

A glamorous anomaly with a past—a tiled Spanish beachfront villa designed by John Calvin Stevens—maintains her dignity against all odds



"Mr. Hazzard, in 1926 and 1927, finished and equipped a beautiful summer home in Grand Beach near historic Old Orchard, Maine. The house, an ornate Spanish type, is large and occupies a commanding view of the sea, with a beautiful ground area beautifully landscaped."

—*Maine: A History*





Lindbergh Slept Here

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

It's a sunny winter day where Old Orchard Beach meets the sky. With fliers in hand, the preview crowd jams into the lush Mediterranean entertaining rooms of "Castillo del Mar," a Roaring 1920s curiosity in the shadow of Danton Towers.

It's almost as though the house can hear the sound of parkas unzipping, feel the evaluative thumps against its paneling. Having hosted so many soirees, how now to welcome the

impatient, the wistful, the frankly unsympathetic?

"I think this place should be crashed with a bulldozer," Hank LaBrie of LaBrie Realty Group says of the mansion where Charles Lindbergh was grateful for a night's sleep in 1927, after landing the *Spirit of St. Louis* directly in front of the house, right here on the beach.

As for *why* did Lindbergh stay here and *who* erected the giant searchlight in front of this house to attract passing aviators at night, these interrogations



“It was like stepping
inside Aladdin’s lamp.”



CYNTHIA FARR WEINFELD

do not fit neatly into the here-and-now of the Murphy's Auction & Realty handout.

Because for all things, a time comes when the elaborate and romantic get collapsed into the 'right now.' Even a place with soaring architectural detail and this much interiority faces these indignities.

The mortgagee's foreclosure sale by the Scarborough-based firm outlines terms of "\$50,000 deposit in certified funds to bid... closing within 45 days of public auction."

Outside the tall windows, the white sweep of sand spills light across the terrace into the living room.

A JOHN CALVIN STEVENS MASTERPIECE

Castillo del Mar (Castle of the Sea) "used to be part of the condo complex" next door that rose beside it in the 1980s, LaBrie says. With more recent lot lines drawn in favor of the more contemporary structure, valid or not, the Jazz-Age "property is now non-conforming. You should speak to the Old Orchard Beach code inspector."

When a magic castle like 209 East Grand Avenue hits the auction block, it's hard to duck the sense that a great deal of classic Maine is not just endangered but at risk of being lost forever.

The original owner of Castillo del Mar was Robert Parks Hazzard, the founder of the Yorktown Shoe Co. in Gardiner.

Architect Stevens must have been overjoyed to get the commission; though he'd traveled to Europe and done sketches of Spanish castles in 1910 [see mainememory.net/artifact/48273], Castillo del Mar is singular among his masterpieces in this vein, according to Maine historian Earle G. Shettleworth, Jr.

"Both from an architectural and historical standpoint, it's a significant summer house on the Maine coast. There are very few Spanish summer places up here, and this is one of the very finest—a fine example of the work of John Calvin Stevens and John Howard Stevens."

Regarding its being an anomaly, Shettleworth agrees with *Portland Magazine* writer Jeff Belyea that when it took shape on this quiet oceanfront, "the villa stood out like a red hot chili pepper garnish on the rim of a plate of corned beef and cabbage"—dour shingle-style retreats built to a vanishing point.

LIKE STEPPING INTO ALADDIN'S LAMP

At that time, Old Orchard Beach was having a five-star day in terms of metropoli-





The interior of Castillo del Mar, under scrutiny here in a showing held before the foreclosure auction, seems frozen in a time and place very much out of step with today's visitors.



tan horoscopes. At nearby OOB Pier, great dance bands like Duke Ellington's and Benny Goodman's were swinging into the night.

And because of the endless, straight beach, Old Orchard Beach had become a stunning mecca for an international coterie of aviators. Before long, the new home's owner, Hazzard, became beguiled by the fly boys and girls and invested in Harry M. Jones's (1880-1973) Stinson Destroyer SB-1 aircraft and hangar. Suddenly, Jones's plane had adverts for HAZZARD painted on each side of the biplane's fuselage. The upper wings proclaimed "\$4," while the lower wings kicked in with "Shoes."

This popular firm, known as The Hazzard Shoe Flying Co., thrilled crowds, gave rides, and delighted the shoe factory owner with the kind of new media possibilities that dazzle the secular prophets of the internet today.

Oh, the parties and the film footage of flappers, gents, and children splashing in the tiled Hazzard swimming pool, even while the planes took off and landed in front of the house.

Enraptured, Hazzard erected a giant searchlight more dazzling than Daisy's green light in *The Great Gatsby*. There was magic on the ground as well as in the air.

Then, after his historic flight across the Atlantic in 1927, the Lone Eagle came to town.

