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THE CARE & FEEDING OF THE AUTOMOBILE

"What a great, great feeling,
What a wonderful sense,
of sheer enjoyment and of confidence.

For that something you're aware of,
Your car's been taken care of,
At the Esso sign of confidence,
At the happy motoring sign."

This was where we faded to grey, for in 1955 we all had black-and-white television sets. Then Foster Hewitt came on with the second period. Such was the nature of Hockey Night in Canada as a powerful image builder in the eyes of a small boy. Hockey players were gods and gas stations were as welcoming as your very own basement rec room.

It was so potent that more than 30 years later I can still easily remember the words and music to the "Happy Motoring Song." And I can still see the cheerfully wrinkled face and hear the comfortable voice of Murray Westgate, who did for Esso dealers with his commercials what Robert Young did for fathers. His message was that good products plus good service equal confidence. It was a universal formula for a successful gas station.

The first real gas station to make an imprint on my consciousness wasn't quite as neat as Murray's, but it did follow the formula. My gas station of 1955 was the Supertest outlet at the intersection of highways 7 and 48, the "four corners" as we called it, in what was then the village of Markham, Ont. It was a low, beige wood-frame structure managed by two amiable middle-aged brothers, neither of whom talked a great deal and neither of whom was liable to come running when your car went over the bell hose that ran between the gas pumps. The older of the two, whose name I forget even though it was undoubtedly stitched on the breast pocket of his grease green shirt, was heavyset and handy-legged. His girth, along with the bending and stooping of his work, left him with shirts that were perpetually stretched open at the navel, a nice touch that complemented the oil-stained rag that invariably stuck out of the back pocket of his pants. I can actually remember watching him sitting perfectly still on an old kitchen chair in the summer heat, no doubt praying

Imperial gave
Canada its first service station in 1907.

Today it's planning
how to serve the
nation's motorists in
the 21st century

By Charles Davies
that nobody would drive into the station and cause him to stir.
The reason for my acute observation was that in 1955 SuperTest gave away iron-on transfers of jet planes to anyone

As you mull over the possibilities of buying soft drinks and chips, your car is serviced robotically, potential problems are diagnosed and it's given a wash:

who bought a reasonable amount - $3 worth, I think - of gasoline. My friends and I, who pleaded hardship because we were nine years old and thus doomed to several more years of bicycle riding, discovered that the brothers could, if they approached properly, be persuaded to part with transfers without our buying any gasoline. Their view seemed to be that our patronage of the air pump made us valued customers. The point is that they were two men who were kind to children and stray dogs, and although they're as gone as the brand of gasoline they once sold, they're not forgotten.

I think of them sometimes when I pull into any of the several gas stations I frequent today. Some are deep discount places, others are "full service" stations, which, in 1999, doesn't always mean what the name implies. Most gas jockeys are reasonably friendly and prompt, but often all they really seem to do is the normal course of duty is pump gas. It comes as somewhat of a surprise to me when one cleans my windshield or offers to check the oil, and I'm amazed when one actually urges me to check the pressure in my tires. Generally I'm content to get out of the station with a full tank and no nozzle scratches on the side of my car.

My sometimes dystopic experiences at the pump make for a dramatic contrast with the vision of the future described by Hilda Mackow. Mackow is the retail planning manager for Esso Petroleum Canada, Imperial Oil's refining and marketing division, and in her office on Toronto's St. Clair Avenue she has several extraordinary renderings of potential gas stations of the late nineties and beyond. One is of a cleanly designed building shaped rather like a large loaf of bread. You enter the end of the building by inserting a debit card in a slot and then punching in the amount of gas or oil you need. Once inside you get out of your car, and it moves automatically down the service line. And, as you would in a typical car wash, you go into a customer-service area that runs alongside. Unlike a car wash, however, you're met by a customer-service representative who, thanks to your debit card and the memory in the station's computer, knows who you are and your car's service record. As you mull over the possibilities of buying soft drinks and chips, your car is serviced robotically, potential problems are diagnosed and it's given a wash. By the time you and your car are reunited you have a fully itemized bill and know exactly what

acts, while technology will help gas station personnel hone their traditional emphasis on service. Or, as Mackow says, "Because of technology, we'll be able to understand customers' buying patterns better. As a result, we'll be able to serve them better."

To serve people properly, says Tim Hearm, vice-president of Esso Petroleum's retail department, service stations need to have a good mix of service and products. The people who handle the most important last two metres of the hose going into the car's gas tank -- the company's "ambassadors" as they are referred to by Esso marketers -- must receive proper training. Gasolines must continually be improved and have strong advertising and marketing campaigns to differentiate them from the competitors. As well, service stations need to provide a variety of complementary products and services -- everything from motor oil and potato chips to car washes and mechanical repairs -- that will help draw customers.

If this makes it sound like running a service station is a serious business, that's because it is. Certainly the stakes are enormous. Esso Petroleum sold just over five billion litres of gasoline in 1988, generating revenues in excess of $2 billion, roughly one-quarter of Imperial's total revenues. And as it has been for years, the competition for gasoline sales remains furious. Major oil companies, contract customers and independents

Often when you pull into gas stations in the nineties you'll find them paired with convenience stores, fast-food outlets, grocery stores and specialty auto-repair franchises.
The final improvement was the installation of a kitchen water tank to hold the gasoline. It had a hose attached to it and sported a no-smoking sign. The progenitor of the pump island had arrived.

