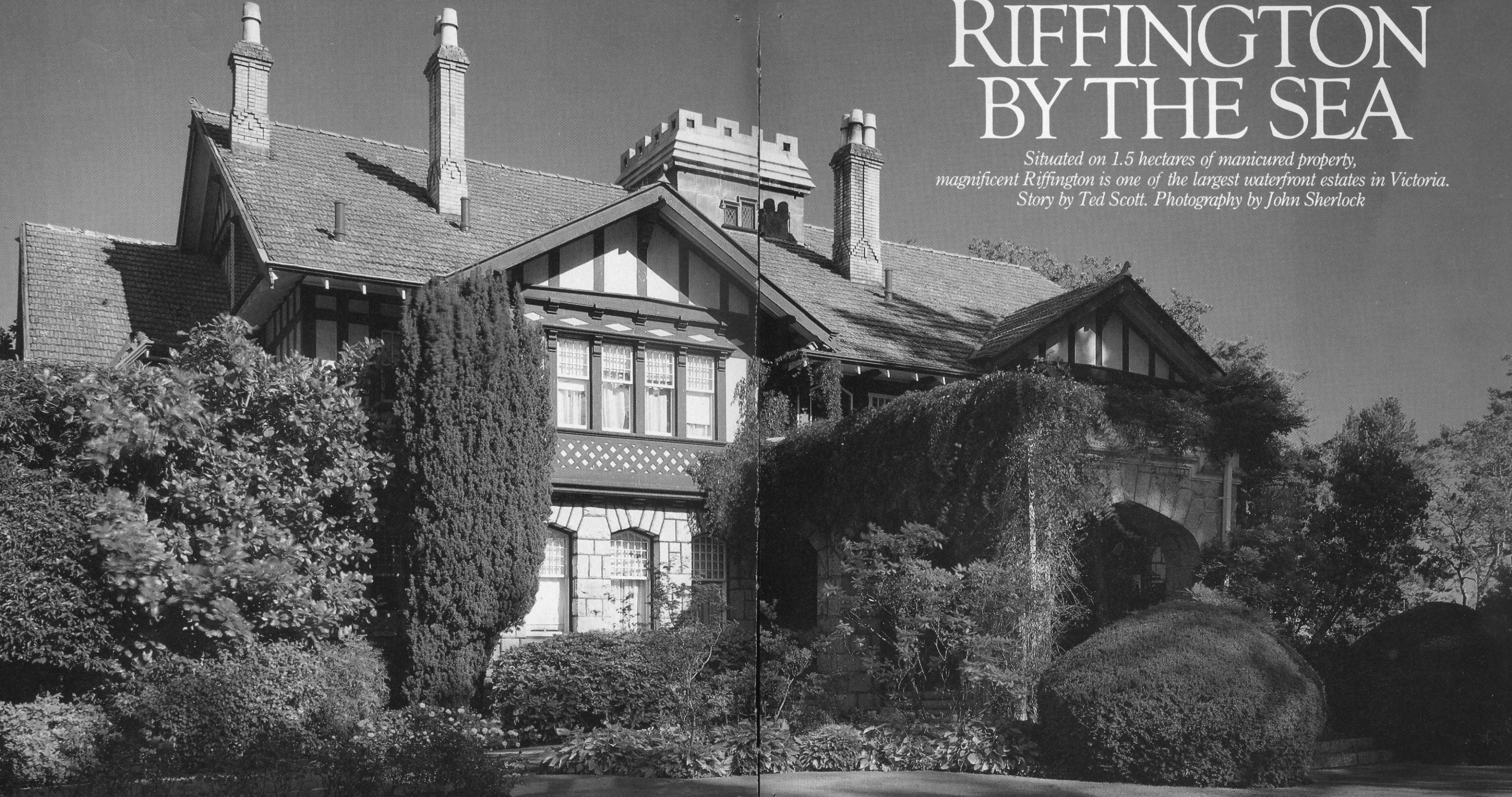


RIFFINGTON BY THE SEA

*Situated on 1.5 hectares of manicured property,
magnificent Riffington is one of the largest waterfront estates in Victoria.
Story by Ted Scott. Photography by John Sherlock*





The fireplace, mouldings and silk-striped wall panels in the French drawing room were installed when the house was new. The French brass fireplace screen and fender, and the Spanish, silvered-gesso altar candelabra are late 19th-century pieces.

