



Birch Bay Village



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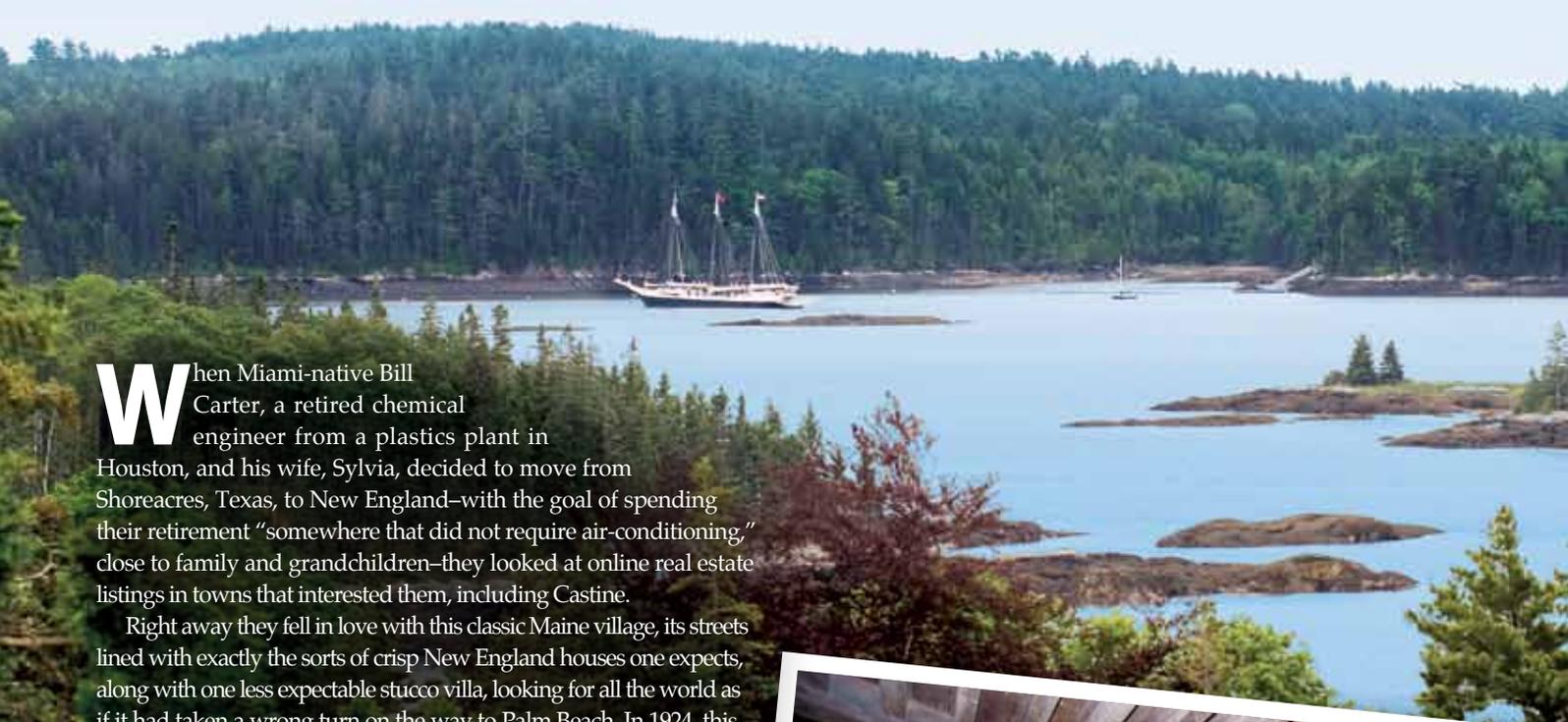
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Sunrise Boulevard

Castine's 'Pink Palace' brings a splash of Palm Beach whimsy to this quaint New England town. **BY BRAD EMERSON**



When Miami-native Bill Carter, a retired chemical engineer from a plastics plant in Houston, and his wife, Sylvia, decided to move from Shoreacres, Texas, to New England—with the goal of spending their retirement “somewhere that did not require air-conditioning,” close to family and grandchildren—they looked at online real estate listings in towns that interested them, including Castine.

