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# East of Eden

For **\$15.5M**, you can be the toast of Bar Harbor, from soup to guns.

BY BRAD EMERSON

**I**N 1867, NEW YORK businessman David H. Haight acquired a large shorefront parcel on Sonogee Point in Bar Harbor, then still known as Eden. Haight hired a Boston builder named Doane to put up a large wooden summer house with a mansard roof and encircling verandas for enjoying the ocean views. Mr. Doane had been brought to Bar Harbor by Alpheus Hardy, a wealthy Bostonian, earlier that year to construct his own simple cottage—there being no contractors on the island considered capable of building a cottage to the standards of a wealthy urban visitor. Seeing the opportunity, Do-

ane remained, building a number of large cottages as Bar Harbor's boom began.

## CASTLE BOOM

Just a dozen years later, Bar Harbor was a destination town, a fashionable watering hole for the East Coast elite. Its huge hotels attracted some of the country's most prominent citizens, and it was considered a serious contender for Newport, Rhode Island's, crown as high society's summer capital.

Throughout the next two decades, elaborate cottages of stone and shingle, embellished with gables and turrets, were built along the shores by some of America's most prominent architects, including William



## FUN FACT:

Remember the New York Supreme Court building with all the stairs that **Charlie Sheen** climbs at the end of *Wall Street*? **Guy Lowell** designed that, too.



Guy's wife was Henrietta Sargent, cousin of John Singer Sargent. John Singer Sargent drew this charcoal image of Guy, above.

## Dazzling Vistas

Born in 1870, architect **Guy Lowell** was one of the Boston Brahmin Lowells, a cousin of Pulitzer prizewinning poet **Amy Lowell** and her brother **Percival Lowell**, who discovered the planet Pluto.

Guy died of a stroke at sea near the Madeira Islands en route to Europe in 1927. But before that he created a pantheon of startling buildings. For example:

- Guy Lowell designed the Boston **Museum of Fine Arts**.

Ralph Emerson, Rotch & Tilden, Frank Furness, and Bruce Price.

In 1902, David Haight's heirs sold three parcels of their father's shoreline, and in the next two years, three grand new cottages appeared: Andrews Davis's "La Selva," Henry Lane Eno's "Sonogee," and Edith Vanderbilt Fabbri's "Buonriposo."

The Davis cottage (See our story "Viva La Selva," May 2013) was in the traditional idiom, but the Eno and Fabbri cottages were inspired by Mediterranean villas, a style newly popular in Bar Harbor, where florid travel writers of the day often drew

comparison to Italian coastal vistas.

### THE BRAHMIN & THE LADDS

In May 1908, the *Bar Harbor Record* announced that the Haight cottage was to be demolished by its new owner, yachtsman Walter Graeme Ladd of Pasadena, California. The site was to be prepared for a new cottage by architect **Guy Lowell**, whose Building of Arts in Bar Harbor was nearing completion (See our story "Athens in the Wilderness," April 2014).

Walter Ladd had worked as an insurance broker, but his chief occupation was managing the fortune of his wife, the former Kate Everitt Macy. Kate's grandfather, Josiah Macy, was a Quaker from Nantucket who'd parlayed a fortune made in shipping and commissions into another as the first oil refiner in New York, and finally into a third, when that refinery was sold to John D. Rockefeller's Standard Oil Trust. Mrs. Ladd and her brother, V. Everitt Macy, were the principal heirs to their grandfather's \$40M estate (approximately \$1.2 billion in







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On the wall facing the window, an original mural by T.R. Mantey duplicates the island view out the huge window opposite.

today's dollars).

Guy Lowell was not yet 40 when he received the commission to design the Ladd cottage, but he was already at the top of his profession as one of the most published and admired designers of the era. He had a degree in architecture from MIT; had studied landscape and horticulture at the Royal Botanic Garden at Kew; and finally, in 1899, received a diploma from the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. For the Ladds, he conceived an Italian villa with stucco walls and red tile roof.

Lowell began with an 'H' shape plan. The projecting wings thus allowed for ex-

ceptional air and light, and took full advantage of the views—with many of the principal rooms enjoying three exposures. Even the servants' dining room, now the laundry and office (the original industrial-scale laundry was in a separate building), enjoys bright light from three large arched windows, an unusual amenity for the era. The plan of the house, while formally arranged, is open, gracious, and highly livable, with proportions so well resolved that every space and detail seems inevitably 'right'.

