

Yankee likes to mosey around and see, out of editorial curiosity, what you can turn up when you go home hunting. We have no stake in the sale whatsoever and would decline it if offered.

The Most Heavenly Neighborhood in Newport, Rhode Island

At least that's how residents of the city's Top of the Hill section feel. And we recently found out why ...



Number 26 Greenough Place, a three-story, five-bedroom Colonial Revival, was built in 1903.



The Moseyer made short work of homemade cinnamon buns during his visit.



Current owners Claire and Charles Ball relax on their reconstructed front porch.

FOR ONE THING, THE TOP OF THE HILL NEIGHBORHOOD is just an easy 10-minute walk to the downtown area with all those wonderful shops and restaurants along the harbor. Then, if you walk 15 minutes in the opposite direction, you'll find yourself at Newport's primary beach, Easton's, and a bit farther south, the famous Cliff Walk. If you're feeling *really* frisky, you could even walk down Bellevue Avenue to all those incredible mansions you've heard about. Or if that's too far, they're only five minutes away by car. Then, after touring one or two, you could head on over to Ocean Drive, ending up at Fort Adams, with the Dwight D. Eisenhower summer White House (he'd golf at the nearby country club) and the beautiful state park where the Newport Jazz Festival is held every August.

In other words, Newport's Top of the Hill neighborhood is ideally located in one of America's most popular tourist destinations. Even better, its lovely old homes, dating back to the 1850s—many designed by famous architects—create a quiet, tree-lined residential area, away from the hustle, bustle, and, yes, noise you'd have to expect in other areas of town during the busy summer and fall seasons.

"When we decided 20 years ago that we wanted to live in Newport, we simply waited for something in the Top of the Hill section to come on the market," said Claire Ball to us one recent summer morning as she and her husband of 40 years, Charlie, chatted with us over coffee and cinnamon buns. Their three-story, five-bedroom Colonial Revival home is number 26 Greenough

PHOTOGRAPHS BY ALEXANDER NESBITT



The Balls rebuilt the home's eat-in kitchen, complete with granite counters and new appliances.



Easton's Beach, Newport's primary beach, is an easy walk from the Balls' home.



Newport's famous Cliff Walk is just a little farther.

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Place, right in the heart of the Top of the Hill neighborhood. Turns out they were both born in the Boston area, but had lived all over the world while raising their two children. Charlie worked for the National Security Agency—doing, as he put it to us with a smile, "spy stuff."

Eventually, he found himself teaching at the Naval War College in Newport, and that's when the Balls decided they wanted to settle down in this famous New England town. "We simply fell in love with living here," said Claire. When 26 Greenough Place came on the market a few months later, they grabbed it, and then, over the next few years, they replaced walls; rebuilt the kitchen (complete with gorgeous granite counters), all three full baths, and the half bath; put on a new roof; restored both fireplaces; installed a central vacuum; replaced the old furnace—and on and on. "In the past 20 years," said Charlie, "we've rebuilt and/or painted every square foot of this place."

IN THE EARLY 1990S THE BALLS FOUND THEMSELVES to be "empty nesters." Both their daughter, Carolyn, and son, Brian, were off to college and then on into the professional world—which left both their rooms, each with its own bath, empty. Thus was born what became well-known in the area (and, through the Internet, around the world) as "Claire's B&B."

For the next 13 years, until a year ago, Claire cooked a full breakfast for her guests every morning. Then, over coffee, she'd tell them what to do that day, where to eat, how to get there, and so forth. "She was their mother," Charlie said. Guests came from all over, many about to be married, just married, or attending a wedding. Apparently, in part because you can rent

some of those mansions, Newport is a very popular town in which to be married (visit yournewportwedding.com for details).

"So what restaurants would you usually recommend?" we wanted to know. Claire was very specific. "For the view, The Mooring," she said. "For the food, Brick Alley Pub. For both view and food, well, there are many, but Fathoms in the Marriott would certainly be one."

