Twenty feet into this home, I knew I was going to live here.
Glass Palisade

Listed for $2.25M, **Cliffside** truly becomes a legend.

**BY COLIN W. SARGENT**

Perched on the Ship Channel’s edge, this soaring hideaway at **13 Birch Knolls** in Cape Elizabeth has been sanctuary to a legendary jewelry designer and advocate for the homeless and many nonprofit organizations since 1995. Lucinda Yates’s story opens when, as a 16-year-old South Portlanter, her life was shattered with the sudden death of her dad. It tore her family apart, leading her to float to California, where she married and divorced very young. She returned with her daughter to Portland in the glitzy 1980s, not expecting a safety net.

“I was 20 when I first came back. I waitressed at The Splendid. Then I waitressed the graveyard shift at Harbor View. Was it Harbor View? Harbor something. It was on Commercial Street, close to the waterfront. That place was crazy! You’d get everybody in Portland coming in there, drinking. But I learned a lot. I used to tell my daughter, ‘I will not pay for your college until you become a waitress.’ It teaches you so much about everything.”

Single-mother Lucinda was already designing jewelry in stolen moments, dreaming of putting the world back together again, when she spied a collection of discarded matte boards in a trash can near a frame shop. She seized upon and rescued that trove, and while playing around with their right angles had a Eureka moment—a hypnotically spare house design she turned into a pin.

Not just any pin.

In 2012, *Huffington Post* reported “Designs by Lucinda has sold more than 5 million pins, raising more than $25 million for thousands of nonprofits in the U.S. and globally, as far as Iceland and Malaysia. And though living on the streets was traumatic—even life-threatening—Yates acknowledges her life wouldn’t be what it is today had she never been homeless in the first place.”

Lucinda updates the 2018 figure to “$30 million” for the nonprofits. Many Mainers admire Lucinda’s fairy tale, her generosity and creative courage. But what became of the frame shop where trash became treasure?

“It was the Artisans, a small custom frame shop right near where...
Pier 1 used to be. She sold art supplies there. I rented a 10 x 10 space from her at $50 a month. Between projects, I used to go out back and have a couple of coffee, to relax. That’s where I found the framing mattes.”

Lucinda is silent for the length of time it takes to take a sip. “She opened another location in South Portland…She ended up going bankrupt.”

Grateful for her good fortune, Lucinda looked for a dream house of her own for her family. “I looked for a year and a half for waterfront property.”

When she saw Cliffside, “I wasn’t more than 20 feet into this home when I knew I was going to live here. I walked in, and I knew. I was looking at the water. I was looking for a contemporary home near the water but hadn’t been able to find it. The next owner is going to feel just what I felt.”

While the structure dates to “between 1935 and 1945, when I purchased Cliffside it was essentially a new home.”

Inside, there are two master suites, a glass staircase, and a glass floor. The stunning effect puts you right out on the granite cliff, even though you might be sipping on a Manhattan near the toasty fireplace.

“The previous owner was William Jelin. I have my art studio here, but the whole house is a creative space. There’s a little spot in the top room where my husband and I have two chairs. I don’t know what happens there, but it’s something magic. We call it The Vortex.”

From so many points of vantage on this stunning lot, you can see the sparkling lights of Portland’s skyline, but better still, you’re treated to all the ship traffic coming in and out of the harbor. With its double tier of waterfront decks, Cliffside almost
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Asked about the kitchen, she laughs. “Billy Jelin didn’t cook. It’s like a galley kitchen designed by a caterer. I had this idea when I was househunting that I wanted this huge French Provincial kitchen. But the kitchen didn’t even cross my mind when I saw the view. Three people can work in this counter space, set back from the main living area, behind this area of pure vista. That need for the French Provincial kitchen—so gone!”

The house is like a ship tacking into the channel. The entire interior is in motion. “The views are so stunning that at first, I couldn’t decorate this house. I was afraid what I’d put in wouldn’t work, because the background is so enormous—the granite

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FROM LEFT: PIN BY LUCINDA; PHOTOS BY FRANÇOIS GAGNÉ FOR LANDVEST

9 0  P O R T L A N D  M O N T H L Y  M A G A Z I N E
cliff, the water. But anything works. I have an 11-foot table and piano in here now, but you’d never know it. That’s because the view is so spectacular. Turns out, you can’t ruin spectacular.”

Outside, nature and architecture converge to create terraced granite gardens as you find your way down to water’s edge and private beach. Need a reality check? You’ll love the two-car garage.

So why would anyone ever leave a place like this? Lucinda will always keep her Portland connection, but “My daughter lives in San Diego, and my grandson is there. He’s 18 months old. He’s a dream boy.”

Lucinda Yates dares to dream. Do you? Taxes are $21,362.