During the First World War and the 1920s, the number of gas stations grew in line with car ownership. Mass production brought the price of an automobile within the average person's reach, and gas stations sprang up along its parallel interstates to keep the traffic moving. In photographs from the period the old gas stations are seen to have both stature and individuality. The basic design was for a pump island, likely covered by a canopy, that was backed by a building combining office and service bays—set back a few twenties and has been used dailily since those early days were well built, often in a combination of brick and stucco. And they came in a vast range of designs, which ran the whole way from mock-Balinese structures that were entirely in keeping with quiet, tree-lined streets to small towers that were at once functional and visually playful. It was in this era, too, that modern standards of competition began to be established. Within 20 years of their inception, gas stations had gone from being more dispensers of gasoline to broad service stations that looked after people's need for lubricants, water for radiators, air for tires, and even for repairs. In wartime, the standard of service was maintained; at some locations women ran the gas pumps, just as they took over the line jobs in factories. In those days kerosene was what counted; it kept lamps lit and stoves burning. Gasolene was almost a novelty item, something that was usually sold in drug stores to clean ladies' gloves.

Nevertheless, cars kept showing up and their drivers kept asking for fuel. To accommodate them—and to keep his warehouse safe from punnicking horses—Imperial's resident manager, C.M. Rolfe, permitted his cars to take buckets of gasoline to customers parked on the street. Then, as demand increased, the company ran a small pipeline out to the curb and posted an attendant in an open-front metal shelter. The final improvement in this primitive marketing exercise was the installation of a small kitchen water tank to hold the gasoline. It had a garden hose attached to it and sported a no-smoking sign. The progenitor of the pump island had arrived.

"In the United States some oil companies see a total automation of service stations with no face-to-face contact with the customer," says Mackow. "I think there'll always be a need for some personal service."
A Global Affair

In the French town of Harneis, population 14,000, spring was just settling in when the mayor, the prefect, local residents and a gentleman from the Canadian village of Florenceville, N.B., population 725, gathered together. It was an occasion of great importance to Harneis, and it had to do with, well, French fries. Lots of French fries. One hundred and eighty thousand tonnes of French fries.

The Canadian was Harrison McCain, chairman of the board of McCain Foods Limited, a private family enterprise from small-town New Brunswick that in the past three decades has grown into a multimillion-dollar food empire. Harrison McCain's father was a potato pioneer. He built the foundation of the family fortune on the export of seed potatoes.

Business is booming, but it was his sons, Harrison and Wallace, who realized that the future lay in frozen foods—frozen fiddleheads, frozen foreign pizza and, in particular, frozen French fries.

Which is where France comes in. In 1981, the McCains opened a French-fry plant at Harneis. To some, the move may have seemed outrageously audacious. Would the French, masters of the much-loved double-fried skinny frites take to the McCain version? Could anything Canadian possibly compare? Resoundingly, yes. The country's fast-food restaurants, most notably McDonald's, became huge buyers of McCain French fries. Making converts of French gastronomes proved so successful that the company went on to purchase a second plant in France and then, last May, formally unveiled a multimillion-dollar expansion of the Harneis facility before the mayor, the prefect and the local citizenry. Today the French facilities can produce about 180,000 tonnes of French fries a year.

What the McCains have done in France—and, for that matter, what they have done in the United Kingdom, Australia, the Netherlands, Spain and elsewhere—is manufacture the quintessential story of Canadian success abroad. In the 20 years since the company made its first foray overseas by entering the British market, McCain has become a shining example of how Canadian firms can match the strength of foreign companies in the global marketplace. The company's expansion seems impressively prescient today—with the melding of markets, resulting in large part from the free-trade agreement between Canada and the United States as well as the ultimate commonality of the European market referred to simply and significantly as "1992." Canadian companies are becoming international in scope and greater in scale.

McCain does a great deal of its business abroad and has 44 factories around the world, all wholly owned offshoots of the little Florenceville company that grew. The McCain people themselves explain their expansion as nothing more than simple common sense. "We just found that we couldn't sustain our rate of growth by continuing to rely almost entirely on the Canadian market," says George McClure, vice-president of corporate development for the company. "I think people are saying today that the globe is your market."

It was not always thus. Canada is still in the process of emerging from years of protectionism that dictated the perceived necessity of keeping Canada Canadian. Mixed with that has been the long-held notion that somehow big is bad—that economies of scale are un-Canadian. In turn, little has been made of the efforts of Canadian companies to establish themselves on far shores. The daily press, it seems, has made much more of the presence of foreign interlopers here than it has of Canadian interlopers elsewhere. The message has often led to the conclusion that if the international business world were anyone's oyster, it was that of the United States, or Asia perhaps. It certainly wasn't Canada's.

