

*Curious motorists who chance upon the gingerbread-ornamented cottages of Bayside are invariably amazed and charmed at the village they've discovered. Even after more than a hundred years it's still not on every map of Maine.*

# Summering at Bayside

*For many families from Maine and beyond, warm weather means a return to the cottage — or renting one — in the little-known community on the shore of Penobscot Bay. By Bruce Snider.*

BRIAN VANDEN BRINK





*While the community is laid out in a neat series of streets and lanes, life in Bayside remains remarkably unstructured. Cottages are close enough that kids in one soon get to know those next door or nearby, as do their parents, and from the porches to the pebble beach they can have free rein while their folks read, sail, or stroll.*

**S**O, how did you find this place?" The question is common among visitors to Bayside. This historic enclave of Victorian summer cottages and shorefront greens lies just off the busy stretch of Route 1 between Camden and Belfast, in the otherwise rural town of Northport. But most tourists breeze by without so much as a tap on the brake pedal. There are no shops in the village whose ads might draw the curious. And with no road signs announcing its location, Bayside can be tricky to find even when one is looking for it. Of course, that low profile has helped preserve the community's time-capsule character. Even in the charmed world of summertime midcoast Maine it remains, hidden in plain sight, a charmed world apart. So those who do make their way here, by chance or by design, tend to remember how it all happened.

"I think someone should write a book: *How I Found Bayside*," says Angela Cassidy, a longtime summer resident from Atlanta. Cassidy spent childhood summers with her grandparents in Christmas Cove, in South Bristol. With her grandparents' passing, she and her husband, Mike, set out to establish their own Maine summer tradition. An artist friend pointed them toward Belfast, a Penobscot Bay harbor town then









\$1,500 for a family-size spread right on the water. Most are well over 100 years old, with all the personality that comes with a century of use. And while some renters fall in love with one cottage and return faithfully year after year, others sample a procession of cottages, savoring each for its unique charms — a beautiful view of the bay, a location on a quiet green free from car traffic, a covered porch perfectly situated for reading while keeping an eye on the kids.

To be fair, all these renters also cope with the inevitable quirks of nineteenth-century buildings that were rudimentary even when they were new. Floors sometimes list and bounce underfoot. Exterior walls without insulation or plaster offer token resistance to the evening chill. Interior partitions can be even less resistant to sound transmission, promoting both family togetherness and extreme discretion. Furnishings range from catalog current to yard-sale chic to Grandma's attic — and some Grandmas had better taste than others. These are private homes, so the predominant feeling is homey and comfortable. But they are second homes, so upholstered pieces sometimes do walk a fine line between broken in and broken down.

"There are great disparities in these cot-



*Cottages at Bayside, many of which are available for rent weekly or monthly, generally don't offer all the comforts of home — but that is the point. Ocean breezes provide the air conditioning, woodstoves and fireplaces take the chill off a rainy afternoon, and who needs television when you can watch the summer go by from your own porch?*





*From summer to summer families come and go, kids grow up, and the cottages get a new coat of paint, sometimes a new color, or a total makeover. But fundamentally Bayside doesn't change, which is why so many people return year after year.*

tages," Einstein readily acknowledges. Some are "right out of *Architectural Digest*." Most, though, he describes as "pretty bare-bones," and it is clear that he prefers the latter breed. "The thing that bothers us in our business," Einstein says, "is that people are fixing these places up."

Thirty years ago, when Einstein first arrived here from New Jersey, cottages were still passed down in families, property values were low, and owners considered their cottages as plain old camps rather than as showplace summer homes. Since the 1980s, though, values have skyrocketed. And along with their hefty mortgages, newer owners often arrive with higher expectations of their cottages, sometimes at the expense of the rustic simplicity that charmed them in the first place. "They put all the new work into it," Einstein says, "they put the Sheetrock on, and, zip, what was there is gone." Fortunately for Bayside purists like Einstein, the charm is still alive and well in the dozens of relatively intact original cottages. "There's still a lot of it out there."

