

## Rossiter Touch in Washington

**D**riving past a guest house, a historic ice house and a barn where chickens once made their daily contributions to breakfast, I approach the main house at Aglin Farm off Woodbury Road in Washington.

Tall trees, some of which have been soaring skyward ever since the house was built in 1908, seem to embrace the gray-shingled home that sits atop a small rise on the 10-plus-acre property. A circular driveway brings me to the front door and past a unique sculpture that welcomes visitors.

The door opens and one of the home's present occupants, Stan Nelson, brings me inside for a first glimpse of the interior, which is dressed with impeccably tasteful furnishings, many of them antique.

We sit for a while on a wonderful wraparound porch that is enclosed and air conditioned but can be adapted to allow the crisp spring or autumn air to pass

through screen windows. It's what brought me here, a melding of indoor and outdoor that would qualify as anyone's favorite room, but it turns out to be just one part of the larger story.

Soon we are met by Mr. Nelson's wife, Carol, a former commercial real estate broker in New York City who handled the sales of some of the most impressive properties in the city before the couple retired (sort of) to Aglin Farm some 17 years ago. Mr. Nelson was also a commercial real estate broker, and an orthodontist practicing in the New York City area.

Mrs. Nelson leads me on a tour of her 9,000-square-foot home that has 14 rooms, each seeming more stunning than the other and almost all offering sumptuous views of a yard that is not so much manicured as it is maintained.

"It's like a park outside," Mrs. Nelson said. "We really didn't do anything to make it that way, it just happened. The house is full of incredible views, whether the win-

dows are facing the east or west."

The home's multitude of windows look out on such amenities as a tennis court, a swimming pool and abutting gardens, and a small natural pond that has served as a sitting area for the world weary over the years.

The home contains paneled liv-

**'The house is full of incredible views, whether the windows are facing the east or west.'**

ing and dining rooms and a fabulous eat-in kitchen, seven to eight bedrooms, eight full baths and three half-baths, two saunas, an elevator and three fireplaces. The lower level has an apartment with another full kitchen that is used by the Nelsons as a cabana. There's

also a large apartment that can be utilized for staff, and a two-bay garage, with the barn able to accommodate an additional six cars.

The tour concludes with a glimpse of the guest house, which has four bedrooms, two baths, a living room, dining room, eat-in kitchen and two fireplaces. This is where, as Mrs. Nelson tells it, Wendell Willkie launched his unsuccessful run for president in 1940.

Now for the really neat thing about the home, formerly known as The Gables: It was designed by the famed architect of the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Ehrick Rossiter, who created or restored a number of historically and architecturally significant buildings in Washington, including The Washington Club Hall, The Sumacs (the former summer home of naturalist author and artist William Hamilton Gibson), Glen Home on Sabbaday Lane, the Gunn Memorial Library, the Mayflower Inn and the First Congregational

Church of Washington, as well as his own home, known as The Rocks.

Aglin Farm was originally designed and built for Dr. William Safford Perry and is one of only two Rossiter designs in Washington that represent what is called the Tudor Revival Style, which marked a departure from Rossiter's work on other buildings around the Washington Green.

Some of the most notable features of Aglin Farm's main house are its three-bay facade with ridge to street gable roof and intersecting cross gables with varying ridge lines. The original facade of the home was stucco (since covered in gray shingles) with half timbers. The gables' ends are cantilevered, the eaves flared and brackets scrolled.

The Gables is a testament to impressive subtlety, if there is such a thing, with the home giving off a sense of permanence without being ostentatious. The actual gables and their spacing tend to elevate the house in the beholder's

eyes and create a sense of warmth and welcome that beckons you to enter. The home blends with its natural surroundings rather than standing apart from them.

Rossiter was quite a remarkable man. He was born in Paris in 1854, and had a twin. His father, Thomas Pritchard Rossiter, was an American genre and allegorical painter who was associated with the fabled Hudson River School of painters, and his mother, Anna Ehrick Parmly Rossiter, was the daughter of a wealthy New York art patron.

As a youngster, he studied at Frederick Gunn's School in Washington (The Gunnery) from 1865 to 1871, and went on to study architecture at Cornell University. He married Mary Heath of Pittsburgh, and the couple settled in New York City, where, in 1877, Rossiter established an architectural office.

It is said that Rossiter's return to the town of Washington was brought on by a longing to revisit the place of some of the happiest years of his life. After summering in the town for several years, in 1882 Rossiter purchased six acres of rugged land overlooking the Shepaug River Valley, where he and others are supposed to have enjoyed picnics and watched sunsets during his formative days in school.