There was a time, however, when our entrepreneurs had no lack of international ambition. In fact, as a recent book from two history professors at Toronto's York University reminds us, the turn of the century was a heady time for growth-oriented Canadians. In the book, Christopher Armstrong and H.V. Nelles take readers back to a period that began just before the turn of the century and ended with the Great Depression. It was a period marked by the rush of Canadians south of the United States. They had, say the authors, "a scheme to build street railways, hydroelectric utilities, and telephone companies in such unlikely places as São Paulo, Mexico City, and the Caribbean islands. They brought new ideas to a Canadian financial community desperately searching for new vehicles for idle capital."

They were men with bold ideas. They were "drawn by an eagerness to make their mark upon a world wider than just Canada." People such as Max Aitken, who was to become Lord Beaverbrook, and William Mackenzie, who developed utility companies in such places as Jamaica and Mexico, seized the opportunity to become barons at a time when the nationalization of utilities was not yet an issue in those southern nations. They attracted the interest—and the pocketbook—of Canadian and British investors. Some were small shareholders in such endeavors as the São Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company. The Canadian stock markets, which were in their early years, were then largely unregulated. Regular reporting of corporate affairs was a thing of the future, and shareholders at home often found there was little available information on the progress of their investments. "When one Nova
Scotian, who had a small share in the original underwriting [of the São Paulo Tramway, Light and Power Company], wrote to enquire how the work was going on. He was told, "You are doing very little other than spending money so there is not very much to write about."

Ultimately the Canadian promoters, and where they lacked sophisticated substituion of brass and silver. They were, according to Armstrong and Nelles, "animal spirits of capitalism... driven by the thrill of creation, the excitement of the game, but above all by the reward of seeing a company come into being, the gleaming Daimlers... the dizzying possibilities of mightiness."

Canadian entrepreneurs have been driven as much by the excitement of creation, of becoming successes in other people's countries, as they have by the wealth that may come to themselves. Since the early days of Beavertook and William Mackenzie, or the press baron Lord Thomson of Fleet after them, there has been the notion that geography is not an absolute barrier to commerce and adventurers. In business, the limitations to growth are not language or locale but finance and competition. For companies with broad-minded corporate philosophies these obstacles are conquerable. While Beavertook and Thomson seemed starry-eyed and sometimes dauntless players in a world passed since, the fact that Canadian business in current times is in many ways just as spirited. While Canadian newspaper headlines point to the acquisition of Canadian companies by foreign firms, the acquisition of foreign acquisitions being made by homegrown enterprises is just as significant.

The Florenceville McCains and their French-Canadian counterparts are one example. The concept of the multinational real-estate development that Toronto's Reichmann brothers have undertaken at London's Canary Wharf, which, when completed, will be home to 60,000 employees in 24 buildings. The Reichmanns, who have already made sigificant inroads in the U.S., with residences in the United States, have long seemed some-what enigmatic compared with the Americans' own land owners - the frequently profiled Donald Trump of New York, for example. But then Canadian entrepreneurialism is difficult to typscet.

The spectrum of Canadian business talent is broader than that which runs between the McCains and the Rechmanns. The reach of ambition extends beyond frozen food and real estate. From high technology to resources, even to culture, Canada is making its presence known beyond its borders. On occasion, the meeting of the Canadian entrepreneur and the foreign acquisition seems a curious one. Consider Turono's "Honors Ed" Mirvish, the budget-minded gourmand who made his fortune selling inexpensive goods through yary sales pitches. Despite the fact that he owns Toronto's Royal Alexandra Theatre, it came as a surprise when Lord Old Vic theatre, her Edwardian grandeur faded and in need of restoration, found salvation in Mirvish. Yet the multimillion-dollar marriage between the merchant and the cultural landscape has worked, and Mirvish has been invested as a commander of the Order of the British Empire for his efforts. As Londoners attend performances at the Mirvish-owned Old Vic, so do they read the Conrad Black-owned Sunday Telegraph.

The Toronto-based multimillionaire has made no secret of his ambitions to top his already considerable achievements with recognition as a newspaper titan. Some, the black influence on British print journalism gives a touch of irony to the span of history. Like Beavertook and Thomson before him, Black has proved that hard work and ambition - not to mention the financing - rival the biggest and the best foreign corporate chieftains.

It is difficult to quantify the scope of the international achievements of Canadian enterprise. Traditionally, statisticians in prime minister's offices in Southern Exposure, "he received only a brief outline of what had been done in Rio, to which the company secretary added the view that the people were doing very little other than spending money so there is not very much to write about."
Valued veterans

By Kenneth Bagnell

In the fall of 1981, Bob Manion, an easygoing man in his early sixties who had been with Imperial Oil for more than 30 years, decided he’d like to retire. He and his wife, Norma, made another important decision: to move to one of their favorite towns, Brockville, Ont., where, on a quiet street near downtown, they would build a new home. The Manions like Brockville, where they work with the Lion’s Club and Norma with the local hospital as well, but several times a year they can be seen heading their 1985 Mercury in the direction of Montreal – 120 kilometres away – for an occasion that is a priority on their calendar and indeed in their lives. It is a meeting of a group whose members are retired employees of Imperial and their spouses, the Montreal Central Esso Annuitant Club. “I won’t miss a meeting if I can possibly help it, rain or shine, sleet or snow,” Manion said not long ago. “After all, it’s a chance to see some of my oldest and best friends, to keep in touch.”

