

**ANN ACHESON: BELONGING TO EARTH, PLACE AND SELF |
CREATING A HOME AT THE FRIED EGG**
S1 EPISODE 6: TRANSCRIPT March 7, 2021

HOUSE CALLS 01

Ann-INTRO

"I saw the FRIED EGG and I came down and stepped on the porch and looked in the windows, and the porch overlooks this vista, and I just said to myself, I need to live here. I purchased everything that was in the house. So that process, owning the fried egg was, you know, stepping into the history of the people who had lived there and how they lived there. It took me years to develop a relationship with that house, because I really felt the sense of stewardship, not ownership. There was something here, being evoked in me, to allow the place to inform me, and to allow the place to invite me into relationship."

Nina-INTRO

"I'm Nina Freedman, and this is WHEREING. WHEREING explores where we are. It is dedicated to those who believe in the inherent right of belonging, and all the ways we feel we belong, and connect to ourselves, to each other, and the spaces that hold the stories where all of this comes alive. Where each experience of belonging is a work of art, created by chance or by design. Dare I ask, is belonging where you are, not what matters most? WHEREING is the spatial story. Welcome."

*Every so often at WHEREING, we will be blending in episodes that share unique, individual stories that people share with us about their homes. These episodes are in a series titled **HOUSE CALLS**. They may be stories about a way a home was built or lived in, what happened there, or an unusual story about its design, its history or impact. It is not about the design of a multi-million dollar home. It's about the apartments, the houses, the rooms, the modest places, that hold so much meaning for us, perhaps because of their very simplicity. If you have a unique story to share, please let us know."*

Nina

Today we speak with Ann Acheson in the first episode of HOUSE CALLS. Ann's early degree in psychology was followed by a lifelong immersion in the healing arts. She and her partner disassembled the FRIED EGG, their summer camp of 20 years, salvaged 80% of the materials, and then used the materials in their self designed, new house. The story is much bigger than that. The FRIED EGG? Let's find out.

Ann, today I'm really looking forward to talking to you about your home, which sounds so magical to me. From its roots, to where it is now, and the whole story behind it. Where was your original home?

Ann

I was born in New York City, and we promptly moved out of the city. Yes, and then we lived in different places, in New England. We moved so much. We lived in different situations. We lived in suburbs, a working class community, a private school community. We didn't really set down roots anywhere in particular, but the gift in having moved around a lot, for me, has been that I felt the keen choice of how I wanted to live my life, that I didn't need to conform to any particular social field.

Nina

What do you mean by that?

Ann

Yeah. I think when we settle into a community, into a social class, then there are aspirations and inspirations, we're informed by that field. And, then we measure ourselves from that place, within that field. And so, because we lived with people who were living different lifestyles, and I didn't actually feel like I belonged to any of them, that offered a choice for me to ask myself how I wanted to live my life. Like, what are my values? How do I want to live my life? So, I've never really felt like I've been pressured by an outside community, to be someone, or something.

Nina

In seeing the places that you've lived in terms of class structures, potentially monetary structures, which is tied to that. Yes. Religion, seeing that not belonging, as a gift.

Ann

Yes. I've always felt like I've sat on the edge of belonging, and looked into belonging. And there is a gift to that, but it's a very fertile edge for me. It's been a conversation that's been alive.

Nina

It's also the being of an outsider, being a little bit different. I actually also find there's the other side of it. It's a gift, but there's always an internal question.

Ann

Yes. That's what I mean by fertile edge. There's a conversation that goes on, about belonging. Whether it's a loud conversation or quiet conversation, when you're sitting on that edge, instead of looking in. It was part of my drive actually, in this expression that I have been following, to land, to set roots, to belong to myself, to belong in community.

Nina

Your home in New Hampshire, in Mill Hollow, seems to be a place of landing and belonging, in community, isn't it?

Ann

Yes. Very much.

Nina

Thinking about what you just said, about almost like being a traveler, in a way up until a point, right, and then, arriving in this place. Potentially, when you arrived, it was maybe just another point of travel, initially, right?

Ann

Absolutely, yes.

Nina

So tell us how you got there and how that started to unfold.

Ann

I was living in Vermont. And I needed to find a different place to live. One of my colleagues lived in Alstead, in the town that I ended up in, and I asked him if he knew of anyone that I could rent a room from. And he said, absolutely. I know this woman named Joanna, she lives in a house called the Three Bears, and she would love to invite you to live with her.

Nina

Were you Goldilocks?

