gelder invented a way of recording jazz performances and transferring them to vinyl that prioritized a sonic immediacy and low-noise aspect. This resulted in the signature "Van Gelder sound," which the National Endowment for the Arts [NEA] described as featuring "a clearly defined separation among the instruments, ensuring that every sonic detail is clear and audible."⁴² As Van Gelder told the NEA:

Jazz essentially is improvised, so to sit there and listen to a musician improvising with a band and everyone playing together, hopefully that creates an atmosphere that can never be reproduced because you're there at the presence of the creation of the music. So what I do is I endeavor to reproduce that moment and make sure that what they're trying to say is presented in the best possible way.⁴³

⁴⁰ While most jazz histories focus solely on musicians, there are several important books that chronicle this defining era in American cultural history from both musical and business perspectives; these include: Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, London: Continuum, 2001; Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011; and Rick Kennedy, *Little Labels—Big Sound: Small Record Companies and the Rise of American Music*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. This section draws from these resources.

⁴¹ Scott Saul, *Freedom Is, Freedom Ain't: Jazz and the Making of the Sixties*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2005. Saul offers a revealing view of the interconnection of jazz, spirituality, and politics during this pivotal period in American history.

⁴² NEA Jazz Masters (website), "Rudy Van Gelder (Bio)", Retrieved from: <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/rudy-van-gelder>

⁴³ Don Sickler, Maureen Sickler and Ken Kimery, NEA Jazz Masters (website), "Rudy Van Gelder (Interview)," November 5, 2011. <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/rudy-van-gelder>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 13

Van Gelder loved music, especially jazz, and he deeply respected the musicians whose work he recorded. That respect was mutual. The number of recording dates he oversaw and the number of albums he recorded numbered in the thousands.

Historical Context: Modern Jazz in post-WWII U.S.

The historical context in which Rudy Van Gelder began to serve as a recording engineer helps measure his significance in the development and growth of modern American jazz.⁴⁴ In the 1940s, jazz was a musical idiom in a major shift, for both cultural and economic reasons. The term “jazz” from the mid-1930s through the start of World War II had become synonymous with “swing,” which had grown from a small-group, New Orleans-born fad into the primary dance music of the entire country, played by big bands from coast to coast. It was social music that provided the melodies and rhythms by which Americans met and danced and romanced.

Jazz

Jazz is a musical form born in the United States around 1900. There is consensus among historians that by the end of the nineteenth century, three distinct forms of African-American music had started to emerge: ragtime, blues, and jazz. All of them shared a similar patrimony: the cross-fertilization of African music to different degrees with various European forms.⁴⁵ The basic ingredients of jazz are polyrhythmic and polytonal ensembles, a strong accompanying rhythm that emphasizes the second and fourth beats of a four-beat measure, the microtonal flattening of certain pitches of the scale, and collective improvisation over a regularly repeated pattern.⁴⁶ Jazz features the inclusion of a musician’s personal style or statement through their music; often this is expressed through improvisational passages.⁴⁷ “Jazz” as a term first appeared in print in

⁴⁴ Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz*, London: Continuum, 2001; Ted Gioia, *The History of Jazz*, New York: Oxford University Press, 2011; and Rick Kennedy, *Little Labels—Big Sound: Small Record Companies and the Rise of American Music*, Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2001. This section draws from these resources and was written by Ashley Kahn, music historian, author and professor at The Clive Davis Institute of Recorded Music, New York University.

⁴⁵ Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz* (London: Continuum, 2001): 5

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Tom Piazza, *Understanding Jazz* (New York: Random House, 2005): 170

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 14

1912 to describe this type of music.⁴⁸ Within this category is an array of sub-genres and hybridizations such as Dixieland, Big Band, Bebop, Avant-garde, soul-jazz, and jazz/hip hop.

Modern Jazz

Modern jazz began with the advent of bebop in the early 1940s. Its roots grew from the small bands of the Swing Era. At that time, musicians experienced an attitudinal shift such that they wanted to create the kind of music they liked; the preference of the audience was no longer the first priority.⁴⁹

The innovators of the mid- and late 1940s left behind many of the commercial trappings of their predecessors. They cared little about pleasing dancers or putting attractive singers in front of the band. Instead they prized instrumental prowess and improvisatory skills. Above all, they wanted to broaden the vocabulary of jazz, and were willing to take chances to do so, even if that mean they would never achieve the crossover fame of a [big band leader like Benny] Goodman or [Duke] Ellington. Fans started referring to this new, strident sound as modern jazz—with the implication that it was akin to the modern painting of a Picasso, or the modern architecture of a Frank Lloyd Wright.⁵⁰

This shift in how jazz musicians began to think of their craft, beyond its function as dance accompaniment or social lubricant, was a significant change. John Coltrane spoke about this in 1958, years before achieving notoriety as a jazz master for whom pursuing music rose to the level of a spiritual quest. Coltrane stated: "I think that the majority of musicians are interested in truth. They've got to be, because saying a musical thing is a truth. If you make a musical statement, a valid statement, that's a truth right there in itself, you know . . . all musicians are striving to get as near a certain perfection as they can get."⁵¹

⁴⁸ Ted Gioia, *How to Listen To Jazz* (New York: Basic Books, 2016): 92.

⁴⁹ Charles Fox, in Geoffrey Haydon and Dennis Marks, *Repercussions: A Celebration of African-American Music* (London: Century Publishing, 1985): 107.

⁵⁰ Ted Gioia, *How To Listen To Jazz* (New York: Basic Books, 2016): 120.

⁵¹ Chris DeVito (ed.), *Coltrane on Coltrane: The John Coltrane Interviews* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2010): 14

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 15

The Bebop Era

During the early to mid-1940s, the big band idea of jazz began to change. The impact of World War II was undeniable, as countless musicians were drafted into the armed forces, which depleted the ranks of many leading big bands. The war-time economy was focused on defense, not entertainment, and many theaters, dancehalls, and hotels could no longer afford to pay musicians. By the end of the war, even as some big bands attempted to reunite, the financial reality they faced forced a dismantling of the usual 18 or 19-piece bands into smaller and smaller groups. Simultaneously, there was a musical push towards what became known popularly as “bebop,” a more modern music produced by smaller ensembles born in the early 1940s in the clubs of New York City, primarily on 52nd Street and in Harlem. Bebop’s focus was less on arrangements and melodies, the calling card of big bands, and more on what musicians called “The Soloist’s Art,” individual improvised statements that became the hallmark of modern jazz. Gradually, during the decade after World War II, jazz transformed with respect to the priorities of jazz players, the expectations of jazz fans, and the sound of the music itself.

Bebop signaled that individual soloists in smaller groups embodied the future of jazz. Chief among the pioneers of this new sound were alto saxophonist Charlie Parker and trumpeter Dizzy Gillespie, who met as bandmates in groups led by pianist Earl Hines and vocalist Billy Eckstine. One of their innovations was a looser, elastic sense of time. When improvising, they did not follow past convention, but spread time across the bar lines. Another development was the penchant for extreme tempos: many new, original pieces were played at a breakneck clip, while ballads could be exceedingly slow. The defining element of bebop was a marked harmonic dexterity. In what often were displays of technical brilliance, bebop players wove improvisational passages extending the scalar vocabulary that musicians were accustomed to exploring. New notes and new ways of playing them created a style that was restless, exciting, and fresh. From the perspective of music listeners, a canyon-wide gap separated mainstream mid-1940s jazz, performed in a mellifluous and predictable fashion by singers and big bands, from this strange, new sound that was effectively a hip, urban Morse code. Bebop’s dots and dashes made for a language that, at the outset, only a few musicians appreciated or understood. Bebop’s sense of exclusivity, coupled with its

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 16

buoyant, intelligent energy, made it attractive to many young African American and a few white ears as well.

Bebop's ideas were well entrenched among other jazz styles by 1946 when Rudy Van Gelder was 21 and conducting his first professional recording session.⁵² The birth of bebop did not signify that everything before it was simply wiped away. Various jazz styles that preceded modern jazz, including big bands, ballad vocalists, the traditional jazz of New Orleans, and various combinations of these branches from the same musical tree, could still be heard in clubs, on recordings, and on the radio. Van Gelder's first client recording for commercial release was Joe Mooney, a pianist, accordionist and singer known for playing popular ballads with a small rhythm section. His tune "We'll Be Together Again" was released on the Carousel label in late 1951.⁵³ In the years that followed, as bebop and other modern genres grew more ascendant in the jazz scene of the mid-1950s, Van Gelder specialized more in modern, post-World War II jazz.

The Rise of Independent Record Labels

Another significant phenomenon that took place during this time was the rise of independent record companies, small labels established by individuals who counted themselves as fans of this new music and believed in its future, and who, at least at the start, ran all aspects of their businesses themselves. Because many of the major record labels of the time, including Columbia, Decca, and RCA, were initially uninterested in taking chances with bebop, many future legends such as Charlie Parker, Dizzy Gillespie, Miles Davis, John Coltrane, and Thelonious Monk were signed instead by these small, independent labels. As the popularity of these artists' music grew, so did the labels, which established a brand identity that often had as strong an appeal as the names of the musicians themselves.

⁵² Dan Skea, "Rudy Van Gelder in Hackensack: Defining the Jazz Sound in the 1950s," *Current Musicology*, nos. 71-73 (Spring 2001-Spring 2002): 57. (retrieved from https://currentmusicology.columbia.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/13/2015/03/current.musicology.71-73.skea_.54-76.pdf.)

⁵³ Skea, 62.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 17

The leading examples and more enduring of these labels include many that worked almost exclusively with Rudy Van Gelder during the 1950s, particularly Blue Note and Prestige. In the 1960s, the Verve and Impulse labels recorded at Van Gelder Studio, and, in the 1970s, CTI recorded there. The catalogs of these labels abound with era-defining masterpieces that are still studied in jazz programs around the world and that also continue to yield best-selling re-issues. A preponderance of these catalogs feature Rudy Van Gelder's name as the original engineer of these recordings. Modern jazz of this era was an ephemeral, non-notated form, and its lasting mark was etched in vinyl on albums released by the small independent record labels in New York City, especially Blue Note and Prestige. A new generation of musicians emerged, including Miles Davis, Thelonious Monk, Sonny Rollins, Bud Powell, Clifford Brown, Max Roach, Horace Silver, and Art Blakey, whose work Van Gelder recorded and whose albums featured their photographs and biographies.

As the 1950s progressed, so did jazz and a new generation of improvisers who followed in bebop's footsteps. A new variety of modern jazz styles emerged as these players began experimenting with other ways to explore bebop's innovations. Among these were "cool jazz," which tempered the frantic feel of bebop while absorbing its other experimental extremes, and "hard bop," which infused bebop's energy with the more down-home feel of blues and gospel. By the late 1950s, the bebop explosion had reached all cities from coast to coast. Small group, post-bop jazz was a national language with many dialects, all featuring harmony-based soloing. Bebop, and the subgenres that followed it, helped to establish a chain of bars and clubs across the United States that provided gig opportunities to musicians.