Esso annuitant clubs were started just over two years ago; the 26 clubs now boast a national membership of about 7,000 and together form one of the largest organized groups of annuitants in Canadian history. And it’s a group that’s contributing a great deal to the country. Thousands of the members are deeply involved in community service – from Alex Butt in Halifax, who manages the finances of the region’s huge Kiwanis Music Festival, to Norm Perret in Toronto, who is spending 12 weeks working full-time this year with Toronto’s United Way campaign, to Alex Budge in Edmonton, who helped put the Edmonton Opera Association back on its fiscal feet.

As well as the innumerable individual efforts, the clubs themselves take on a variety of social causes. In Dartmouth, N.S., for example, Gerry Moriarty, president of the Dartmouth club, visited the city’s local hospital one afternoon early this year and with another club member presented it with a $2,000 contribution toward the purchase of an expensive piece of microscopic equipment. And last year in Calgary the Esso Resources club put its shoulder behind the city’s United Way campaign and collected $20,000 toward Esso Resources’ contribution, helping it to become the first company in Calgary to donate more than $200,000.

Across Canada other companies and organizations have clubs for retirees, and while the clubs have many differences, most share the conviction that they should contribute to the community. For example, in Toronto members of the city’s chapter of the RCMP Veterans’ Association gather 10 times a year not only to socialize but to plan events that help fulfill one of its national objectives: “To provide support for worthy community services and organizations of a charitable or benevolent nature.”

Still, the social opportunities such clubs provide may be one of their most telling and important virtues. Last spring, a newsletter received by all retirees of IBM Canada Ltd. included a list of the club’s purposes. Among them: “To remind you that you are still a part of a great alumni of IBMers and to remind the spouses of retirees who have passed away that you are still a welcome part of our special IBM community.” This plain and simple goal is vitally important in modern society, helping its growing population of older people cope better in their senior years. “All the studies I know,” says Ronald Burke, a psychologist at Toronto’s York University, “report that the healthiest people are those who have relationships with others. They do not feel alone. Insofar as companies assist such clubs they are making a real social contribution.”

In recent years the growth in the number of older Canadians has often been examined in light of some of its worrying aspects. Is our health-care program geared to accommodate the inevitable cost of the illnesses of the elderly? What
When they returned to Montreal Matthew Sutton, president of one of the clubs, said simply, "The most important thing was that people were able to go back together again. It is very important among our members to keep in touch with old friends from work. If I make a call to a member I can expect to be on the phone for quite some time. People want to talk with someone they used to work with. I find that very revealing, both of them and of Imperial.

People long after the groups returned from Masuscule, Sutton's phone ran late at night with a sad message: one of his old colleagues had just died. Early next morning Sutton phoned six members of the Montreal Centre Club. They in turn turned dial a larger number of people. Among the visitors at the funeral home that evening were many of the man's former colleagues, there to express their sympathy to his wife and children. Many returned the next day for the funeral. "You cannot overestimate the value of that kind of support," says Dr. Andrew MacRae, principal of Acadia Divinity College in Wolfville, N.S., which has recently begun to offer doctoral degrees in pastoral care. "Annuitants have a real role to play in providing comfort." Dr. MacRae. In Calgary, the city's large Essos Resource club set up teams throughout the city earlier this year to provide support to members when illness or death touches their lives. "We have," says Ian Fowler, president of the club, "a good deal of history that makes it their special task to visit those in need of comfort and support." The rapid growth of Imperial annuitant clubs is an indication of the need for such a service. As a result of the "Near Rare" by the number of annuitants who had grown substantially as a result of two voluntary early-retirement programs (in 1982 and 1986), there seemed to be a need for such clubs. As a result of this, there are several clubs that have formal clubs with scheduled meetings and activities.

In his travels, Imperial's chairman, held an annual meeting in Italy a year ago. He phoned from them and invited them to include a also held a large seminar on the Lake and their impact on the Ford/Imperial. "I'm not sure," he says, "but there's been a lot of enthusiasm ever since.

In a survey of 800 clubs, however, many felt a bit surprised. "We were touched by the large number of club representatives who would like to consider the 654-kilometer stroll from Banff National Park, through several other national parks, all the way to Yoseh Lake Trailhead. "The route," the newsletter adds for those out of breath simply reading about the trek, "can be broken into convenient sections for such things as refurbishing of food, time-out stops, waiting out inclement weather..." Most of Imperial's clubs limit membership to one-third of their phones and a lot of those people have come along to add to the sense of fellowship can be easily maintained, but local clubs often get together for major events. In the Alberta Rockies, for example in Sarina, a community with roughly 1,000 Imperial annuitants, a local motel resided on the sound of music and chat...
If my grandmother were still around, she'd be perfectly at home in the house I live in, because it's remarkably like the house that she lived in during the thirties and forties. There is a large kitchen that overlooks the back garden (which, thanks to modern land values, is only about a tenth of the size that hers was). There are lace curtains and wallpaper with cabbage roses, a stained-glass window warped by time and ancient windows with diamond panes that let in every icy blast of winter. But two things about my house would astonish Grandma. One is the price I paid for it about a year ago—more money, I suspect, than she and my grandfather together earned in their entire working lives. The other is the fact that this is no mere shelter; this is an investment. Grandma and Grandpa, of course, were utterly unfamiliar with the modern notion of a home as an appreciating asset.