Ann

I didn't get to try out three beds. Yeah. So, I land in this beautiful little house with this woman who is eccentric, and an artist, and had friends named Taffy, and Fritzzy and Reese, and, it was like, what is this world that I just stepped into? It was really amazing to start to feel the creativity that was in this place. And, one day, there was a very specific day. I was driving up the road from the Three Bears, and I heard this drop of information, "you are home." Hm. As you said, I was traveling. I was still traveling, you know, that was my orientation. I wasn't particularly looking for home. And so, when I heard that, that I was home, it was so startling. I was like, Okay. I'm home. Okay. And then, it was several years later that I ended up purchasing this summer house, called the Fried Egg in Mill Hollow. So, there was an evolution there, that ended up happening, from hearing that I was home, to landing.

Nina

What do you think it was, that suddenly, that was home.

Ann

I feel like I was informed, that piece that came in, felt like a directive. So, the journey was to discover into the question you just asked me, like why here? You know, I mean, I liked it. I felt very at home in New Hampshire , but I'm not sure that my personality would have said, okay, this is it. This is where I'm going to be, necessarily, cause I was in that mode of traveling, and not feeling like I really needed to land at home.

Nina

Right. And possibly nomadic.

Ann

Right. I always kind of felt like I could live anywhere.

Nina

It's a commitment to a place.

Ann

Yes. It is a commitment to a place, and myself.

Nina

That's right. So, you bought this place. Now, you mentioned, that it was called the Fried Egg?

Ann

The Fried Egg, yes.

Nina

Did every house in their community have a name?

Ann

Not every one.

Nina

You had mentioned the Three Bears.

Ann

That's right. But, I did live in the American Wing, after the Three Bears.

Nina

So, that was your place, the Fried Egg. Tell us a little bit about the history of the Fried Egg, and why it's called the Fried Egg, and what drew you to it? The house, and the land around it.

Ann

The Fried Egg was built in 1908, as a summer camp. And, it was situated on top of a hill that looks down. The land was all clear down to a lake. The lake had been a swamp that had been dammed up, to have water power for these mills. There were a pile of other mills down the way. And, that created the industry and the ability for people to live in this area. And so, the Fried Egg was built as a summer getaway for a family that lived across the lake, and wanted to be able to have a different place, where they could be in the summer. It was built as a camp. So, the outside walls, were the inside walls. There was no insulation to the house, and there was a porch that wrapped around three sides of the house. So, it served as a getaway, and sat on 16 acres of land.

Nina

So, it was a summer camp for a family, not a summer camp for children.

Ann

That's right. In New Hampshire, the use of the word camp for house, is synonymous. And, it was sort of roughing it a little bit, you know. There was a fireplace in the Fried Egg, but there was no central heating. So, if it was cold outside, we were cold inside, and we'd make a fire and you know, huddle around the fire, which is how we lived, in the summer for 20 years, my husband and I summering here.

Nina

This house was somewhat beloved in the community as well. Wasn't it?

Ann

It was.

Nina

Why was that?

Ann

That's a really good question. There was a mystique to the Fried Egg. A lot had happened here. There were a lot of parties and gatherings, and people would come up from New York City and visit the Fried Egg. So, there was a sense of relaxation and community and connection, that revolved around the Fried Egg. When I was living down the road, literally in this little apartment, and I was on a walk, one winter, and I saw the Fried Egg, and I came down and stepped on the porch and looked in the windows, and stepped around the corner. And the porch overlooks this vista, and I just said to myself, I need to live here. And, I had written a letter to the woman, the family who owned the house, and asked if I could purchase the Fried Egg when it came up for sale. And she said, yes. And I found out later, that the neighbors were all wondering why I got to buy it. And they didn't like this outsider coming in, and buying the Fried Egg. I purchased everything that was in the house, all of the furniture. So that process owning the Fried Egg, was stepping into the history of the people who had lived there, and how they lived there. When I walked into the living room, all the wood is exposed, patina, bead board, the floors, old growth, everything's kind of rough wood and painted beautifully. You got the sense of age and a sense of history, just being in this space. It took me years to develop a relationship with that house, because I really felt the sense of stewardship, not ownership. There was something here being evoked in me, to allow the place to inform me, and to allow the place to invite me into relationship.

Nina

Yeah. Why is it actually called Fried Egg?

Ann

There are a lot of different theories, but one of the theories, and I think this might be the accurate one, is that originally it was painted yellow, and then somebody decided to paint it and they could only reach as far, as how tall they were. And they painted it white, as tall as they were, and the rest of it was yellow.

