

REAL ESTATE **PLUS**

▶ HOMES & PROPERTIES
▶ OPEN HOMES
▶ INVESTMENT COMMERCIAL
▶ RENTAL ACCOMMODATIONS

Seaside home weathers trends

By Susan Down
Times Colonist staff

SINCE 1937, Cyril Hume's seaside home has stood its ground not only against the winter southeasters, but the seasonal decor trends that buffet local homes as well. The only private home in Sidney to have heritage designation, the cottage has undergone minimal upgrades, so that what you see is the original atmosphere, rather than a restoration, from ceiling plaster to linoleum.

Hume's grandparents bought the cottage from its original owner when they moved from the Okanagan in 1944. "According to my mom, their jaws dropped when they saw it," said Hume, who has lived in the house since 1980. "But after they'd spent the first winter in this uninsulated house on this windy point, they thought, 'oops.'"

Evidence of human habitation sits lightly on the property. An unpaved two-tire-tracks-through-the-grass driveway wends through a small meadow, under a lofty grove of firs. The path to the house through an arch of libernum trees offers the visitor more chances to decompress after the drive on the Pat Bay Highway.

With its terra cotta stucco, the cottage itself resembles a giant flowerpot, a suitable image for its landscape designer owner.

The cottage lines are enhanced by the casement windows with diamond pane upper lights. The windows are still single pane, but the heating system has evolved from a wood/coal stove, to electric, and finally to a gas insert in the granite fireplace supplemented by a gas stove in the hallway.

Inside, the wall colors have not been altered. In the main living area the walls were originally ivory with a robin's egg blue ceiling, a scheme changed in the 1950s to peach and green. The latter is a combination — popularized again in the 1980s — that Hume has retained. "I asked my grandmother why she painted the ceiling green and she said it was to

QUICK TOUR

Year Built: 1937

Architect: Hubert Savage (attributed)

Size: 990 square metres (1,100 square feet)

Rooms: Two bedrooms, one bathroom, kitchen, living/dining room, sunroom.

Unique Details: Original light fixtures, kitchen cupboards, lino and 1950s paint colors; casement windows with upper diamond-paned lights; granite fireplace; "box" room guest sleeping area on landing leading to attic; built-in buffet with pass-through in dining room.



JOHN MCKAY/TIMES COLONIST

DISTINCTIVE F2 Terra cotta stucco cottage, top, resembles flowerpot. Below, from left, sunny breakfast room; garden arch; cupboard has new pullout drawers

Distinctive: cottage's decor celebrates owners own heritage

cut the glare," said Hume. "It's true, this close to the water, an amazing amount of light bounces up there, and this helps to pull it down."

The decor celebrates Hume's own heritage. Watercolor paintings, created by family members, are hung carefully with brass hooks from the picture rail in the old-fashioned way.

Central to the room is what Hume calls his "beater" sofa, its brown leather the color and texture of a barnstorming flyer's "bomber" jacket. The rest of the antique tables and chairs were chosen for their slim compact designs that don't overwhelm the room. A shallow built-in buffet features a pass-through to the kitchen.

EN ROUTE to the kitchen is a sunny breakfast room, a one-storey, bay windowed turret with just room enough for the 1880s-vintage round table. Mrs. Tiggy Winkle or Jeremy Muskrat would fit right in at any tea party.

In the kitchen, Hume had to make some hard choices: he reluctantly replaced the woodstove with a modern electric solid-element range, but he kept the worn yet resilient 60-year-old linoleum flooring.

Still, he has held the line against a complete renovation. "The more modern idea of counters and dishwashers and space fights against the nature of the house," he said. Hume has supplemented the limited work surface area with a small movable island and a small natural wood cabinet next to the stove.

The cupboard configuration has remained the same but with a slightly different usage. For example, a shallow wall closet which once housed an ironing board is now a spice cupboard. Another closet has become a formfitting alcove for the fridge, while a third contains new pull-out drawers.

Walls are three shades of creamy yellow with the plaster on the lower half scored to resemble square tile.

The cupboards on the other side of the room resemble a two-piece Welsh dresser. "In the 1930s, they weren't much into built-in cabinetry," said Hume.

"The old fashioned dresser was supposed to be it. It's a built-in, but it's already looking back in time to something earlier." Hume painted the inside of the glass front upper cabinet a strong china blue to match the tiny accent tiles in the original sink unit.

