Trending: Where the architects live
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Architects Ann and Howard Lathrop stand by the model of a modern home that they designed at their offices in Westport, Conn. on Wednesday, October 15, 2014. Photo: Brian A. Pounds Buy this photo

More than a half-century after the esteemed group of architects dubbed "The Harvard Five" made their presence known in New Canaan, southwestern Connecticut remains a hub for the profession, with twice the share of architects per capita as the rest of the nation.

Across America, architects account for seven people per 10,000 residents, but in Fairfield County, the rate is 14.7 architects per 10,000 residents, a Hearst Connecticut Newspapers analysis of state licensing data shows. There are several reasons for the sky-high saturation, but New Canaan Historical Society Executive Director Janet Lindstrom said it likely stems from the five famous Harvard architects that made the area home in the 1950s.

The group included Johnson M. Johansen,
Architects in the country," she said, noting Connecticut comes just behind the state of New Jersey on the ranking. New Jersey has more than twice as many residents as Connecticut's population of 3.6 million.

For Ann Sells, principal of her own firm on Old Kings Highway in Westport, the fact that her town has a higher concentration of folks in her field than other places makes a lot of sense.

"Westport's always been considered kind of artsy," she said, pointing to the town's long history as a cultural center thanks to top-tier performances at the playhouse and the influence of household names like Paul Newman. But the love of art doesn't just exist onstage, there's also a love of design built into the town's fabric, she said.

"There's a concentration of design shops. Everything from small shops to the big box stores like Pottery Barn and Crate & Barrel, and a lot of designers and antique stores, so it becomes this go-to place for design," she said. "And I think it has to do a lot with the fact that people want to be where others are. When you have a shoe store, you want to be where other shoe stores are nearby, so there's a concentration effect that draws like-minded people here."

There is also a higher average income in towns like Westport, New Canaan and other spots in Fairfield County than the nation as a whole, which enables people to utilize architects in home design projects rather than relying on a draftsman, which is more typical in other states.

"People have a higher level of taste and expectations and sense of quality in real estate here too," Sells said. "People who live here have traveled widely and lived in many other places, and they have money to spend. That's not unique to Westport, though. It's New Canaan, Darien, Rowayton and Greenwich as well."

When measuring the concentration of architects in towns with at least 10,000 residents, nine Fairfield County towns make the top 20 list.

"Something like this really defines the communities we live in," said Jones of the AIA. "People in these areas are surrounded by good architecture and don't even know that, and I say this with tremendous pride."

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