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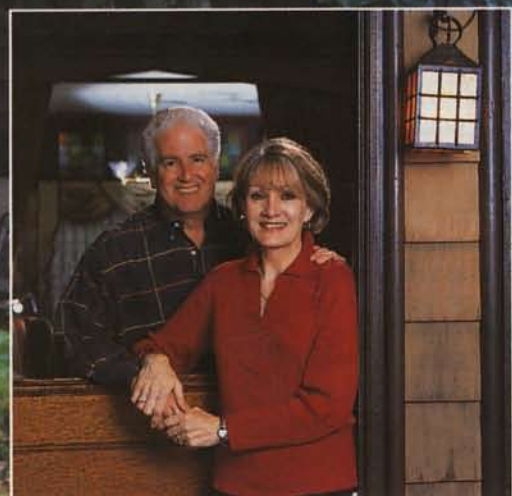
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Art FOR Art's Sake

A unique 19th-century cottage in Newport, Rhode Island embodies the artistry of the Aesthetic Movement.

By Cheryl Hackett-Galvin • Photographs by Kindra Clineff

Throughout the Industrial Revolution, factories on both sides of the Atlantic churned out mass-produced goods to quench the middle-class's insatiable thirst for inexpensive furnishings, pottery and textiles. Even though consumerism was a popular pastime during the Victorian period, a group of influential artists, architects and craftsmen banded together and started their own revolution. Proponents of the Aesthetic Movement felt that assembly lines were dehumanizing. Through lectures, articles and exhibits, they encouraged artisans to revive hand craftsmanship and emphasize exotic and classical elements in their designs, no matter how costly or labor intensive. As a result, elegance and richness became fashionable terms between 1870 and 1930.

Alexander F. Oakey, who began his architectural career with celebrated architect Richard Morris Hunt in New York in the mid-19th century, wrote extensively about the Aesthetic Movement. For example, in an 1882 edition of *Harper's New Monthly Magazine*, Oakey wrote, "Contrary to the prediction of many sober-minded citizens, the decorative art craze, as they were pleased to call it, has not died out, though it has passed through many phases in a few

years, and may now be seriously considered as a revival, and as an organized attempt to extend and develop the achievements of art till beautiful things, and the beauty that is the result of harmony in our surroundings, become the rule and not the exception."

Around the same time Oakey penned those words, he was busy drawing up plans for the J. Griffiths Masten House, which would be located in the heart of Newport, Rhode Island's venerable Kay Street/Catherine Street/Old Beach Road District. At the height of the Gilded Age, Oakey and other prolific architects such as McKim, Mead and White, George Champlin Mason and Peabody & Stearns transformed the 2,800-acre neighborhood into an architectural laboratory, where many vernaculars were tested and perfected. Today, more than 100 Queen Anne, Stick Style, Italianate and Cottage Ornée homes still preside in the district, which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Even though the Masten House would be used as a summer cottage, Oakey embraced the Aesthetic Movement's philosophy and designed a stately three-story residence that boasted a gabled Stick Style façade, a two-story living hall, 35 stained glass windows, seven fireplaces, and intricate moldings and millwork. Many of the home's original features remain intact today. Fortunately, for more than 120 years, the Masten House quietly passed through the hands of four fastidious owners who lovingly maintained the architectural integrity of the home.

Left: Century-old Japanese maple trees frame the Newport, Rhode Island 19th-century cottage, which is distinguished by a veranda, a trio of gables and rows of stained glass windows.

Inset photo: Rhode Island natives Larry and Jan Girouard have a penchant for preservation. Their Victorian home has been the highlight of three holiday house tours.



Destiny Calls

While house hunting in 1996, newlyweds Larry and Jan Girouard were eager to find an historic home. Just as they decided to place a bid on a Colonial home built in 1720, the couple's real estate agent convinced them to peek at a new listing located a few blocks away. The moment the Girouards spied the Masten House they were smitten. Jan recalls, "The house spoke to us right from the start.

As we toured the house, surprises turned up in every room. We knew the house was special." Within a half hour, they put down a deposit.

When the Girouards officially became the fifth owners of the Masten House, they set out to create an authentic period decor. Jan, a lifelong collector of antiques and an interior decorator says, "We feel we are stewards and we believe we have a responsibility to keep to the period as much as

possible." Like a tapestry, Jan and Larry have carefully woven vibrant color and rich texture into each room to create a historically sensitive setting that showcases the architect's masterful attention to detail.

The Perfect Canvas

Most first-time visitors to the Girouards' home are not prepared for what awaits them on the other side of the front Dutch door. As you cross the

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Above: The grand fireplace in the living hall with its hand-carved stone mantel, an antique oil painting and Tiffany-style globes on the chandelier capture the spirit of the Aesthetic Movement.

Right: The carvings on the sandstone mantel are indicative of Newport's Colonial heritage.



