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Stainless-steel cabinets, left, from St. Charles in a Steven Harris–designed kitchen. Page 138.

Art deco classics and a Chinese scroll meet in a New York apartment, above. Page 104. Left: Architect Richard Meier at the Getty Center site in Brentwood. Page 128.

COVER
Tulips dominate a formal garden on Oscar de la Renta's Connecticut estate. Photograph by Richard Felber. Page 94.

APRIL

FEATURES

Tales of the Hudson River Valley

Local landmarks embody centuries of life in a patrician preserve

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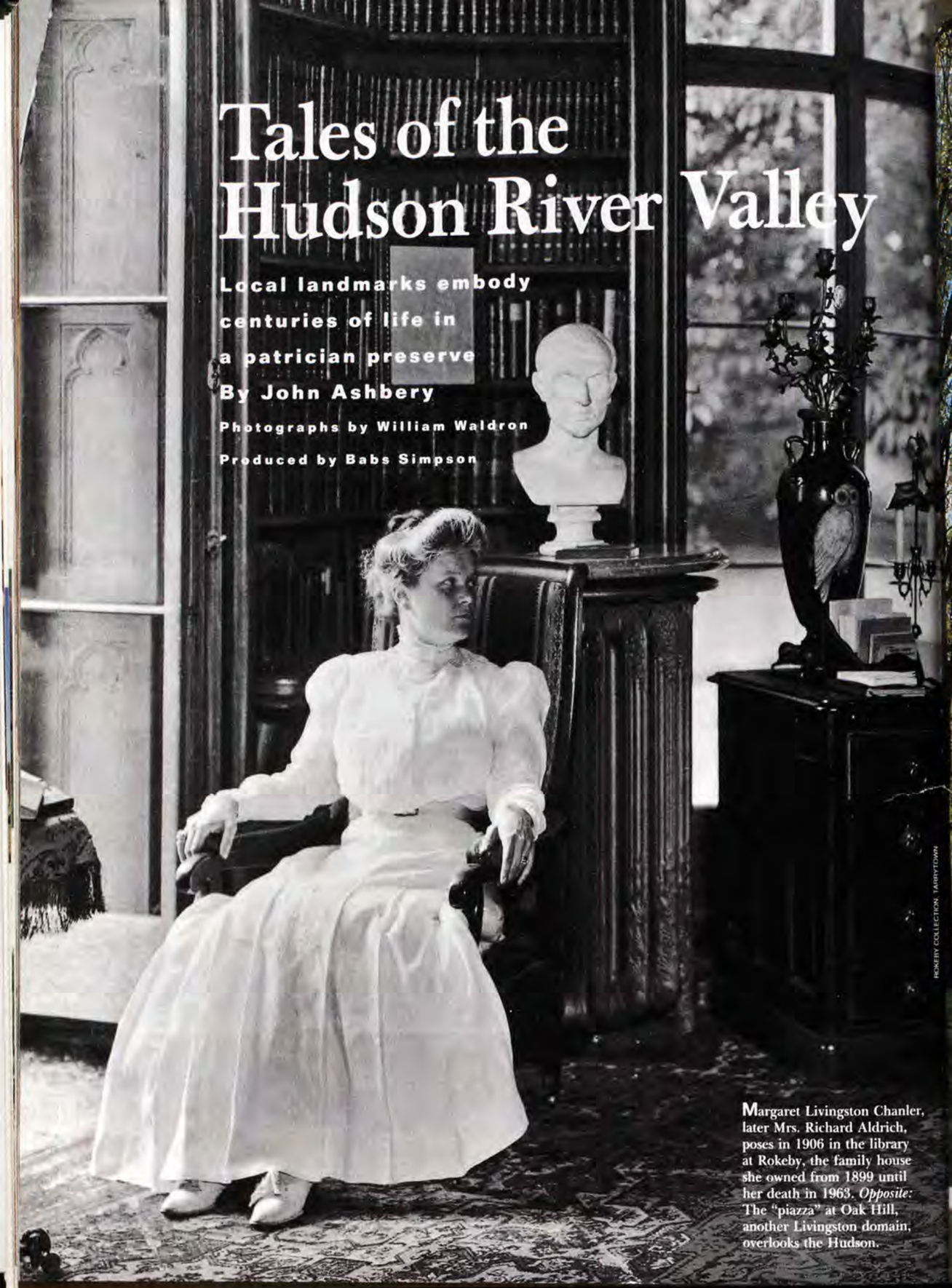


