

BELLE ISLAND

THE 1001ST REASON TO MAKE NY'S THOUSAND ISLANDS HOME

By David M. Brown

Every morning, the owners of Belle Island wake to the beauty of the St. Lawrence Seaway and the magnificence of century-old Boldt Castle, 400 yards north on Heart Island. Here, at Alexandria Bay in the nucleus of the Thousand Islands in upstate New York and southeastern Ontario, the family also enjoys views of the Adirondacks and the rush of history, geological and human.

To this world destination, sculpted by glaciers thousands of years ago, post-Bellum industrialists began taking their vacations by rail or steamboat from eastern cities and building getaway mansions with

extravagant yacht houses, most of which have been restored to their original glory. In 1872, President Grant vacationed just south of Belle Island at Castle Rest, the island owned by George W. Pullman, creator of the Pullman sleeping car, which he patterned on packet boats from his Erie Canal boyhood.

A cluster of nine islands around Belle Island became known as “Millionaire’s Row,” as each success story posted New World heraldry on a proprietary island. In 1900, George Boldt, general manager of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City and owner of Philadelphia’s Bellevue-Stratford Hotel, began his six-story home, one of America’s largest, on Heart Island, where the restored landmark and its ancillary masonry buildings are open to the public.

“The views are fantastic, unparalleled,” says one of the owners, Richard Pietrafesa, who spent much of his childhood on 1.5-acre Belle Island, formerly called Maud and Linlithgow islands.

“My mom and dad lie in their bed and have a nighttime view of a castle, lit against the stars,” he adds. “Ocean freighters pass by the front every hour, close enough that you see every small detail — but far enough away that you are sequestered from their wake.

“The channel view during the day is spectacular both from inside





the house and from the deck,” he adds. “You could sit there all day watching the hundreds of boats passing, listening to the gentle waves lap up against the rock wall.”

One family winter’s tale relates that Boldt, during the excavating of Heart Island for his castle, walked on the ice to a large stone shoal and, with his cane, drew the outline of a bell, saying, “Put it here; let’s make an island.” Hence, bell-shaped and hotel-inspired Belle Island is beautifully flat and without the large-rock encumbrances of many neighboring islands.

