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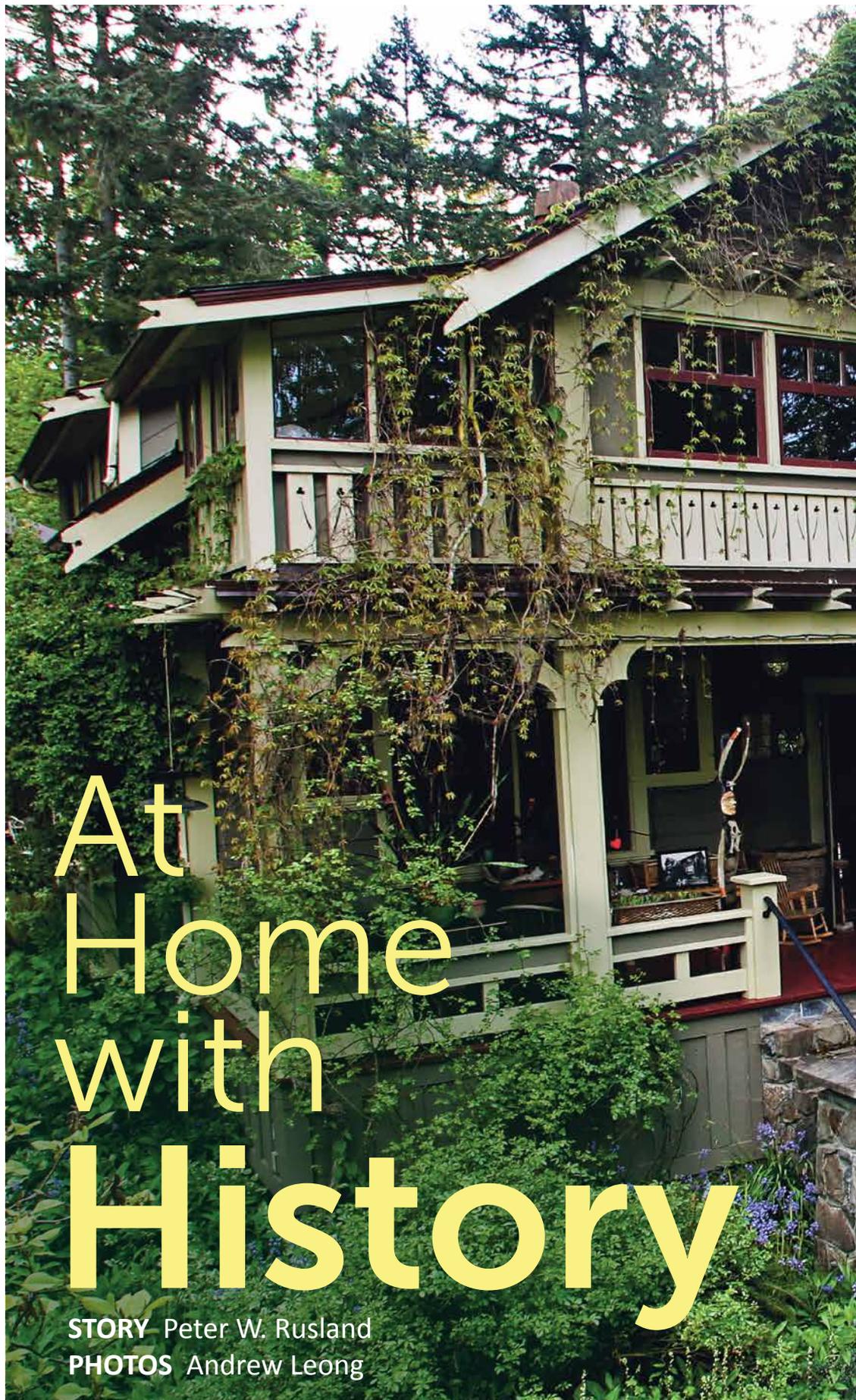
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At
Home
with
History

STORY Peter W. Rusland
PHOTOS Andrew Leong



Priceless Chez Coulson Broke the Bank

As Ulla and David Coulson pose for pictures with their historic Miller Road home perched on the highest point around Eagle Heights, they share the history and pleasure of their beautiful property.

“We used to refer to our home as Ravens’ Hill,” Ulla says, noting roosts of the intelligent, mythical birds in the firs ringing their two-acre spread.