ROKEBY COLLECTION, TARRYTOWN

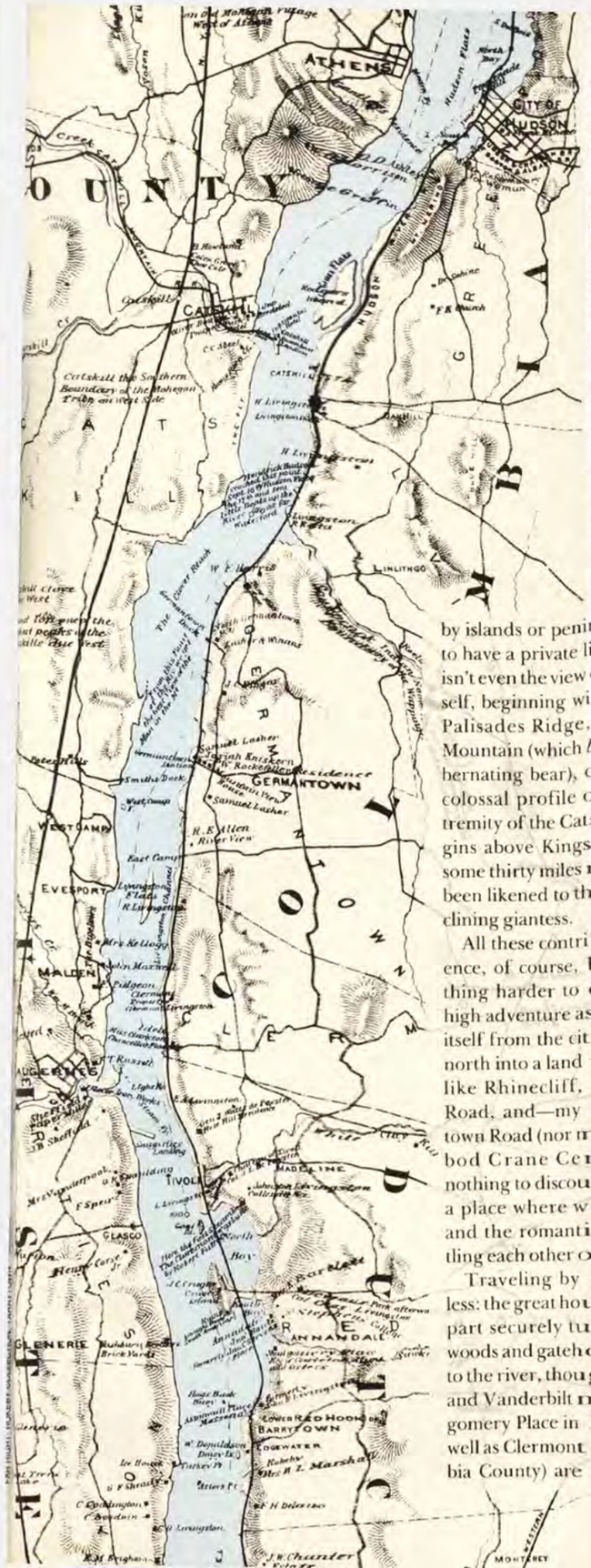
Margaret Livingston Chanler, later Mrs. Richard Aldrich, poses in 1906 in the library at Rokeby, the family house she owned from 1899 until her death in 1963. *Opposite:* The "piazza" at Oak Hill, another Livingston domain, overlooks the Hudson.