The lives led by my grandmother and me could scarcely be more different. After her family moved from Indianapolis to the suburbs of Chicago at the end of the last century she never moved more than 10 kilometres in any direction. During her entire married life she lived in just two houses: the one she and Grandpa rented for 20 years (the Depression meant they never could afford to buy it), and the little bungalow they finally bought in 1953. I have moved from Chicago to Toronto to Michigan and back to Toronto. I bought my first house when I was 30 and am now, less than 10 years later, working on my second. I will probably own six or seven or even eight houses in my lifetime. My current house occupies a large place in my emotions, fantasies and plans for financial independence, and I have spent astonishing sums of money decorating it to look as if, instead of having moved in a year ago, I had inherited it from Grandma.

It wasn't until this decade that my generation, the baby boomers, developed such a craving for roots. We married later than our parents, had children later, fancied ourselves for years as great adventurers ready to pack up at a moment's notice to go trekking in Nepal or white-water rafting in the Yukon. Until I was 28 years old I could fit everything that I owned in the back of my Volkswagen Beetle, and I was proud of it. Possessions were for parents. Home was a place to escape from. Cut the grass? That was something that only hopelessly bourgeois dads did. Weed the garden? What on earth did Mom see in that?

Then came the eighties. I turned 30, along with a great many members of the population, and one day I woke up with an irresistible urge to become a woman of property. I became a compulsive reader of real-estate ads. Open houses drew me like a magnet. When I found the right house I fell for it hard. Like love at first sight, I just knew. I only wish I could learn to buy a pair of shoes as fast as I bought that house.

At about the same time as I was taking my first plunge into property, all the other 30-year-olds in Canada were seized by the same urge. And so the big-city housing markets in Vancouver and Toronto and even Calgary (during the last oil boom) went into one of their cyclical frenzies. Soon it was clear that house mania was about more than getting yourself some roots. It was also about getting yourself...
some equity. People believed that with- out a toehold in the house market they would be doomed to second-class finan- cial citizenship and that if they didn’t buy now they would never buy. Prices would just keep rising further and further out of reach. This belief became some- thing of a self-fulfilling prophecy as the demand for houses grew, sellers were able to ask, and get, more and more. Today, the collision of emotion and mon- ey is as much a part of the central dramas of my generation.

Yet in spite of what you read in the papers, sky-high house prices have not done much to deter first-time buyers. They are simply driven to greater heights of ingenuity. People borrow from their parents. They get third mortgages. They rent out the basement, buy a place 100 kilometres north of the city or get a night job. Then, as soon as possible, they trade up. Said one real-estate agent I know, “I try to get my clients into a property that will last them five years.” Most of his clients are repeat customers. They move with their kids (“A pregnant woman is the surest commission of all,” he says) when they get divorced, or when they get married, or when they get pregnant, or when they get divorced, or when they get married, or when they get pregnant...

Instead of spending January working on my tan, I would snuggle down in my new chair in my new living room and listen to my furnace hum.

My first house: it became both nest and nest egg. And if that wasn’t enough I soon realized that like the clothes I wore and the car I drove, my house gave me a chance to make a grand statement about the sort of person I was. And to my aston- ishment I discovered that in spite of all my vocalised proclivities and par- ticularities and society, when it came to nesting I was a deep-south conservative.

This revelation will come as no sur- prise to real-estate agents and home builders, who know that the more transient we are, the more we want our houses to look as if we’ve inhabited them for three generations. People raised in the split-level bungalows built in suburban Toronto in the fifties can’t wait to move back down- town into some narrow, cramped Victorian row house that their parents once gratefully fled. People shopping for something a little more spacious in the Fraser area near Vancouver, in Millvina street, Punxatawny, and then stoic. Today I recall those inci- dents with something like pride as diffi- cult circumstances marked my entry into full adulthood.

Soon I was charting with my neigh- bors down the back fence about rising real- estate prices now that I had moved from the renting to the owning class the subject proceeded, elation, not just about the merits of various lawn fertilizers and of aluminum versus plastic eavestroughs. I could no longer afford winter vacations in Tobermory and had long since given up my dream of that six-month trek month through the hills towns of Nepal. But the trade-off was real roots of our own we’re determin- ed to buy them.

Nearby everyone I know wants to live in the country. Grandmother, about the lives do not resemble grandmother’s in the slightest. She stayed home and sewed clothes and canned tomatoes and pickles and bought bread from the baker and lived in the same house her family lived in for 200 years. She herself is 80 years old. The Georgian-style facade extends to the garage and includes such architectual must-haves as fake flowers, imitation chintzy, fake flowers. I remember when “chintzy” was a word that meant cheap and tacky. Now it means a decorating effect that starts at $49.95 a metre.