**F**OR the many who harbor such proprietary feelings toward this place — and they include renters, summer  
(Continued on page 112)







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(Continued from page 76)

residents, and members of the small contingent of year-rounders — Bayside history is another perennial topic of conversation. Beverly Crofoot, a longtime year-round resident and president of the Bayside Historical Society, has researched the subject for an upcoming book, and her outline of Bayside's beginnings is fittingly picturesque. In 1849, she explains, the Eastern Maine Methodist Episcopal Church Conference purchased twenty-five acres in what is now Bayside to use as the site of its annual camp meeting. "It cost \$200," she reports. Congregations from Penobscot River towns like Bucksport, Brewer, and Orono, and inland towns like Montville and Unity soon built wood-frame structures where members — who camped out in tents — gathered for meals and thrice-daily prayer sessions. Many of these "society cottages" still stand, proudly wearing their town names. By 1876, camp meeting attendance had reached 10,000. But even in the early days some came for pleasure rather than prayer, and as the years passed, the balance tipped from religious fervor toward plain recreation. "It became a holiday spot," Crofoot says. "Part of it was the whole rustication movement."

But things did not stay rustic for long. At the turn of the last century, the village boasted boarding houses, shops, a ball field, a tennis court, and a barbershop. At the top of the central green stood a grand hotel, from whose wide verandas one could follow the comings and goings of the steamships that stopped at Bayside on the Bangor-to-Boston run. Over the years, the tent platforms evolved into hybrid cottages with solid walls and canvas roofs, then into the permanent structures that survive today.

It was the architecture that first struck Angela Cassidy, who had experience writing historic preservation ordinances back home. Most of the cottages were built in a style architects now call Carpenter Gothic, a homegrown expression of the nineteenth-century Gothic Revival. But compared with more substantial year-round buildings of the type, Cassidy points out, Bayside's style is "more vernacular. It's a very simple Victorian." Cassidy also found the compact village layout a marvel of pedestrian-friendly design. "I loved the idea of this little planned community, so open, with all these parks. It's a fantastic lesson in urban planning." A lesson, she laments, that America's housing industry appears to have forgotten. For the most part, she explains, "We don't build neighborhoods; we build subdivisions." Even when we try, we seem

to have lost the knack. On a visit to the ritzy neotraditional development of Rosemary Beach, Florida, Cassidy recognized its model immediately: "They're trying to recreate Bayside." But in her view, Traditional Neighborhood Developments like Rosemary Beach and Seaside, Florida, (the too-good-to-be-true small town where *The Truman Show* was filmed) still fall short of the mark. "They're not real."

Bayside is real. And while one senses a similar authenticity in countless towns that grew up before the automobile came to dominate the American landscape, it is a rare quality in vacation communities. The summer vacation as we know it arose fairly recently, with the mobility that the automobile provided. Ever since, the resort industry has promoted the vacation as an

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escape from the drudgery of daily life, an idyll of luxury. In the meantime, though, our homes themselves have come more and more to resemble resorts, with air conditioning, TV in every room, and a spa in the backyard. Business travel has drained the novelty and prestige from a stay in an anonymous hotel room, no matter how plush the towels. To some, relieving the routine drudgery of everyday life has come to mean taking a break from such everyday luxuries. For those requiring a total escape from civilization, the Maine woods offer plenty of secluded cabins and remote fishing camps, but not everyone needs to get that far away. A cottage colony like Bayside offers an escape, not from civilization, but from the crowding in of contemporary life. Those who return summer after summer, finding a sense of community that is fading in so much of the country, might view their time in Bayside as an escape to civilization.

**T**HERE'S a village-like feeling, where people take ownership of Bayside, even if they're just renters," says Jim Rossman, who with his wife, Eliza, and their three small children, will make a third

visit to Bayside this summer. Because new faces show up in the village every Saturday afternoon all summer long, Rossman says, "we know some of the owners feel claustrophobic." But among his summer neighbors he has found a comfortable mix of renters and owners, most of whom "are happy to broaden their friendships." The close quarters of Bayside, it seems, are enough to ward off the antisocial. Indeed, the place seems a magnet for just the opposite type, another boon to parents with young children — and to those with children who are not so young. "The people next door tend to learn who you are and who your kids are," Rossman says. "There's always someone who's seen your kid in the last half hour." And if that informal tracking system fails, he notes, "there's a lifeguard on the dock."