And, besides shopping, which goes without saying, her "to do" list? "Well," she said, "you must do the Cliff Walk, and go out on Ocean Drive, and, for a history lecture as well as fun, I'd recommend taking one of the sailboat tours around the harbor." Her final piece of advice: "Walk. Parking downtown can be impossible."

Several years ago, Claire's B&B was named one of the three best places to stay in all of Newport (and there are lots of them), which certainly indicates that she was doing a fabulous job. But, we wanted to know, didn't she become weary of having "strangers" in her house all the time?

"I never had a problem with anyone," she said, but added that most B&B associations indicate that "owner burnout" usually happens after seven years. So how was she able to go for 13 years? Again, her answer was specific: "First, have only two rooms. I tried doing three for a while, and it was too much. Second, don't be open all year." Claire's season was May through October.

BY THIS TIME WE'D FINISHED OUR COFFEE, downed two cinnamon rolls, learned a lot about Newport, and discovered the secrets of running a B&B. So it was time to tour the house. Charlie led us up steep but nicely carpeted stairs to the third floor, where we came upon a bedroom, full



Clement Moore ("The Night Before Christmas") died at home here in 1865.



Also in the neighborhood are the Newport Art Museum (above) and the Redwood Library.



President Eisenhower golfing at the Newport Country Club, c. 1958.

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bath, and sitting room—all part of Claire's B&B—as well as another bedroom and a walk-in attic. Back down on the second floor, we found the large, sunny master bedroom with the master bath, a good-size dressing room, Charlie's corner office with his computer, and a second bedroom and bath for the B&B. In back was a laundry/storage room with a washer and dryer.

The first floor has a handsome entranceway area and a living room with fireplace, at one end of which is a sliding door opening to the family room, also with a fireplace. Then there are the dining room, a powder room, and the large eat-in kitchen, where we were introduced to Astro, the Balls' friendly greyhound—relaxing there, Charlie told us, after a long working session the day before. Turns out Astro is a member of Therapy Dogs International, Inc.; he visits as many as a dozen elderly or hospitalized people several times a month.

"Being with Astro gives them a real lift," said Charlie. We must say we felt pretty darn good after patting him for only a moment.

Continuing our tour, we peeked out the back door to the small porch, where Charlie has his cooker, facing a nice backyard with shrubs, flowers, trees, a lawn, and a blacktop area big enough for four cars. We didn't go down into the cellar where, Charlie said, he has a small workshop and half bath.

Overall, the house is in tiptop shape, and although it's a fairly large home (3,629 square feet of living space), it nonetheless has a homey, comfortable feeling about it throughout. We could be happy living at 26 Greenough Place.

The Balls' reason for selling is the usual one: Charlie is retiring. Time to simplify their lives. They plan to settle near family in Maine, perhaps in a retirement community. (Their asking price: \$1,049,000. Seems fair to us.)

AFTER SAYING OUR GOOD-BYES TO CLAIRE, we stood for a moment with Charlie out on the covered porch, recently rebuilt, that extends across the front of the house. Looking through hanging plants down the tree-shaded street, we could just make out the Clement C. Moore house a few doors away. (You know, the fellow who wrote "The Night Before Christmas.") Although they're not visible from the porch, both the Redwood Library and Athenaeum and the Newport Art Museum are just a couple of minutes' walk away, too. We could have settled so easily into one of the padded deck chairs out there.

Then it occurred to us that something was lacking: a screened-in area. How, we asked Charlie, could anyone sit out here on a warm evening without being bitten alive by mosquitoes?

"There are no mosquitoes in Newport," he replied. None? None. That took a minute to digest. Being from New England, we'd long ago decided that the only place free of mosquitoes would have to be heaven. Now we knew of another place. Or is it possible that Newport's Top of the Hill neighborhood is heaven? Naaa. Probably just the next-best thing. ☺

FOR DETAILS, contact Connor H. Dowd, Keller Williams Realty, 809 Aquidneck Ave., Middletown, RI 401-846-7653; homesearchri.com

FOR FALL EVENTS IN NEWPORT, including the 37th Annual Newport International Boat Show, September 13-16, and the Bowen's Wharf Seafood Festival, October 13-14, call 800-976-5122 or visit gonewport.com

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