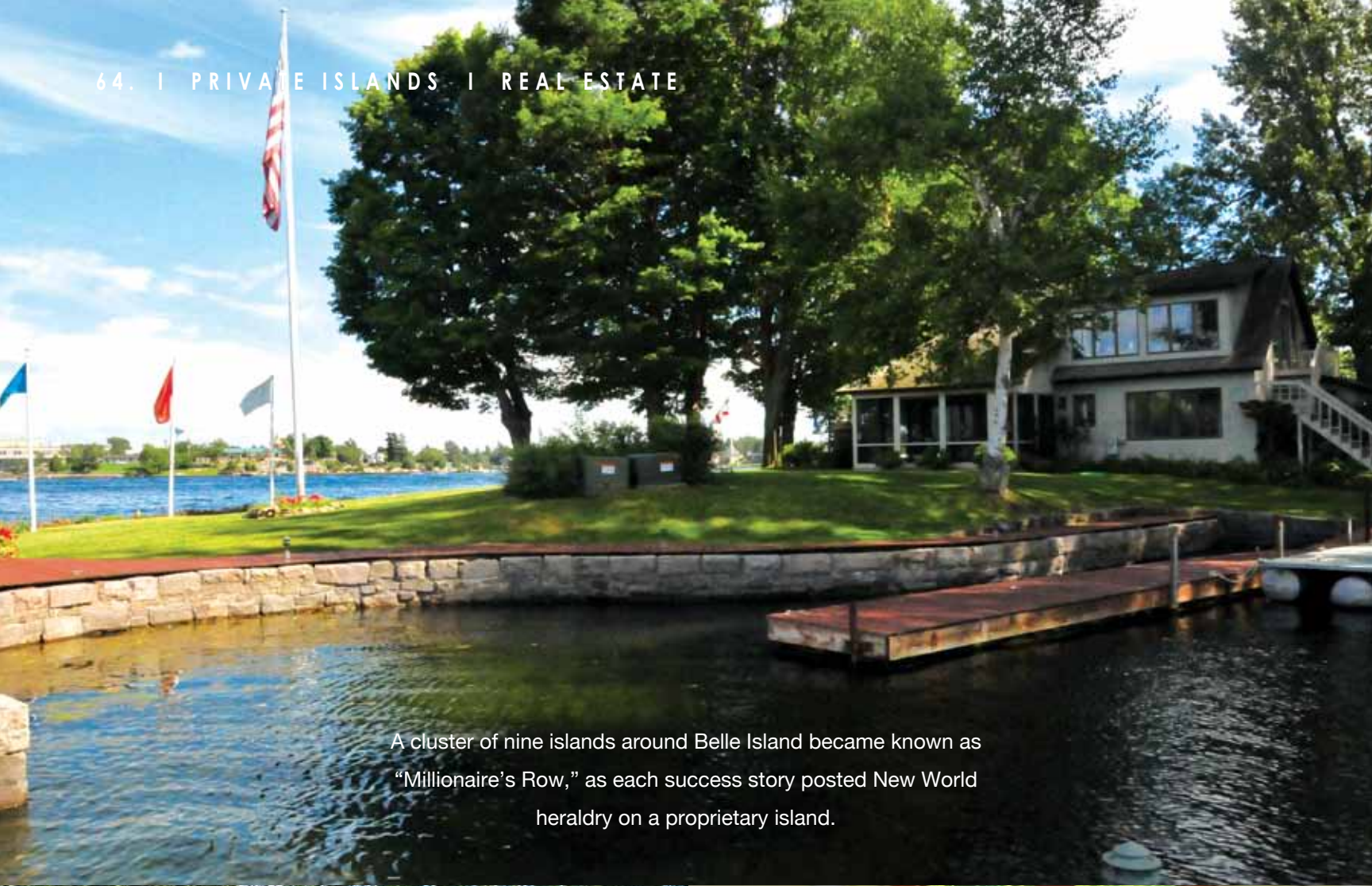
In 1905, Alexander R. Peacock, a Pittsburgh-based Andrew Carnegie protégé and boating aficionado who became a millionaire when the Carnegie Steel Company was taken over by the United States Steel, purchased Belle Island from Boldt, who probably built the island’s original Classical Revival-style house, torn down decades before the current ownership.

Today, all of the structures on Belle Island are on one level, including a five-bedroom house, built by the family in 1988; an enclosed boathouse for two 30-foot boats or four smaller boats; a 120-foot-deep water dock; a covered dock slip for three boats; and a sheltered harbor with a slip for two boats.

“From every position on the island, we have a clear view to the St Lawrence Seaway main channel and to Boldt Castle,” Pietrafesa says. “Yet, on the back side of the island, the waters are calm, suitable for swimming and fishing.”