Nina

So, you're in the house, and you're coming there for the summers, and then something happens, and you decide, well, you have two homes at this point, I believe. Right? You have where you stayed during the winter, and where you stay during the summer, and the Fried Egg, it's your summer house. And then, you reach a decision to live in the Fried Egg all year round. Right? That generated planning for that change, and how you might live there all year round. And, it resulted in taking down the fried egg, and rebuilding on the same site. The whole planning of this and the whole building of this, is an amazing story, and it's a story of community, and creativity and respect, even though you were taking it down, completely. Let's start with the planning of it, because I find it amazing. I mean, you're not an architect. You're not a designer really, although you're a creative person.

Ann

My husband did design a house that we lived in, in the winter time. So, he had experience when we decided to move over here.

Nina

If you could tell us a little bit about the planning of it, because now the both of you are planning it together.

Ann

Right. That ended up being maybe a seven year process, I think. Yeah. This is another one of those things that dropped in directive for me. For a few years, my husband would leave the Fried Egg a few days before I did. And I would go into meditation for several days, into silence. And, during one of those times, I saw myself as an old lady, here on this land. That felt like another piece for me, like, oh, okay. So I'm going to live here when I'm older. I didn't introduce this idea to my husband for a little while. I didn't have the courage to say something at that point. I think that's really what it was. But eventually I mentioned that idea to my husband, and that started this process of envisioning ourselves as elders, and wanting to create a house that would work better for us. You know, with the snow, with access to the roads. We were thinking about being in a neighborhood, rather than being more isolated. The thought of taking down the Fried Egg was, it was kind of like a sacred cow, right? The Fried Egg has been for me, such a special place, that the idea of taking it down, and starting again was like, no, that's not going to happen. And then, at a certain point, when things came together, that became the inevitable thing. It was like, of course, we have to take the Fried Egg. It was obvious. We could take down the Fried Egg and create something, and when that dropped in and it was like, okay, so this is what we are going to do. That summer, when we moved over to the Fried Egg, it was preparation for taking down the Fried Egg, which we didn't know how we were going to do. The 20 years of perennial gardens, I started to dig up the plants and give to the community. Now I disassembled the gardens. And then there was of sense of, this house is so loved by everyone, let's have a good-bye Fried Egg open house, so that people can come and say goodbye. It was Labor Day weekend, and we didn't really think that it was going to be that big of a deal, but there were, I don't know how many people came, it was going to be from noon to two. People came at noon, and they stayed until like eight at night, and they brought food and there was a real sense of celebration. And we had some plans by then, and we have friends who are architects and builders, and they were looking at the plans, and giving us information. And, other builders were like, what are you going to do with this wood? That's part of this house. I mean, it's first generation old growth wood, that actually has a lot of value to it. You might want to have someone salvage this. We still, at that point, didn't know what we were going to do. And then a friend of ours came in the door. And he's been involved with this mill down the road, restoring the mill, which was about the same time period that it was built in the early 1900's. He looked around, and he said, what are you going to do with this wood? Do you think that we could use it for the mill restoration project? He actually had the skill and the wherewithal to know what to think about, in terms of how to take it down, and what the steps in order to do that. At that point, I just knew I had to show up every day that he was going to be taking down the Fried Egg. Then, it became both of us doing it together. So I showed up every day, and he'd say, okay, we're going to take off the roof today, we're going to pick up the floorboards of the master bedroom today.

Nina

And generally though, when you were thinking about taking down the house and rebuilding, did you get a contractor, or you hadn't yet gotten to that point, where you were not going to go get a contractor?

Ann

We had no idea. We were entertaining all possibilities. This is what evolved out of the process of inviting our neighbors in to say goodbye to the house. We had some folks, who were going to do the site, and their business is called the Fuzzy Brothers. Fuzzy Brothers said that they would come with their machines and scrunch up the house, and put it in dumpsters. So that was an option. And then after the party, it just didn't seem like that was the thing to do. We really needed to pass this wood along to the mill project. Right. So I had never done anything like that before, but it seemed like a perfectly wonderful way to honor the Fried Egg, by taking it down and reusing the

material. Over the Columbus Day weekend, there were two groups of kids from a Waldorf school who came and helped take apart the house, and a lot was done that weekend. Then some neighbors came, and helped out, and friends...

Nina

The house was taken down by the community.

Ann

Yeah, it was Bob and I, and then other people would come. So, there was like a breathing piece, friends would come and then leave. But every day, for two months, Bob and I took down the house, and then friends came in and helped whenever they could. That was a really remarkable experience. And I could feel the craft that was put into building the house. I could feel, the men who were the carpenters, who originally built the house as we were disassembling.