Mrs. Ladd's Quaker heritage is reflected in the relative simplicity of this very large house. The design depends as much on superb proportions and scale as ornamenta-

tion for effect. The center of the main façade is the exception, featuring exuberant Renaissance-style stucco decoration in full relief framing the entrance. But even here, the lightness that proclaims this a summer villa prevails.

Rather than the predictably ponderous front door, one enters through French doors and steps into a large transverse hall with apsidal ends, a shallow vaulted ceiling, and a polished pale marble floor. But one barely notices this, because enticing from the end of a hall directly ahead is an enormous arched window with columned arcades, directly facing the ocean.

Lowell used a sure hand combining





**Lowell** used a sure hand, combining **function** with **beauty** and **drama**. From these halls radiate the main rooms.

from the mid-day sun. Its enormous Ionic columns, ennobling and graceful, frame the views and make a perfect transition from indoors to outdoors.

**B**ehind the living room is the former billiard room, now used as a study. A shallow fitted closet, echoing and balancing the windows and doors of this perfectly symmetrical room, still contains the fitted storage racks for cues and equipment. Both rooms open to the main hall.

At the other end of the hall, a corridor leads to the kitchen wing, servants' stair, and elevator. Up a broad flight of stairs are eight large bedrooms and a sitting room, each with fireplace and room-sized bathrooms with large French windows. Many of the bedrooms have vestibules, affording added privacy. Every room is bright, and on the day of my visit, despite the heat and sun outside, the rooms were cool and capturing every breeze from tall open French doors, bringing the outside in.

A door leads again from the upper hall to the servants' hall, entering a parallel world worthy of Downton Abbey. The

woodwork here is varnished cypress and bead board, and linen rooms and utility closets with deep sinks attest to the maids who once ruled this parallel universe. The servants' stair makes a last run to the third floor, where an 80-foot corridor lit by ventilating skylights leads to a linen room, 11 maids' rooms, and two baths. A garage across the street, lost in the Bar Harbor fire, contained quarters for the butler, chauffeur, and footman.

Again, such was Lowell's talent that these rooms, thanks to the ingenious skylights, cross ventilation from large dormer windows, and the deep roof, not a

function with beauty and drama. From these halls radiate the main rooms. One goes up a few steps from the ocean hall into an anteroom with bookcases and fireplace, and on the wall facing the window, a large mural by T.R. Mantey, original to the house, duplicates the island view out the huge window opposite.

This in turn leads to the dining room (which contains its original Renaissance-style furniture designed by Lowell). Across this hall is a reception room, now used as a card room, which leads to the enormous, high living room, where arched French windows open to terraces and the large portico with ionic columns provides shade



Mrs. Strawbridge was the former Margaret Dorrance, daughter of the founder of Campbell's Soup.



hint of attic stuffiness is to be found here.

In spite of her world-class venue, the frivolous life of a Bar Harbor socialite—endless rounds of parties and entertainments—was not for Kate Ladd. For much of her life a semi-invalid, her favored diversion was an afternoon musicale and tea. Many noted musicians of the era played at these recitals.

Then there were the medical pursuits. Named for Kate's philanthropist father, who'd died young of typhoid fever, the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation was created in 1930 to further the causes of Science and Health Research. The foundation's first grant was in support of bring Alfred Einstein's assistant, Walter Mayer, to the United States.

## Canny Celebrity

After World War II, **The Strawbridge family** snatched the mansion up. The Campbell's Soup heirs freshened the house, and in the playful spirit of the previous owners, gave it a new name, *Villa Ponte di Paglia* (a pun loosely translated as 'House of Strawbridge').



**W**alter Ladd came from a middle-class family in Brooklyn, and Kate's mother objected to their engagement, finally relenting by 1888 when they were married.

In 1891, Ladd listed his occupation as 'Insurance Broker.' By 1893, that occupation had changed to "Gentleman" when Ladd liquidated his own business holdings to devote himself to the management of his wife's fortune. His chief hobby was yachting. In 1915, he commissioned the *Wenonah* from the Lawley shipyard.

