A Thousand Julys

This comfy oceanfront designer home by Royal Barry Wills was aces in 1938. This summer, think of this marvelous home as The Yin of Maine Coastal Real Estate.

BY COLIN W. SARGENT

In Mr. Blandings Builds His Dream House, Cary Grant and Myrna Loy glorify the creation of the ultimate country residence outside the dreary, hyperactive city. Creamy white paneling and banks of natural-light-filled windows (certainly a reaction to Victorian piles, dark woodwork, and high-rise canyon shadows) announced that the owners of this sanctuary were young, fresh, well-heeled, and automobiled. Ten years before the hit movie landed at State Theatre in Portland, Falmouth Foreside had a debut of its own.
Trend-setting society architect Royal Barry Wills (1895-1962) studied the waterfront lots in the new “Bramhall Field” development and created a spiffing squire’s residence at 18 Carroll Street just to the south of Portland Country Club. Wills was red hot in 1938, having been selected by a “typical” upper-income family as having the most desired design for a home in a Life magazine contest. In second place was the modernist Frank Lloyd Wright. As you can imagine, Wright went into a “Royal” tear about it.

This home was all about comfort. “The herringbone floors are original,” says real-estate broker Teddy Piper of David Banks Re/Max By The Bay. “So are the cedar shake shingles (designed to look individually cut for rustic elegance) and the steel mullions on this bay bumpout” that’s almost a room unto itself, flanked by steel casement windows that match the period.

But something’s missing. I feel a strong sense of music here, but there are no instruments on display. This magnificent bay window would be the perfect place for a baby grand.
From this spot, you can almost overhear the swells at Portland Country Club whispering about the new Royal Barry Wills house taking shape against the blue waves as they sip their Old Fashioneds. With his weekly column and dream-home sketches in the *Boston Transcript*, Wills was the high priest of the modern Cape Cod and its sumptuous variations.

And what a view this four-bedroom beauty has—especially now. “Here we are in Falmouth, on a 2.7-acre lot facing the water, and we don’t see the CMP Power Plant,” says Piper. Outside the windows are deep green lawns, exquisite shrubbery, and impossibly privileged views of “the Brothers, a pair of islands off the Otis property.”

The Otis Elevator people?

Piper laughs. “I’ve heard that both con-
Here we are in Falmouth, on a 2.7-acre lot facing the water, and we don’t see the CMP Power Plant!

As you approach the sweep of water, you can see the Portland House apartment building (1969) to the right, softened by distance above the causeway to Mackworth Island. The feeling of insular comfort and safety here is strangely thrilling.

“A removable dock can be added with town permission,” Piper says. It’s easy to imagine a kayak soundlessly stealing to the soft shore.

“Bramhall Field was one of the older developments on the Foreside. John Marshall Brown Co. was the original developer. The lots facing the water were built first.”
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“Royal Barry Wills built at least a hundred homes like this in Maine,” Piper says. “Many are in Cape Elizabeth.”

Yes, but who were the Cary Grant and Myrna Loy who were building this snug haven as the world was becoming increasingly dangerous and on the brink of war. Kristallnacht was in November, 1938, and the Invasion of Poland began in September, 1939. But also, one of my favorite tunes was written in 1938 and recorded by Marlene Dietrich in 1939. As I look out the window, I can almost hear it: “You go to my head… like a summer with a thousand Julys.” Time stops here.

THE LUCKY ONES
The original owners, William and Elinor Clark, were just 30 and 31 when the house was built. Their daughter, attorney Sarah “Sally” Clark McIntyre (University of Maine School of Law 1976) remembers: “My parents built the house [the blueprints still exist on the property]. My father’s father sent my father, who went to Harvard, up to Maine from Boston to run the business that became Bancroft and Martin Rolling Mills of South Portland. They provided many of the steel girders for the bridges on the Maine Turnpike.

“...”

You can see the Portland House to the right, softened by distance.

“...”

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were always dropping in. There were parties for the Symphony, and in fact sometimes the conductor would bring a group of friends and perform here.”
Bingo. I bet I know where.

“My mother went to New England Conservatory. She played the piano. My brother-in-law [the late Donald F. Sandberg, also a Harvard grad, who, according to his obituary, composed “music for the Harvard Hasty Pudding show Seeing Red in 1952” and headlined recitals at the Isabella Stewart Gardner Museum] played the piano too. My father played the musical saw. It was a riot. I played the flute. During the holidays, hundreds of guests came to sing carols—that was quite something—and sometimes play duets. We called the huge room with the bay window the Music Room. It didn’t just have one piano—it had two.”
Small wonder the room still rings with the after-echoes. For $3.415M, you could join in. Taxes are $31,491.