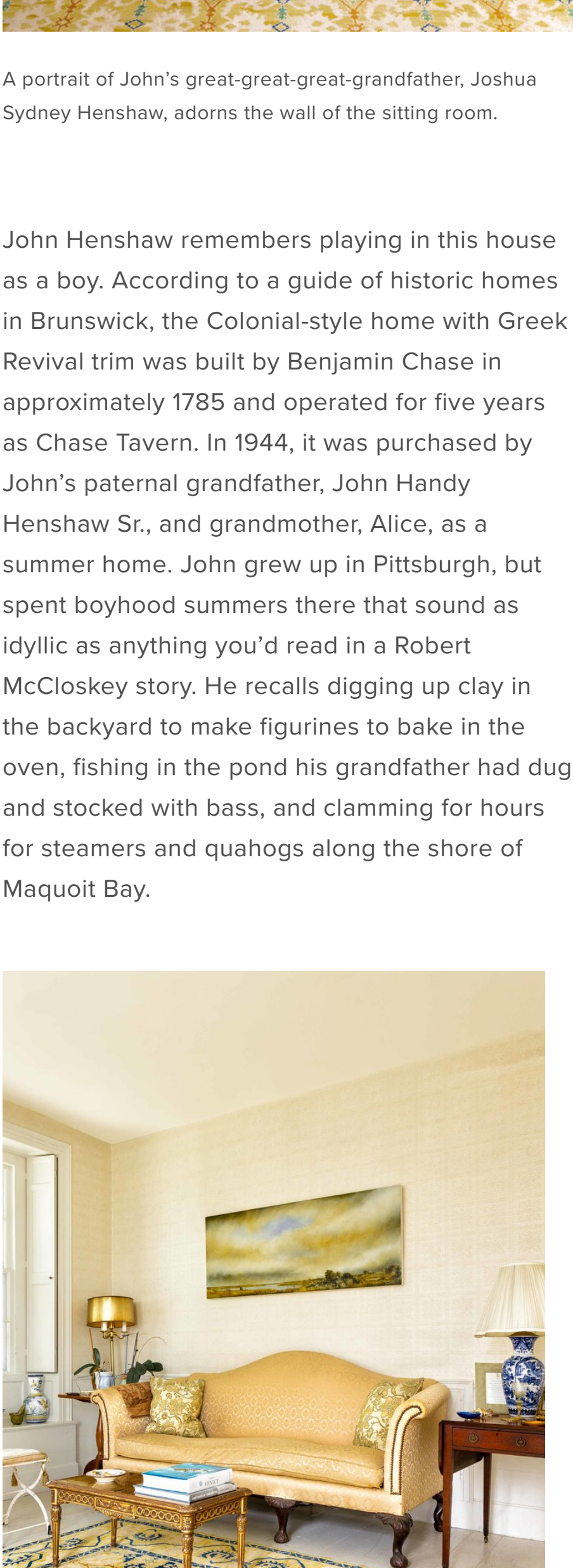


PASSING THE TIME

December 12, 2018

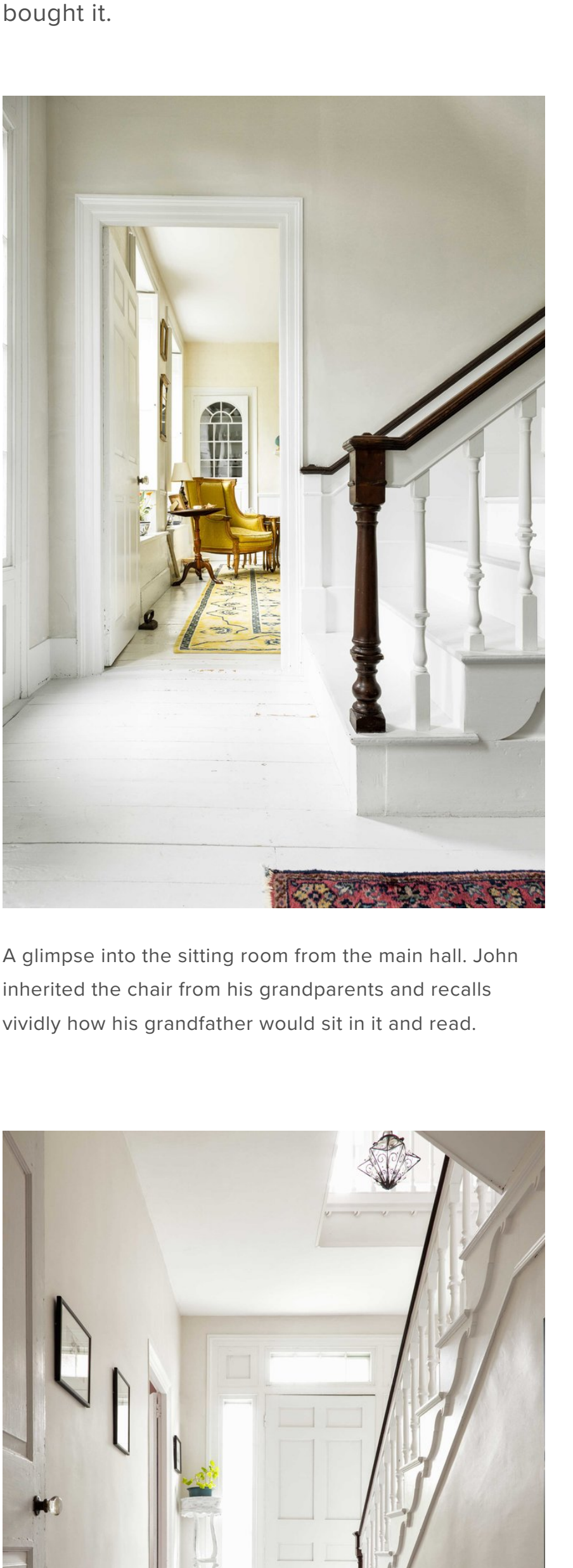
Words by Allison Paige | Photos by Myriam Babin

Revisiting the past with the owners of one of Brunswick's storied homes.



A portrait of John's great-great-great-grandfather, Joshua Sydney Henshaw, adorns the wall of the sitting room.

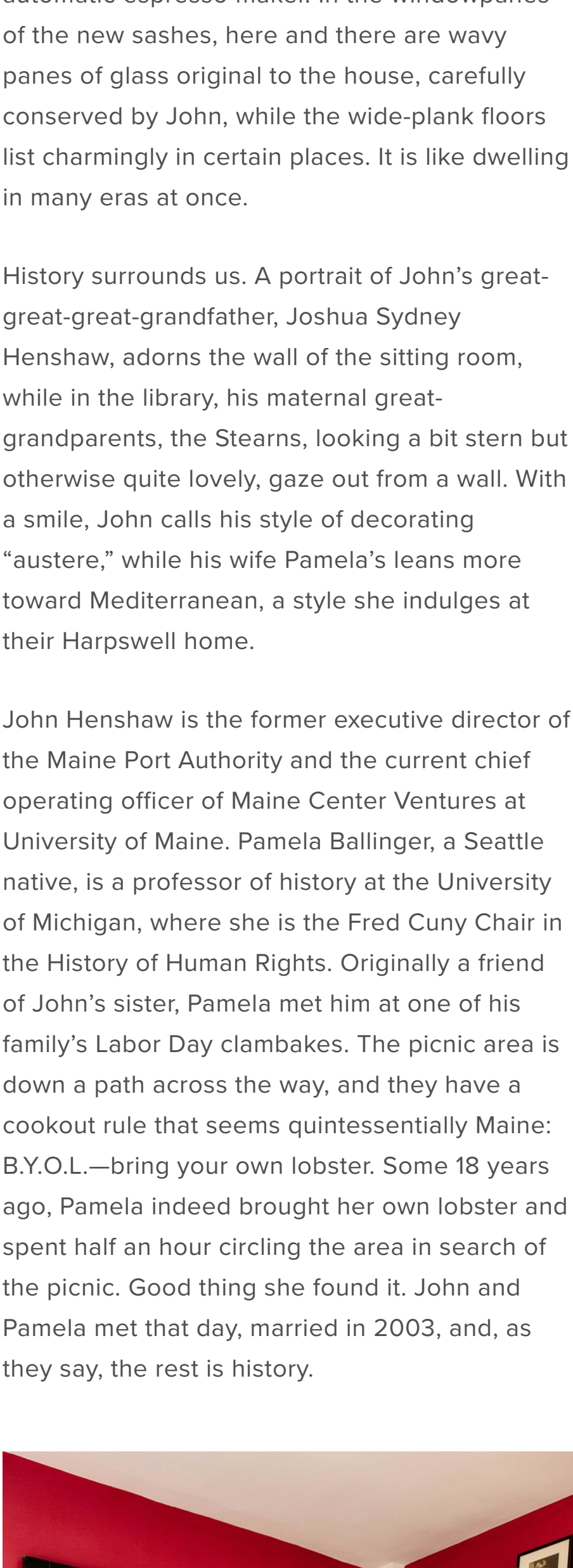
John Henshaw remembers playing in this house as a boy. According to a guide of historic homes in Brunswick, the Colonial-style home with Greek Revival trim was built by Benjamin Chase in approximately 1785 and operated for five years as Chase Tavern. In 1944, it was purchased by John's paternal grandfather, John Handy Henshaw Sr., and grandmother, Alice, as a summer home. John grew up in Pittsburgh, but spent boyhood summers there that sound as idyllic as anything you'd read in a Robert McCloskey story. He recalls digging up clay in the backyard to make figurines to bake in the oven, fishing in the pond his grandfather had dug and stocked with bass, and clamming for hours for steamers and quahogs along the shore of Maquoit Bay.