Van Gelder's Role in Modern Jazz

Rudy Van Gelder played a significant role in the lasting impact of this music that served as one of the most effective bridges across racial and societal divides. His recording studios in both Hackensack and Englewood Cliffs proved to be havens from the racial strife in America. They were venues where the musical identities of generations of jazz musicians were respected and spaces in which interracial camaraderie was welcome. Rudy made it possible for African American jazz artists to have their voice heard through the recordings that he engineered. Ron Carter, who recorded on more sessions engineered by Van Gelder than any other bassist, recalled that, "All my friends, whether they were

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 18

African American or White, came to Rudy Van Gelder's place and were met with an air of ultimate professionalism that the guys appreciated. They all loved Rudy. When they left the studio, Rudy had captured part of them on his machines that could then be shared in houses—on home stereos—everywhere.”⁵⁴

In the world of jazz, important locations have seldom survived to become landmarks. Most of the venues in which the most significant musical happenings took place, including nightclubs, theaters, and recording studios, are either no longer standing or have been repurposed.⁵⁵ The Louis Armstrong House Museum in Queens, New York,⁵⁶ the John Coltrane Home in Dix Hills on Long Island, New York,⁵⁷ the Miles Davis house in East St. Louis, Illinois,⁵⁸ and Motown Records in Detroit, Michigan,⁵⁹ are rare exceptions. The Van Gelder Studio and Home stands among these sites, offering a point of connection to this rich history and cultural legacy.

The Role of the Recording Engineer

Ever since Thomas Edison created the phonograph in 1877,⁶⁰ the art and science of audio recording has been evolving. At New Jersey's Bell Labs, work on sound recording grew out of telephone transmission science of the 1920s; since no tools existed at that time, Bell Labs sought to create new sound recording and measuring equipment.⁶¹ As with the field of recording and the equipment involved, the role of the recording engineer has changed over time. There is much that is required of an engineer, and it has never been a job fully nor

⁵⁴ Ron Carter (jazz bassist), interviewed in person by Ashley Kahn, Englewood Cliffs, NJ, June 8, 2019, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

⁵⁵ John Leland. "In These Harlem Jazz Clubs, Musicians and Audience Became One," New York Times, May 3, 2018.

⁵⁶ Louis Armstrong House Museum, Kupferberg Center for the Arts, Queens College, City University of New York. <http://kupferbergcenter.org/louis-armstrong-house-museum/>

⁵⁷ The John and Alice Coltrane Home. <https://www.thecoltranehome.org>.

⁵⁸ The Miles Davis House of East Saint Louis. <http://www.houseofmilesestl.org/>

⁵⁹ Motown. <https://www.motownrecords.com/>

⁶⁰ "Origins of Sound Recordings: The Inventors," Thomas Edison National Historical Park, Edison, New Jersey, <https://www.nps.gov/edis/learn/historyculture/origins-of-sound-recording-thomas-edison.htm>.

⁶¹ "Bell Labs makes Contribution to Record Archives," *The Daily Register* (Red Bank, New Jersey), 10 February 1980: C13.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 19

clearly defined. For its earliest pioneers, as was the case with Rudy Van Gelder, the function was self-taught. The role of audio engineer was described in 1999 by *New York Times* correspondent and author Richard Buskin, in his collection of interviews with industry-leading producers and engineers, *Inside Tracks*:

In actual fact, the engineer is the person that attains not only the desired sound but also the right effects to help enhance it. It is a job that has expanded tremendously over the years along with the huge advances in recording technology, and the engineer's increased role has been reflected in the acknowledgments that have generally appeared on records...it is his job within the daylight-starved walls of the studio to help arrange the music and coax the best performances out of the artists.⁶²

The role of recording engineer requires being catalyst that transforms a solid musical performance to a timeless recording. Rudy Van Gelder had this quality, according to Alfred Lion, who ran Blue Note Records and personally produced the label's sessions from its founding in 1939 until his retirement in 1966. Once Lion began working with Van Gelder in 1953, he never worked with any other engineer. Lion stated:

Rudy set up the mikes [himself]. He knew what he wanted, with all the experience we had together. He always improved on it, too. I didn't interfere with what he was doing. He has a good feeling for jazz, and when the guys played out there, he knew what to do with them. Sometimes he'd make the guy sound better than he actually did in person. He gave them a little extra, which you can do in the studio. The musicians learned from him, too...Rudy's a very knowledgeable and soulful person. He's not like some [engineers]—you know they call them “needle noses” —they just look at the needle on the meter.⁶³

While Van Gelder recorded many musical genres, including classical, folk, blues and even polka music, as well as the spoken word, it is for jazz that he is most acclaimed. Van Gelder is considered the man who single-handedly established the audio standard for recorded jazz in the post-World War II era, when that genre became a worldwide phenomenon. Van Gelder remains the sole

⁶² Richard Buskin, *Inside Tracks* (New York: Avon Books, 1999): xv.

⁶³ Ibid., 110-111.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 20

recording engineer to have ever received the distinction of being named a Jazz Master by the National Endowment for the Arts (2009). As Cogan and Clark argue in their book, *Temples of Sound*, "This much is hard to dispute: Rudy Van Gelder defined the way we listen to recorded jazz."⁶⁴

Some legendary audio engineers who worked during the same era as Van Gelder include Tom Dowd (Atlantic Studio), Phil Ramone (A&R Recording), and Al Schmitt (Capitol Studios).

Tom Dowd, Atlantic Records' longtime engineer who recorded Ray Charles, Aretha Franklin, Eric Clapton, and the Allman Brothers, among other legendary musicians, emphasized the need to be able to communicate with different musicians on more than one level. Dowd pursued audio engineering after working as a physicist on the Manhattan Project. Dowd said: "The musical background helped me to develop my ears, helped me recognize chords. The physics background just put me in touch with reality and numbers, and it does not matter what the hay we are talking about because it all gets down to numbers. That is a way of looking at it."⁶⁵

Phil Ramone, who ran A&R Studios in New York City, often recorded many of Atlantic Records' overflow sessions in the '60s. He later transitioned to a music producer role for clients including Barbra Streisand and Billy Joel, and he agreed that the "people" aspect of engineering is arguably the most important, and that there's an enduring need for familiarity with studio equipment and technique. He stated:

I think whether you're an active technician or a person who uses his ears and finds a great engineer to work with, it's a real team effort. It just happens that I was fortunate enough to have been an engineer first. I think in this day and age, where young people have a chance to record at home and make great demos and work with multiple-track stuff, it's impossible to be a good producer without having some technical knowledge.⁶⁶

⁶⁴ Clark and Cogan, 194.

⁶⁵ Michael Buffalo Smith, "From the Manhattan Project to the Allman Brothers Band: An Interview with Tom Dowd," *Swampland.com* Fall 2002, http://swampland.com/articles/view/title:tom_dowd (accessed June 17, 2020).

⁶⁶ Ted Fox, *In the Groove: The Stories Behind the Great Recordings* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986): 246.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 21

Al Schmitt, who started in the world of big band jazz and is known for his work at Capitol Studios in Los Angeles from the 1957 to present, focused on getting the best sound possible before even touching the record button. Schmitt said: "I learned all about miking techniques and how to balance quickly. It all had to sound right at the same time because you couldn't fix it in the mix [i.e., post-production, mixing the various tracks], and I still prefer to work that way."⁶⁷

The Van Gelder Sound

The sound that Van Gelder created in his studio was influential among studio engineers and musicians, and many cited its impact. As recording engineer Phil Ramone recalled:

In those days, everybody read everything on the back of every record. I used to buy a lot of records made at Van Gelder's [studio]. Tons! . . . So I absolutely knew what the importance of the engineering was, even then when there was a naiveté in me that made me just jam forward to know everything. I knew that some of the stuff that was on RCA and other labels was different in attitude and I think a little bit more conservative. Rudy's work was more aggressive.⁶⁸

A cloak of mystery obscured most details beyond the name "Van Gelder." Stories circulated among musicians and producers of an exacting, bespectacled man who was an optometrist by day and an engineer by night. Van Gelder purposefully removed the brand names from his recording equipment to shield his process from others; he did not allow food, drink or smoking in his control room and he wore white cotton gloves while handling microphones.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 81.

⁶⁸ Phil Ramone (recording engineer and producer), interviewed on telephone by Ashley Kahn, March 8, 2001, Fort Lee, NJ, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 22

Two musicians who spoke positively of Van Gelder's business-first approach were McCoy Tyner and Elvin Jones, famed pianist and drummer, respectively, in the John Coltrane Quartet of the 1960s. Tyner remembered that:

We all loved him, even though he was very firm about some things he wouldn't tolerate, like bringing supper into the control room itself: food, drinks, none of that. John [Coltrane] smoked cigars and pipes, but I don't think he smoked in the control room—maybe out in the studio. He would fraternize with us on a limited basis—once you got to know Rudy, and got to talk to him like when the session was over, he'd comment on the session, sometimes he'd laugh. But he was there to make sure everything was set up, and during breaks he would check everything. He had things to do.⁶⁹

Jones recalled that: "Well, that room was perfect, there were perfect acoustics in there. Rudy was a meticulous guy—he built that place himself. It was like he was doing an eye operation or something [laughs]. He was wearing gloves when he was handling the microphones, 'Don't touch the microphone!' We used to laugh about that."⁷⁰

As fastidious as Van Gelder appeared to some, fellow engineers and producers respected his sense of professionalism and privacy. For example, jazz and R&B producer Joel Dorn noted that, "I made a record there and never saw the tape machine. It was behind a small wall and you didn't go behind the wall. Rudy sat there like a chemist."⁷¹ Tom Dowd recalled that "Rudy and I collaborated on a few Modern Jazz Quartet albums. He was secretive. You couldn't ask him, 'Hey, Rudy, what mic did you use there?' or 'What echo chamber?' No comment. But that's his personality."⁷²

⁶⁹ Tyner interview.

⁷⁰ Elvin Jones, interviewed by Ashley Kahn, December 4, 2001, New York, NY, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

⁷¹ Joel Dorn, interviewed on telephone by Ashley Kahn, June 22, 2001, Fort Lee, NJ, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

⁷² Dowd interview.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 23

Van Gelder's association with the well-known Blue Note label is one of the most enduring aspects of his legacy. Music historian Dan Skea described Van Gelder's impact on the label's sonic identity:

Van Gelder is perhaps most famous for his role in establishing what is commonly referred to as the "Blue Note Sound." Not long after they first began appearing in the early 1950s, his recordings for that label, distinguished by their warmth, clarity, and sonic precision, set a new standard for the sound of small group jazz on record, a standard against which almost all subsequent efforts were measured. Whereas earlier jazz recordings seemed to come at the listener from a distance, Van Gelder found ways to approach and capture the music at closer range, and to more clearly convey jazz's characteristic sense of immediacy.⁷³

One defining aspect of the Van Gelder sound lies in a careful yet organic balance of music and room sound. The microphones were neither set too close, as some studios preferred, nor too far away, as they had been in previous decades, and employed a mix of instruments that did not add any inappropriate dynamics or effects. Guitarist Les Paul, whose experiments with tape technology in his home and studio in Mahwah, New Jersey, created a new standard in the early 1950s, said this about Van Gelder:

The most impressive thing about Rudy—which is very much a compliment—is that Rudy was conservative and not being radical with any equalization or extreme experiments. He was one to remain stable. And the musicians respected that, knowingly or unknowingly. Whether they technically knew what Rudy was doing, they knew that if something good went in, it came out that way. Where, in a lot of other cases it came out radically different.⁷⁴

Much of the Van Gelder sound had to do with his personal bond with those playing the music in the studio. He stated:

⁷³ Skea, 54.

