

CLASSICS





Duchesses of York

Cragmere, the dramatic showcase built in 1895 by a young Cuban-born Portland architect atop a stunning cliff along Shore Road, can be yours this summer—for a mere \$3.495 million.

BY COLIN SARGENT



Last night I dreamed I went to Cragmere again.

It seemed to me I stood draped in darkness, as though I were about to step into a world transformed, with ocean spume sparkling against the rocks and Cragmere just a gateway to the stars."

Okay, maybe Daphne du Maurier never made it to Shore Road, but if she had, she'd certainly have been spellbound by this fieldstone former designer showcase home with a wraparound porch to eternity.

You know Shore Road. It's that a serpentine roller-coaster that follows the ocean from Ogunquit through Cape Neddick to York Beach past golf courses and through tunnels of green trees and wild rugosa roses. It's a cliffhanger, too. In fact, the Cliff House Resort is a big attraction here, with diners viewing the surf blasting against the cliff's sheer granite walls.

Nearby is the romantic stone chapel St. Peter's By-The-Sea, so lyrically designed it's almost too pretty for a postcard.

And then, a few privileged driveways to the south, the gravel road to Cragmere and its galaxies of English gardens hits you smack in the face with nothing less than a 'beauty overload.'

"It was built in 1895," says Virginia Spiller, librarian of the Old York Historical Society, "by Cuban-born Antoine Dorticos, with offices in Portland, as a 'summer cottage' by a prominent Philadelphia family, the Connarros. George Mecum Connarroe was a leading probate attorney as well as a real estate developer. His wife, Nannie Dunlap Connarroe, was the great-granddaughter of Col. Clement Biddle, the Quartermaster General for George Washington's staff."

Swept away by a visit to the Maine coast, Connarroe impulsively purchased "'100 acres of shoreline to subdivide immediately around his cottage,' according to the *Boston Globe* in 1888, 'with one provision—that the purchaser erect a cottage that would cost not less than \$5,000.' I couldn't tell you if any of those got built," Spiller says, but the Connarros did generously build the scenic St. Peter's

Cragmere, built in 1895 as a summer cottage for the George Mecum Connarroe family of Philadelphia, was designed by architect Antoine Dorticos, who trained with Francis Fassett and taught French at Portland High School for 25 years before committing suicide. The house, restored and updated in 1999, sits on 1.4 acres. It features five bedrooms and six fireplaces on three floors, as well as a three-car detached garage and a guest house with its own garage. Above: The living room's French doors open to a breathtaking view of the ocean. Top right: The porch on the ocean side is protected from weather, providing another room for entertaining or relaxing during the summer months. Right: The round portion of the porch forms a balcony for the master suite above.





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Above: The kitchen features Sub-Zero refrigerator, granite counters, and custom white wood cabinets. **Right:** A massive stone archway greets visitors at the front door—once they've traversed the driveway, the front walk, and the steps.

By-The-Sea and the Ogunquit Library as gifts to the area.”
The Philadelphia story cut to the credits when “George Connarroe died at 65 of pneumonia,” though, and the Weare family moved in.
“Members of the Weare family [their descendant, Kathryn Weare, still owns The Cliff House resort] used to work for Connarroses,” Spiller says, and now here they were lords of the manor, as well as owners of sprawling tracts of oceanfront themselves.
Which is not to understate the contributions of the present sellers, the Cranes—whose architectural stewardship here resulted in an award from Gov. Angus King, “the first time that private homeowners have been so honored,” says listing agent Eileen Roberts of Anne Erwin Sotheby’s International





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Realty in York. "From England they went to Canada and were both teaching school there. Then they went to the Boston area, and Chris entered the software business. They bought Cragmere as a vacation home with the intention of restoring it to its former glory.

"Brian Sleeper was general contractor for the project—a labor of love."

Six fireplaces flicker amid "more than 5,000 feet of tasteful elegance." Fastidiously restored mahogany porches and balconies testify to the no-holds-barred 1999 restoration that was the subject of magazine panegyrics across the country. What better place to feel as though you're living in an L.L. Bean catalog than to live in the place where glamour L.L. Bean catalog spreads have been shot?

"The kitchen is new and beautifully crafted," Roberts says, "with granite counters, state-of-the-art stainless appliances, Fisher & Paykel dish drawers, Sub-Zero refrigerator: all the bells and whistles you'd find in a modern kitchen, but with whimsical seaside cabinetry by Mike Fernald of Fernwood—he did all the new woodwork in the house—that's in keeping with the feel of the house. The kitchen opens up onto a deck on the sheltered side of the house for afternoon sun."

The master bedroom suite is new, "built where there was once storage space. They raised the roof here to accommodate the spacious and luxurious master suite. Oh, and the deck! The deck makes you feel as if you're on a ship, with 180-degree ocean views. Whoever buys this house will never leave this spot. It is wonderfully integrated into the original structure, with custom storage, a beautiful bathroom, and a whirlpool tub with ocean views.

"The third floor—once attic space—has been renovated to include a huge media room, an office overlooking the ocean, an exercise room, a sewing room, and a full bathroom. Obviously these could be bedrooms, too. It's all spectacular space, and all of the detail replicates the original detail of the house.

"My favorite space is the covered porch," Roberts says: "Stone columns, mahogany detailing—it's incredible. There's a portion of it that's like standing in a captured gazebo."

A second building is included in the package, too, with a three-bedroom apartment and garage space for at least two cars.

Back in the 1960s, there were some down years for this beautiful estate, including "long periods of abandonment" and even a stint as a gift shop. "In the 1960s, the shop



specialized in imported goods, exotic things, expensive novelties," Virginia Spiller says. "Imagine trying to market with that today, now that *everything's* imported!"

The architect Dorticos, Spiller feels, is the gold-nugget 'find' that recent appreciation for Cragmere has unearthed: "The son of Pedro Dorticos, a wealthy planter in Cienfuegos, Cuba, he studied in Paris after his family was displaced by a political upheaval in Cuba. He came to Maine at 18, studied at Gorham Academy, and surfaces in the *Portland Directory* of 1877 as a draftsman. Then, he's listed as a French teacher at Portland High School in 1882. He was a mentor for John Calvin Stevens and Frederick Tompson, and drew with Stevens during classes held at the Maine Charitable

Mechanics Association," Spiller says.

"According to the *Portland Transcript* in 1893, Dorticos was the dreamer who first conceived of building luxury cottages on Portland Harbor islands such as Cushing, Great Diamond, and Chebeague," including Shingle Style landmark cottages he and his family stayed in on Peaks and Chebeague (sadly, this structure burned in 1894) during the dawn of modern tourism here.

"My concepts are artistic, low-priced, seaside cottages and houses," Dorticos wrote in his 1887 entry in *Leading Business Men of Portland*. Isn't that fantastic?" Spiller says.

Twenty-one homes are credited to this talented and overlooked visionary, who thankfully is now listed in the *Biographical Dictionary of Architects in Maine*. ■