### TIME AND TIDE

Walter died in 1933 and Kate in 1946. War and the Depression had diminished the market for huge Bar Harbor summer cottages, but in the optimistic post-war era, George Strawbridge snapped up Eegonos.

Strawbridge was a member of the Philadelphia family that owned the famous Strawbridge & Clothier store. Mrs. Strawbridge was the former Margaret Dorrance, daughter of the founder of Campbell's Soup.

The Strawbridges freshened the house, and in the playful spirit of the previous owners, gave it a new name, *Villa Ponte di Paglia* (a pun loosely translated as 'House of Strawbridge'). Mrs. Strawbridge died in

1953, but in those few short years, the world around the house had changed dramatically. The great forest Fire of 1947 burned many of the large estates in the neighborhood, and big cottages were once again out of fashion. Nearby, Buonriposo was demolished the following year.

Thankfully, *Villa Ponte di Paglia* met a sweeter fate. In 1954, the house was purchased by Dr. Richard Gott, a native of Brooklin, Maine, who taught French at the prestigious St. Mark's School in Southborough, Massachusetts. Dr. Gott also purchased La Selva, the neighboring estate that had once sheltered Mrs. John Jacob Astor IV. He combined the two into a luxurious campus for his new summer school, *l'Ecole Arcadie*: "An intense six-week summer program for boys and girls aged 13-18. All classes and activities are conducted in the French language. Salt water swimming, tennis, cycling, and sailing complete a delightful summer. European staff."

### ADIEU TO ALL THAT

*L'Ecole Arcadie* closed in the early 1970s. The 1960s and 1970s were a dark time for Bar Harbor cottages. A roll call of the estates demolished in those decades reads as a requiem to an era.

But the house was once again to be lucky.



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It was spotted by architect Stanley Hallet. Hallet didn't dream of huge Gilded Age summer cottage in Maine—in fact, quite the contrary, he had dreams of Provence—but he was smitten. By forming a cooperative partnership, the Hallets and three other couples—the Lewises, the Grahams, and the Hills—found themselves in possession of a 35-room Italian villa on the shores of Frenchman's Bay in September of 1975.

The four couples drew up a plan for sharing common and private spaces—not that difficult with eight master bedrooms on the second floor and 11 bedrooms for servants on the third.

The house was occasionally rented for functions to help with upkeep. In the tradition of a new era, the villa received a new name. In whimsical fashion it became East of Eden, a reference to Bar Harbor's original name (even though the house is technically northwest of Eden). Though a few of the partners came and went over the years (and Hallet's brother Michael moved in and became the de facto handyman), there is no doubt that their stewardship saved the

## Meet the Seller

William B. Ruger, Jr., 77, served as an executive at the Sturm, Ruger & Co. firearms company until his retirement as CEO in 2006. His father, William B. Ruger, Sr. (1916-2002), co-founded the Southport-Connecticut-based company with Alexander Sturm in 1949.

"Bill Jr. alone has a \$90 million stake in the gun company," wrote *Forbes* Magazine the year William Sr. died.

house from probable destruction—or death by Bed and Breakfast.

## PULLING THE TRIGGER

All things come to an end, and the partnership placed the estate on the market. Lucky for them, things had changed since the seventies, and big houses were back in fashion. In 2007, it was purchased by William B. Ruger Jr., a noted collector of automobiles and 19th century art and heir to the Ruger firearms fortune.

When questioned about why he took on this project, current owner William B. Ruger Jr. replies, "During my frequent vis-

its to Bar Harbor, I'd always admired the grand old cottages. In the 1960s, I was offered 'The Turrets,' now the administration building of the College of the Atlantic, for \$20,000, but at that point I felt the price—or rather the funds required to restore it—would be a bit of a stretch. When I was offered 'The Turrets' again for \$50,000, the pressures of my job precluded my taking it. My desire to own a Bar Harbor house remained, and years later, when 'East of Eden' became available, I jumped at the chance."

A man of informed and decided taste and opinions on matters aesthetic and technical, he was ready for the project, having previously completed a similar restoration of a late Victorian country estate in New Hampshire. East of Eden's "clarity of design and planning and first-rate craftsmanship appealed to me, as did the challenges of solving old problems properly with modern solutions, and I decided, with the house approaching 100 years, that it deserved to be brought back to its past splendor, but in a way that would

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## HOUSE OF THE MONTH

ensure its survival for another century.”

