

Passport

A 'Dreamgirl' Country Estate: Broadway Legend Robert Avian's Lodge On the Market

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By John Torsiello

Theater legend Robert Avian is known for the unique style, class and poetic depth of his works. It is no wonder why some 40 years ago he took what was a hunting lodge that needed some tender loving care in the bucolic town of Kent and turned it into a impeccably tasteful, idyllic retreat, one that meshes wonderfully with its natural environment.

Avian, 76, a dancer, choreographer, theater producer and director, purchased what is now known as The Lodge at Flanders Mountain in the 1970s. The Tony Award-winner (choreography for 'A Chorus Line,' 'Dreamgirls,' 'Ballroom') quickly began a renovation of the main building, as well as several other structures on the property, and set about creating a magical manmade landscape that rivaled the natural one surrounding the main home, which, of course, is the centerpiece of the 252-plus-acre estate.

The property boasts the main house, guest quarters, a pool, sumptuous gardens and specimen plantings and a pond. The main house was built in the 1930s and is embraced by unspoiled land. Beyond the main house are a guest cottage, caretaker's house, cabana, garage and a barn.

In the main home, the lodge-like feel is preserved in a post-and-beam great room that features a soaring ceiling, a stone fireplace and a rich infusion of natural light from ample windows. The spacious room encompasses a living room and dining and gaming areas. A kitchen has its original beehive oven. On the second level is another great room, which enjoys expansive views of Flanders Mountain.

The main house has four bedrooms, including a luxurious master suite. Near a Gunite pool is a cabana with a kitchenette, bar, an entertaining area, a full bath and changing rooms. The property's two-bedroom guest cottage has a kitchen, living room and full bath. A barn could be used as a studio or provide additional garage space.

The grounds, are, well, glorious. There is a two-acre spring-fed pond with a float that holds a screened-in gazebo, a simply magical, almost fairytale-like spot to while away a summer's day or evening. The abundant gardens that weave throughout the property provide a vast array of blooms from the earliest spring field of daffodils to the last rose of summer.

Avian was born in New York City, and spent his early career dividing his time between dancing in such Broadway shows as 'West Side Story,' 'Funny Girl,' and 'Henry, Sweet Henry' and working as a production assistant on projects like 'I Do! I Do!' and 'Twigs.' He met Michael Bennett when they both appeared in 'Nowhere to Go But Up' in 1962, and over the course of the next two decades the two collaborated on 'Promises, Promises,' 'Coco,' 'Company,' 'Follies,' 'Seesaw,' 'God's Favorite,' 'A Chorus Line,' 'Ballroom,' and 'Dreamgirls,' Avian's first credit as a solo producer.

Additional Broadway credits include 'Putting It Together' and the 2006 revival of 'A Chorus Line,' which he directed. In London's West End, Avian choreographed 'Follies,' 'Martin Guerre,' 'The Witches of Eastwick,' 'Miss Saigon,' and 'Sunset

Boulevard,' repeating the assignment for the Broadway productions of the latter two. He also staged 'Hey, Mr. Producer!,' the Cameron Mackintosh tribute.

The Lodge at Flanders Mountain, naturally, became a gathering place for Avian and his friends, some of them famous beyond the theater, such as Julie Andrews and Andrew Lloyd Weber.

"It was said that every time Bob had a hit show something got added or redone at Flanders Lodge," says Ira Goldspiel of William Pitt Sotheby's International Realty, the listing agent for the property, which is offered at \$3.62 million. "Bob has been here for 45 years and it is time, he believes, for the next owner to take charge and care for the home and property the way he has."

To create the present state of the property was no easy task, says Goldspiel. "I think there must have been people telling Bob that he couldn't fix up the house and property the way he envisioned. But he invested so much time and money on its restoration and renovation that it became what it is, today, a very unique property. Some of the original portions of the interior of the home, the post-and-beam construction, the original fireplace, and a beehive stove that is still in use in the kitchen, were preserved. The interior of the home is a mix of modern and traditional, which is very popular these days." The living space of the home encompasses 5,102 square feet, with three bedrooms and three full baths.

A significant piece of the charm of The Lodge at Flanders Mountain is the surrounding property and the views that the home and grounds afford. "Once you are on the property you see nothing but nature," Goldspiel says. "There are these wonderful views and fabulous pond and Flanders Mountain that you can see when standing on the back deck. The pond is incredible, with a floating gazebo that moves with the breeze. It really is something special."

Goldspiel says the property can be farmed, or not, depending upon the whim of the new owner. "You can hike and cross-country ski on your own property also."

For information on The Lodge at Flanders Mountain, contact Goldspiel at 860-927-7724 (office, 917-626-3481 (cell)), or visit www.williampitt.com.

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