Opposite: All of the main rooms in the house open onto the reception hall, a grand two-storey space topped by a stained-glass rose-window dome. The table is 17th-century English oak gateleg. On the staircase landing stands an old vestment cupboard, which originally belonged in an English vicarage.

Below: In the middle of the entry-hall ceiling is a shallow, rose-window dome.

I was transported to Riffington in a manner to which I could easily become accustomed: in a very quiet, plush, dark-grey Rolls-Royce. It was a fitting introduction to Vancouver Island's Oak Bay community and to one of its most prestigious mansions.

Oak Bay is a seven by two-kilometre strip of land running north-south along the sea several kilometres east of Victoria. Its eastern boundary is named Foul Bay Road, but there is nothing foul about this 79-year-old municipality. It is a district of large, conservatively designed homes surrounded by meticulously groomed gardens on spacious lots. I think it is one of the most beautiful residential communities in North America. The Uplands is the jewel in this crown.

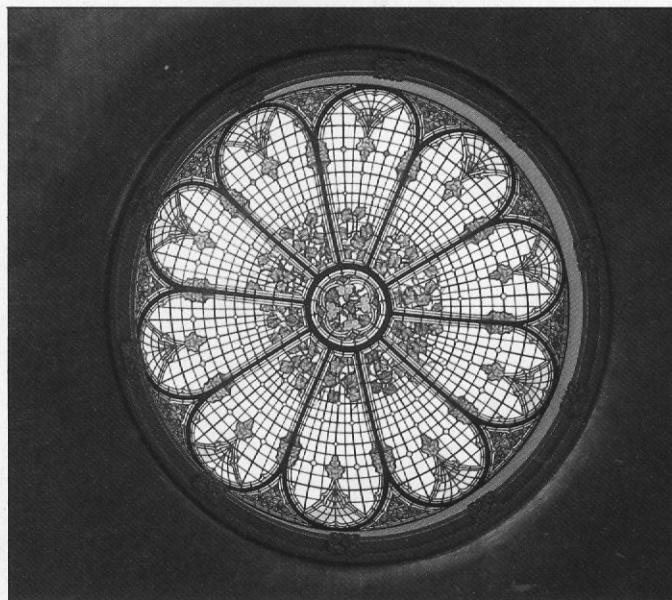
Uplands is a subdivision, but it does not consist of the rows upon rows of identical houses that you typically associate with the word. This 188-

hectare parcel of land was planned (in 1910) by the associates of Frederick Law Olmsted, a landscape architect and the designer of Manhat-

tan's Central Park. It was based upon the garden-city concept of placing houses on spacious lots in parklike surroundings. The Uplands's curving boulevards were designed to follow the contours of the sloping land, and, in a move that was unusual for the day, all of the utility wires normally strung overhead on poles were placed underground.

Riffington was built in 1911 as a showplace for the new subdivision. It was designed by Vancouver architect Philip A. Jullien and sits on 1.5 hectares of land that slope gently towards the sea.

The house was acquired in 1946 by Hubert Wallace, whose father, Alfred, founded the Burrard Drydock Company in Vancouver, and whose brother, Clarence, was the lieutenant-governor of British Columbia from 1950 to 1955.





Hubert was vice-president of his father's company. As a young man, he was a member of the Canadian yachting team that won a bronze medal in the 1932 Olympic Games. His love of sailing led him to help establish the annual Swiftsure Yacht Race and to become a founding member of the Vancouver Maritime Museum. A recent historical article in *Pacific Yachting* magazine said, "There was always a flutter of excitement when Hubie Wallace brought his yawl, the *Minerva*, to the starting line." When not on the water, Wallace spent his time in this elegant house by the sea.