That raven title is reflected in a flock of artwork inside their lovingly restored, yet unpretentious, place that was built in 1913.

Aside from its functional grandeur and well-tended gardens, the couple — both age 61 — is perhaps most proud of preserving the original home of Cowichan’s Hillcrest Lumber tycoon, Carlton Stone.

“Carlton was the business pillar of the valley. I was honoured to take it over,” Dave said. “I felt like a steward taking over the family estate — and the Stone family (was pleased) knowing it would be restored.

“It’s a unique craftsman-style with signature carpentry details, much like a (architect Samuel) Maclure (home),” he says of the imposing stone-and-wood houses found largely on Vancouver Island.

“Ours has some unique characteristics I haven’t found (elsewhere), not even in Victoria. From clover leaves on the upstairs railings, and the clinker-brick chimney, to bird’s mouth details on the ends of all the barge boards and lookout beams.”

Details like those — and sweat-equity they’ve invested since buying their

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pad in 1989 — are why the noted heritage contractor and design builder explained that chez Coulson is basically priceless.

“It took us 10 years to finish all the renovations; we broke the bank on it,” admits Dave.

Their biggest efforts included a book-lined kitchen, leafy sunroom and recreational basement inside their 2,700-square-foot, two-storey manor.

“Every room is done except the upstairs bathroom.”

The “ex-hippies” who’d moved to Maple Bay from Nelson (where Dave was a heritage renovator), realized the old home’s potential while viewing it with a realtor who didn’t believe the Coulsons had the cash to buy it.

The couple had a budget of about \$80,000 and the price was around \$135,000.

“But it was my house. I knew it,” said Denmark-born Ulla. “So I ran up and down the stairs because that’s ownership to me.”

“I said ‘Sold,’” remembered Dave. “It was scary though.”

They bought their forest oasis from Art Bellis’ estate for \$120,000, then

rolled up their sleeves to pay for it — and renovate and landscape it while raising daughters Erin and Lindsay there.

Kitchen upgrades included yanking six layers of “tar-backed pre-lino” to reveal lovely fir floorboards, noted Dave who is originally from Windsor, Ontario.

“I’m most proud of the landscaping. Seasonally, it changes every day. The house is just bricks and mortar.”

Rock-terraced, park-like grounds sport gravel paths winding among sculptures and collectibles, Dave’s custom-built office building, plus a mix of tree and shrub species spanning an atlas cedar, acacia and camellia, to bamboo, golden-chain laburnum and Virginia creeper.

There’s even a pirate-ship tree-fort for grandson Ronan, whom Dave calls “a precocious six-year-old.”

Cutting trees anywhere is a hideous thought to the Coulsons, but when a huge fir fell during a recent windstorm, Dave planted a “living wall” of plants among the root mass.

He and resident father-in-law, Hardy, also salvaged mature Garry oaks — cut by hydro crews near St. Peter’s-Quamichan Anglican Church — and made antique-type living-room furniture for

Coulson House.

Ulla enjoys her grounds’ great outdoors, and peaceful front-porch parlour, but her hobby is tending her collection of cookbooks — among thousands of other titles comprising the couple’s small, private library.

“I ran a bookstore (Ulla’s in downtown Duncan) so I know how to organize. It’s all alphabetical,” she said. “I hate Kindle.”

The Coulsons loved a visit by the late Norman Stone.