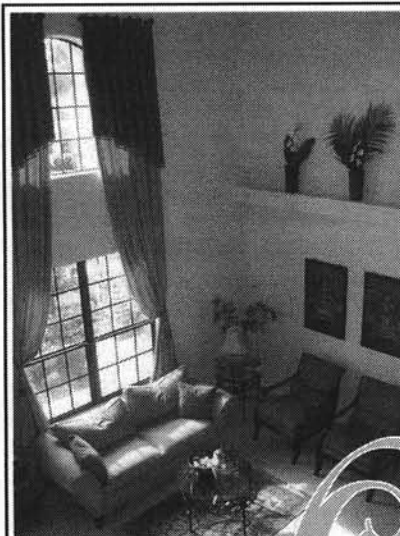
This was where he would build his beloved home, The Rocks, where his daughter said that her father "gloried in thunderstorms, watching flashes of lightning and the rain creep into the valley below from a large window in the alcove on the main stairs of his home." (from "Return to Arcadia," by Alison Gilchrist.)

In one of his most momentous actions as a resident of Washington, Rossiter, upon hearing that land known as Steep Rock was going to be bought by a timber company, decided to buy the land himself and preserve it. Residents and visitors alike today continue to enjoy the property, now known as the Steep Rock Preserve and part of much larger holdings preserved by the Steep Rock Association.

Washington, in the latter years of the 19th century and in the early 20th century, would see an influx of what was called at the time "Washington's first summer colonists," many of them wealthy New York City families that came to live close to their sons at what became The Gunnery ▶ 36



Facing page, Carol and Stan Nelson on the wraparound porch at Aglin Farm in Washington; far left, a dining alcove in their home. Above, views from a sitting area in the home, which was originally designed by Ehrick Rossiter.



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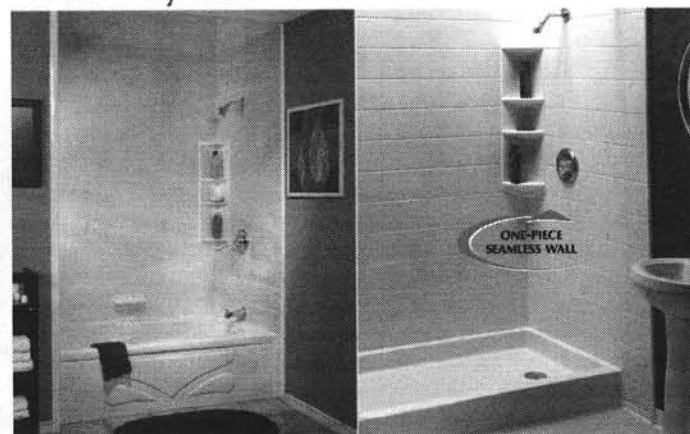
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Rossiter, who lived to a ripe old age of 87, passing away in 1941, would become a friend and business acquaintance with many of these "colonists," initiating a firestorm of design, building and redesign activity that stretched over a number of decades.

It may be that Rossiter, early in his career, was influenced by Henry Hobson Richardson, a noted New York architect he was said to have worked for prior to establishing his own practice. Richardson was known for bold, innovative work that would contribute to the basis for modernism and the work of the legendary Frank Lloyd Wright during the late 19th century.

Rossiter was renowned for having a sense of placing a home exactly in the perfect spot to create a seamless merger with its natural surroundings. His positioning of windows in order to let in just the right amount of light throughout the day is another hallmark, and his proportioning of rooms was done to make them highly functional, pleasing to the eye and, above all else, comfortable for the home's occupants. He eschewed the so-called "great rooms" that were so popular during his time, especially during his early and middle years. He also was known to pay great attention to detail and highly valued crafts-



An exterior view of the main house at Aglin Farm in Washington.

manship, two items that never go out of style.

In all, Rossiter designed or redesigned 15 surviving residences in Washington, which were stunningly captured in the book "Rossiter," produced by Stephen J. Ketterer, who lives in

Edgewoods, a delightful Rossiter house on Old North Road. The book clearly shows Rossiter's genius and the influence the architect had on this small town. "Return to Arcadia" also has some great factual information on Rossiter's Washington years.

Aglin Farm, which is being offered for sale by Klemm Real Estate, and handled by Carolyn Klemm, is on the market for \$5.8 million. The Nelsons also own a small home adjacent to Aglin Farm that can be included in the sale.

"This is a unique opportunity because it is the only Rossiter available in Washington right now," Mrs. Nelson said.

Indeed, Aglin Farm is a one-of-a-kind residence that has stood the test of time, and the ebbs and flows of good taste. ■

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