

Valhalla by the Sea

No matter how nice the view, it's what's inside that counts



WORDS AND PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID TRAVER ADOLPHUS

The garages that go with the houses overlooking Narragansett Bay, where the land runs out in Warwick, Rhode Island, are not the natural habitat for anything a car nut would find interesting. They're the sort of places that accumulate the detritus of dissolute yuppie-dom, the cast-away jet skis, inflatable children's toys, lawn darts and appliance boxes of a crass and carless lifestyle.

If you could see it from the road, you might think Dick Shappy's garage was merely another of these soulless storage appliances, if a very large one. But if you came closer, the four tall doors with a

subtle wood "antique car shop" sign, and the pump with "Packard Service" globe to the sign, hint at something more interesting. And if you came closer still, you might get lucky and find the doors were up. There would almost certainly be at least a couple of old motorcycles on the brick patio in front, and inside, an Ali Baba's cave.

When Dick moved onto the property in 1991, the seller had built the structure in violation of a local ordinance, in part to spite his neighbors, whose ocean view it blocked. Dick found it as an unfinished stick-framed shell, with four sliding glass doors in front and nothing inside but a

bare concrete slab and a set of stairs in the middle leading to nothing. From the moment he saw it, he envisaged it as a garage. The glass doors went one-by-one in favor of overhead garage doors, and a red tile floor now extends from the garage out to a patio work area outside.

Dick uses the two-story building to hold ongoing projects, and other pieces that are just near to his heart. At any time, he dedicates about half of the space to the restoration of an ever-rotating and ever-expanding fleet of vintage motorcycles, here including five Flying Merckels, along with a couple of Indians and a Harley-Davidson. But there's always room for a special classic (or Full Classic) Lincoln or Cadillac—currently, there are two, a 1912 Cadillac Phaeton in mid-restoration, and an '11 Cadillac demi-tonneau. The semi-empty second bay normally holds a Derham-bodied '34 Duesenberg J Convertible Sedan, currently at his downtown warehouse having a new convertible top fitted.

Upstairs, the treasure trove continues, with a massive floor-to-ceiling store of V-12 and V-16 Cadillac parts. "There are so many Cadillac parts up there that we're trying to deplete some of it," said Dick. "We're worried about the load." Fortunately, he's got another garage next door.

The view out the doors of Dick Shappy's garage over the water is fine, but the view inside is our idea of a good time. 🏠