Nina

All the details.

Ann

Yeah. The details, and the care that was put in. And Bob took half of the lumber for the mill project, and we kept the floorboards, and the bead board, and windows and some other things, in order to put them into our new house, to repurpose them.

Nina

It's such an interesting process. The length of the planning process, the patience, the allowing for the time, to let this to unfold, and then inviting friends in one by one, not knowing who would show up, they were always people there, to help. And, I was laughing when I was thinking about this, because I live in New York City. I live in an apartment. So, what if I wanted to renovate my apartment, and reach out to my neighbors, and said can come for a party, and help me renovate my apartment, pull down the walls, put in a new kitchen... Oh, what would happen? And, I mean, they would look at me like I was from Mars. They might say, well, why don't you go ahead, and maybe we'll bring you some pasta. While you're doing this, we'll feed you a little bit. But not only that, I wouldn't be allowed to do this. So, the beauty of hearing about this collective action of a community, that, I guess you had a schedule, because you wanted it done maybe before the heavy winter started. But basically, it was just what let's see what happens. This is generally what it's going to happen, but we'll get people. That trust, that it was going to happen, is huge. It reminds me a little bit of the Amish barn raisings of the community. Yes. Which is so uncommon.

Ann

There have been a lot of raisings in the area. That is part of what's here. Yeah.

Nina

So you did the demolition, and then, did the building take place the following year, once spring started?

Ann

Yes. And in the winter time we were working with the design and we were having conversations with our builders. So we had four builders.

Nina

Oh, you did have builders.

Ann

Yes. We did have builders, there was a team of three. And then a friend, who's a builder, who we invited in to be part of the team. It, wasn't a contracting business that we hired. They're local guys who have families and work for a living by building houses, and building other things. And in that way, they were very willing to have us work alongside them. So, my husband and I, when they put the flooring in, we did all the sanding and painting of the flooring. We were involved as much as we could be in the project and were being consulted while we were painting shingles, and things like that.

Nina

Was there any thought given to keeping any of the painted yellow wood from the Fried Egg, either as a remnant, somewhere in the house? Or, re-introducing that color anywhere, to keep it in line with the history? Nothing, you're done with that.

Ann

I can't say that I really liked that yellow. It was a strong yellow. And also, for me, I don't call this house the Fried Egg anymore. It wasn't about preserving the Fried Egg, but it was about bringing the essence forward. And, by utilizing the old bead board - we have wainscoting in our living room, and the wainscoting is the bead board. And then all the flooring from the fried egg, from the first and second floors, all fit on the first floor of the new house. That old wood is 200, 250 years old. It has story, it really has presence. So now we live with the essences, but not with the Fried Egg. And we decided to put the 10 foot deep porches back on two sides of the house, which is what the Fried Egg had. The porch was a big part of the Fried Egg experience for us, the summers on the porch. And so it becomes a living space in the summer. With COVID, we spent a lot of our time on the porch. We ate our meals on the porch and, we could sit in the rainstorms on the porch, because we wouldn't get wet. So it becomes this conversation with the outside world, with nature, with the land.

Nina

Is there something about the house now that you see, or feel that you did not imagine?

Ann

Hmm, good question. It's a gift to be on this piece of land, year round. And, so that part of me that's the traveler, or the roamer, who moved back and forth between the two homes, there's something that has settled in me, that I didn't expect. Yeah. There's the access to parts of myself, and also in relational space with my husband, that we're experiencing in this place of being settled, and being held by this house, and by what we did together, and by the land, that the house sits on.

Nina

Wonderful. and how does the community, what's their reaction to it now?

Ann

When we finished the house, the next Labor Day, we had an open house for the community, to come in and to celebrate with us, this new home. Again, so many folks came and we gave tours and everyone brought food and I guess people are curious, like what you did you do, and we got a lot of really good feedback and, I felt like the community blessed the house. And then, we could settle more. It had been such a complete creative process up until that point, that it was like, we need to celebrate. It was really fun. And, that sense of completion and celebration carried us into the next thing, permission to live here more deeply. I personally have an intention of cultivating and maintaining community. That's important to me. It's part of the belonging piece, you know?

Nina

At this point, what do you feel home is?

Ann

Ultimately I think home is a relationship to self, and a relationship to one's creativity, relationship to one's belonging. And for me, that includes being part of the earth. Attending community, part of the place.

Nina

Beautiful. Well, thank you so much, Ann, for this magical story of the Fried Egg.

Nina-OUTRO

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