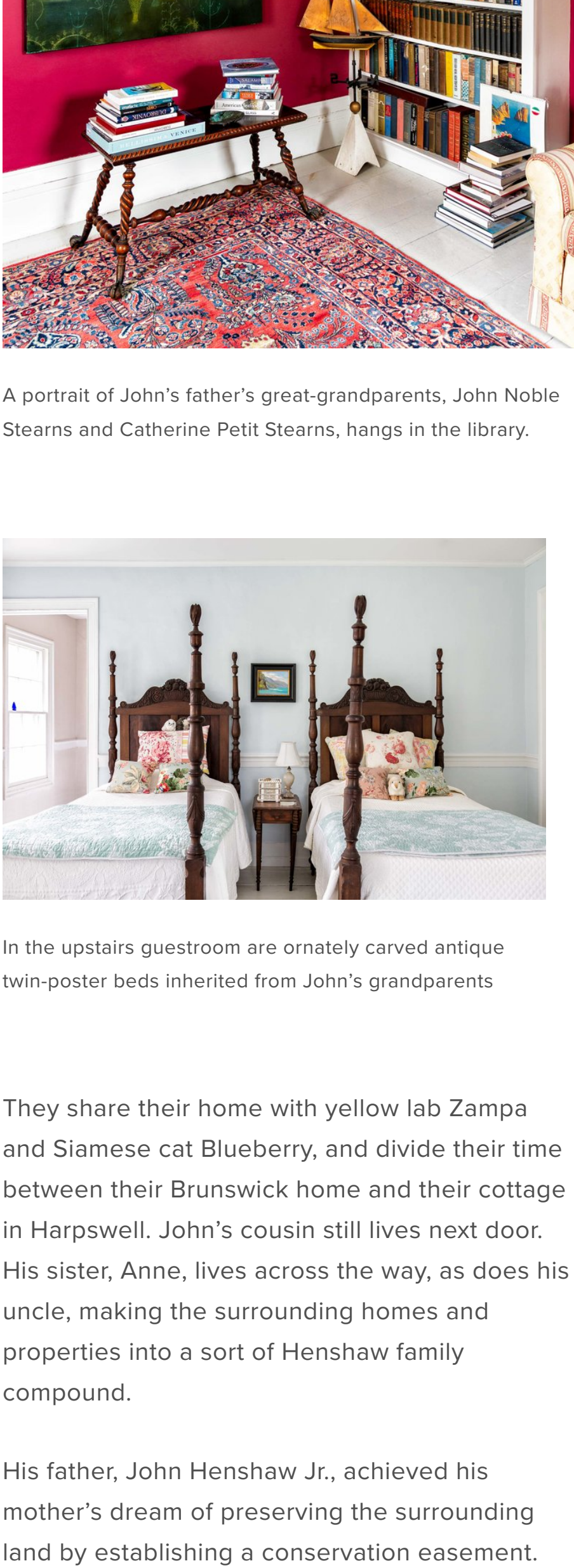
A landscape of a Delaware marsh by Peter Brooke hangs above the settee.

