

10728. Terrace Hall and Jenkins Cottage.



JONATHAN AND ROB'S NEW HOME, TERRACE HALL, IN A TURN-OF-THE-CENTURY POSTCARD.

HOME MAKING PART I: HOUSE HUNTING

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One Saturday night, at an obligatory party following an obligatory art opening, we ran into one of our favorite art dealers, Andrew Kreps. At some point in the evening, we invited him to go on a drive with us the following day. But when we heard his voice on the

answering machine the next morning, we were caught off guard. The plan had been made under the influence of coke and alcohol, and we hadn't foreseen that the next morning we'd barely be able to move, much less go on a road trip. So we came up with the idea of telling Andrew that we were going to drive all the way out to Asbury Park, New Jersey, thinking he would never want to come. "I'm there! Seeya in ten minutes," was his answer when we called him back.

With a shared interest in tourist culture and resort towns of yesteryear, we had always wanted to visit Asbury Park. That day with Andrew, we discovered a ghost resort town overlooking the Atlantic Ocean. Rainbow flags flew from restored "painted ladies" right next door to burnt-out crack houses and location trailers from *The Sopranos*. All this, just one hour from New York City. When Andrew patiently explained the concept of a mortgage, we figured that it would be cheaper and more fun to live in a mansion in Asbury Park than our studio apartment on the Lower East Side.

The next morning we called a local realtor and made an afternoon appointment. "In two years, this will be the South Beach of New Jersey," he said as he showed us around. "Have you been to Zippers yet?" he then asked, referring to a gay strip bar on the boardwalk. Coincidentally, we had, the night before. We'd found the Jersey boys with their Long Island Iced Teas to be among the town's charms.

That day we signed a contract on a '20s bungalow-style house just two blocks from the ocean. By the end of the week we had backed out of the deal, and three months later, after backing out of five more contracts, we'd started to question whether Asbury Park was right for us after all.

For one thing, speculation frenzy had taken hold - "If only you had looked last

year," we were told repeatedly. Not only that, but Zipper's had mysteriously closed. The rainbow really started to fade when a realtor, who had just sold a dilapidated hotel to an investor with plans to turn it into "a clothing optional gay bed and breakfast," took us to a barbecue at a new homeowner's house. In a sea of Raymond Dragon-Clad and Tommy Boy-scented muscle, we felt as out of place as we would have at a church social. Though we loved the idea of being part of a new gay community, we both have pronounced antisocial tendencies. Plus, the party house looked like it had been decorated by Christopher Lowell.

A few months later, at another obligatory party after another obligatory art opening, our friend Jenny told us about an article she'd just read in *W* about how Uma Thurman, Ethan Hawke, Alexis Rockman, and a slew of supermodels were buying houses in upstate New York. Feeling like Patsy and Edina from *Absolutely Fabulous*, we began to take long drives up the Hudson River, and were drawn further and further west by the pull of the Catskill Mountains. We were soon looking in areas more than two hours from Manhattan, but it didn't seem to matter. Finally we realized the obvious - we didn't want to live in New York City anymore.

Our new plan was to find a large domestic place to inhabit. Initially, we didn't have a preference with regard to architectural style, but in the course of our search we developed a fascination with Victorian houses of the 1890s. With their widow's walks, gingerbread trim, stained glass windows, and grand staircases, these architectural extravaganzas are the opposite of the sheet-rocked white cubes rented by the square foot in Manhattan. In Delaware County, we found a hippie realtor with a long

gray beard and Birkenstocks. He introduced us to the town of Fleischmanns.

Like Asbury Park, Fleischmanns had been a booming resort town in the early twentieth century. As the story goes, Charles Fleischmanns, a U.S. Senator from Cincinnati and the owner of Fleischmanns Yeast and Gin, was looking for a hotel room one night in the town of Grif-fin's Corners. Turned away because he was a Jew, he returned the next day with a suitcase full of money and bought the entire town.

Fleischmanns was a sports enthusiast, so in the center of the village he built a baseball field. On the outskirts, he dug an artificial lake and named it Lake Switzerland. Along the main street, he built a row of mansions for his friends. By the '20s, Fleischmanns had become the most glamorous resort town in the region, dubbed "the Jewish Alps." But by the '70s, because of the new cheap airfares to more exotic locales, the Jewish jetset had flown off. Three sects of working class Hassids took their place, and today they make up the majority of Fleischmanns' summer population.

Thanks to Charles Fleishmanns' efforts of one hundred years ago, it is no longer difficult for a Jew to get a hotel room in the area. We sensed, however, that the Hassids are not entirely welcome either. A local antique dealer once said to us, "If only we could bill them as the Amish of the Catskills, maybe they'd even attract tourists." As a result, we were able to find a house that was even grander than what we had expected for quite a bit less money than we'd planned on spending.

The house we chose sits high on a hill overlooking the village. It's surrounded by a circle of one-hundred-foot tall pine trees. Here's how it was described in the real estate listing: "Grand old

Victorian Queen - prettiest Painted Lady you've ever seen. Sit on your porch rocker and enjoy the sound of the Bushkill Trout Stream. Thirteen bedrooms, two-and-a-half baths, huge porch, second floor veranda, sunroom, fireplace, original woodwork throughout. Needs TLC."

Built by spinster sisters in 1895, "Terrace Hall," as it was then known, changed hands several times before becoming a hotel in the 1940s, dubbed "Maria's Cottage." (The doors to the house's thirteen bedrooms are still labeled with brass numbers.) At some point it reverted to a private residence, and in the '70s,

gussied up with mauve wall-to-wall carpeting and peach floral wallpaper, it was rechristened "Rosebud."

For the next twenty years, the house went unmaintained. But miraculously, Mother Nature was kind. When we found Rosebud, her petals had wilted, but she was structurally sound and still a sight to behold. Immediately, we knew that she was the one. She needed us even more than we needed her: Makeover!

Next Issue, Part II: "Home Bodies: Decorating a Haunted House"