While the esthetics are unchanging, some of the home's systems had to go. To install a washer, dryer and freezer, Hume had to have the wiring upgraded, although he has kept the impossibly small 15-amp breaker panel as a basement decoration.

His home office takes up the master bedroom with his own sleeping quarters in the original guest room at the end of the hall. His grandparents' walnut bed, bureau and dressing table give the room a 1920s verisimilitude.

Although the bathroom required some rebuilding because of extensive rot, even that was done to replicate what was there. For example, square white tiles replaced originals of identical size. A new linoleum floor is a ruddy striated pattern similar to what Hume remembers in his childhood home.

Up half a flight of stairs on a landing between the main floor and the attic is what was originally called a box room.

Instead of storing steamer trunks, Hume's grandparents used it as a guest room. There is enough space for a cot and night table. He also plans to eventually develop the large attic, adding a dormer for a fine seaview.

Outside, Hume revived the neglected garden, introducing some new flora where once were only snowberries, alders and daisies.

New plantings revolve around and contrast with the striking colors of purple-leaved hazelnut and plum trees. He has also deepened borders around the house from three to eight feet.

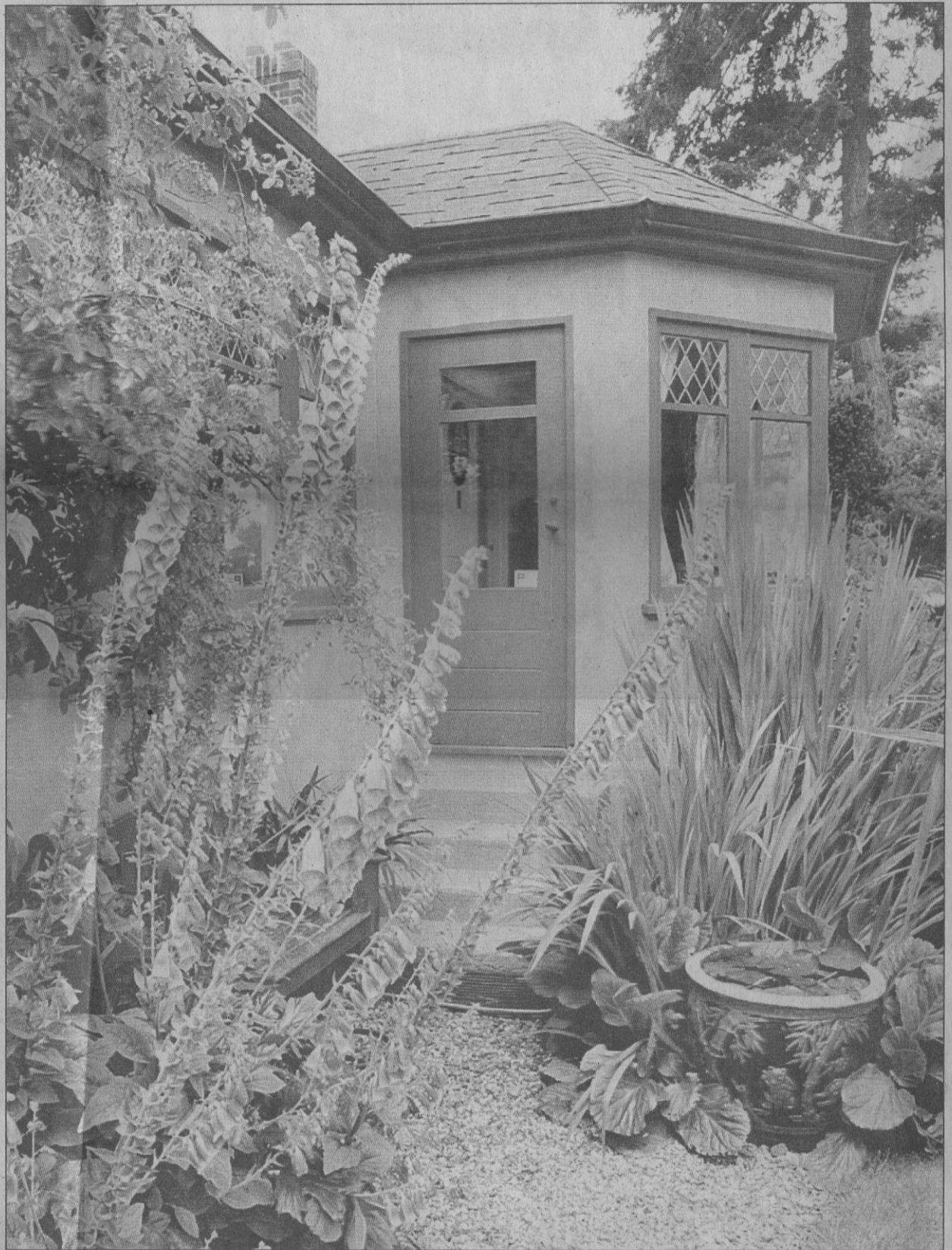
ON THE weather side of the house, Hume has planted flowers such as peonies which die back completely every year. To protect against summer storms, he has designed columns to support roses and let damaging breezes pass through.

