

# Rosset Estate In East Hampton Hits Market For \$6.5 Million

By Tom Clavin | June 8, 2016

Barney Rosset was such a legendary figure that the property on Hands Creek Road in East Hampton where he lived for many years is still known in both publishing and real estate circles as the Rosset Estate. While it is highly unlikely visitors will discover an uncensored version of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover” that had fallen behind a bookcase, the house and grounds still reek of the legacy of a giant in book publishing.

The property—just listed by Town and Country Real Estate at just less than \$6.5 million—is quite remarkable. It includes 13.5 acres of gardens and open meadows (upon which Rosset used to ride his tractor), tennis court, swimming pool, separate garage, and is surrounded by preserved land. The 4-bedroom, 5,500-square-foot house has en-suite baths, a chef’s kitchen, four fireplaces, a library (of course!), upper-level decks, and for the adventurous, a rooftop hot tub. Downtown East Hampton is only 2 miles to the south.

It is not a stretch to say that Mr. Rosset—who died at 89 in 2012—was a big reason why there are so many book publishing people on the South Fork. More than just moving here, Mr. Rosset almost headquartered his company in East Hampton. His life spanned what is now recognized as the golden age of book publishing, when good and great writers were nurtured by their editors and many publishers were independent companies. Grove Press, Mr. Rosset’s company, turned out to be more independent than the others.



He was born in Chicago in 1922, the decade in which a legendary editor, Maxwell Perkins, helped to introduce Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Wolfe, and F. Scott Fitzgerald to American and European readers. Mr. Rosset joined the Army during World War II and served in the Signal Corps. Meanwhile, a small publishing company had started up on Grove Street in Manhattan, and after the war, having pulled together some money from various jobs, in 1951, Mr. Rosset bought it. In an interview with *The Paris Review*, Mr. Rosset recalled, “I was doing nothing at the time and thought, ‘This might be interesting.’ I think I paid 1,500 dollars for half—which included the inventory. I took the inventory to my apartment on 9th Street, all of it, in three suitcases.” He would run the company for 34 years.

Mr. Rosset was never known for being generous with advances to writers. He was not an especially smart businessman, so money was often in short supply. However, he was known for being a vehement opponent of censorship and for fighting to have banned books made available to the American public. Another reason why money was tight at Grove Press was that Mr. Rosset engaged in hundreds of lawsuits aimed at overturning obscenity laws. Two successful efforts resulted in the publication of “Lady Chatterley’s Lover” by D.H. Lawrence and “Tropic of Cancer” by Henry Miller. Among the other authors he published were Samuel Beckett, Jack Kerouac, Malcolm X, David Mamet, William S. Burroughs, and Marguerite Duras.

How did he wind up on the South Fork? In the late 1940s, Mr. Rosset was living with the painter Joan Mitchell in the south of France. They heard from friends about the emerging New York School of artists in New York, particularly Jackson Pollock and Hans Hofmann. The latter had a school on 8th Street in Manhattan, and Mr. Rosset believed that Ms. Mitchell should attend it. If they were moving to New York, though, he insisted that they get married. Ms. Mitchell was the first of Mr. Rosset’s five wives, with whom he had four children and four stepchildren.

Through Ms. Mitchell, Mr. Rosset met many of the New York School painters, who also included Willem de Kooning, Franz Kline, and Robert Motherwell. He later described them as “very inarticulate people. They didn’t talk much. Motherwell did, but he couldn’t paint so well.” In the late 1940s and early ’50s, some of these artists were spending an increasing amount of time in the Hamptons, with Mr. Pollock and his wife, Lee Krasner, being pioneers by moving to the Springs full-time. Mr. Rosset visited the artists there. Mr. Motherwell had a house in East Hampton, and Mr. Rosset decided that is where he wanted to live too.

With Mr. Rosset on the South Fork, other publishing executives, editors, agents, and writers followed. He entertained industry visitors and was quite the raconteur. He also diversified his portfolio by undertaking other ventures, such as being the U.S. distributor of the Swedish soft-porn film “I Am Curious (Yellow),” which contained nudity not seen in “mainstream” American movie theaters before. While the film made money, most of Mr. Rosset’s non-publishing efforts were not successful. Grove Press was not much of a money-maker either, and in 1985, Mr. Rosset sold the company. Today’s incarnation, Grove Atlantic, is one of the very few independents left on Publishers Row.

Mr. Rosset sold the estate on Hands Creek Road in the mid-1990s and the property has undergone upgrades and other renovations in the intervening years. This makes it an even more special value, when you add its present pristine condition to some of the walls having heard decades of literary conversations between Mr. Rosset and some of the world’s finest writers.