All that Glitters

Decorative detail and hand craftsmanship were synonymous with the Aesthetic Movement. Richard Guy Wilson, a professor at the University of Virginia, author of several books on 19th- and 20th-century architecture and host of A&E's *America's Castles* puts the period in perspective:

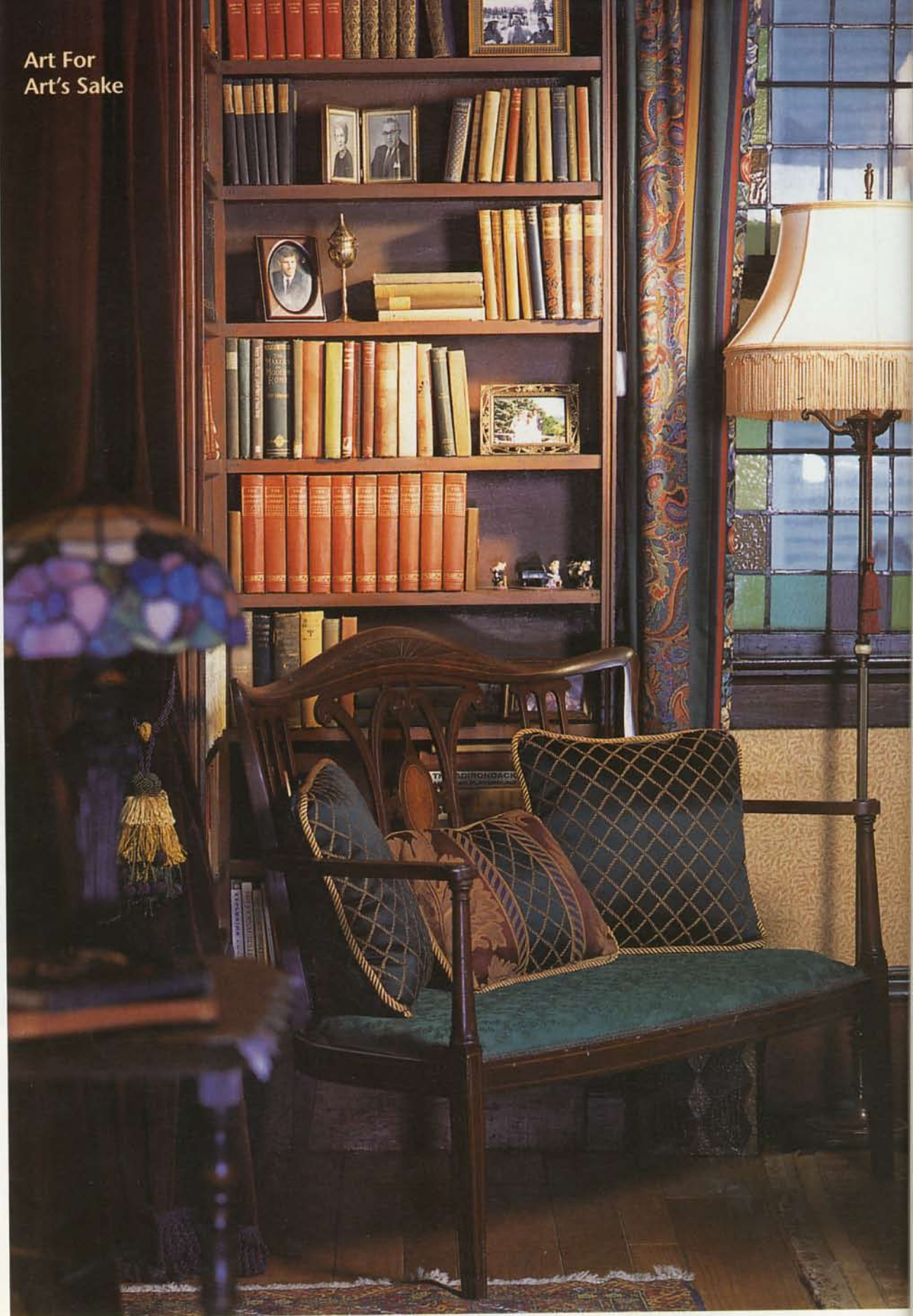
"The so-called Aesthetic Movement flourished in England between the later 1860s and the early 1890s and is sometimes thought of as the predecessor to the Arts and Crafts movement. Architecturally it went under the names of the Queen Anne and Olde English styles, though other idioms were sometimes used. Its prominent proponents included Richard Norman Shaw, James McNeill Whistler, Oscar Wilde, Liberty's and even William Morris. The Aesthetic Movement emphasized lots of pattern, thin-legged 'art' furniture, blue and white china, Japanese prints and finely crafted objects. Much of the emphasis of the Aesthetic Movement lay with beauty and not with high moral purpose, hence its nickname: 'Art for Art's Sake.'" —C.H.G.

Opposite: All of the woodwork in the home retains its original finish. Finely turned balusters punctuate the main staircase, balcony and room dividers in the living hall.

Right: The newel post has been outfitted with an antique light fixture and acid etched globe.



Art For
Art's Sake



Thanks to Jan's detective work, the antique settee was purchased at a former owner's estate sale and returned to its original location in the den.



Above: As was customary during the Victorian period, the dining room is decorated with luxurious layers of color and texture.

Right: An antique vase that belonged to Larry's mother serves as a sentimental centerpiece in the dining room.