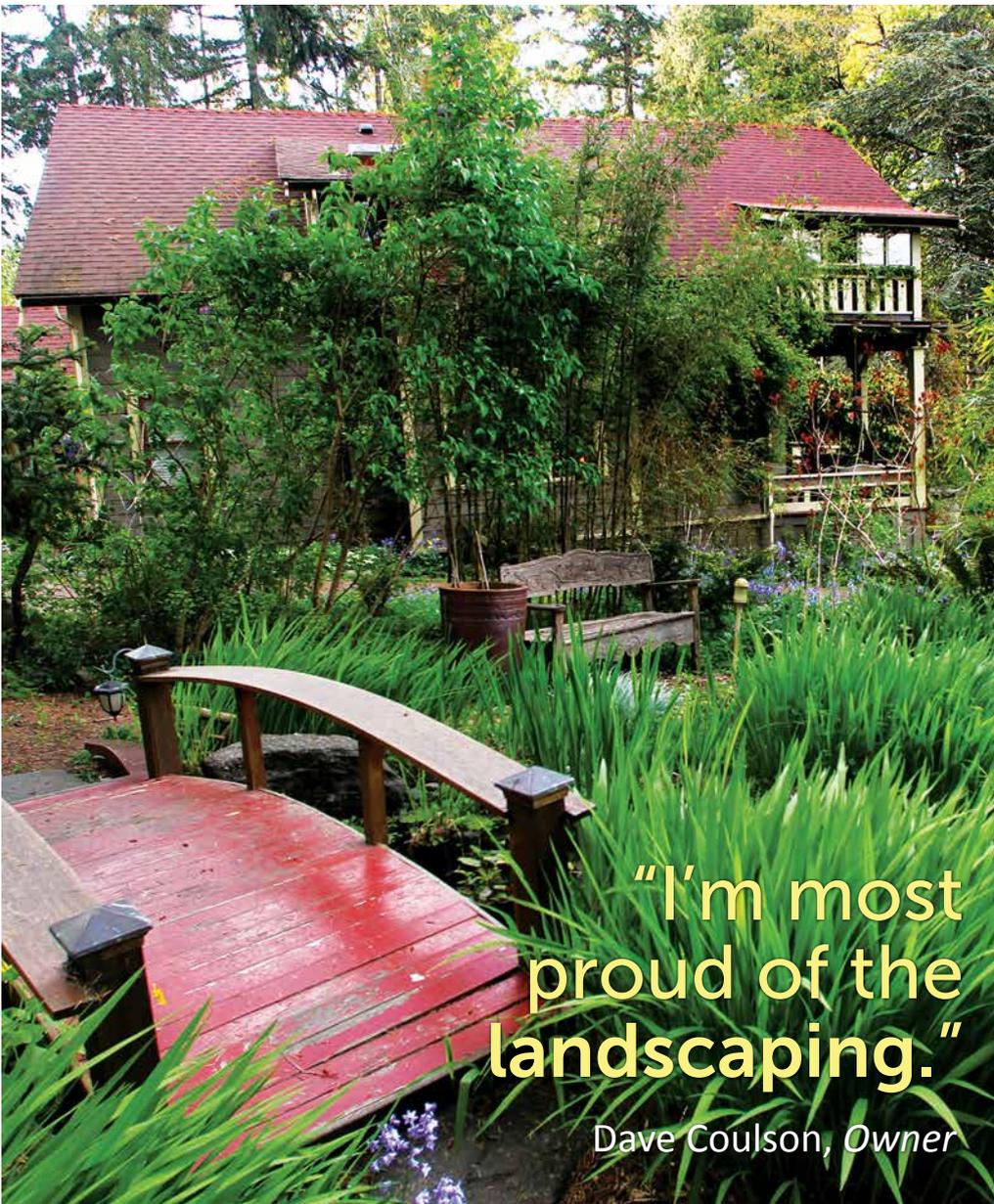
Stone strolled around, reminiscing about where he and his five siblings were reared before dad Carlton built his beloved (now-demolished) Stonehaven in 1927 near what is now Cowichan District Hospital.

“He said ‘That’s where the bitch slept,’” Dave said of Norman’s unflattering comment about his former nanny’s room.

He also remembered breaking four ribs by falling on the Stones’ deep claw-foot tub.

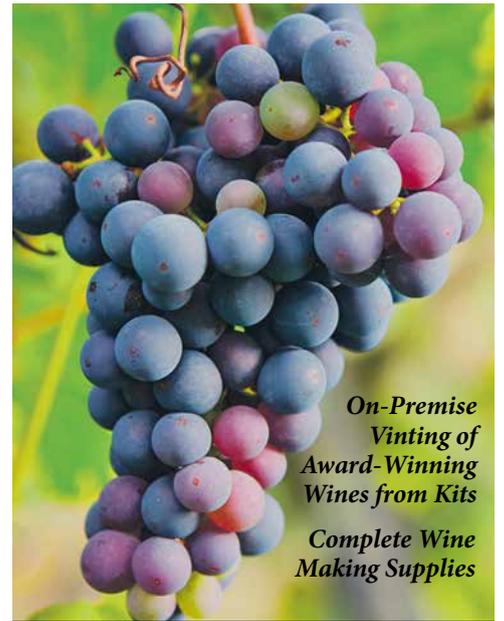
The home’s preserved provenance has the Coulsons ready to seek heritage status for it.

“Our place is pretty hard to improve on,” Dave says.



"I'm most proud of the landscaping."

Dave Coulson, *Owner*



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