But for her, who has a double, there is some- thing very strange about these rooms fea- tured in the decorating magazines and the Ralph Lauren ads. None of them bears any trace of the modern conveniences and pastimes that are so crucial to the way we actually live today. There are no clock radios, blow dryers, compact disc players, computers or cordless phones. Above all, there are no televisions. Instead there are fireplaces. But the tele- vision, in front of which we tend to relax or indulge more than any other fire, is hidden somewhere, safely out of sight. Perhaps it is shut away in the respectable rear of the house. “There in the basement don’t want to put the television in their living room,” says an architect I know who has been designing Georgian country homes. “I think it’s lower class.” As for microwave ovens, I haven’t seen one yet that looks as if it might belong in an English coun- try cottage. But I’m sure someone is working on it.

Instant atmosphere is the main selling point of every new subdividing being built. “It’s like going through a piece of Georgian, Tudor or French pro- vincial — anything, in fact, but contempor- ary. The very names of these subdivi- sions ring with the echoes of a stately past: the Balmoral, the Sheffield, Som- erset Estates, Tara Estates (in which houses made for Mississauga’s) Ont., has Heritage Hills. Vancouver has Heritage Estates. St. Andrews on the Hill, under construction a few miles north of town, is described by the producer’s design firm as “the timeless elegance of an English country manor,” complete with stone garden fountains, a formal English street and “the un- tamed beauty of an ancient landscape” thrown in for no extra charge. Western builders are not as enamoured of their eastern eras, although they all take their major cues from Georgian England.

People who settle in Carriage Lane Park, near Vancouver, are assured of receiving classic “heritage doors.”

Since moving into my little piece of history, I’ve spent enormous sums of money to make habitable a place my grandmother would have sensibly abandoned long ago. There were the repairs. There was the authentic original woodwork, which needed six coats of white paint to cover up the brown paint. There were the real pine floors, which cost only slightly more to strip, sand and stain than the finest wall-to-wall broad-loom would have cost. And then there were the leaky windows, which I decided to leave alone because, after all, they were what made me fall in love with the house in the first place. Grandma would have been appalled.

Grandma didn’t care much for tradition. Tradition was the Depression, when she earned her eggs on a farm in Wisconsin. Tradition was the war years, when her daughter, my mother, had to stand guard every night in winter in the kitchen (heat- ed by an enormous oil-heated stove fur- nace) because fuel was rationed and the rest of the house wasn’t heated at all. Grandma knew what she wanted. She wanted to be in her own house. She didn’t buy Wonderful. She wanted to cover the old wooden floors with fashionable linoleum and the drab old frame oven with Innsburg. She wanted to wall up the fireplace (how lower class it was, not to mention smoky and inefficient, and much better to build a woodstove instead) and put in a nice electric fire instead. She threw out the old pine rocking chair and got one of those reclining loungers. When she was, in her Eighties, to watch about the time she and Grandpa could finally afford a brand new bang of the gentry, who: “I’m too old to make such a change.”

My second and current house is older than my first. And it has a story, which the real-estate agent told me in loving detail. The man who built the house back in 1902 was the first settler in these parts. He built the big park down the street and named it and all the streets around here after his home town in England. Grandpa named it after, you could not mind spending a lot of money to put a little tra- dition into my life.

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LEAPIN’ LIZARDS

By JAMIE FINDLAY

A small Ontario town is home to an internationally renowned breeding centre for rare reptiles.

THERY VERY NAMES ARE TROPICAL gothic: the Mojave chuckwalla, the Mongolian frog-eyed sand gecko, the Solomon Island prehensile-tailed skink. They sound like the sort of creatures that are glimpsed every decade or so, out of the corner of one’s eye, in the shadow of a sand dune or at the foot of some giant tropical tree. And many of them are just that kind of animal. For this place, unique among zoological institutions, is a breeding haven for rare and endangered reptiles from around the world.

It is called the Reptile Breeding Foundation and is located just outside the small town of Cherry Valley, in Ontario’s Prince Edward County. I am being shown around by Tom Huff, the executive director. First we see the snake room. My guide goes along the rows of plywood boxes that house the snakes, opening doors and looking in. “Just a bit of courtship going on in there,” he says, indicating two Jamaican boa (nonvenomous, like all the animals here), lying in each other’s coils. From another box he casually withdraws what looks like a thickish rusty-brown snake. “Legless lizard,” he says and points to the eyelids and ear slits, which snakes do not have. Remember the snake-pit scene in the film Raiders of the Lost Ark? It was these harmless creatures that provided much of the voltage. “There are some good close-ups,” says Huff, “and you can see that most of them aren’t snakes.”

Lizard or snake, the effect is the same. Creatures of this ilk have always made us flinch, and for that reason they are at a disadvantage in the conservation game. People tend to care less about reptiles than about pandas or whales or snow leopards. But in the early seventies a Toronto anthropologist named Geoffrey Galley set out to do something for the scaly orders. Inspired by the work of the British naturalist Gerald Durrell, he and his wife began breeding rare and endangered reptiles in their home. They were joined in their ef-
Perhaps you know that snakes and lizards are good for the world, that they keep rodents and insects in check, but if you come here you'll find another reason for saving them and that is the astonishing range of their forms and adaptations.