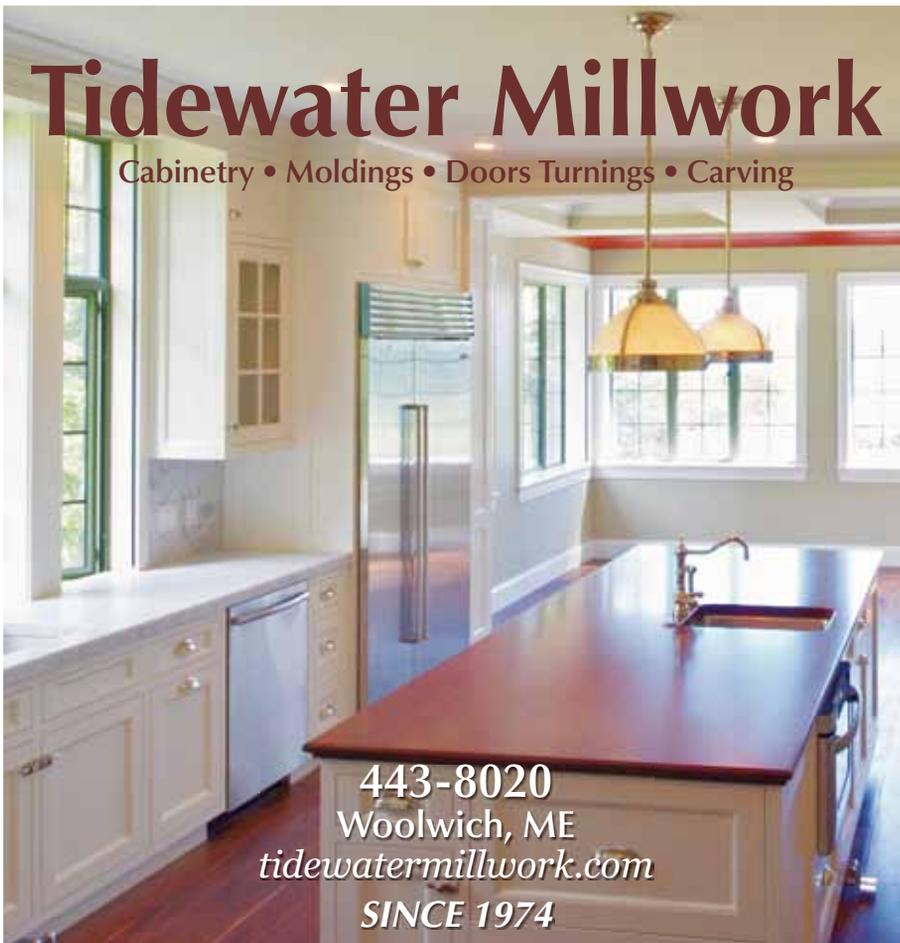
Right away they fell in love with this classic Maine village, its streets lined with exactly the sorts of crisp New England houses one expects, along with one less expectable stucco villa, looking for all the world as if it had taken a wrong turn on the way to Palm Beach. In 1924, this Spanish-Italian confection was the talk of the town when Miss E.K. Branch, a banking heiress from Richmond, Virginia, built it as her summer retreat. Not for Effie Branch the gray shingled cottages of her neighbors. Her architect, William Lawrence Bottomley, was one of the most fashionable of the day, with practices in both Richmond and New York.

