

## Penland Paradise

### Penland School of Art: a North Carolina paradise

The Airport in Asheville North Carolina is small, quaint, and genteel, just like the rest of the town. Although Asheville is one of my favorite cities it is not the subject of this article, we are merely passing through on our way to a more remote and exotic locale, Penland School of Crafts. The drive from Asheville is lovely and takes about an hour and 30 minutes. For the most part the road is a winding snake up the Blue Ridge Mountains. Remarkably, this country is lovely anytime of the year. I would recommend fall for drop-your-jaw autumnal tree color. Truly all year long there is a wealth of beauty. The mountains are soft, round, and feminine in appearance, with deep wells of verdant green between the peaks and mounds. The road slips up and over the passes and slides down into the valleys as if planned for a theme park ride, or perhaps they were planned for the vistas that open at every turn, it is a brilliant drive.



This is a view of the main campus as you approach on Conley Ridge Road.

The final turn that takes you up the last mountain and onto School property is an extreme hairpin and the road defies gravity as does your vehicle. A Shangri La-esque valley is hidden at the top of the mountain. There strewn about several hundred acres are the buildings that comprise this remarkable community of artists, teachers, and students.

Penland's teaching studios are not open to the public. However, the Penland Gallery sponsors tours of the campus on Tuesdays and Thursdays, mid-April through early December. Because tour sizes are limited, visitors should call ahead for reservations. There is a charming coffee house on campus for refreshments.

The residence halls and administrative buildings are turn of the century or older. The Edward F. Worst Craft House is a 3-story log cabin that houses the supply store, and student residences and is one of the largest log cabins in the country. Horner Hall, at one time an Episcopal Boys School, was converted into a delightful gallery space, filled with light and wonders of art and craft.



The Edward F. Worst Craft House

The classes at Penland are interesting, informative, creative and life changing. Students come from all over the world to share the learning experience in an environment of freedom and acceptance. This is a very safe place to experiment with the creation of art that may not be accepted in the mainstream of art schools. It is a magical experience for all who attend.



This is the entrance to Horner Hall

Now drive back down the mountain and join the other mortals at the Biltmore Estate in Asheville for dinner or bask in the sun on the beach at the Outer Banks, these choices though tempting are pale and thin after a visit to Penland.