Riffington's plan is nearly square, with major rooms at each of the four corners, and smaller, less important rooms in between. In the middle of the house is a large, two-storey, octagonal hall with a shallow, rose-window ceiling dome; galleries with pointed arches encircle the hall at the second level. Ceramic tile floors in the hall are covered with broad, oriental carpets.

The house is quite a distance from the street and has a long, circular drive, which offers changing views of the building as one approaches. Visitors exit from their automobiles under the *porte-cochère* and enter a small foyer, which opens to the central hall. Opposite the foyer is a view of the sea.

To the left of the entrance is a French drawing room. Its decor is restrained, but it is, nevertheless, the most ornate room in the house, with mouldings framing the original silk-covered, striped wall panels and forming a decorative frieze along the edge of the ceiling. The introduction of too many colors would make this room look garish, and so the original designer (and subsequent decorators) chose a more satisfying complement to the vigorous lines and textures. Except for the rose-colored flowers in the motif along the



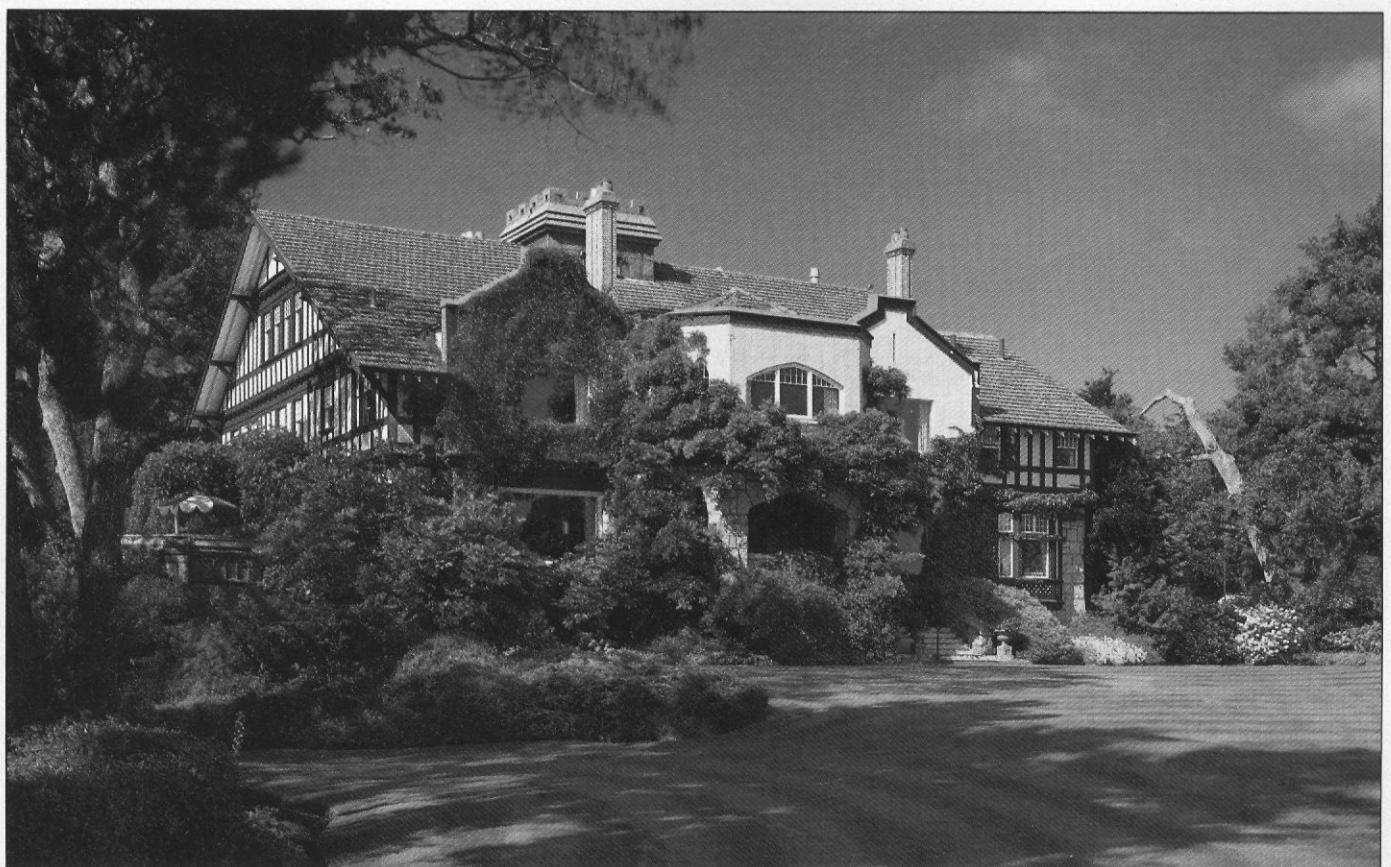
The hand-carved Adam fireplace mantel in the dining room is 220 years old. The Regency chandelier has four tiers of crystal prisms, which change color when the light intensity is varied. The portrait of Mrs. Glwadys Wallace was painted by Myfanwy Pavelic.