⁷⁴ Skea, 67.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 24

I sort of had a rapport with the musicians, and I tried to understand what they were trying to do. I always felt that jazz musicians should be treated in a way that was a little more as if it were a major effort than the way they had been treated in other places. But that was a strong feeling on my part—that I could allow certain types of clients who came to me and had faith in me—to allow them to compete on a quality level with the biggest companies. And particularly with jazz.⁷⁵

Atlantic Records producer Jerry Wexler reflected on high-fidelity, analog recording sessions: "For me, there are three different types of producer. First, there's the documentarian . . . then there's the Phil Spector type, where the whole thing is conceived in his brain . . . and then the third type I have no name for, but I can define it as 'serving the artist.' Most of the producers in this last category are original jazz fans and record collectors. Rudy Van Gelder was an example of the last category."⁷⁶

Van Gelder's approach was to capture the studio performance and preserve it in a manner that would, on a home stereo or on the radio, offer a listening experience featuring a realistic acoustical environment that places the listener in comfortable proximity to the music and musicians. In a Van Gelder environment each player can be heard in an appropriate balance, clearly and without strain or effort. The crispness of the cymbals and the full range of the piano could be heard, as well as the air that breathed through the saxophones and trumpets. The New Yorker's Richard Brody noted that:

Van Gelder brings out the sharp edge of a horn's tone, a burr or a buzz or a glare, that retains the connection to the column of air from the musician's body, the pressure of the lips. His piano sound tends to the percussive, achieving a relatively thin but tactile plangency. And he's a master of letting the power of drums come through without overwhelming the texture of the ensemble. That's where the warmth and the cool come in: his live mixes capture a sense of the group—he lets each individual

⁷⁵ Skea, 72.

⁷⁶ Jerry Wexler, interviewed on telephone by Ashley Kahn, February 19, 2001, Fort Lee, NJ, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 25

voice sound prominent while maintaining a sense of the musicians' proximity, of the intertwining of their sounds and, above all, of their sensibilities.⁷⁷

Van Gelder recalled guitarist Jimmy Raney's compliment about the Van Gelder Sound. Raney remarked that music usually sounded better when playing in the studio than when listening in the playback room, but he told Van Gelder that, "When I'm here [in Van Gelder's control room], it always sounds better than it sounds in the room."⁷⁸

Van Gelder invented a way of recording jazz performances and transferring them to vinyl discs which prioritized a sonic immediacy and low-noise aspect. The National Endowment for the Arts described "the Van Gelder Sound" as featuring "a clearly defined separation among the instruments, ensuring that every sonic detail is clear and audible."⁷⁹

Recording Studios in New York City and beyond

In the 1950s and 1960s, new studios were established in resonant, high-ceilinged spaces that had originally been auditoriums, theaters, or houses of worship. Record companies chose these kinds of spaces to get the right "room sound" for a wide range of music ensembles, from small bands and piano soloists to large orchestras and full-cast Broadway musicals. Many of the studios were in New York City, often near the labels' corporate offices. Among the leading studios of this period were: Columbia Records' 30th Street Studio (a former Greek Orthodox church that Van Gelder himself visited and studied); Atlantic Records Studio (repurposed office space at 1841 Broadway); RCA's Webster Hall in the East Village (a venue for political rallies at the outset); and Vanguard Records' studio location at the Brooklyn Masonic Temple building. These studios were revered for their generous space, interior design, and the warm, natural reverb and tones they produced, and they were all staffed with engineers who

⁷⁷ Richard Brody, "Postscript: Rudy Van Gelder (1924-2016), Modern Jazz's Listener of Genius", *The New Yorker*, August 26, 2016.

⁷⁸ Sidran, 133.

⁷⁹ NEA Jazz Masters <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/rudy-van-gelder, 2009>.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 26

knew how to get the best sound from these facilities. They worked with generous production budgets and support staff.⁸⁰

Other independent studios of note during this period include the Reeves Sound Studio on East 44th Street; A&R Recording on West 48th Street; Beltone Studios at 1651 Broadway; and Regent Sound on 57th Street. Also during this time, record companies in other parts of the country, most of them independent labels, created studios that became legendary for their sound and output, including Chess Records in Chicago, Illinois; Motown/Tamla Records in Detroit, Michigan; and Sun, Stax, and Hi Records in Memphis, Tennessee.

In northern New Jersey, there are also examples of recording studios that operated concurrently with the Van Gelder Studio. Two noteworthy studios were in the neighboring community of Englewood. Singer/producer Sylvia Robinson created Soul Sound Studio, active in the 1970s and 1980s as the home to the hip hop label Sugar Hill Records and in which the Sugar Hill Gang's "Rapper's Delight" was recorded.⁸¹ Another was Bennet Studios, which Dae Bennet, the son of singer Tony Bennet, ran out of a Victorian-era train station in Englewood between 2001 and 2011 and in which artists Trey Anastasio, Rob Thomas, Tony Bennet, k. d. lang, and various jazz artists recorded albums.⁸² Neither of these studios operates today.

In Mahwah, New Jersey, the legendary musician and guitar-designer, Les Paul, also kept a recording studio in his home from 1952 to 2009. Paul had started recording in the late 1940s in the garage of his home in Hollywood, California, where he experimented with overdubbing (also known as sound on sound), delay effects such as tape delay, phasing effects and multitrack recording. Like Van Gelder, Paul was self-taught and he utilized some of the same equipment: an Ampex Model 200 reel-to-reel audio

⁸⁰ Is Horowitz, "Gotham Sets the Pace," *Billboard*, December 14, 1974; Ian Dove, "On the Trail of a New York Sound," *Billboard* December 14, 1974. These two essays offered a historical overview of New York City's audio recording scene.

⁸¹ Kate Kelly, "Sylvia Robinson: Pioneering Record Producer, Ushered in Era of Rap," *HuffPost*, March 18, 2015.

⁸² David Weiss, "Bennett Studios Closes," *SoundScoop*, <https://sonicscoop.com/2011/09/12/bennett-studios-closes/>, September 12, 2011.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 27

recording deck and a disc-cutting lathe.⁸³ Paul even created his own disc-cutting assembly, utilizing automobile parts. Les Paul's house and studio in Mahwah still stands, and some of his earlier studio equipment has been installed in the Mahwah Museum as a permanent exhibition.⁸⁴

Comparison of Van Gelder Studio to other studios

While Van Gelder's studio was but one among many studios in the New York City area, there are many reasons that he and his studio stood out from other engineers and recording venues. Unlike every other studio mentioned above, the Van Gelder Studio still stands and remains in use as a recording studio. It was designed and built with the specific intention of operating as an audio recording facility, and, other than hosting various audio and video interviews, it has never served any other purpose.⁸⁵ Van Gelder took the step of creating his new studio because he had the client base and because he wanted to create his own reverberant room. He developed this studio apart from the major recording studio scene, investing in new equipment as it became available and working to reduce or eliminate distortion and extraneous noise. He tried out new studio techniques and experimented with microphone placement to improve the recordings.⁸⁶

At the height of the era of analog recording, the close of the 1950s and well into the 1980s, Van Gelder ran his studio by himself and was the only engineer to work in it. During this period, he had no assistants and did not rent the studio to other engineers. It was a one-man show: he alone prepared for and ran all sessions, serving as his own tape operator and dealing with all pre- and post-production duties, including mastering and creating the acetates used to manufacture the vinyl stampers himself. The result was that Van Gelder's personal reputation and that of his studio achieved a singularity in the minds of musicians,

⁸³ "Les Paul," Ampex Corporation, History of Recording, https://www.historyofrecording.com/Les_Paul.html.

⁸⁴ "Les Paul in Mahwah," Mahwah Museum. <https://mahwahmuseum.org/les-paul-in-mahwah-2/>.

⁸⁵ Don and Maureen Sickler. Interviews by Ashley Kahn, Englewood Cliffs, NJ. various dates.

⁸⁶ Michael Cuscuna, "Rudy Van Gelder: A Work in Progress," interview with Rudy Van Gelder, *Blue Note Perfect Takes* CD+DVD, 2004.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 28

music professionals, and music fans. No other engineer or studio had that one-on-one relationship, and no other studio yielded the same quality or quantity of well-recorded jazz marked by sonic consistency.

With no payroll to worry about and with his living quarters only a few steps away from his studio, Van Gelder reduced his overhead and made his studio more affordable to smaller record labels with tighter budgets. For example, in 1959 when the Englewood Cliffs studio opened, Van Gelder charged \$30 an hour during the day and \$45 at night, excluding tape cost and mastering service, while similar rates at large-room Manhattan studios were \$50 and \$65.⁸⁷

Many saw Van Gelder as “the David to the Goliath of the huge record labels’ well-funded and well-practiced engineering legions,” as music writer Jesse Klapholz wrote in 2017, adding that “Van Gelder’s real legacy is not so much in his techniques as in the sheer volume of his output—in the huge number of influential sessions that came through his suburban New Jersey doors, which provided an affordable alternative for the burgeoning independent labels outside of the big N.Y.C. studios.”⁸⁸ Van Gelder explained his pricing strategy as a way to allow him to guarantee the sonic quality from recording to final product noting that “This is really the only major stipulation I have, that I do the process. It’s not because it is expensive, because the expense is minimal. I purposely keep it that way because I don’t want the money to be a part of their decision.”⁸⁹

Van Gelder’s reputation was one of professionalism and respect on a level that bridged differences of age, race, and musical preference. This was a rare thing in the 1950s and 1960s, and one that made the musicians comfortable in a manner unlike other studios where the staff might not have been jazz-friendly and where anonymous, unproven assistants were present.

⁸⁷ These figures have been culled from ca. 1959 invoices in Van Gelder’s office, and the relative pricing comes from a brochure printed by Fine Recording Inc., 1959. Van Gelder Studio Archive, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

⁸⁸ Jesse Klapholz, “The Secret Legacy of Rudy Van Gelder,” *SonicScoop*, <https://sonicscoop.com/2017/03/15/rudy-van-gelder-optometrist-day-recordist-night/March 15, 2017>.

