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Past

Somers home evokes several bygone eras



By JANE K. DOVE

A onetime working farm and summer estate of a movie mogul, Olde Orchard Hill Farm sits serenely atop a crest in Somers that spies the Hudson Valley in the distance.

The complex of buildings on 38 acres offers visitors a modern country retreat only 50 miles from New York City, one that nonetheless evokes the spirit of a bygone era.

With its two-story, white-columned veranda and stately tree-lined entryway, the 14-room manor house conjures images of Tara and Twelve Oaks from "Gone With The Wind." The house is believed to have inspired some of the film's exterior shots, even though it dates from an earlier period, 1800.

Nevertheless, Olde Orchard has a real Hollywood pedigree. It was the summer escape of Jack Cohn, a founder of Columbia Pictures, who transformed the property at 50 Orchard Hill Road into an opulent estate in the 1920s, entertaining friends and associates from the film industry.

The property was later used by horse breeders and is owned today by Janet and John DeVito, who have opened it up to extended family and friends over the

14 years they have lived there, including Mr. DeVito's mother, who lived in the guest house and his grandfather, who lived in the Manor House.

AN OPEN HOUSE

"We purchased the house after my father died quite suddenly," DeVito said. "I am a commercial and residential contractor and was looking for a large piece of property where I could build a house big enough for Janet and I, our three children, my mother and my grandfather. I heard the then-64 acre property was available and was interested, because it was close to our hometown of Yorktown."

DeVito decided to take the plunge on the 10,000-square-foot house and multiple outbuildings.

"I subdivided some building lots and built homes to defray renovation costs. Once I was done building, I put a restrictive covenant on the remaining 38 acres so that it will remain open space forever."

DeVito said he has always had an interest in land preservation and is involved with the Teatown Lake Reservation in Ossining and other environmental groups.

"In addition to the beauty of the home and property,

Janet and I were also attracted to the fact that we border the 650-acre Angle Fly Preserve, one of the largest parcels of preserved land in this area."

Remaining in the area where he and his wife grew up as high school and then college sweethearts and maintaining close ties with friends and family have been among the most treasured aspects of the DeVitos' life at Olde Orchard Hill Farm.

"This has been a warm and happy family home over the years we have lived here," he said. "I built a brand new home for my mother as well as a home right next door for my brother and his family. As a result, my mother had six grandkids around her, three of ours and three of my brothers. It worked out very well."

The DeVitos regularly open up their home to their friends, both old and new.

"They all come over here regularly to enjoy our place and we love having them. We also have lots of more formal functions, parties and fundraisers."

DeVito is a dedicated lacrosse coach and allows teams to use his fields for practice.

"We have had as many as 200 kids here. I am happy we have the space to do it."

Olde Orchard Hill Farm has also been home to two



weddings, one planned and the other a total surprise.

"We had our daughter's wedding here and it went fine, except for the fact that it was a dreary and rainy day," DeVito said. "But one of our neighbors wasn't so lucky a bit later.

"His daughter's wedding was held outside on his property on a day of heavy rain but with no tent. The skies literally opened up on the wedding party and guests and we told him to come and use our home for the ceremony, which he did. Fortunately, the reception had been planned for another location, indoors."

All in all, the DeVitos said their home has been filled with love and laughter over the years.

"We have many big family gatherings, with the Thanksgiving through Christmas holidays the high point of the year," Janet DeVito said. "We decorate extensively, have everyone by and just love it. Some of our friends call our home the DeVito Bed and Breakfast and we are pleased to open it up to everyone we care about."

A SPECIAL PLACE

The historic charm and rural character of Olde Orchard Hill Farm have been lovingly and carefully preserved over the decades. Barns and significant outbuild-

ings have been added. The original home has grown in size, with its period architectural details maintained and enhanced.

The 38 acres are totally private, with towering mature trees, the titular old orchard and equestrian facilities, including four barns, one of which has been renovated for use as DeVito's office.

Open fields with Hudson Valley views abound. There is also plenty of room for the next owners to expand the stable area with an indoor and/or outdoor riding ring if they desire.

At the entrance to the property, stone pillars and 100-year-old trees, spaced at exact intervals along the drive, stand like sentinels.

Gardens abound. The grounds also contain a sparkling 62-foot pool and a 2,000-square-foot pool house with a great room, kitchen, massage room, showers, changing rooms, and full amenities well-suited to large-scale entertaining. A separate structure at poolside houses an array of cooking and grilling equipment.

A tennis court edged with tall hemlocks, a bocce court and a children's train – complete with a mini-station stop and railroad crossing – add to the many attractions of Olde Orchard Hill Farm.

The main residence, situated up from the road, is

defined by its two-story columned veranda. The core of the home dates from the turn of the 19th century, with all of the Federalist-period details preserved, including fine woodwork, handsome moldings, oak floors, several fireplaces and expansive formal rooms.

The entrance hall opens onto a 52-by-30-foot living room with two large fireplaces, and a 38-by-30-foot dining room, with a coffered ceiling and two more fireplaces. A parlor with yet another fireplace and bar complete the striking first impression.

Other first-floor features include a solarium, a family

50 ORCHARD HILL ROAD AT A GLANCE

- Somers
- Square footage: 10,000
- Acres: 38
- Rooms: 14
- Bedrooms: 5
- Bathrooms: 4 full; 2 half
- Amenities: 3,700-square-foot guest house, pool and pool house, tennis court, barns
- Price: \$3.9 million



Living room



Janet and John DeVito



Master bedroom



Dining room

room with a fireplace and a comfortable study with full media cabinetry. The first-floor mahogany veranda offers more space for entertaining, and the large country kitchen – with a center island, breakfast room and butler's pantry – presents opportunities for casual dining.

Upstairs, the home has five generous bedrooms, including a large master suite with access to the upper veranda. The master suite contains a luxurious white marble bathroom, with steam shower, Jacuzzi and ample closet and storage space. There's an office with a fireplace to the rear of the master suite.

The separate guest house, perfect for friends or extended family, contains approximately 3,700 square feet of space, including a living/dining room, kitchen, butler's pantry, family room with fireplace, main-level master suite and two additional bedrooms. It is fully handicapped accessible with a one-car garage.

A two-story vintage barn has been transformed into a modern work space with several offices, a conference room, full kitchen and powder room. The barn is attached to a commercial-size kitchen and a two-car garage with a loft, work area and half-bath. Parking garages for six more cars are on site.

An additional barn complex features well-maintained stables overlooking open meadows and the adjoining preserved land. The entire complex captures the feel of a rural enclave but is close to suburban shopping and transportation, including Metro-North Railroad.

The DeVitos have placed Olde Orchard Hill Farm on the market because the spread is much more than they need at this point in their lives.

"We have loved living here and sharing this beautiful place with friends and family," Janet DeVito said. "We will treasure our memories but now must move on to something smaller, probably right in this same area of Westchester. We hope the new owners will love Olde Orchard Hill Farm and care for it the way we have."

For more information, contact Linda Crispinelli or Carol Cirico at (914) 277-8040. ■

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