



The famous Grey Gardens estate is back on the market, priced at \$19.995 million. Photo credits: The Corcoran Group.

| HOME |

PAST IMPERFECT

By Pamela Brill

THE LEGENDARY GREY GARDENS ESTATE IS UP FOR SALE,
OFFERING PROSPECTIVE BUYERS A HISTORIC LANDMARK
WITH THE OPPORTUNITY TO CREATE THEIR OWN UNIQUE STORY.

EASTHAMPTON'S GREY GARDENS FIRST GAINED A CERTAIN NOTORIETY IN THE 1970S AS THE DECAYING DIGS OF EDITH BOUVIER BEALE AND HER DAUGHTER, EDITH—JACKIE KENNEDY ONASSIS'S AUNT AND COUSIN, RESPECTIVELY. THE PROPERTY WAS LATER PURCHASED BY FORMER EXECUTIVE EDITOR OF *THE WASHINGTON POST* BEN BRADLEE AND HIS WIFE SALLY QUINN, WHO PUT HER OWN PERSONAL STAMP ON THE HOME AND RESTORED IT TO ITS ORIGINAL LUXURIOUS STATE. »



Over the years, Grey Gardens has been the subject of a documentary, an HBO movie and a Broadway musical, resulting in a rich and textured chronicle of the renowned abode. Today, the \$19.995 million estate is back on the market, inviting the homebuyer to acquire a property with a somewhat quirky past.

EARNING ITS NAME

Built in 1897, the shingle-style house located on West End Road received its name from horticulturist Anna Gilman Hill, who lived there in the early 1900s. She installed the concrete walls that surround the lush gardens. In the 1920s, the property was purchased by high society's Phelan and Edith Beale, who later divorced. While "Big Edie" and her daughter, "Little Edie" (as they came to be known), continued to reside there, they eventually fell victim to financial ruin, and their dwelling subsequently experienced the after effects. Stray cats and raccoons also took up residence, the gardens became overgrown, and the dilapidated house became practically uninhabitable. When the Suffolk County Board of Health threatened to evict the two in the 1970s, Kennedy Onassis came to the rescue with a generous donation, on the condition that her aunt and cousin could remain in their home, once it was cleaned up.



This page from top: A sun room overlooking the grounds is ideal for year-round entertaining. The dining room is outfitted with eye-catching built-ins, including a leaded glass cupboard and a window seat looking out onto the grounds. ***Opposite page:*** Stairs off the main entry lead to second-floor bedrooms, including the room in which Big Edie and Little Edie shared.



In 1975, the former socialites of Grey Gardens attracted the attention of two filmmakers who made a now legendary documentary, detailing the whirlwind saga of the Beales. After Big Edie's death a few years later, Little Edie sold the home to Bradlee and Quinn, who had their work cut out for them. In fact, it was Quinn who is credited with returning Grey Gardens to its prime condition, enabling the D.C.-based couple to entertain and host their guests every August.

"Sally is a purist," said Michael Schultz, a real estate broker with the Corcoran Group, which has listed the property. "She not only restored the home but tried to preserve its fixtures and furnishings: the clawfoot bathtubs, marble sinks, new bathroom vanities meant to look like the original and the built-in cupboards in the kitchen and dining room."

He also notes that approximately 75 percent of the furniture is original; the wicker couches and chairs have been redone, the chairs reupholstered, and the floral fabrics and striped wallpaper have all been recreated to reflect the original décor. The home was also updated with modern-day amenities, such as central air conditioning and forced hot air heating.»

Clockwise from bottom: A wide Dutch door with leaded glass windows on either side beckons visitors into the spacious entryway. Despite ample space for Big Edie and Little Edie, the two opted to share a bedroom on the second floor because the master bedroom was believed to be too drafty. A Gunite pool which was added in the 1970's. The stucco cottage situated in the gardens once served as a writing haven for Ben Bradlee of The Washington Post.



CHARACTER ABOUNDS

On a visit to Grey Gardens on an unseasonably chilly spring day, the house exuded a warmth that transcends the ages. Standout features include thick, leaded glass windows on either side of the large Dutch front door, gorgeous hardwood floors throughout and built-ins such as floor-to-ceiling bookcases, deep cupboards and a generously sized window seat looking out to the grounds.

A 6,000-square-foot, three-level structure, Grey Gardens boasts nine bedrooms and 7.5 baths—“a large home for its day,” observes Schultz. “But people can come into the home and make it their own.” For instance, he suggests, they may want an island in the kitchen for extra cooking space or install larger showers in the bathrooms.

Beyond the house’s walls, prospective buyers would be remiss to overlook the equally charming outdoor gardens, restored by Quinn after many years of overgrowth and neglect. A gunite pool and tennis court, which were added in the 1970s, offer recreation areas tempered by breezes off the Atlantic Ocean, a mere 300 yards away. A small stucco cottage, where Bradlee reportedly did some writing, looks like it’s straight out of the pages of a storybook.

Whoever takes possession of Grey Gardens will be acquiring not only a place to call their own but the legacy of its former proprietors.

“Certain people will be attracted to Grey Gardens because of its rich history, not just with the Bouvier Beales, but with Sally and Ben,” says Schultz. “Ben was the editor of one of the most



important newspapers in the country.” (In fact, director—and East Hampton neighbor—Steven Spielberg is currently filming *The Post*, recounting Bradlee’s tenure during the publication of the *Pentagon Papers*.)

Even after Grey Gardens has a new owner, it’s unlikely that the Beales will be forgotten. During a recent walk-through of the property, a black cat was curled up fast asleep on the welcome mat before one of the back doors. Upon seeing a visitor, she immediately retreated to the safety of some underbrush off the patio. Perhaps a descendent of the Beale family cats or, better yet, a testament to a rich and storied history that lives on. **LL**

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