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Rockland's Rebirth

A Tranquil Inn on Ocean's Edge

Maine HOME + DESIGN

August 2007

Bar Harbor Farm House
Adrift in a Historic
Beatrix Farrand Landscape

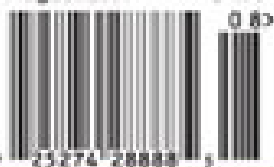
Kennebunkport's
Stone House
The Quintessential
Summer Cottage

+ From Garden to Plate
Organic Fare at
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Reflections

Tranquility at the ocean's edge

THE INN PLACE
by Joshua Bodwell

Photography François Gagné
Design and Styling Windemere Studios

At the end of a narrow, tree-lined road just a few short miles outside the wonderful hustle and bustle of downtown Camden, there is an inn perched on the edge of the Atlantic that feels a world away from the daily summer hubbub. The aptly named Inn at Ocean's Edge is cut into a plunging hillside that tumbles down to Penobscot Bay. Looking across the water to both Islesboro and Seven Hundred Acre Island as they rise up from the chilly sea, the Inn is the picture of an idyllic Maine getaway.

With just 32 rooms spread across three buildings on 23 secluded acres, the Inn is large enough to offer more privacy than your average bed and breakfast, and yet it isn't so big that it sacrifices coziness or character. With its ideal location and attention

to detail, the Inn combines the charm of the bygone era of grand hotels with a modern sophistication and elegance. In the four years since they purchased it, the owners—husband and wife Tim and Joan Porta and partner Jesse Henry—have overseen a dramatic transformation of the Inn at Ocean's Edge. But anyone who knows the Porta name won't be surprised: the family has been associated with one of Maine's most popular and luxurious accommodations for decades.

The young Tim Porta got his first taste of the hospitality business when he worked alongside his siblings in the two Martha's Vineyard hotels his parents owned. In 1968, Porta's parents purchased the historic Migis Lodge on Sebago Lake. Ten years



later—after earning a degree in hotel management at Michigan State University and doing brief tours of duty in both Vietnam and the ranks of the Sheraton hotel chain—Tim purchased the Migis Lodge from his parents in 1978.

In continuous operation since 1916, Migis Lodge is a tranquil lakeside getaway on 100 wooded acres that boasts 3,500 feet of water frontage. Over the past three decades, the Portas have transformed the land around the rustic main lodge and 31 guest cabins into a resort that offers swimming, boating, tennis, hiking, and a soothing spa experience. On-site childcare services allow moms and dads a bit of uninterrupted time to bask in the sun or play a round of golf at a nearby course. Under the Porta's watchful eye and with their knack for accentuating the Maine lakeside experience, the Lodge has become a revered summer retreat to which generations of families return each year.

Jesse Henry first began working at Migis when he was still a college student. Over ensuing summers, Henry held myriad positions around the lodge—he drove the water-ski boat, waited tables in the dining room, and manned the front desk. Henry was so adept at each of his many jobs, that several years later Porta urged him to leave his journalism job in Canada and return to Migis to become its general manager. Henry took Porta up on his offer and soon became an integral part of the resort.

In 2003, with Henry attending to the minutia of running the resort and to its loyal guests, Tim and Joan Porta finally started to think about building a little getaway for themselves on a wooded lot on Islesboro they purchased in 1985. After a late-autumn visit to the island for an inspection of the property with their architect, the Portas spent the night back on the mainland at the Inn at Ocean's Edge. Though the Inn wasn't for sale, Porta struck up a conversation with the owners about the possibility of buying it. "For years," he says, "we had periodically looked at other inns on the ocean in hopes we could someday offer our guests at Migis Lodge a seaside option."

After Henry visited the Inn and observed firsthand the property's potential, the three invested together on the project in the spring of 2004. The young man they once hired to pull people around Sebago Lake on water skis was now their business partner.

To strip the Inn of the decidedly Victorian décor it was laden with at the time of the purchase, M.L. Norton and Brett Johnson of Windemere Studios were brought in to oversee a major redesign. Norton and Johnson pared down the Inn's public spaces and guest rooms to a simple, coastal-cool aesthetic. The profusion of soft blues and whites—on walls, floors, and furniture fabrics—makes guests feel as though they might just float right out of their rooms, across the lush lawns, and down to the ocean's edge. "We brought in these shades of bluey-green, aqua, and turquoise," Norton says, "to emphasize the expanses of water outside the Inn. Now, even inside, you're always surrounded by the watery quality of the property."

The renovations to the Inn took a major leap two years ago. Henry and the

The innkeepers caught in a rare moment of stillness: Tim and Joan Porta, and Jesse Henry.

The posh new pool house beside the main lodge of the Inn at Ocean's Edge (bottom left) offers guests a regal yet luxurious space to gather and relax, as well as a pair of luxury suites above.

The intricate, scroll-armed chairs in the pool house (opposite) were upholstered by the McLaughlin Upholstering Company and set atop a Merida rug.



THE INN PLACE



Portas have added a heated vanishing-edge swimming pool with a posh pool house and luxury suites above. They also purchased the neighboring property with a circa 1970s house on it and converted the home into a chic new restaurant concisely called the Edge.

At the Edge, chef Bryan Dame has crafted an ever-evolving menu that focuses on fresh local products. Dame prepares not only sophisticated takes on classic New England fare, he also offers casual creative dishes like lobster BLTs and brick-oven pizzas with gourmet toppings. Offering seating for 100 inside and out, the restaurant is so perfectly sparse and stylish that, even though the suggested attire is casual, dining at the Edge while the sun sets over Penobscot Bay feels like a regal affair.

Not ones to slow down, the Portas expanded their empire of elegant Maine destinations again this year when they began leasing and managing the Black Point Inn in Prout's Neck, which is located just outside Portland. The Portas have revitalized the circa 1878 building—which is listed on the National Registry of Historic Hotels of America—blending Maine charm with modern sophistication. Adding the Black Point Inn to a list that already included Migis

Lodge and the Inn at Ocean's Edge makes for something of a Porta trifecta. "All three places are quite different," Porta says, "but the one thing they all share is the same high level of hospitality and high-quality accommodations."

When the Portas made the decision to buy and renovate the Inn at Ocean's Edge, they put their Islesboro house on hold. But Porta doesn't sound too upset about the pause in his plans because, in many ways, purchasing the Inn was the realization of a life-long dream. "Having grown up on Martha's Vineyard and Cape Cod," he says, "getting back to the ocean has always been really important to me."

Porta says he can see his Islesboro property when he stands on the Inn's sweeping front lawn. He says that someday soon he'll get around to actually building a home out there. "I have this vision," he says wistfully, "that in my retirement, I'll have a nice long dock out in front of the Inn, and I'll be able to take my boat back and forth between my house on the island and the Inn and the restaurant." And he says it with a tone in his voice that implies there is not a thing in the world that could make him happier. **MH+D**



Chef Bryan Dame



The signature Windemere blue walls in the pool house (opposite, left) were faux finished with Venetian plaster by Carl Kamrath.

The pool house suites are the paragon of airy, summery sophistication (opposite, right top and bottom). Above the queen-sized bed hangs the appropriately titled painting “Deep Blue Sea” by Jay Hall Connaway from Gleason Fine Art in nearby Bar Harbor.

As dusk gathers in the treetops, the stylishly revitalized Edge restaurant is the epitome of the word “inviting” (above). The Edge’s chic wrap-around stainless steel bar, as well as much of the Edge’s interior in general, was the innovation of Windemere’s Brett Johnson; further south, Johnson is the man responsible for the much-lauded interior of the Fore Street restaurant.