John's uncle, Weld Henshaw, bought the house next door, and John palled around with his cousin Nat. Nat's home, a historic Cape, had secret rooms where they would find raccoon families and "adopt" a cub for the summer. He tells of how they would tear into his house with their muddy boots on, prompting his grandmother to cry, "This is not a camp! This is my house!" The flocked velvet chair where his grandfather sat in the parlor reading *Scientific American* still holds its spot. In every room, stories and memories abound.

The house is storied in more ways than one. Benjamin Chase had five daughters, one of whom, Susan, according to local lore, may have been courted by Henry Wadsworth Longfellow while he studied at Bowdoin. The Chases' stately home may have been the inspiration for "The Old Clock on the Stairs." A plaque declaring it so was affixed to the house when John's grandfather bought it.



A glimpse into the sitting room from the main hall. John inherited the chair from his grandparents and recalls vividly how his grandfather would sit in it and read.



In the front hall is a steamer trunk from the 19th century, purchased in Harpswell. The inside is lined with newspapers from the period.

With a twinkle in his eye, John shows me a clock on the stairs that, while not the original, is a Roxbury tall case clock that dates back to 1820, a time when even Longfellow might have seen it. Longfellow's poem mused, even then, about the provenance of the building and its past occupants, the children who played there, the new bride, of all whom had lived and died there, and the inexorable passage of time. I find myself wondering in a similar fashion, over the Chases and Henshaws, junior and senior, and of the many people who, over more than 230 years, passed through these rooms.

In 1944, the house had no insulation or plumbing; there was an outhouse and a well. Eventually, John's grandfather replaced the privy with a pantry ("where my grandmother hid her silver above the ceiling," says John) and installed a bathroom and running water. His grandparents retired and lived in the house full time in the 1970s, insulating it in a rudimentary fashion by rolling slabs of fiberglass along the attic floor. His grandmother's desire was to return the home to its former, formal glory as a year-round residence.

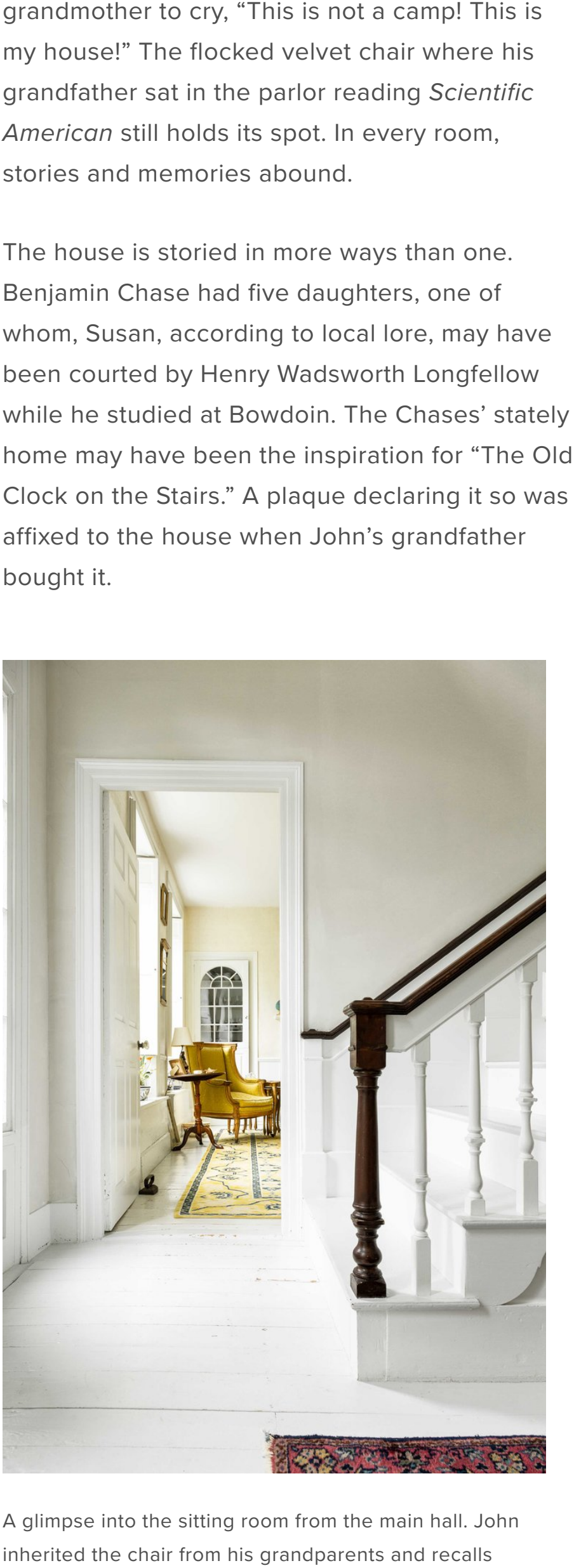
When John bought the four-bedroom, three-bath, 3,000-plus-square-foot home from his grandfather's estate in 1998, he continued the restoration, living above the garage (now gone) while he insulated, renovated the kitchen, replaced windows, removed one of the original three staircases ("A narrow staircase, full of bats," John says with a laugh), and built a deck along the back.