Frog-eyed sand gecko

White's tree frog

Female Madagascar tomato frog

Solomon Island giant plesiosaur-tailed skink

For Tom Huff, a Californian and former keeper at the San Francisco Zoo, who came up to Canada at their invitation. In 1974 the foundation was incorporated as a charity, and two years later it moved to its present building near Cherry Valley. Up until last year it survived mainly on contributions from Gaberry.

Propagation is the name of the game here, and the foundation is good at it. At one time it had more Jamaican boa than Jamaica. (Most of them have since been given away to zoos, leaving the foundation with about 30. Huff estimates that Jamaica itself has about 60.) Over the years the foundation has twice been recognized by the American Association of Zoological Parks and Aquariums for its work. When reporters came to call they invariably want to know how a tiny institution like this can succeed in breeding rare reptiles while the big zoos often fail. One of their secrets, says Huff, is disruption. Putting two males in with a female or turning a garden hose on a mating pair in order to mimic the rainy season often shakes up the animals' lives just enough to make them amorous.

On our way to the lizard room we stop to have a look at the incubator. Inside is a fresh clutch of Burmese python eggs, most of them the size of large potatoes, their shells dirty-white and as pliant as old leather. The baby pythons emerge in a curious way. They are equipped with a small temporary cutting appendage called an egg tooth, which they use to slit the shell. They stick their heads out for a few hours and then, finally, dart out like bits of static electricity. "Don't think we'll get much there," says Huff, pointing to a few of the smaller eggs. "But you never know. Might get a rat or two.

Institutions of this sort, like baby pythons in the wild, lead precarious lives. Last year Gaberry found that the operating costs of the foundation were getting to be too much for him and so began a time of concentrated fund-raising. The foundation inaugurated an "adopt a reptile" program and began caving around for corporate sponsors. Gaberry suggests, cautiously, that they are over the crunch, for the moment, but that fund-raising will continue to be essential to the foundation's existence.
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The lizard section is full of curiosities. Huff shows me some frog-eyed sand geckos, tiny lizards that look like tadpoles with legs; a shingleback skink from Australia, whose tail, when seen from above, perfectly mimics its head; and some Bengal monitors, with their powerful bodies and flinty looks. Finally I stand and stare at a tank full of matamata turtles. This is the usual response of anyone who sees a matamata for the first time. The creature has a head like nothing on earth. It is not the head of a manta ray, or a snail, or a pair of fire bellows, yet it contains hints of all these. The neck is a piece of coral, the ear flaps fragments of leaf, the nose a small snout, the jaw a broad, flat frying pan. Typically it spends its days eating fish among the rocks and mud of the great South American rivers.

Not all these creatures can floor us with their facts, as the matamata can, but most have some quirk, some oddity to shock or delight us. For they belong to a very old class of animal, and over them they have acquired some staggering innovations. Perhaps you know that snakes and lizards are good for the world, that they keep rodents and insects in check, but if you come here you will find another reason for saving them and that is the astonishing range of their forms and adaptations. They get you thinking about the inventiveness of evolution, the way life can transmute so fantastically under the long press of time.

"There are so many myths about reptiles," says Huff at the end of the tour. We are standing on the steps of the exoticism, the public display section of the foundation; he is talking about the importance of educating the public about these creatures. "You know, people think a hoop snake gets around by shaping itself into a hoop and rolling along the ground and that a mother snake swallows her young to protect them. But the truth about reptiles is even more incredible than the stories. There is a snake in Malaysia that flies - that launches itself out of a tree and floats to the ground. There is a lizard that can shoot blood out of its eyes. There are snakes that live their entire lives in the sea. What I can't understand is why people make up stories about reptiles when the facts themselves are so strange."
1615, Champlain became the first white man to travel up the Ottawa River and down the French River into Georgian Bay, thereby establishing a transportation corridor between the Great Lakes and the Atlantic Ocean. He explored the upper Great Lakes that would play a vital role in Canada's fur trade for two centuries.

Yet Champlain remains a perplexing and mysterious character. He wrote five books about his various undertakings but was silent about his family, his upbringing, his education and his wife, Hélène, a woman 31 years younger than he. He spoke of bringing the French culture to the New World and the Christian faith to the natives, but he never explained what drove him on in the face of personal danger, an indifferent government and the treacheries of rival commercial interests. He sketched the Indian battles in which he participated and the Hurons with whom he once wintered. He left no images of himself. Champlain is, therefore, a hero without a face.

**Mystery surrounds his birth and his burial.** The parish registers at his birthplace, the French town of Brouage, on the Bay of Biscay, have been destroyed, so historians can only estimate the date of Champlain's birth—between 1567 and 1570—and speculate about his background. He has been variously described as the son of a fisherman and of a naval captain and even as the illegitimate offspring of an aristocrat. Champlain died on Christmas Day, 1635, in the settlement of Quebec and was buried in a church built specifically to house his remains. The church has long since vanished and, with it, any trace of the founder of Quebec.

The unbridgeable gaps in the Champlain story have made the great adventurer an unpopular subject for serious study. "I don't think there's any doubt that Champlain was a great man," says the University of Manitoba historian Jack Blunstone. "But because there are so many gaps in our knowledge of him, from a biographer's perspective he's one-dimensional."