Rokeby's almost exuberant shabbiness speaks of the Aldriches' determination to keep the place afloat come hell or high water

THE UPPER HUDson River valley is hardly a well-kept secret. It is, as valley resident Joan K. Davidson puts it succinctly, "the cradle of American history, American art, and the modern American environmental movement." Yet for various reasons it remains elusive, a place of legends, of which Rip Van Winkle's is only the best known. The very fact that it's difficult to keep in focus a mental or visual picture of the valley helps protect its mystery and the pockets in which legends live on.

Ironically, unless you are one of a handful of landowners lucky enough to own a house overlooking the Hudson, the best way to view the valley is by train, which follows the river's eastern edge all the way from the northern tip of Manhattan to Albany, in some cases slicing through the backyards of estates, but generally keeping a low profile while providing breathtaking views that make the ride one of the most beautiful train trips in America.

It isn't just the unpredictable river itself, now unexpectedly narrow, now suddenly opening out into broad wind-washed expanses like the Tappan Zee, elsewhere divided



by islands or peninsulas which seem to have a private life of their own. It isn't even the view of the west bank itself, beginning with the fortresslike Palisades Ridge, then on to Bear Mountain (which *looks* like a giant hibernating bear), culminating in the colossal profile of the eastern extremity of the Catskill range that begins above Kingston and stretches some thirty miles northward and has been likened to the contours of a reclining giantess.

All these contribute to the experience, of course, but there is something harder to define: a sense of high adventure as the train detaches itself from the city and plunges due north into a land where place names like Rhinecliff, Tivoli, Wolf Hill Road, and—my favorite—Doodletown Road (nor must we forget Ichabod Crane Central School) do nothing to discourage that sense. It's a place where workaday rural life and the romantic past coexist, jostling each other only slightly.

Traveling by car you see much less: the great houses are for the most part securely tucked away behind woods and gatehouses that bar access to the river, though several (the Mills and Vanderbilt mansions and Montgomery Place in Dutchess County as well as Clermont in southern Columbia County) are open to the public and well worth seeking out. In general, there is a healthy mix of public and enlightened private stewardship that has helped secure the integrity of what Tim Mulligan, in his valuable guide *The Hudson River Valley*, calls America's Loire Valley.

A newcomer who is making an impact on the region, Joan K. Davidson acquired Midwood, an eighty-seven-acre estate with a sprawling hundred-year-old house perched on a cliff above the river, barely six years ago, though the J. M. Kaplan Fund, of which she is president, has supported environmental and historic preservation as well as sound land use in the Hudson Valley for decades. Her proprietary pride sounds quite as strong as that of the landed gentry when she characterizes "our stretch of the valley as extraordinary in its nineteen miles of almost contiguous scenic landscape full of gorgeous farmland, historic houses big and small, and good old river towns."

That stretch of coastline (some thirty square miles in all), recently

A manservant stands outside a drawing room window at Rokeby, c. 1884, *above*. Built in 1811–15, the house acquired its tower in the 1850s. *Left:* The estate is one of many marked on an 1894 Hudson Valley map. *Opposite above:* Olmsted Brothers improved the west gardens in 1911. *Opposite below:* The Gothic revival library on the ground floor of the tower.

designated the Hudson River Historic District by the National Park Service, is a surviving remnant of several patents dating from the late seventeenth century, when the English were seeking to develop the province of New York, as the Dutch had before them, through land grants to favored colonists who would in turn establish settlements in the wilderness in an aristocratic pattern descended from the feudal system. Two of the largest grants were Robert Livingston's Clermont and the Beekman family's Rhinebeck, a few miles to the south.