I SAW LINDBERGH

While no Hazzard descendant survives to give us a first-person account, "I saw him," says Kenneth F. Snow, 91, of Scarborough (of the Snow's Clam Chowder Co., the second family to own Castillo del Mar).

In fact, "my cousin Joe Snow used to joke that Lindbergh slept in my bedroom. He did sleep there!

"My cousin Joe maintained the *Spirit of St. Louis* when it landed on the beach there, and Hazzard, [then] owner of the house, brought Lindbergh into the house. I remember the big searchlight Hazzard put out so that planes could take off and land.

"After Lindbergh did the feat to Europe in 1927, the plane was brought back by destroyer, and he made money afterward by flying over the country, barnstorm-



Aviator Charles Lindbergh, second from right, takes in the view after landing on Old Orchard Beach in 1927.

ing. He'd kept *Spirit of St. Louis* at the Scarborough Airport, which is now taken over by buildings. That's where my cousin Joe maintained *Spirit of St. Louis* [for him].

"When Lindbergh actually landed on the beach, I was there. I was six or so. I watched him land. Later on, a kid tried to tear a piece off the tail [from the *Spirit of St. Louis*, the same aircraft that hangs in the Smithsonian's Air & Space

Museum today], and Lindbergh gave him a sharp kick." Try and do that today. "Today, he'd be sued in a moment. But the plane was made of cloth."

THE SNOW'S CLAM CHOWDER YEARS

"We [the Snow family] didn't own the house until just before the war," Kenneth Snow says. "We began at the house in 1942, I would think, and we sold it to Judge Danton when my father died."

What was the inside of your house like?

"Of my mother's home? All the tile work was from Palestine. Now it's no longer Palestine. The inside was beautifully done by John Calvin Stevens. It had nine bathrooms. The place was empty when we moved in. I remember the woodwork, the beautiful chairs in the dining room. The lamps around the swimming pool were from Jerusalem. All the flooring. It even had a wine cellar and a room for electrical in one room and two laundries. The grounds used to have a pool."

IT'S A LITTLE COMPLICATED...

The most recent owner, Bill Danton, 58, says of Castillo Del Mar, "My father, Chief Judge Nicholas Danton, bought the house in 1971. People have brought up Lindbergh's visit over the years. Lindbergh stayed in the first bedroom off the master bedroom, where my son Nicholas has grown up." In 1978, Danton was "the first Greek American on the OOB town council." In 1987, he built Danton Towers beside the house. Then, "in 1999, the condo association wanted me off the property; they told me to take my property and leave. They sold me back this house because they wanted the money, so it was a \$315,000 shakedown." Danton has been newsworthy recently for his visionary attempt to have a floating dock near the end of Old Orchard Beach Pier for cruise ships, which he intends to pursue. As to how he arrived in the foreclosure precipitating this auction, his shortfall is related to a separate business matter. "Someone wrote a \$3.6 million check to me that didn't clear. This is a bump in the road for me and my family. It's a little complicated, and this is not the end of the story."



The Old Orchard Beach assessing department values Castillo Del Mar at \$1.351 million; \$682,400 for the land, \$630,500 for the house.



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FROM LEFT: OLD ORCHARD BEACH HISTORICAL SOCIETY; FILE; ROBERT WINKOWSKI



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VANISHING MAINE

It must have been amazing, seeing all the famous international aviators on the beach.

"Wiley Post and Amelia Earhart would fly over. I even remember a zeppelin flying over my house that went on to [crash in] Chicago."

What happened to the swimming pool?

"We covered it up. Every guest from half of the motels in Old Orchard Beach was jumping into it in the middle of the night."

What's your most singular memory of the house?

"Joe Snow, at age 22, wrote away for the plans to make an airplane of his own—a Heathkit. I helped him make it. Soon enough, we had the plane down on the beach, using a motorcycle engine.

"We were taxiing on the beach when my brother ran up and said, 'Mother says don't dare go up in that plane.' [A few minutes later] we passed him about 40 feet in the air.

[Later, as the shadow of the plane passed over the Snow Estate] my mother said [to someone visiting], 'I'm glad my son's not up there.'"

As for results of the auction, with just three bidders on site, Castillo del Mar goes "for \$850,000." The purchaser is "a friend of mine, a real estate guy from Old Orchard," says Bill Danton, whose family has lived in and loved this sweep of sand since the Snow era. ■

▶ Additional research by Jesse Stenbak. To see vintage films of OOB aviators right in front of Castillo del Mar, visit youtube.com/watch?v=yY0qD-0tiM, and youtube.com/watch?v=ElP6wwBH94A. To take an aerial tour via Hoverflow, visit portlandmonthly.com/portmag/2012/12/oob-jcs-extras.



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