Far right: The antique brass lamp with lead crystal prisms once belonged to Jan's grandparents and has cast favorable light on family gatherings for three generations.





The jewel-toned stained glass windows inspired the color palette of the guest bedroom.

threshold you are awestruck by the dramatic scale of the two-story living hall with its 20-foot, beamed ceilings. A massive brick fireplace with a hand-carved sandstone mantel serves as the focal point of the room. Opposite the hearth, a grand staircase accentuated by intricately turned walnut balusters leads to the second-floor balcony and bedrooms. And strategically positioned windows comprised of multiple panes of stained glass illuminate the space with a kaleidoscope of color.

A pair of wooden room dividers distinguished by more balusters and a Turkish motif flanks the entry to the formal dining room. A 10-foot ceiling adorned with Anaglypta, an antique brass chandelier with etched glass globes, a cozy fireplace with a Colonial-style mantel and a row of stained

glass windows work in tandem to create a feeling of intimacy. Meals and conversations are savored at the Queen Anne-style dining table dressed with heirloom linens, china and crystal.

The music room and den are situated beside the formal rooms and are decorated with an eclectic mix of new and antique furnishings. An antique settee in the den has its own story. While researching the home's history, Jan managed to contact relatives of the homeowners who had occupied the house between 1906 and 1967. The family was happy to show her early photographs of the home. A couple of years later, the family held an estate sale and Jan purchased the settee, which had originally graced the den for more than half a century. Jan says with a chuckle, "This is the ultimate yard sale

story. And now the settee is back home where it belongs."

The second and third stories of the home include six bedrooms and two bathrooms, all bearing Jan's signature multi-dimensional designs. Guests particularly enjoy "Lora's Room," which Jan named after her grandmother. The ceilings are painted rose and the walls are resplendent with a period black, teal and rose wallcovering. A canopy and crystal chandelier lend a hint of Old World elegance to an Eastlake bed. And Lora's antique rocking chair and photographs chronicling her life stir fond childhood memories. Jan says, "So much history surrounds us. Each family photo and memento displayed in the home speaks of who we are and of our history."

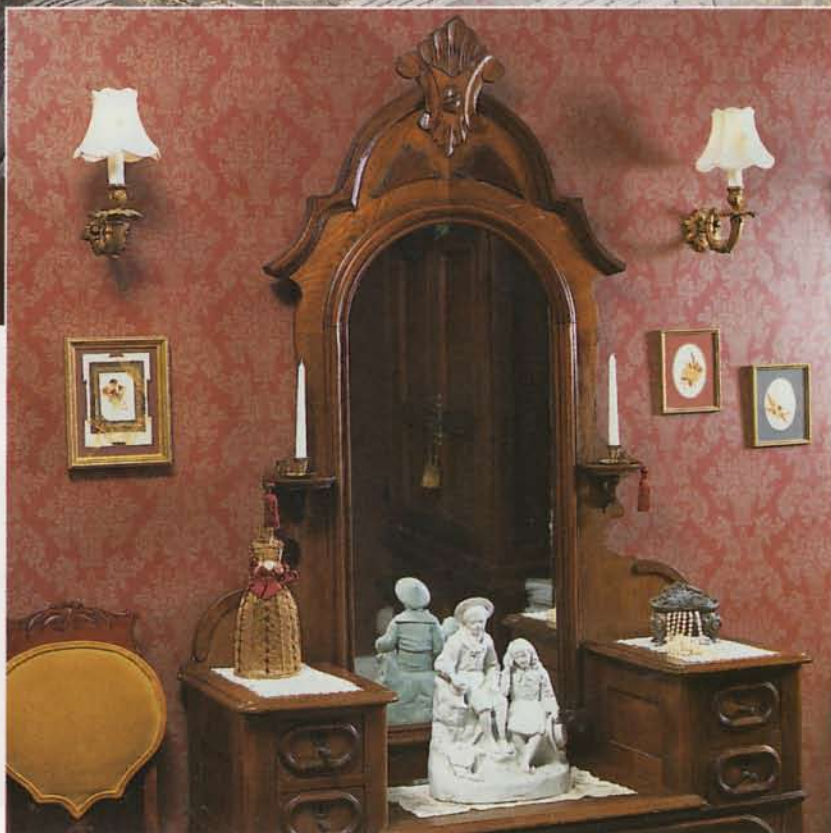
Like the guest bedroom, the master bedroom features a suite of antique fur-



Architectural elements such as the ceiling beams, crown molding and mantelpiece in the master bedroom reflect the aesthetic sensibilities of architect Alexander F. Oakley.

niture and regal hues from ceiling to floor. The ceiling is painted teal and the walls don a cranberry and gold damask wallcovering. An antique walnut bed and vanity echo Oakley's sentiment, that beauty is the result of harmony in our surroundings.

Thanks to Jan and Larry's efforts, a good house only got better. The newest stewards of the Griffiths Masten house are successfully adhering to the Aesthetic principles of its architect. ❁



Countless excursions to antique venues in New England yielded the homeowners many treasures, including the antique vanity and theatre chair in the master bedroom.