Sitting in the pale-yellow kitchen, which was once John's grandparents' kitchen and long before that the Chase Tavern—where weary travelers hoisted pewter mugs of ale—one feels a doubling, even a tripling of time. At the counter where a large hearth once served as the home's cooking fire and a source of heat, John makes me a perfect latte in a minute flat with his automatic espresso maker. In the windowpanes of the new sashes, here and there are wavy panes of glass original to the house, carefully conserved by John, while the wide-plank floors list charmingly in certain places. It is like dwelling in many eras at once.

History surrounds us. A portrait of John's great-great-great-grandfather, Joshua Sydney Henshaw, adorns the wall of the sitting room, while in the library, his maternal great-grandparents, the Stearns, looking a bit stern but otherwise quite lovely, gaze out from a wall. With a smile, John calls his style of decorating "austere," while his wife Pamela's leans more toward Mediterranean, a style she indulges at their Harpswell home.

John Henshaw is the former executive director of the Maine Port Authority and the current chief operating officer of Maine Center Ventures at University of Maine. Pamela Ballinger, a Seattle native, is a professor of history at the University of Michigan, where she is the Fred Cuny Chair in the History of Human Rights. Originally a friend of John's sister, Pamela met him at one of his family's Labor Day clambakes. The picnic area is down a path across the way, and they have a cookout rule that seems quintessentially Maine: B.Y.O.L.—bring your own lobster. Some 18 years ago, Pamela indeed brought her own lobster and spent half an hour circling the area in search of the picnic. Good thing she found it. John and Pamela met that day, married in 2003, and, as they say, the rest is history.

A portrait of John's father's great-grandparents, John Noble Stearns and Catherine Petit Stearns, hangs in the library.



In the upstairs guestroom are ornately carved antique twin-poster beds inherited from John's grandparents

They share their home with yellow lab Zampa and Siamese cat Blueberry, and divide their time between their Brunswick home and their cottage in Harpswell. John's cousin still lives next door. His sister, Anne, lives across the way, as does his uncle, making the surrounding homes and properties into a sort of Henshaw family compound.

His father, John Henshaw Jr., achieved his mother's dream of preserving the surrounding land by establishing a conservation easement. The easement includes all the Henshaw properties—some 275 acres—and ensures that the land will remain pristine and undeveloped, just as she always wanted.

In many ways, John and Pamela are thoughtfully carrying on what John's grandparents started nearly 75 years ago—a continuum of care that would no doubt make his grandmother proud. The home, steeped in history as it is, has the perfect stewards to see it through to the next generation, not only restored but reinvigorated. Across the way, the family still regularly gathers as they have for generations, to picnic or clam by the bay, to throw a football, grill a steak, or maybe even steam some lobsters, just for old time's sake.



In the front yard of the house, the garden John's grandmother, Alice, planted is still thriving. Sweet cicely, geraniums, phlox, and day lilies come back every year.

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