⁸⁹ Steven Cerra, “Rudy Van Gelder: A Signature Sound,” *Jazz Profiles* blogspot <http://jazzprofiles.blogspot.com/2011/05/rudy-van-gelder-signature-sound.html>, May 8, 2011.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 29

Engineers and musicians who worked at the Van Gelder Studio later recounted their appreciation for the personal and professional treatment that Rudy Van Gelder provided during recording sessions. Atlantic Records engineer Tom Dowd, who worked on recordings with Van Gelder, recalled that

There were so many other studios starting up in New York then, started by people who had the money to throw in, but didn't know the first thing about how to operate the equipment or how to make the musicians comfortable. So when I knew [Coltrane] was going to record at Rudy's, he was at least in professional hands and in a professional environment, and that was encouraging.⁹⁰

McCoy Tyner, Coltrane's featured pianist when recording at VGS, put it this way: "When you were with Rudy, you knew that you were home. He dealt with us like we were family."⁹¹

In William Clark and Jim Cogan's 2003 book *Temples of Sound*, an authoritative overview of legendary American analog recording studios during this era, the Van Gelder Studio is one of only fourteen deemed worthy of inclusion by the authors. Unlike the Van Gelder Studio, most of the studios featured in this book no longer exist. Three are still operational in Los Angeles (Capitol Studios, Sunset Sound and United Recording Studios) and three others now serve as historic sites open to visitors (Stax and Sun in Memphis; Motown in Detroit, Michigan).

Recording Studios listed on the National Register

There are at present seven music recording studios listed on the National Register of Historic Places, all of them associated with country or rock music. Only two of these studios were designed and built to function as music studios: RCA Studio B and RCA Victor Studios Building, both in Nashville, Tennessee.⁹²

⁹⁰ Tom Dowd (Atlantic Records recording engineer), interviewed on telephone by Ashley Kahn, February 19, 2001 on telephone, Fort Lee, NJ, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

⁹¹ McCoy Tyner, interviewed by Ashley Kahn, April 12, 2001, New York, NY, transcript, personal archives of Ashley Kahn, Weehawken, NJ.

⁹² Church Studio, Tulsa, Oklahoma Ref. No. 100001595, Listed September 8, 2017

Original purpose: church; Florence Alabama Music Enterprises Recording Studios, Florence, Alabama Ref. No. 16000397, Listed November 29, 2016

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 30

Rudy Van Gelder – the Later Years, 1980 - 2016

As Van Gelder's career continued from the age of analog recording into the digital era, the transition taking place from the late 1980s through the 1990s, he kept abreast of this seismic shift in music technology and updated the Englewood Cliffs studio accordingly. When it was clear that digital music recording would largely supplant analog formats, he was positive about the change:

The biggest distorter is the LP itself. I've made thousands of LP masters. I used to make 17 a day, with two lathes going simultaneously, and I'm glad to see the LP go. As far as I'm concerned, good riddance. It was a constant battle to try to make that music sound the way it should. It was never any good. And if people don't like what they hear in digital, they should blame the engineer who did it. Blame the mastering house. Blame the mixing engineer. That's why some digital recordings sound terrible, and I'm not denying that they do, but don't blame the medium.⁹³

Van Gelder was prepared to make the shift and invest in new technology. In 1986 he engaged one assistant, Maureen Sickler (current owner of VGSH), whose role increased until she was brought on full time by 1989.⁹⁴ Sickler remained at his side, assisting him with each step of technical innovations and with recording sessions, until he passed in 2016.⁹⁵ As such, the studio remained in demand, both because of its up-to-date standards, and increasingly because of its heritage.

Original purpose: tobacco warehouse; House of David Recording Studio Complex, Nashville, Tennessee Ref. No. 16000472, Listed November 15, 2016

Original purpose: residential buildings; Muscle Shoals Sound Studio, Muscle Shoals, Alabama Ref. No. 06000437, Listed 2 June 2006 Original purpose: coffin showroom; RCA Studio B, Nashville, Tennessee Ref. No. 12000420, Listed July 10, 2012

Original purpose: recording studio; RCA Victor Studios Building, Nashville, Tennessee

Ref. No. 15000445, Listed 21 July 2015 Original purpose: recording studio; Sun Record Company Memphis Recording Service, Memphis, Tennessee

Ref. No. 030001031, Listed July 31, 2013 Original purpose: store.

⁹³ Rozzi, 46.

⁹⁴ Maureen Sicker. Interviewed by Jennifer Rothschild, Peggy Norris, H. Michael Gelfand and Ashley Kahn, Englewood Cliffs, various dates.

⁹⁵ Ibid.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 31

Two examples of the Van Gelder Studio's legacy speak directly to a deep connection that most Black American musicians feel to the place. In 2009, the young trumpeter Christian Scott aTunde Adjuah chose to record his third and most political album, *Yesterday You Said Tomorrow*, in Van Gelder's studio. In 2018, the hip-hop musician, emcee, and producer Q-Tip, long celebrated for his groundbreaking, jazz-infused music with the group A Tribe Called Quest, admitted that he had moved his family to Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, in order to be close to the studio in which John Coltrane had recorded his spiritual anthem, *A Love Supreme*.⁹⁶

Awards and Industry Recognition

Starting in the 1980s, Rudy Van Gelder began receiving awards and other recognitions. In 1991, the French rail service SNCF dedicated an entire train to a jazz theme. Each car of the train depicted a chapter in the history of jazz, including one in which Rudy Van Gelder's Hackensack studio was reproduced and music he had recorded there was played. This jazz train toured the country.⁹⁷

In 1999, Van Gelder was asked by Blue Note Records, then part of the global EMI music conglomerate, to re-master his original recordings for that label. The project took more than ten years, during which the success of the "RVG Edition" series of compact disc (CD) recordings was well-documented, profitable and headline-grabbing.⁹⁸

Many journalists, scholars, and musicians interviewed Van Gelder during the last decades of his life for articles, books, documentaries, and liner notes. A mounting number of images shot in the Englewood Cliffs studio by famous photographers, including Francis Wolff, Chuck Stewart, Jim Marshall and Joe Alper are appreciated by jazz fans.⁹⁹

⁹⁶ "Q-tip" visited the Van Gelder Studio and Home on August 31, 2020 and spoke with Maureen and Don Sickler there.

⁹⁷ *Le Train du Jazz*, SNCF booklet, 1991.

⁹⁸ Clark and Cogan, pg. 206. Quinn, Mike. "RVG Blue Note Editions," *JazzTimes*, June 1, 2002.

⁹⁹ See e.g.: Cuscuna, Michael, Laurie, Charlie, and Schnider, Oscar. *The Blue Note Years: The Jazz Photography of Charles Wolff*. New York: Rizzoli, 1995; Placke, Rainer and Wulff, Ingo. *Blue Note Photography*. Germany: 2009; Sandomir, Richard. "Chuck Stewart, Jazz Photographer Dies at 89; You've Seen his Album Covers," *The New York Times*, January 27, 2017; "Jim Marshall, photographer of Woodstock, Cash, Dylan and others, dies at 74," *Los Angeles Times*, March 24, 2010.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 32

Rudy Van Gelder - Partial List of Awards

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 33

Date	Award	Organization
1985	First Annual Blue Note Award for contribution to jazz	Blue Note Records
1990	Special Achievement Award	Audio Engineering Society
1993	Lifetime Contribution to Technical and Creative Excellence in Recording and Sound	TEC (Technical Excellence & Creativity) Awards Hall of Fame – Mix Magazine
1996	Certificate and Lifetime Award for creativity, innovation and achievement in jazz and studio recording	Georg Neumann GmbH (German microphone manufacturer)
1998	Best Engineering Award and Best Reissue Award RVG Series	<i>Swing Journal</i> , Japan
2003-2004	Entry in Who's Who in Science and Engineering	Marquis Who's Who
2004	A Team Award (for advocates, altruists, aiders and abettors of jazz) celebrating his 50 years of work with Blue Note Records	Jazz Journalists' Association
2006	Historic Preservation Commendation Award	Bergen County (New Jersey) Department of Cultural & Historic Affairs
2006	Certificate of Special Congressional Recognition for Preservation of Classic Jazz Recordings	The Senate and General Assembly, State House, Trenton, New Jersey, Joint Legislative Resolution
2009	Jazz Master	National Endowment for the Arts
2009	Alfred Lion Award for Creative Excellence	Blue Note Records
2009	Fellowship Award	Audio Engineering Society
2012	Trustees Award (Grammy)	National Academy of Recording Arts & Sciences
2013	Gold Medal Award	Audio Engineering Society

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 8 Page 34

The Musical Legacy of The Van Gelder Studio

The National Endowment for the Arts noted about Rudy Van Gelder: “Considered by many the greatest recording engineer in jazz, Rudy Van Gelder recorded practically every major jazz musician of the 1950s and 1960s on thousands of albums.”¹⁰⁰

The large number of albums generated during the fifty-six years of recording sessions at Van Gelder’s Englewood Cliffs studio is unmatched by almost any other commercial recording enterprise in the United States (primarily because the life expectancy of most recording studios is less than half that duration).¹⁰¹,¹⁰² Information from Rudy Van Gelder’s appointment books and invoice system, from album liner notes and credits, and from jazz discographies indicate that between 1959 and 2016, Van Gelder oversaw more than 4,000 recording dates.¹⁰³

Some of the most recognizable figures in jazz, including John Coltrane, Herbie Hancock, Dizzy Gillespie, Ray Charles, Donald Byrd, and Horace Silver, regularly recorded their music at the Van Gelder Studio (“VGS”). Their albums serve as the foundation for current musical styles; one can trace the evolution of jazz from the end of the 1950s, when music was primarily acoustic and focused on post-bop innovations, through the rise of modal jazz and on to the ascendancy of electric instrumentation and funk and rock rhythms. At VGS, it is possible to trace the career paths of many jazz artists, as they grew from sidemen to bandleaders, as they tried out different line-ups and instrumental combinations, as their music progressed from one style and approach to another, all through this one recording venue.

¹⁰⁰ NEA Jazz Masters (website), “Rudy Van Gelder”, <https://www.arts.gov/honors/jazz/rudy-van-gelder>

¹⁰¹ Clark and Cogan, 11, 12.

¹⁰² Most of the information in this section, including album titles, number of sessions, awards and other honors of distinction, was obtained from the personal files of Rudy Van Gelder, currently maintained by Maureen Sickler at VGSH, 445 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey.

¹⁰³ The Van Gelder Archive, Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey; The JAZZ Discography Online. <https://lordisco.com/> (access to this information requires a paid subscription.)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetVan Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 35

A testament to the legacy of VGS is the number of Gold and Platinum records awarded for albums recorded there. Originally conceived to honor artists and track sound recording sales, Gold and Platinum Awards have come to stand as a benchmark of success. These awards, given by the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), represent huge sales, 500,000 albums for gold, 1,000,000 for platinum, and 2,000,000 or more for multiplatinum.¹⁰⁴ Among the Gold records that were recorded at Van Gelder Studio are Wes Montgomery's "A Day in the Life" (A&M/CTI Records), and Grover Washington's "Mr. Magic" (Kudu Records).