Americans planning family summer vacations face innumerable options. And with each passing year, the vacation industry contrives ever more enticing packages, promising endless distraction for kids and second-honeymoon romance for parents. "If you want that kind of vacation," Rossman advises, "Bayside is not going to be that way; it's a vacation *with* your kids." But the Rossmans live in Brooklyn, New York; Jim commutes to Wall Street. The last thing they want in a vacation is something designed by someone else. "When you live in New York," he says, "your kid's life is structured from the moment he wakes up to the moment he goes to bed." Bayside is an unstructured environment that still offers plenty of options: the bay for sailing and kayaking, the quieter waters of inland lakes nearby, the shops and restaurants of Belfast just four miles up the road, the schooners and galleries of Camden and Rockland less than a half hour away, all of Down East Maine within day-tripping range, and Bayside itself, for doing as little as possible. "There are so many things to do as a renter," Rossman says. "It's got all these amenities, but it's so casual." Just how casual Rossman learned on his first visit. Curious about sailing, but with precious little experience, he wandered down to the town dock one morning as the sailors were setting out. "Within two or three minutes someone had invited me to come on their boat," he says. "I just hopped on the boat and was gone for six hours." Not an everyday experience, he says, "for a guy from Brooklyn."

Such stories are familiar to Angela Cassidy, who dreams of Bayside all through the long, mild, southern winter. She and her family enjoy Atlanta, too, of course, but Bayside provides what they do not find at



home. "I wanted our children exposed to another part of the country . . . and other ways of thinking," Cassidy says. As for herself, "I want to escape all the stresses, the tensions, the frenetic pace of life. I like to escape the stress of the big city. I like to escape the traffic, the helicopters flying overhead." With her Atlanta friends she jokes about the sporadic cell-phone service in small-town Maine, about summers without cable TV. But the fact is, it feels good to do without those things for a few weeks each year. "You're escaping all that stuff," she says. "I've got that every day of the week, all day long, back at home." There is one new feature in her Atlanta home that she does especially treasure: a snapshot of the family cottage in Bayside she and her husband finally bought last year. It's up on the refrigerator, she says. "I just stare at it." □

### Renting in a Cottage Colony

◆ Bayside is a memorable place, but it is not the only cottage colony in Maine. Local chambers of commerce can point you toward others and to specific cottages for rent. Agents who handle summer rentals are another resource, as is the Internet, which makes it easier than ever for owners to reach their market directly. One of the largest selections of summer rentals appears in the classified advertising section of *DOWN EAST*.

◆ Before booking a summer cottage, take a moment to review your expectations. Decide if privacy is a concern, or if lumpy mattresses or steep stairs present problems for you, and say so up front. Learn as much as you can about any cottage you are considering. Is it sunny and bright inside or shady and cool? Maine summer nights can be brisk. Is there a thermostat in the house, or is a woodstove the only source of warmth? If so, make sure there is dry wood to burn and that you know where it is and how the stove works. If something goes wrong, is there a local contact to call for help? Renters are typically expected to supply their own towels and bedding; is there anything else you should bring?

◆ Once you have committed to a rental, remember to stay flexible. Bayside is not a resort with identical rooms and furniture chosen by committee; that is why you are here and not at some famous vacation hotel. Minor inconveniences may well be part of the package, but so be it. Choose wisely and then relax. You will probably remember them as part of the charm.

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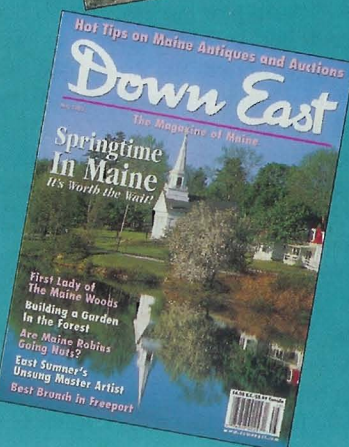
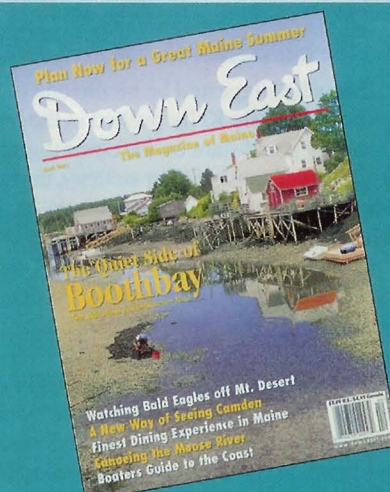
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