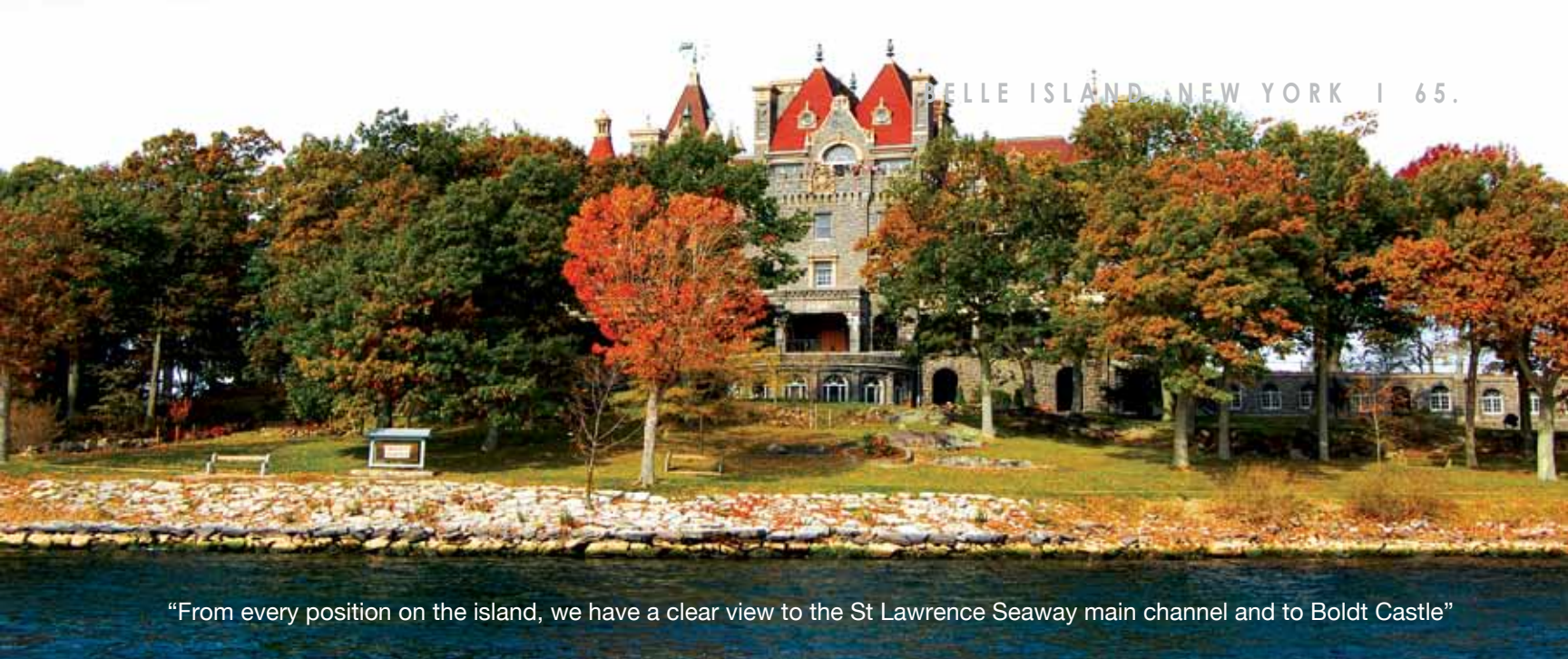
Sportfishing, in fact, is world famous for novices or avid anglers here. Eastern Lake Ontario is sought after for salmon, brown and lake trout, and the St. Lawrence, Black, Salmon, and Oswego rivers have great bass and pike. Muskies from the St. Lawrence River and the walleyes





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from Oneida Lake are legendary. The eastern Lake Ontario tributaries also have some of the finest winter steelhead fisheries in the Northeast.

Within minutes of Belle Island are beaches for swimming and water-skiing at the “Lake of the Isles” inside of nearby Wellesley Island. About 100 yards away from Belle Island, Wellesley also features stores, restaurants and The 1000 Islands Club and Marina, where Pietrafesa and family rent their slip and park their cars; its pool and restaurant are available to them. “The trip to Wellesley takes about four minutes at idle, one minute if you are in a hurry,” he says, chuckling.

So, too, the neighboring islands are a wonder, with historic or new structures, beautiful gardens and standout topography. “I’ve explored them with a jet ski for over 20 years and I am still finding alcoves I didn’t know about, cliffs to dive from, ruins to explore and parks to stop at,” Pietrafesa recalls.

Alexandria Bay and nearby Clayton are summer-event attractions as well, with annual events such as the Poker Run for high-performance speedboats, the nation’s largest antique boat show and Bill Johnston’s Pirate Weekend, commemorating the exploits of the eponymous pirate and his cohorts, who hid among the 1000 Islands during Revolutionary War times.

Pietrafesa recalls some of his many island memories: “flying a delta wing kite behind the ski boat; weekend visits with my kids and my siblings’ kids, teaching them to drive a boat as my father taught me; twilight wine cruises, with the unmistakable gurgle of the inboard engine; and loading up the 60-footer with 20 people to go anchor in a secluded harbor for a swim, and ending up with 40 onboard before we began dropping everyone home at the end of the day.”

Belle Island is priced at US\$ 1.395 million. Those flying private planes may consider Maxson Airfield, (Identifier 89NY), 90 miles from Syracuse, NY, and 42 miles from Kingston, Ontario. For more information on this outstanding lifestyle investment, see www.1000islandsprivateislandforsale.com or contact Richard Pietrafesa directly, richard.pietrafesa@gmail.com or 315-952-2831.



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Alexandria Bay, New York

US\$ 1,395,000

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