Notable Recordings at the Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs

<u>Date</u>	<u>Artists</u>	<u>Title</u>
1959	Horace Silver	<i>Blowin' the Blues Away</i>
1960	Eric Dolphy	<i>Outward Bound</i>
1960	Hank Mobley	<i>Soul Station</i>
1960	Jimmy Smith	<i>Midnight Special</i>
1961	Dizzy Gillespie	<i>Perceptions</i>
1961	Donald Byrd	<i>Royal Flush</i>
1961	Freddie Hubbard	<i>Ready for Freddie</i>
1961	John Coltrane	<i>Africa/Brass, Ballads</i>
1961	Ray Charles	<i>Genius + Soul = Jazz</i>
1962	Freddie Hubbard	<i>Hub-Tones</i>
1962	Grant Green	<i>Feelin' the Spirit</i>
1962	Herbie Hancock	<i>Takin' Off</i>
1963	Andrew Hill	<i>Black Fire</i>

¹⁰⁴ The Recording Industry Association of America. riaa.com.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetVan Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 36

1963	Hank Mobley	<i>No Room for Squares</i>
1963	Joe Henderson	<i>Page One</i>
1963	Kenny Burrell	<i>Midnight Blue</i>
1963	Lee Morgan	<i>The Sidewinder</i>
1964	Andrew Hill	<i>Point of Departure</i>
1964	Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers	<i>Free for All</i>
1964	Art Blakey & the Jazz Messengers	<i>Indestructible</i>
1964	Eric Dolphy	<i>Out to Lunch</i>
1964	Horace Silver	<i>Song for My Father</i>
1964	Joe Henderson	<i>Inner Urge</i>
1964	John Coltrane	<i>A Love Supreme</i>
1964	Kenny Burrell	<i>Guitar Forms</i>
1964	Lee Morgan	<i>Search for the New Land</i>
1964	Tony Williams	<i>Life Time</i>
1964	Wayne Shorter	<i>JuJu</i>
1964	Wayne Shorter	<i>Speak No Evil</i>
1965	Herbie Hancock	<i>Maiden Voyage</i>
1965	Tony Williams	<i>Spring</i>
1965	Wes Montgomery	<i>Bumpin'</i>
1966	Cecil Taylor	<i>Conquistador</i>
1966	Cecil Taylor	<i>Unit Structures</i>
1966	Jimmy Smith	<i>The Cat</i>
1966	Joe Henderson	<i>Mode for Joe</i>
1966	Pharoah Sanders	<i>Tauhid</i>
1966	Wes Montgomery	<i>California Dreaming</i>
1967	Antonio Carlos Jobim	<i>Wave</i>
1967	Lou Donaldson	<i>Alligator Boogaloo</i>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetVan Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 37

1967	McCoy Tyner	<i>The Real McCoy</i>
1969	Donald Byrd	<i>Fancy Free</i>
1969	Hubert Laws	<i>Crying Song</i>
1969	Lou Donaldson	<i>Everything I Play is Funky</i>
1969	McCoy Tyner	<i>Time for Tyner</i>
1969	Milton Nascimento	<i>Courage</i>
1969	Quincy Jones	<i>Walking in Space</i>
1970	Antonio Carlos Jobim	<i>Stone Flower</i>
1970	Freddie Hubbard	<i>Red Clay</i>
1970	George Benson	<i>The Other Side of Abbey Road</i>
1970	Hubert Laws	<i>Afro-Classic</i>
1970	Quincy Jones	<i>Gula Matari</i>
1970	Stanley Turrentine	<i>Sugar</i>
1971	Dizzy Gillespie	<i>Portrait of Jenny</i>
1971	George Benson	<i>White Rabbit</i>
1971	Kenny Burrell	<i>God Bless the Child</i>
1971	Stanley Turrentine	<i>Salt Song</i>
1972	Deodato	<i>Prelude</i>
1972	Freddie Hubbard	<i>Sky Dive</i>
1972	Randy Weston	<i>Blue Moses</i>
1973	Don Sebesky	<i>Giant Box</i>
1973	Eric Gale	<i>Forecast</i>
1973	Paul Desmond	<i>Skylark</i>
1973	Ron Carter	<i>All Blues</i>
1973	Ron Carter	<i>Blues Farm</i>
1974	Bob James	<i>One</i>
1974	Chet Baker	<i>She Was Too Good to Me</i>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetVan Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 38

1974	Graver Washington, Jr.	<i>Mister Magic</i>
1974	Paul Desmond	<i>Pure Desmond</i>
1975	Bob James	<i>Two</i>
1975	Grover Washington, Jr.	<i>Feels So Good</i>
1975	Idris Muhammad	<i>House of the Rising Sun</i>
1975	Jim Hall	<i>Concierto</i>
1983	Don Sickler	<i>The Music of Kenny Dorham</i>
1985	Abdullah Ibrahim	<i>Water from an Ancient Well</i>
1985	Jimmy Heath	<i>New Picture</i>
1991	Dr. Lonnie Smith	<i>The Turbanator</i>
1991	Joe Henderson	<i>Lush Life: The Music of Billy Strayhorn</i>
1991	Kenny Barron	<i>The Moment</i>
1991	T. S. Monk	<i>Take One</i>
1992	Hank Jones	<i>Handful of Keys</i>
1992	The Elvin Jones Jazz Machine	<i>Going Home</i>
1993	Hank Jones	<i>Upon Reflection</i>
1994	Benny Green	<i>The Place to Be</i>
1994	Gary Bartz	<i>Episode One: Children of Harlem</i>
1995	Cindy Blackman	<i>The Oracle</i>
1995	David Hazeltine	<i>4 Flights Up</i>
1995	McCoy Tyner	<i>Infinity</i>
1996	Abdullah Ibrahim	<i>Cape Town Flowers</i>
1996	Sonny Fortune	<i>From Now On</i>
1997	Buddy Montgomery	<i>Here Again</i>
1997	Charles Earland	<i>Blowin' the Blues Away</i>
1997	Grover Washington Jr.	<i>Breath of Heaven</i>
1997	Ron Carter	<i>The Bass and I</i>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service**National Register of Historic Places**
Continuation SheetVan Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New JerseySection number 8 Page 39

1998	Hank Crawford	<i>After Dark</i>
1998	Hank Crawford	<i>Crunch Time</i>
1998	Steve Kuhn	<i>Countdown</i>
2000	Don Sickler	<i>Reflections</i>
2000	Jimmy McGriff	<i>Feelin' It</i>
2000	Larry Coryell	<i>Inner Urge</i>
2001	Larry Coryell	<i>Cedars of Avalon</i>
2002	Cedar Walton	<i>The Latin Tinge</i>
2004	David "Fathead" Newman	<i>I Remember Brother Ray</i>
2004	Steve Turre	<i>The Spirits Up Above</i>
2005	Frank Morgan	<i>Reflections</i>
2005	Larry Willis	<i>The Big Push</i>
2006	Bill Charlap with Freddy Cole	<i>Music Maestro Please</i>
2006	Cedar Walton	<i>One Flight Down</i>
2006	Louis Hayes and the Cannonball Legacy Band	<i>Maximum Firepower</i>
2006	Tom Harrell	<i>Light On</i>
2009	Christian Scott	<i>Yesterday You Said Tomorrow</i>
2010	Eric Alexander	<i>Don't Follow the Crowd</i>
2011	Houston Person	<i>Nice 'n' Easy</i>
2011	Houston Person	<i>So Nice</i>
2013	Joey DeFrancesco	<i>One for Rudy</i>
2015	Eric Alexander	<i>The Real Thing</i>
2015	Houston Person & Ron Carter	<i>Chemistry</i>

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 9 Page 1

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National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

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Bergen County, New Jersey

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

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Bergen County, New Jersey

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

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Bergen County, New Jersey

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 9 Page 7

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 9 Page 8

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 9 Page 9

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United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Section number 10 Page 1

SECTION 10: GEOGRAPHICAL DATA

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet for Section 10.)

The Van Gelder Studio and Home is located on Block 412, Lot 9 in Englewood Cliffs.

Boundary Justification Statement

(Explain, on the section sheet following the Verbal Boundary Description, how the chosen boundaries meet the requirements for boundary selection and are the most appropriate boundaries for the nominated property or district.)

The referenced tax parcels include the entirety of the building and site as it existed historically.



Van Gelder Studio & Home

New Jersey and National Registers Nomination
445 Sylvan Avenue, Englewood Cliffs,
Bergen County,
New Jersey

Boundary and tax map

0 15 30 60 90 Feet

Datum: NAD 1983 State Plane New Jersey

Legend

- NJ & NR boundary
- Coordinates
- Tax Parcels

1.02 Acres



NJDEP,
Historic Preservation Office
April 2021

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places

Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 1

Index of Figures:

Figure 1: Site Plan dated April 17, 1958 by Garrett Lockwood, P.E.

Figure 2: Van Gelder Studio drawing, lower level. Dated 4/15/58.

Figure 3: Van Gelder Studio drawing, upper level. Dated 4/15/58.

Figure 4: Elevation drawing by David Henken, ca. 1958. View of south façade.

Figure 5: Historic photo circa 1959 showing southeast elevation of building still under construction. Photo taken by Rudy Van Gelder. Camera facing northwest.

Figure 6: Historic photo circa 1959 of Rudy Van Gelder at the construction site on masonry foundation with blueprints. Photographer unknown.

Figure 7: Historic photo circa 1959 during construction of the building showing David Henken at left. Photo by Rudy Van Gelder.

Figure 8: Historic photo circa 1960 showing southeast elevation of building. Photo taken by Rudy Van Gelder. Camera facing northwest.

Figure 9: Historic photo circa 1965 showing easternmost portion of southern elevation. Camera facing southeast. Photographer unknown.

Figure 10: Historic photo circa 1965 showing southern elevation of building. Photographer unknown. Camera facing northwest.

Figure 11: Historic photo circa 1965 showing northwestern façade of building and entrance driveway. Photographer unknown. Camera facing east.

Figure 12: Historic photo of John Coltrane and others in back yard at VGSH. Dated 6/28/65. Camera facing north.

Figure 13: Historic photo of Bill Evans Trio with symphony orchestra in Van Gelder Studio, Dated 9/29/65. Photographed by Rudy Van Gelder. Camera facing northeast.

Figure 14: Historic photo of John Coltrane and band members inside of Van Gelder Studio. Date 1966. Photographed by Chuck Stewart. Camera facing north.

Figure 15: Historic photo of Rudy Van Gelder in control room, dated 3/14/89. Photo by the *Record* (Hackensack). Camera facing east.