A ninth-generation Livingston, Henry, lives today in Oak Hill, a handsome if somewhat severe foursquare federal house built in the 1790s by his ancestor John and now topped with the mansard roof that so many Hudson Valley houses acquired during the nineteenth century. An affable man whose close links to the region are apparent even before he speaks of it, he is married to the former Maria Burroughs, a great-granddaughter of the Hudson River painter Frederic Edwin Church, whose quasi-oriental palace, Olana, looms on a hilltop nearby. Henry Livingston believes that his ancestor chose Oak Hill's site not just for practical reasons—the narrowness of the Hudson at this point would later facilitate a commercial link with the old Susquehanna turnpike to the west—but also for its beautiful view. "He had an eye for luminism," Livingston says, pointing to the seven-foot-tall windows facing the river which are unusually large for the period and "very cold." Nevertheless this is a warm house, burnished by being cared for by generation after generation.

A kitchen wing added in Victorian times seems to have become the hub of family activity; from it a broad corridor with parlors and a dining room on either side sweeps the length of the house to the "piazza"—another nineteenth-century addition, angled so as not to interrupt the river view from inside, where life goes on all year and the late-afternoon light pouring eastward over the Catskills is a joy in any season.

The same porch positioning exists at Rokeby, owned by Winthrop "Winty" Aldrich (an assistant to the state commissioner on environmental conservation and perhaps the most prominent of the Hudson Valley activists) and his brother and sister. Built for General John Armstrong, an Aldrich forebear, possibly

Dropcloths and wallpaper samples, *opposite*, help furnish restoration architect Jeremiah Rusconi's 1839 house in Hudson. *Above:* A Greek revival bedroom mantel. *Left:* Said to have been built by a sea captain, the house recalls Hudson's heyday as a whaling port. *Below:* The parlor-studio.

ROCKEFELLER TAVERN

Rockefellers gather in the 1930s at their ancestral house in Germantown, *above*, part of which was once a tavern. *Left:* In a downstairs hallway the present owners, Mary Black and Mike Gladstone, have concealed a lavatory behind the doors of a Dutch kas. *Below left:* A Dutch door connects halves of the house built at different times. Black's half is on the near side of the door, Gladstone's beyond.

to the designs of the French architect Joseph Jacques Ramée, the house was occupied by the family in 1815 while it was still uncompleted, after their temporary home burned down. Today it still looks as if they hadn't finished moving in: its almost exuberant shabbiness contrasts with Oak Hill's solid comfort and speaks of the Aldriches' determination to keep the place afloat come hell or high water.

Rokeby became the property of Winthrop's grandmother, Margaret Livingston Chanler, in 1899, after she succeeded in buying out her many siblings' interests; several years later she married the musicologist and *New York Times* music critic Richard Aldrich. Remodeled and enlarged in the mid nineteenth century and with further interior alterations done in 1895 by Stanford White, a family friend, the house is both ungainly and totally charming, the ideal house to have been a child in. A center hall furnished with gigantic Renaissance revival cabinets leads to a perplexing warren of little staircases and service rooms whose pattern no one has ever been able to figure out; at the corners of a landing White introduced "hidden" servants' passages to confuse things even further.

A reception room to the left of the

ha nd a drawing room furnished
by ite with green upholstery and
wa aper intended to continue the
tap vert of nature outside are both
or ted toward the river, as is the
Ge ic revival octagonal library, the
gr ıd floor of a five-story tower.
T reception room still has its red
ar rown French floral paper hung
or wood and muslin framework to
pr ct it from "rising damp"—to me
or the title of a British TV series
u recently, but a fact of life in the
v y. Everything—gilt leather
b ings, a fading Aubusson carpet,
b lots from wherever and when-
e (including a piece of imperial
C nese embroidery salvaged by
t indomitable Margaret, who was
i hina during the Boxer Rebel-
l where it was being used as a
s lbag)—looks old, tired, distin-
g hed, rich, and right. Miss Havi-
s n would have felt at home here,
l obviously, so do the spirited and
ve Aldriches.

omewhat more formal, though dly austere, is the brick gentilnmière known as Forth House—ivingston, a few miles east of the er—owned by the architect Harry n Dyke and his brother Frank, a rticulturist. Harry, who has a ctice in New York City, has also ne restoration work on historic uses in the valley region, including an Davidson's Midwood, the ckefeller Tavern, and others beging to art dealer Pierre Levai d novelist Harold Brodkey.