Bottomley was noted for his skill with proportion and detail, and the interiors, even the service areas, are beautifully conceived. All rooms have two and three exposures—the vast drawing room, used in Miss Branch's day for musicals, has four. The incline of the main stair from the huge entrance hall is so gentle that one is barely aware of the climb. Materials are carefully chosen, and it is clear Miss Branch spared no expense. Paneled doors with iron arches open to the main rooms. The hall floor is of small cork tiles, dark



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and light, beautifully worn, and polished to the appearance of stone. The dining room walls are textured and scored to imitate sandstone. Across the hall and down several broad steps, the drawing room, used by Miss Branch for musicales, has 12-foot beamed ceilings and tall, leaded windows—some with pale lavender panes—opening to the terraced lawn. Down another few steps is the library, the set piece of the house, with Pompeian murals on the vaulted ceiling, a Gothic hooded fireplace, and bookcases set in carved limestone arches. Perhaps best of all is the tower room at the top of the house, reached by a winding, arched corridor. This is the room, with views in all directions, that Sylvia Carter has appropriated as a painting studio.

Miss Branch's new villa was called 'The Play-House' but Pulitzer Prize-winning novelist Ellen Glasgow [*In This Our Life*, 1941], a relative and frequent guest, called it the 'Friendly Folk Visitor Center' for the lavish Southern hospitality dispensed there by 'Cousin Effie' and the staff that traveled with her from Richmond. But the locals, eyeing

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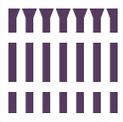
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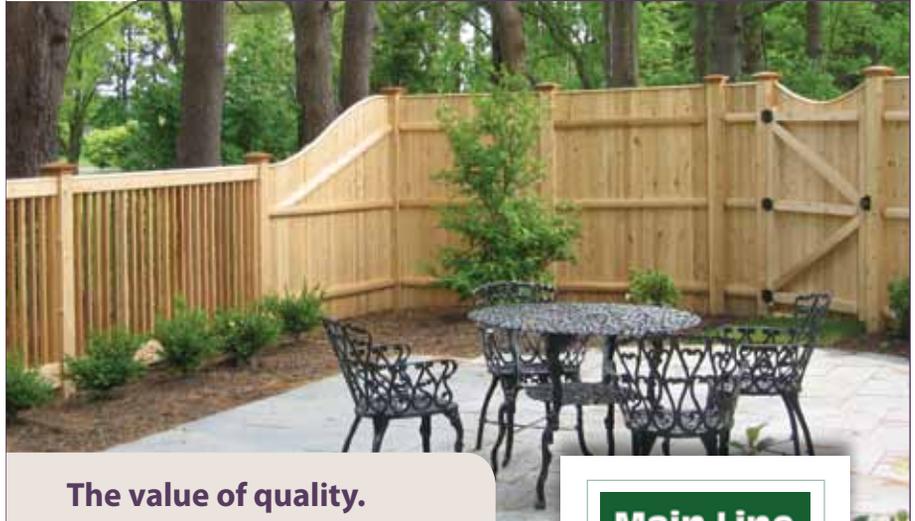
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the salmon-tinted stucco exterior, succinctly dubbed it 'The Pink Palace' and though the house has since been painted white, the name endures. This is the house the Carters purchased in 2004.



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Buying a Spanish villa in Maine was the easy part. The house had been rarely occupied in recent years and was showing its age—local children had used the leaded-glass windows for target practice. There was

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TALKING WALLS

work to do, and the Carters rolled up their sleeves and began restoring and adapting the house for modern life.

Systems were upgraded and original details were restored, down to the push-button light switches. Bill re-tiled the bathrooms himself and—after sobering, first-winter heating bills—built storm windows for the multitudes of differently shaped windows, including the distinctive keyhole windows in the bathrooms. A wood stove was installed in the brick arch which once held a coal range in the kitchen. Former servant areas were updated for modern life—a washer and dryer in the butler's pantry, new counters in the kitchen, and the maids' dining room became a breakfast room. Former maids' bedrooms became quarters for grandchildren. With a twinkle, Sylvia Carter reports that when the grandchildren are visiting, she has to tape over the mother of pearl call buttons that once summoned Miss Branch's maids, as the grandchildren find ringing them entirely too much fun. ■

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