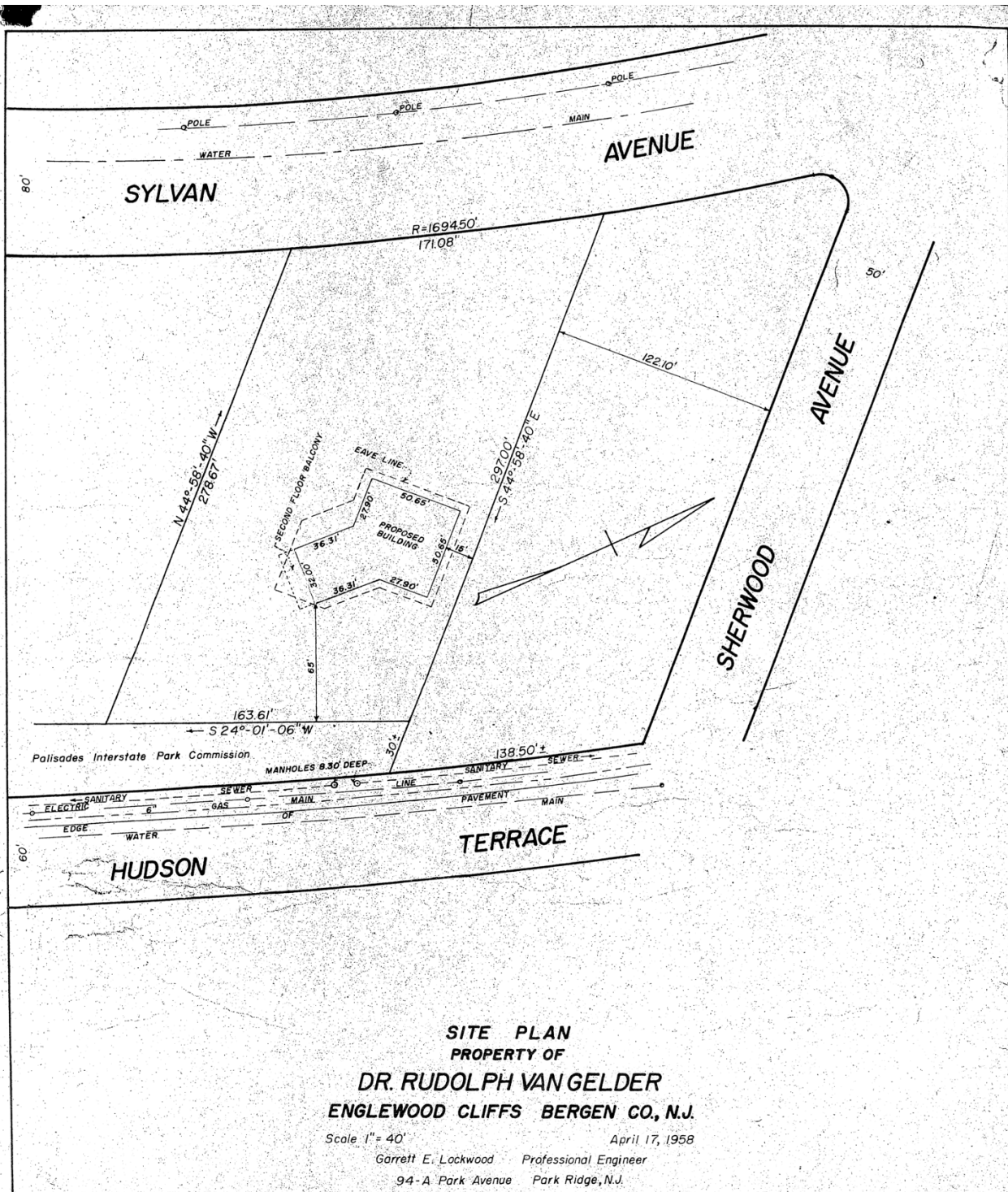
Figure 16: Herbie Hancock with Don Sickler and Maureen Sickler, Van Gelder Studio. 2/9/19. Photo by William Neumann. Camera facing west.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 2



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 3

Figure 1: Site Plan dated April 17, 1958 by Garrett Lockwood, P.E. Van Gelder Studio Archive.

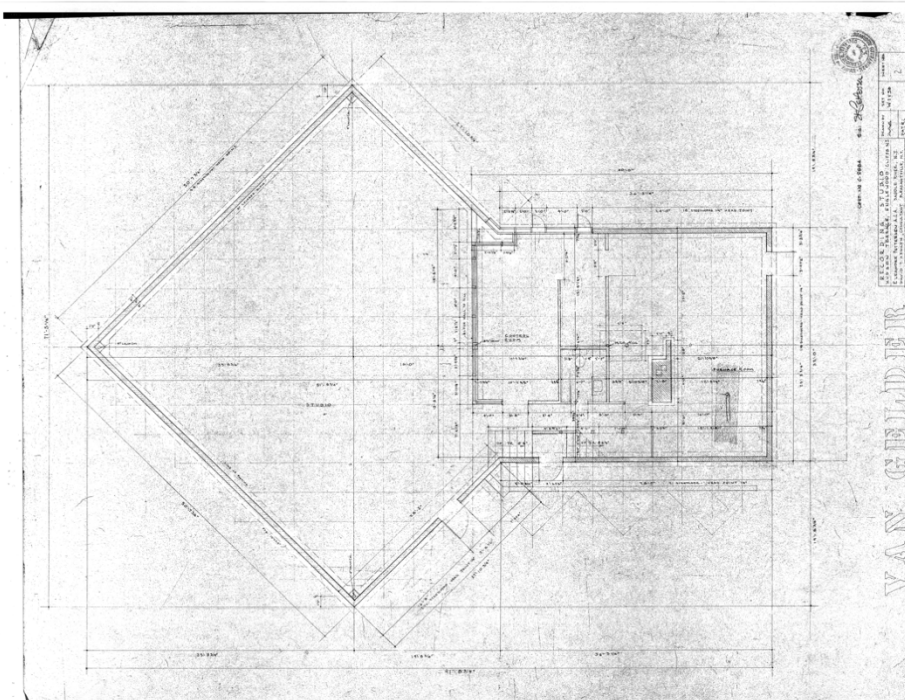
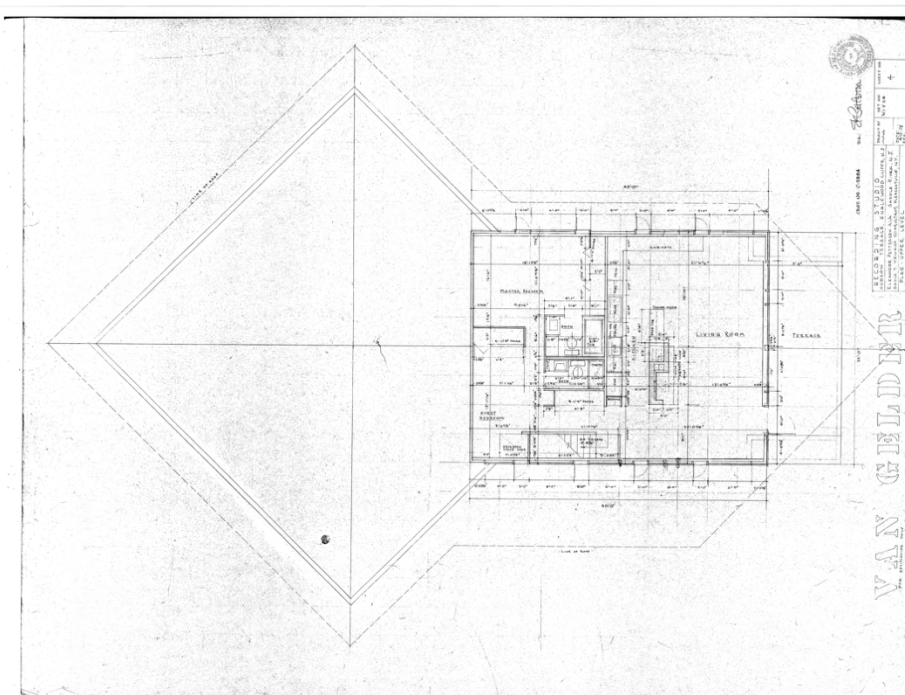


Figure 2: Van Gelder Studio Drawing, lower level. Signature of Eleanore Pettersen in upper right corner; Englewood Cliffs, Van Gelder Studio Archive.



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 4

Figure 3: Van Gelder Studio drawing, upper level. Englewood Cliffs, Van Gelder Studio Archive.

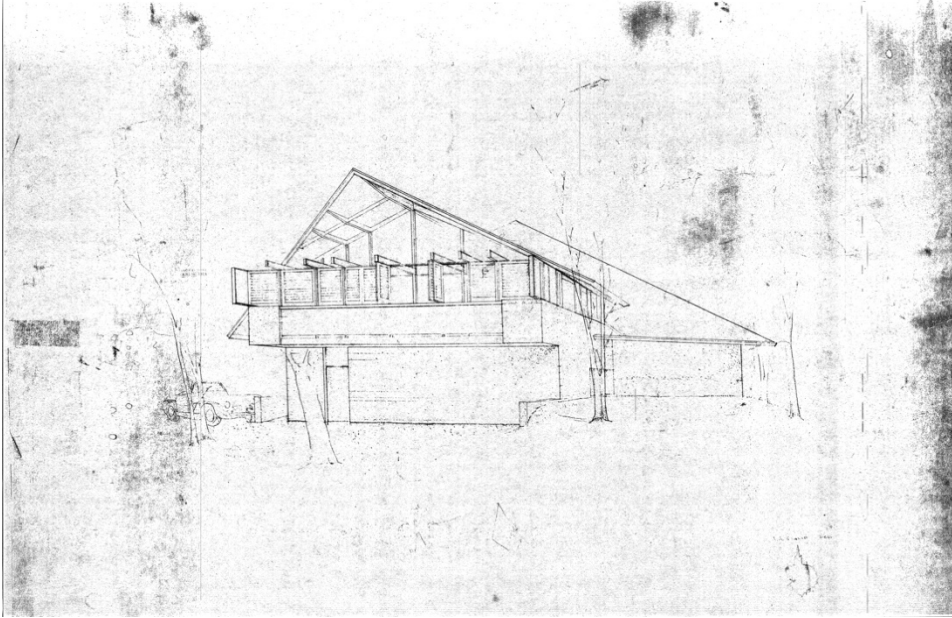


Figure 4: Elevation drawing, south façade. ca 1958 Van Gelder Studio Archive.



Figure 5: Historic photo circa 1959 showing southeast elevation of building still under construction. Mrs. Rudy Van Gelder (Elva) is in the foreground. Photo taken by Rudy Van Gelder. Camera facing northwest. Van Gelder Studio Archive

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 5



Figure 6: Historic photo circa 1959 of Rudy Van Gelder at the construction site on masonry foundation with blueprints. Photographer unknown. Van Gelder Studio Archive



Figure 7: Historic photo circa 1959 during construction of the building showing David Henken at left. Photo by Rudy Van Gelder. Van Gelder Studio Archive

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 6



Figure 8: Historic photo circa 1960 showing southeast elevation of building and carport below cantilevered terrace with trellis and southern window wall. Photo taken by Rudy Van Gelder. Camera facing northwest. Van Gelder Studio Archive



Figure 9: Historic photo circa 1965 showing easternmost portion of southern elevation of the building with ramp balustrade and cantilevered terrace above carport. Photographer and subjects unknown. Camera facing southeast. Van Gelder Studio Archive

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 7



Figure 10: Historic photo circa 1965 showing southern elevation of building. The eastern roof hip shows original skylights that were subsequently removed. Detached garage is to the left of the photo. Photographer unknown. Camera facing northwest. Van Gelder Studio Archive.