Forth House (whose name may be

OAK HILL

an abbreviation of Forsyth, that of an early owner, or allude to the River Forth—Scottish place names abound in the region), purchased by the van Dyke brothers and their late mother in the 1950s, has rightly been called one of the most outstanding Greek revival residences in the county. The façade, with its discreet white portico (the rear one runs the length of the house as a piazza), is sober but welcoming; the interior decoration is notable for its rows of lead medallions, copied from an ornament at the Erechtheum in Athens, that march around door and window frames and seem to be bolting the house together. The van Dykes have added a spectacular conservatory, which protects tender plants in winter and serves as a dining and party room in summer; adjoining it is a room

Livingston portraits survey the dining room at Oak Hill, *above*, now home to a ninth-generation heir. *Below left:* The American Empire sofa and matching chairs were made for Oak Hill. *Below:* The house dates to the 1790s.

TOP LEFT: ROBERT BOICE

chiefly devoted to housing issues of *Country Life*, which, as Harry observes, accumulate at an alarming rate.

One unusual feature is the triple-hung windows at the back, typical of southern houses of the time. They allow access to the piazza and a recently created terrace and let in breezes in summer. Outside, a series of enclosed formal gardens and "wild" English-style ones, as well as a grove of towering trees that screen it from a nearby highway, extend the serene classicism of the house.

Several miles to the southwest in the town of Germantown (once called East Camp by the Palatine refugees who settled it in the eighteenth century) is the house known during most of the nineteenth century as the Rockefeller Tavern, now the home of art historian Mary Black and publisher Mike Gladstone. It is a remarkably clear wedding of the vernacular Dutch and English styles common throughout the Hudson Valley. The Dutch half, which originally served as a house and tavern where John D. Rockefeller's great-grandparents were married in 1772, was basically a plain one-room stone structure with a half-story loft above; it dates from about 1755. The more spacious and higher-ceilinged English half was added about 1800.


FORTH HOUSE

The tavern was ideal for the two houses under one roof that Black and Gladstone had envisioned, which are further united by long first- and second-story porches. A connecting Dutch door, originally an exterior door of the tavern, now serves as a perfect device for defining separate but contiguous units. Beyond adding a few windows and a downstairs lavatory cleverly hidden in a replica of a large Dutch kas, or wardrobe (of which Oak Hill has a particularly fine example), the owners have left the place much as it was. Both halves are furnished with a combination of nineteenth-century antiques and comfortable contemporary furniture and folk art from Black's collections, the most notable pieces being her family portraits by Erastus Salisbury Field and Gladstone's pair of Wardian cases, patented terrariums more often seen in Victorian engravings than in person.

> The valley is a place of legends, of which Rip Van Winkle's is only the best known

Hudson, New York, is the train hub of the upper valley, and the first house one encounters on walking up from the station is Jeremiah Rusconi's faded redbrick Greek revival one. It stands as a kind of symbolic signpost to the small river city, whose fortunes have fluctuated with the times and are still doing so. Rusconi, whose business is architectural restoration (he was also the art director of the Merchant Ivory film *The Europeans*), bought the place *(Continued on page 172)*

Lead medallions based on paterae at the Erechtheum in Athens ornament Greek revival woodwork at Forth House, *right*. The dining table is set for one of the teas at which Harry and Frank van Dyke entertain neighbors. *Above:* Harry van Dyke, an architect, and his brother, a horticulturist, enlarged the 1833 house with a neoclassical conservatory, at left.