Despite the almost casual mixture of furniture pieces that comprise many periods and styles, the living room retains a formality. Of note are a number of 17th and 18th-century oriental cabinets and the Baccarat crystal candelabra wall lights.



British royals have enjoyed the pleasures of this 743-square metre, salt-water swimming pool with its own private sandy beach.



Since 1947, the same full-time gardener has maintained Riffington's rolling lawn and impressive collection of ornamental trees and shrubs.

RIFFINGTON BY THE SEA

edge of the carpet (nicely echoed in some of the china displayed on the shelves), the room and appointments are monochromatic. The result is a room with great dignity.

A library, once a billiard room, is to the right of the foyer; across the hall, on the west side of the plan, are the other two large, ground-floor rooms: the living room and the dining room. The living room gains its interest from color rather than texture. This room and the dining room are similar in decor, and each looks out onto the ocean through a picture window. (These large, single panes of glass are incongruous in this style of architecture. The diminutive lights in the doors leading from the living room to the garden are what one would expect to see here.)

Between the drawing room and the dining room, a wide, formal staircase leads from the hall to a second-floor corridor, which encircles the hall and passes in front of the four bedrooms that occupy this level. The openness of this hall is refreshing. Being able to lean on the balcony rail and converse with someone standing on the ground floor enhances the three-dimensionality of the architecture, giving it more a feeling of sculpture. We are quite accustomed to horizontal communication in buildings, but vertical spaces inside our houses are typically limited to stairways.

Mrs. Wallace's bedroom is on the entrance side of the house and looks out onto a beautiful Japanese garden, which is built upon a massive outcrop. It is a site that would appeal to the esthetic sense of a Japanese designer: a quirk in the landscape upon which to develop something unique. Mr. Wallace's bedroom is on the opposite side and looks out over the ocean. The two rooms are joined by a walk-through dressing room and a bathroom.

On the western edge of the grounds, across a vast expanse of lawn and next to the sea, is a modern cabana with glass walls and an Olympic-size, tidal swimming pool. A former Duke of Kent swam here as the guest of a previous owner, and the Wallaces themselves played host to Princess Margaret.

For all of its elegance and the important role it plays in supporting a graceful lifestyle, Riffington is relentlessly formal. Its sitting rooms are imbued with splendor. The only room in which I can imagine myself curling up with a good book is a small den between the library and the living room, a dark, cosy place where the walls are lined with books with titles such as: *The Log of the Cutty Sark*, *The Seacoast of Bohemia* and *Home Port: Victoria*. □