Figure 11: Historic photo circa 1965 showing northwestern façade of building and entrance driveway. Photographer unknown. Camera facing east. Van Gelder Studio Archive.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 8



Figure 12: Grass covered area in side yard at VGHS. John Coltrane is seen bending down at center right. Others pictured include Pharoah Sanders (in the background with his head bent), Archie Shepp (in a hat), Jimmy Garrison (to Shepp's left), and John Tchicai (with his back to the camera). No photo credit given. June 28, 1965. Clark and Cogan p. 205.



Figure 13: Bill Evans Trio with symphony orchestra: Bill Evans (piano), Claus Ogerman (conductor). Van Gelder Studio, Englewood Cliffs, N.J., September 29, 1965. Photo(s) by Rudy Van Gelder. Camera facing northeast. Van Gelder Studio Archive.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Historic Maps and Photos Page 9

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey



Figure 14: Inside of Van Gelder Studio in Englewood Cliffs. John Coltrane, center right, discusses a passage of “A Love Supreme” with producer Bob Thiele, (right), saxophonist Archie Shepp (center left), and pianist McCoy Tyner. Photographer: Chuck Stewart, 1966. Camera facing north. WRTI, “A Love Supreme Comes Alive in Unearthed Photos,” <http://wrti.org/post/love-supreme-comes-alive-unearthed-photos> (2017).

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen County, New Jersey

Historic Maps and Photos Page 10

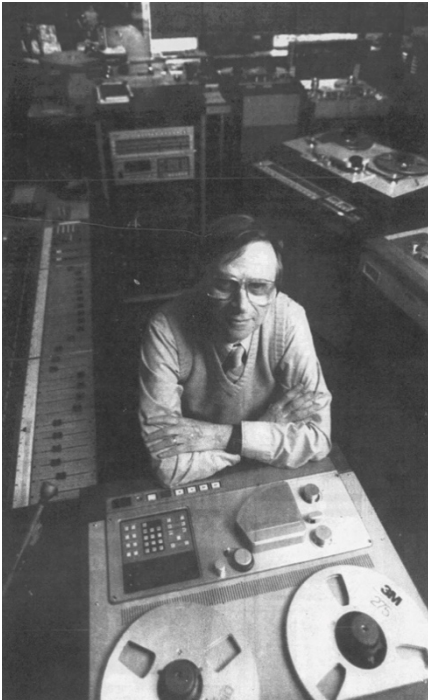


Figure 15: Rudy Van Gelder with recording equipment in the control room at Van Gelder Studio. Photo appears in article by Leonard Reed titled "The Sorcerer Behind the Music: Jazz Perfectionists Find a Mecca in Englewood Cliffs," *The Record* (Hackensack), Tuesday, March 14, 1989, pg. D-9.



Figure 16: Herbie Hancock with Don Sickler and Maureen Sickler, Van Gelder Studio. February 9, 2019. Photo by William Neumann. Camera facing west.

Name of Property: Van Gelder Studio & Home
Municipality: Englewood Cliffs, NJ
County: Bergen
Photographer: William Neumann
Date Photographed: March 16, 2019

Description of photographs and number, including description and direction of camera:

1 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0001.TIF

Aerial view of property and surroundings, camera facing East and downward.

2 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0002.TIF

View of northwest and west facades of building. Camera facing northeast.

3 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0003.TIF

View of ramp, exterior block wall and trellis. West elevation. Camera facing north.

4 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0004.TIF

View of detached garage and southernmost area of west façade. Camera facing southeast.

5 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0005.TIF

View of west and south elevations of building. Camera facing northeast.

6 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0006.TIF

View of north corner of the building, northwest and northeast elevations are shown. Camera facing south.

7 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0007.TIF

View of terrace. Camera facing east.

8 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0008.TIF

View of terrace and door to residence. Camera facing northwest.

9 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0009.TIF

View of residence interior showing corridor to bedrooms. Camera facing north.

10 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0010.TIF

View of interior southern window wall and living area. Camera facing southwest.

11 of 23

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0011.TIF

View of galley kitchen. Camera facing west.

12 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0012.TIF

View of galley kitchen showing back of fireplace. Camera facing east.

13 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0013.TIF

View of second bedroom. Camera facing west.

14 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0014.TIF

View of master bedroom. Camera facing northeast.

15 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0015.TIF

View of master bathroom showing red concrete tub. Camera facing west.

16 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0016.TIF

View of recording studio interior. Camera facing downward and southeast.

17 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0017.TIF

View of recording studio interior. Camera facing northeast

18 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0018.TIF

View of recording studio interior. Camera facing north.

19 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0019.TIF

View of recording studio interior showing control room at left. Camera facing southwest.

20 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0020.TIF

View of recording studio ceiling and uplighting. Camera facing upward and southwest.

21 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0021.TIF

View of laminated fir arch. Camera facing northeast.

22 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0022.TIF

View of control room interior. Camera facing west.

23 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0023.TIF

View of Scully mastering Lathe. Camera facing west.

24 of 24

NJ_Bergen County_Van Gelder_0024.TIF

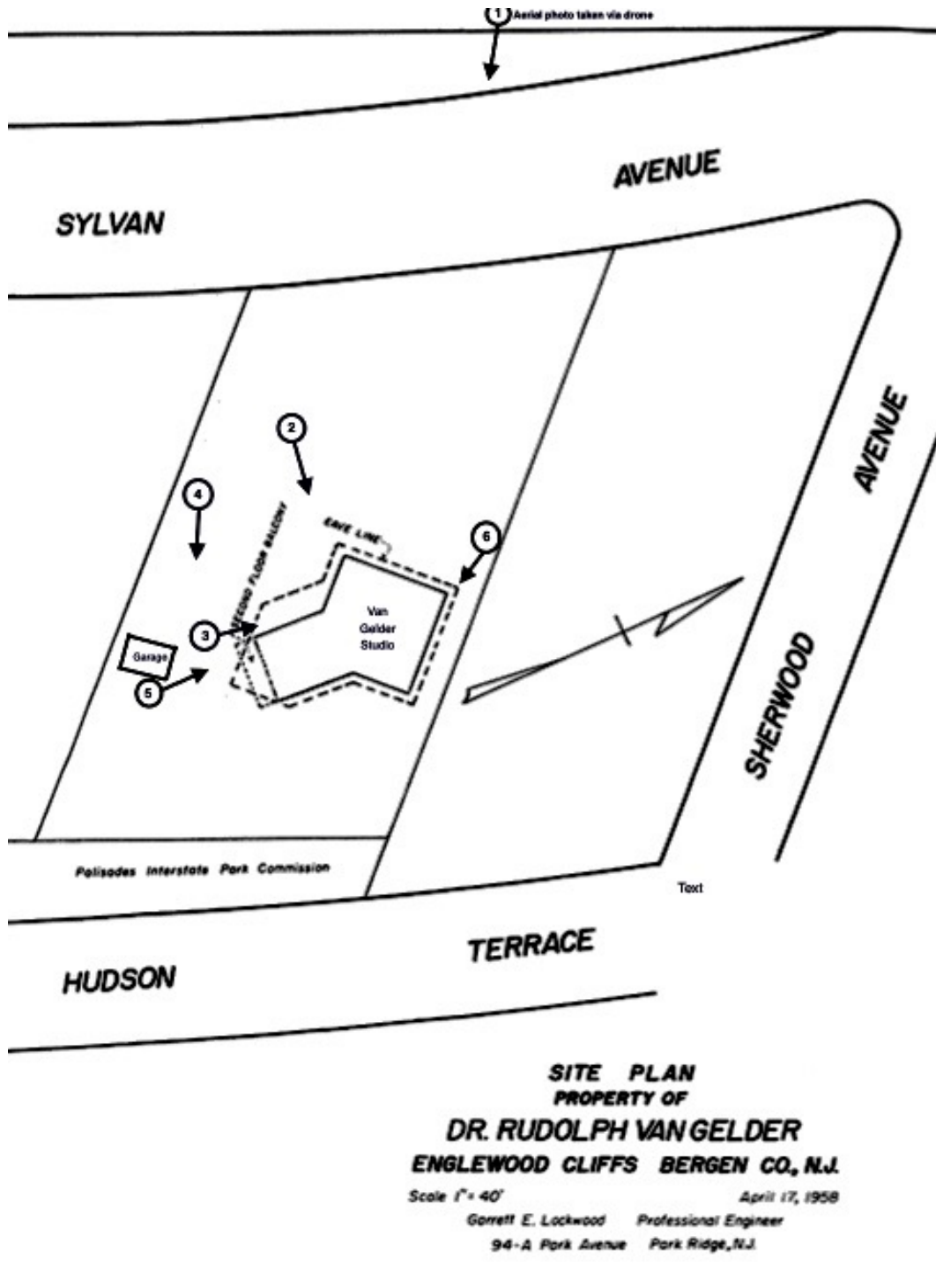
View of workbench area behind control room. Camera facing west.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 1



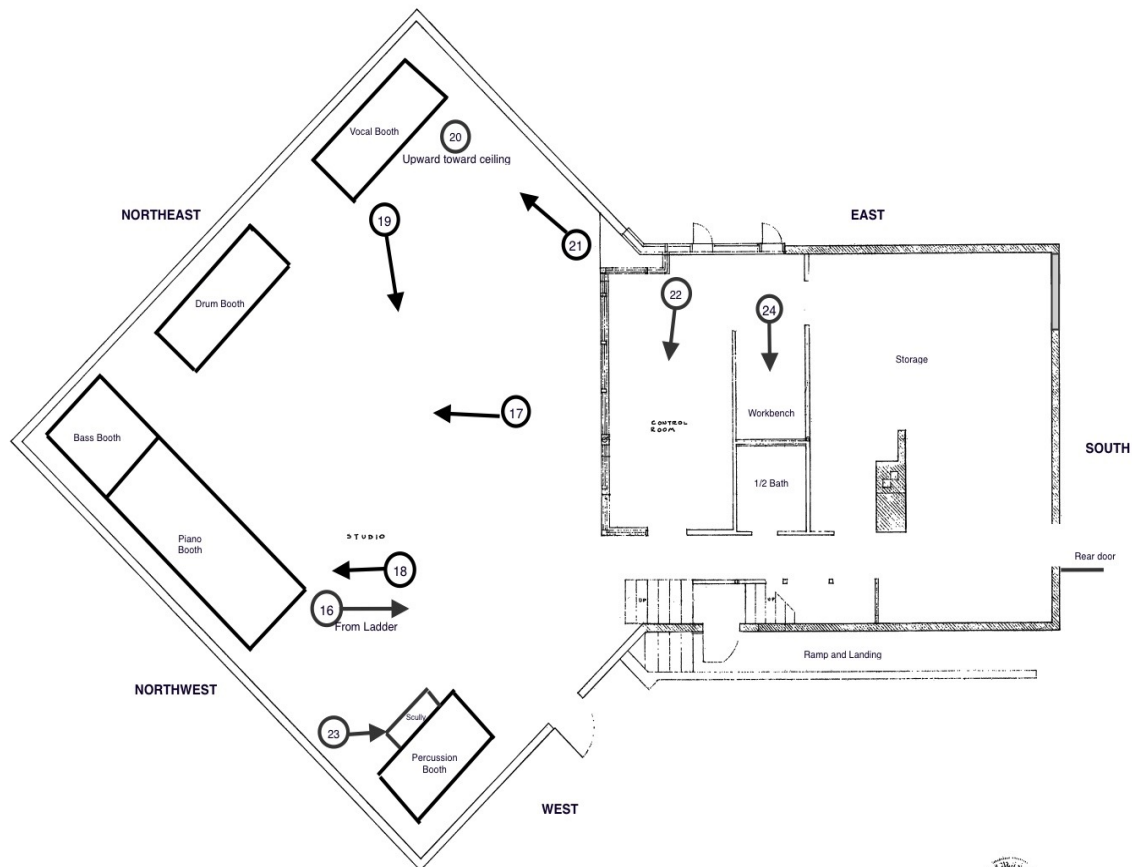
United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 2