One visualization technique he uses is to treat the grass as water and the flowerbeds as islands and landforms. For example, a perimeter hedge of native plants is clipped to mimic the horizon.

He is also sensitive to light and color of the changing seasons.

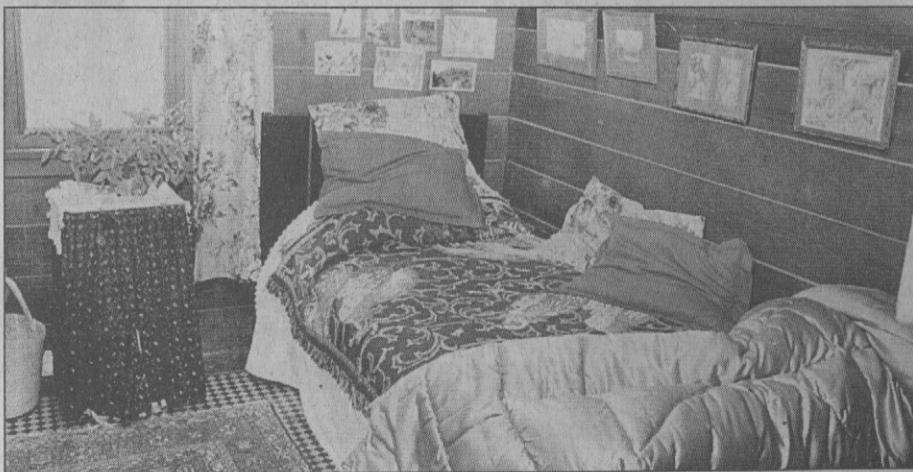
"In the winter, greys and silvers pick up color of the winter sea," he said of one corner of his garden.

The result of such planning is an enchanting vista from every window, a perfect nursery rhyme setting. There once was a man who lived in a flower pot....



JOHN MCKAY/TIMES COLONIST

Gardens surrounding house, above, abound with color; originally called a box room, this space, up half a flight of stairs on a landing between main floor and attic, now is used as a guest room; bathroom's soft colors reflect ambience of home's overall decor



Landscape designer a master of colorful settings

By Susan Down
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A trainer art therapist before he started his second career, Sidney landscape designer Cyril Hume has an uncommon talent for creating colorful settings.

He has a particular weakness for the overstuffed look of a cottage garden, the kind that surrounds his own 1937 cottage.

Instead of the clipped and

labyrinthine gardens of a formal country estate, the cottage garden is fragrant and companionable, a floral wreath that embraces the house.

While every garden needs care, the cottage garden seems to prefer the laissez-faire approach.

For example, in Hume's garden, rose bushes entangle themselves in tree branches, and a purple-leaved elder has a Clematis growing up through it.

"Cottage gardening is defined by creepers and vines and fullness," he said. "But a cottage garden can be a vague and misleading term. Historically, a cottage garden was simple and humble with cabbages next to violets or a lilac bush. It was utilitarian and practical. But in North America in the 1920s and 1930s, a nostalgia kicked in with spires of foxgloves and hollyhocks."

The situation changed in the 1980s,

says Hume, when people wanted to make use of the more sophisticated plants available to create specimen gardens with all types of foliage shapes and textures.

"The cabbages are gone," he said. "Foxgloves might still be around, but people are introducing more hostas and grasses and things that might not have found a place early on."

Pay attention to the surroundings,

says Hume. As he gets further from the house, his own tended garden gradually defers to native plants such as Oregon grape and ferns. Even within his cultivated plots, he creates areas that reflect the sea vistas beyond.

"Take some time to look up and out at the larger picture, not just down at the plants," he said. "Ask how is this garden part of the view and the view part of the garden. Do you compete with it, complement it, frame it or turn your back on it?"