Although Champlain is unfashionable among the academicians he commands considerable appeal among amateur archaeologists and historians in Canada—individuals like Joe C.W. Armstrong, the author of a biography entitled simply **Champlain**. Published in the fall of 1987, the book took 10 years to research and write. Armstrong says he traveled all over the world, from France to Canada, from McKee Bar to the Great Lakes, from Quebec to New York. He visited various places with a common theme—first, in France and invested $50,000 in the project. To Armstrong, Champlain is a heroic figure who epitomizes the values—courage, perseverance and determination—on which this country was founded.

Then there is René Levesque, a Quebec civil servant and amateur archeologist who is obsessed with finding Champlain’s grave. Born in Quebec City, in 1925. Levesque first learned of the mystery of Champlain’s tomb as a 12-year-old schoolboy. He recalls standing with his classmates one day at the foot of the Champlain monument on Quebec City’s famous Dufferin Terrace. His teacher, who enlivened history lessons with tours of the old city, said that Champlain was buried somewhere nearby but that nobody knew exactly where. "Ever since then," he says, "I have wanted to find Champlain’s grave."

Over the past four decades, from the time he was a university student, Levesque has spent countless hours rummaging through historical documents for information about the whereabouts of the grave and digging beneath restaurants and churches in the heart of Quebec City. And he is the most recent person to embark on the strange and quixotic search for Champlain’s tomb. Since the search began almost 125 years ago, dozens have tried to unravel the riddle. Among them, they have written numerous newspaper articles and almost two dozen pamphlets and booklets; they have produced 15 different theories about the location of the tomb. But none has received quite as much attention as Levesque did last year.

Levesque—who is not related to the late Quebec premier—and archeologist Charles Beaujard began digging in their spare time beneath the bell tower of Notre Dame Basilica in Old Quebec in the spring of 1988. When the two men discovered a metal coffin that looked extremely old, they created an overnight sensation. Word of the find was leaked to the media, and the story was quickly picked up by the largest newspapers in the country. Several days before the coffin was to be opened, Bill Cameron of the CBC’s news program **The Journal** interviewed a jubilant Levesque about his 40-year quest. For the_quarterly, his research and his work as a civil servant, whose roots in Quebec go back to 1679, it appeared to be a moment of triumph.

But just when success seemed imminent, the search was suspended. Four experts from the Quebec cultural affairs department found the conclusion to be incorrect. The tomb was likely the final resting place of Emmanual Huygens, a Belgian Jesuit who died on January 21, 1679. Their conclusion was partly based on the fact that the letters "P" and "U" were visible on top of the crypt. "P" would stand for prince, the French word for father; the other letters, of course, form part of the surname Huygens.

The government experts felt that the evidence was conclusive and that sifting the grave would therefore be an unjustifiable desecration. Levesque, however, was not satisfied that the coffin was that of Huygens and was able to convince the Quebec authorities to allow him to examine the remains later that year. His examination convinced him that the experts had been correct, but he felt that Champlain’s grave might still be found beneath the Notre Dame bell tower. A further search revealed nothing and so the mystery continues.

When Champlain died in 1635 Quebec was a tiny settlement on the banks of the St. Lawrence River. The principal building (picturesed below in a 1608 illustration) was a two-story structure that served as a storehouse and residence for some of the settlement’s 150 inhabitants.

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Once again people seemed satisfied that Champlain's resting place had been found, and for the next three decades interest in the subject waned. Then, in 1940, the search for Champlain's tomb took a new turn. People began digging to test their theories. An engineer named Claude-Victor Jeanotte led the way that year after producing a purely hypothetical map of what Quebec might have looked like at the time of Champlain's death. He proposed a dig on the courtyard of the Séminaire de Québec (a site he supposedly chose because a pedastal he held over the map stopped there) but found nothing.

In the 1950s amateur historian Silvio Damas and several members of the Quebec Historical Society conducted the longest and most thorough search ever. They scrutinized all the historical documents and the speculative literature and discovered something that everyone else had overlooked—a narrow L-shaped lane within what had been once the d'Alleboust property that had never been built on in the nearly 400 years that passed since Champlain had founded Quebec. Could the lane be preserved in the early years because it was the site of Champlain's first and only church? Or was it opened when the town was established in 1651 the group began digging in this "enigmatic passageway," as Damas called it.

The dig continued in brief annual sessions of one or two months until the fall of 1957. Damas and his friends discovered a stone and marble grave containing two adjacent buildings. In one they found a flat piece of oak containing several crudely carved nails. It seemed to them to resemble the base of a coffin, but they neither found any evidence of Champlain nor conclusive evidence to date the foundations from the mid-17th century. After much study of the foundations, however, the Quebec Historical Society announced the discovery of Notre-Dame-de-Reconnaissance chapel and the tomb of Samuel de Champlain.

In 1958, the 350th anniversary of the founding of Quebec City, arevived people's interest in Champlain, and people began to review the evidence once more. The case was under the aegis of Champlain's brother-in-law, the Canadian historian and writer of the 19th century. It was then that Damas and his colleagues had already been on the right track—the tomb, the younger Canadian historian, Claude-Victor Jeanotte. He felt, however, that it was a few metres to the east of the spot suggested by Damas.

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