Photo map: Exterior photos



VAN GELDER

RECORDING STUDIO		DATE: 10/1/58	SHEET: 2
1000 W. TERRACE, ENGLEWOOD CLIFFS, N.J.		ARCHITECT: W. V. S.	
ELEANOR PETERSEN AKA. SADDLE RIVER, N.J.		DATE: 10/1/58	
DR. J. J. KENNEDY CONSULTANT, PLAINFIELD, N.J.		SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"	
PLAN - UPPER LEVEL			

Photo map: Interior, lower level (studio)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 3

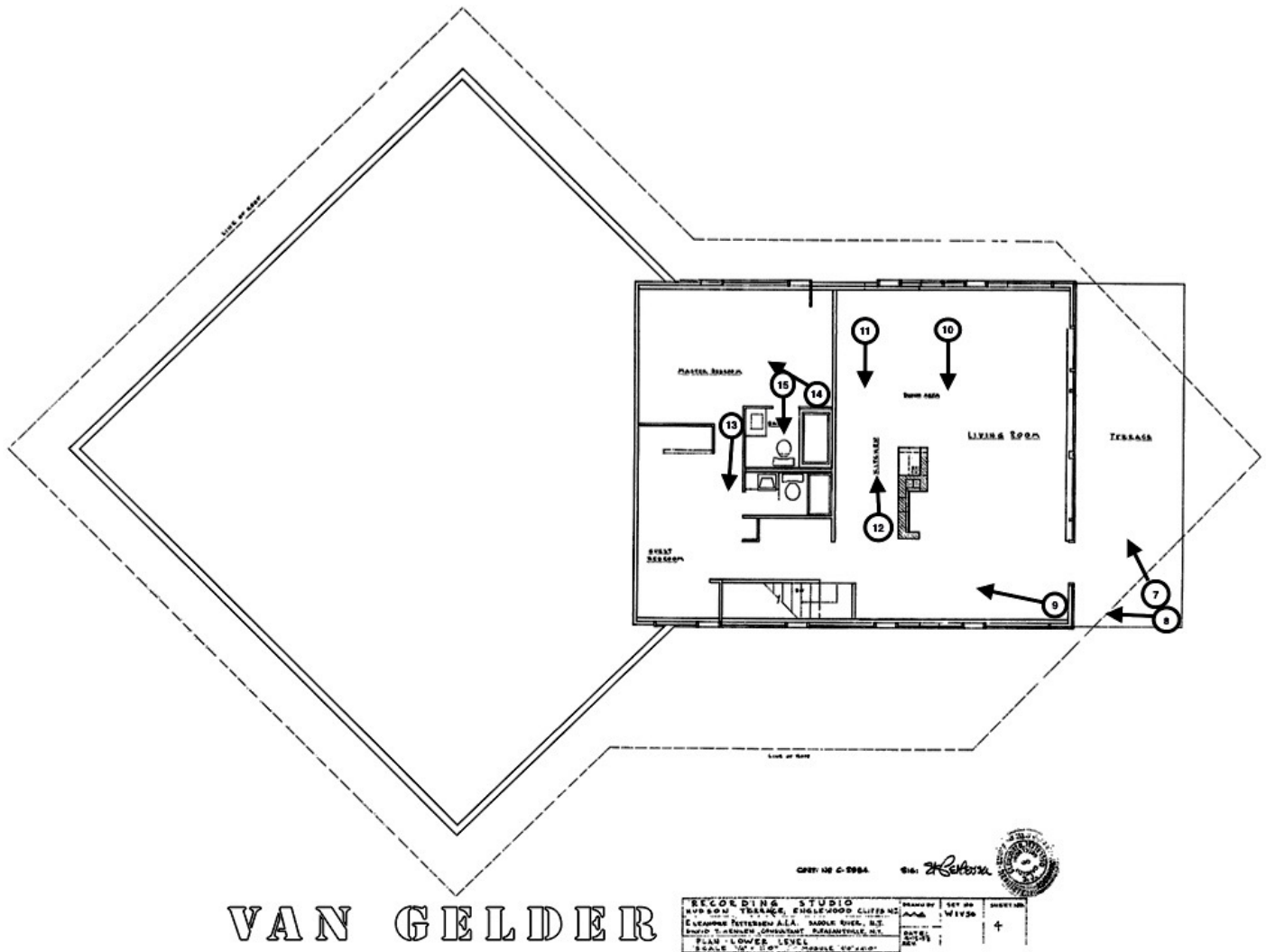


Photo map: Upper level (residence)

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 4



Photo 1: Aerial view of VGSH as seen from the west side of Sylvan Avenue. The roof is barely visible within the tree cover of the densely-forested lot. The driveway to the studio is at the lower left corner of the photo. Saint Peter's University can be seen directly east of VGSH, and the George Washington Bridge is in the distance at the right of the photo. Modern commercial buildings flank the VGSH property to the north and south. Camera facing east and downward (taken with drone).



Photo 2: Northwest and west facades of building. Roof of detached garage is seen at the far right of the photo. The adjacent blue-green glass commercial building to the north of the VGSH is seen on the left. Camera facing northeast.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 5



Photo 3: West elevation. Ramp to landing, exterior block wall and trellis shown. The driveway/parking area is seen at the left side of the photo. Camera facing north.



Photo 4: View of Detached garage and southernmost portion of building, second-floor terrace, wooden privacy screen and elevator. Camera facing southeast.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 6



Photo 5: West and south elevations of building showing the elevator (added in 2016), terrace and privacy screening, and trellises on both the west and south elevations. Garage roof corner seen at the left of the photo. Camera facing northeast.



Photo 6: View of north corner of VGSH, northwest and northeast elevations. Camera facing south.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 7



Photo 7: View of concrete terrace and window wall. Camera facing east.



Photo 8: View of terrace showing concrete block planter, wooden privacy screen above block wall, and window wall with entrance door. Camera facing northwest.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 8



Photo 9: View of living area showing custom cabinetry under windows on western wall to left of photo, corridor to bedrooms, fireplace, and built-in shelving. Original cove lighting and added track spotlights and pendants are shown. Camera facing north.



Photo 10: View of living area showing southern window wall and interior portion of block planter on western wall next to gray drawer units. Camera facing southwest.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 9



Photo 11: View of galley kitchen with living/dining area at left. Camera facing west.



Photo 12: View of kitchen showing back of fireplace at right of photo. Camera facing east.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 10



Photo 13: View of second bedroom showing original cove lighting. Camera facing west.



Photo 14: View of master bedroom, furnished as an office. Camera facing northeast.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 11

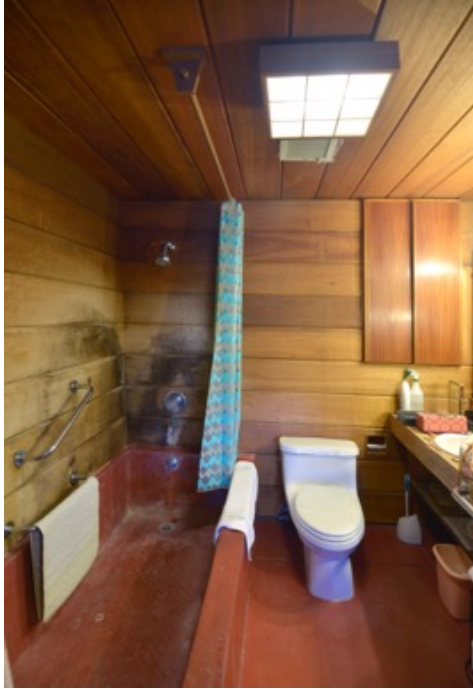


Photo 15: View of master bathroom showing red concrete tub and floor, wood paneled walls and ceiling. Camera facing west.



Photo 16: View of recording Studio interior showing control room at left, staircase to second floor living area at center. Camera facing downward and southeast.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 12



Photo 17: View of recording Studio showing red concrete floor, concrete block walls, cedar ceiling, two isolation booths, Steinway grand piano, microphones and organ (center-right). Speakers are seen on top of the central isolation (drum) booth. Camera facing northeast.



Photo 18: View of recording Studio interior showing isolation booths. Camera facing north.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 13



Photo 19: View of recording studio showing control room at left. Camera facing southwest.



Photo 20: View of recording studio showing cedar ceiling and up-lighting. Camera facing upward and southwest.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 14

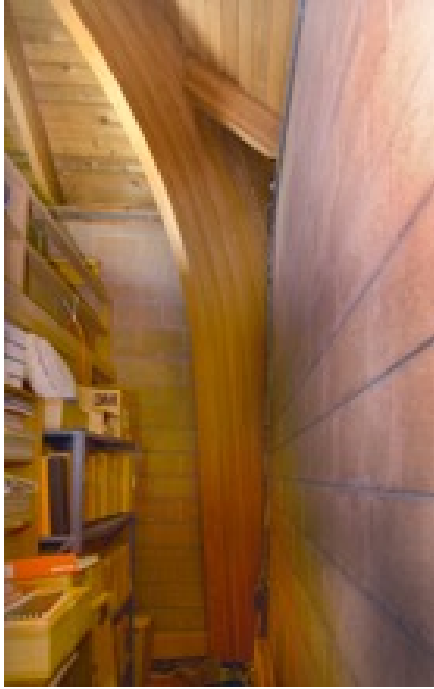


Photo 21: View of laminated fir arch at corner of studio. Camera facing northeast.



Photo 22: View of control room interior. Camera facing west.

United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

National Register of Historic Places Continuation Sheet

Van Gelder Studio and Home
Bergen Count, New Jersey

Section number Photos Page 15



Photo 23: View of Scully mastering Lathe. Camera facing west.



Photo 24: View of workbench area behind control room. Camera facing west