### THE LATEST RENAISSANCE

**E**ast of Eden’s age had begun to show, and Ruger set about putting it right, embarking on what would be a multi-year, multi-million-dollar restoration from the ground up. He and designer F.W. Atherton, Associates assembled a team of contractors, craftsmen, and artisans.

The renovation resembled a military invasion. Ten chimneys were rebuilt, down to replacing each Italian-style chimney cap. The red tile roof was fully restored. Under the roof, the rafters supporting the wide eaves had rotted, the whole thing supported only by the soft trim below (which Atherton notes admiringly was of top grade old-growth cypress, and itself as good as the day it was installed). The 12 bathrooms were gutted. The

**“When ‘East of Eden’ became available, I jumped at the chance.”**

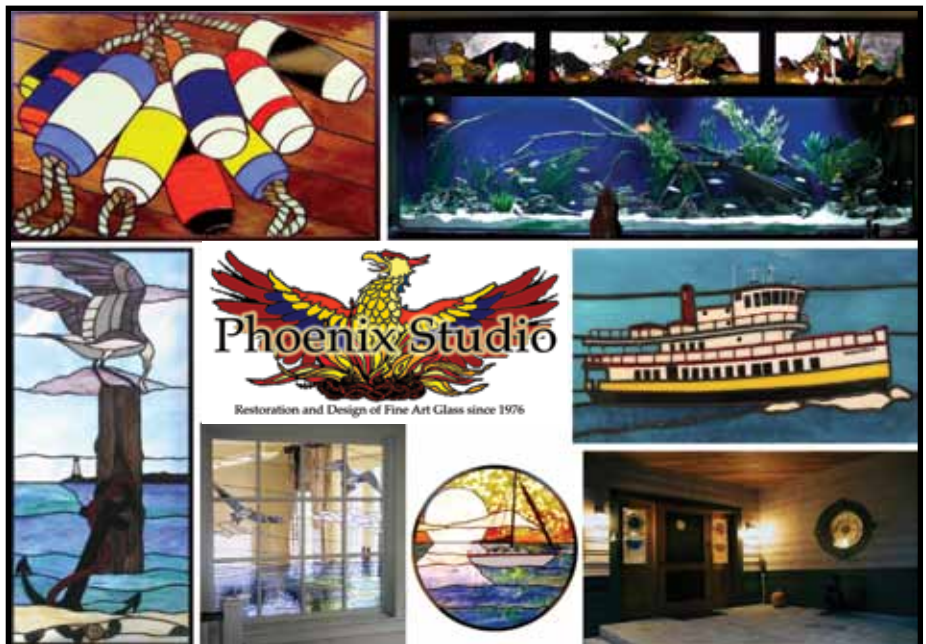
—William B. Ruger, Jr.

mural in the library was cleaned and repaired; windows were rebuilt; high tech infrastructure systems were installed (the basement resembles Pentagon command); and the kitchen and pantries upgraded.

Outside, Ruger was thorough in his restoration. The home’s iconic Ionic columns were rebuilt, and the elaborate baroque brackets supporting the second floor balconies were replaced. The magnificent stucco work of the façade was cleaned and restored to its former glory.

Perhaps the home’s most dramatic addition—and a departure from its original form—was the eight-bay garage, dubbed ‘Garage Mahal.’ Designed by F.W. Atherton, its pedestrian entrance has a baroque frontispiece that holds its own with the house.

As a final touch, the grounds of the long-lost Buonriposo, the neighboring Fabbri estate, have been incorporated into East of Eden, providing acres of sweeping lawn as foreground for the ocean views that have so long ago remind previous residents of the Bay of Naples. Taxes are \$55,640. Listed by The Knowles Company. ■



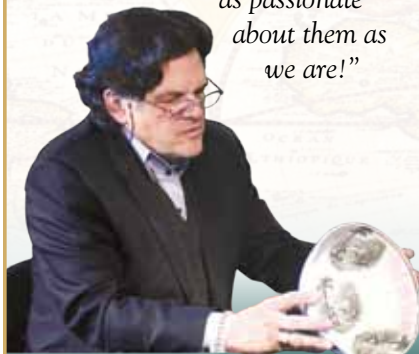
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