



[Home](#) > [Life & Arts](#) > [Fall Almanac 2022](#) > Eclectic sculptures dot Woodbury landscape



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Eclectic sculptures dot Woodbury landscape

BY MICHAEL CHAIKEN REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN September 3, 2022



*A bulldozer appears to be dancing in this sculpture by Edward Tufte at Hogpen Hill Farm in Woodbury.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
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*An Airstream trailer juts out into the air at Hogpen Hill Farms in Woodbury.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN



*Artist Edward Tufte poses with his sculpture 'Dancer With Calipes Her DNA'.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN



*One of the stone sculpture created by Edward Tufte at Hogpen Hill Farms in Woodbury. Take note of the painting of the women blowing a wind instrument peeking through the stone.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN



*'And Everything Else...Is Everything Else' read the signs along the driveway that runs through Edward Tufte's Hogpen Hill Farm in Woodbury.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
REPUBLICAN-AMERICAN



*One of the sculptures in the field at Hogpen Hill Farm in Woodbury.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
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*A sculpture created by Edward Tufte at Hogpen Hill Farm in Woodbury.*MICHAEL CHAIKEN
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There's a hairpin turn off Weekepeemee Road in Woodbury that will take you to Hogpen Hill Farms at No. 100.

But on this farm, you won't find chickens, goats or cattle playing.

Instead you'll find a rusted bulldozer doing a pirouette. You'll find gargantuan stones playing leap frog. And you'll spy stainless steel panels dancing in a chorus line.

And dotted across the field, you'll find Picasso-inspired paintings of women playing wind instruments to provide a silent soundtrack for the outsized sculptures that dot the 234-acre landscape owned by the artist, Edward Tufte.

Tufte will open up his sculpture garden – which most days is a tree farm – on weekends from Sept. 24 through Oct. 23.

Tufte arrived at art from an unexpected entry point. Before retiring, he spent 33 years teaching politics, public affairs, statistics and computer science at Princeton and Yale. Tufte also is, as described by Forbes magazine, "the guru of graphics, the high priest of presentation. For more than 30 years he has been showing us how to visualize data with simplicity, clarity and elegance, while campaigning against 'chartjunk' and other design practices that lead to obfuscation."

Art and the art of presentation are not as incongruous as one would think, explained Tufte.

"My five books on data visualization and my landscape sculpture have seeing intensely in common," said the former professor.

"But," Tufte explained, "the data work is mostly in the flatland of the computer screen and paper."

"Sculpture is in the real physical three-dimensional space – and the viewer lives in the same place as the artworks," said Tufte.

For Tufte, art is a respite from presentations.

"After too much time staring at a computer screen, I love the physicality of artworks and the presence of viewers in the space," said Tufte.

Wanting to create art does not necessarily lead to creating a sculpture garden.

Tufte said, "The idea of my art farm is to create a big space that is completely outside and different from the rest of the world."

"The space is serene, beautiful, gracious, funny, prankish, separate, silent, joyous, beyond words," said Tufte. "There's no stupidity, meanness, anger, hate."

And there is indeed a serenity at the farm. Even if there was no artwork to capture your attention, the rolling hills and the valley surrounding Woodbury provide a respite to the hustle and bustle of everyday life deep into the Nutmeg State and along Interstate 84 or Route 8. And the sheer size of the farm and the texture of the landscape offers plenty of space to get your hiking muscles into a groove.

There is clearly a sense of humor percolating beneath the art imagined by Tufte. The mirth is obvious as you see his Airstream trailer perched atop discarded parts from the former nuclear power plant in Waterford. The trailer is reportedly fully equipped with brakelights that are still illuminated. Then there are the assorted large mechanical-looking space age-looking dogs built out of what appear to be air plane parts.

There is also a clear wink in Tufte's eye when he was asked about the inspiration for the pieces.

"My inspiration?," he replied, "Well it is hard to say."

"But," the former college professor added, "only amateurs worry about inspiration; the rest of us go to the studio every day and go to work."

"In the last 10 years, Hogpen has been open erratically," said Tufte. "It is a working farm."

During the worst of the pandemic, Tufte said the lines were long at Hogpen Hill as people longed for outdoor activities to occupy themselves.

Tufte said, "It is good having visitors because that gives me and my staff a deadline for cleaning up, mowing, completing new works."

Hogpen Hill Farms is at 100 Weekepeemee Road. Woodbury. There is no sign indicating the sculpture garden is there. You just have to look for the number 100 written in red on a placard by the road.

Tickets need to be bought in advance at tufte.com