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# Lakeland BOATING

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MARCH 2009

*Tested!*  
**Rampage 34**  
**Formula 270**

*pp. 22*  
**1000 Islands**  
*A Photographic Tour by Ian Coristine*

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St. Lawrence  
project 2 in Cottage  
Projects.

The path turns back and forth, opening at last upon a rolling meadow. Off to the right is a veritable explosion of wildflowers—purple loosestrife, goldenrod and white lady's slippers. Past this meadow, a steep emerald hill falls toward the river.

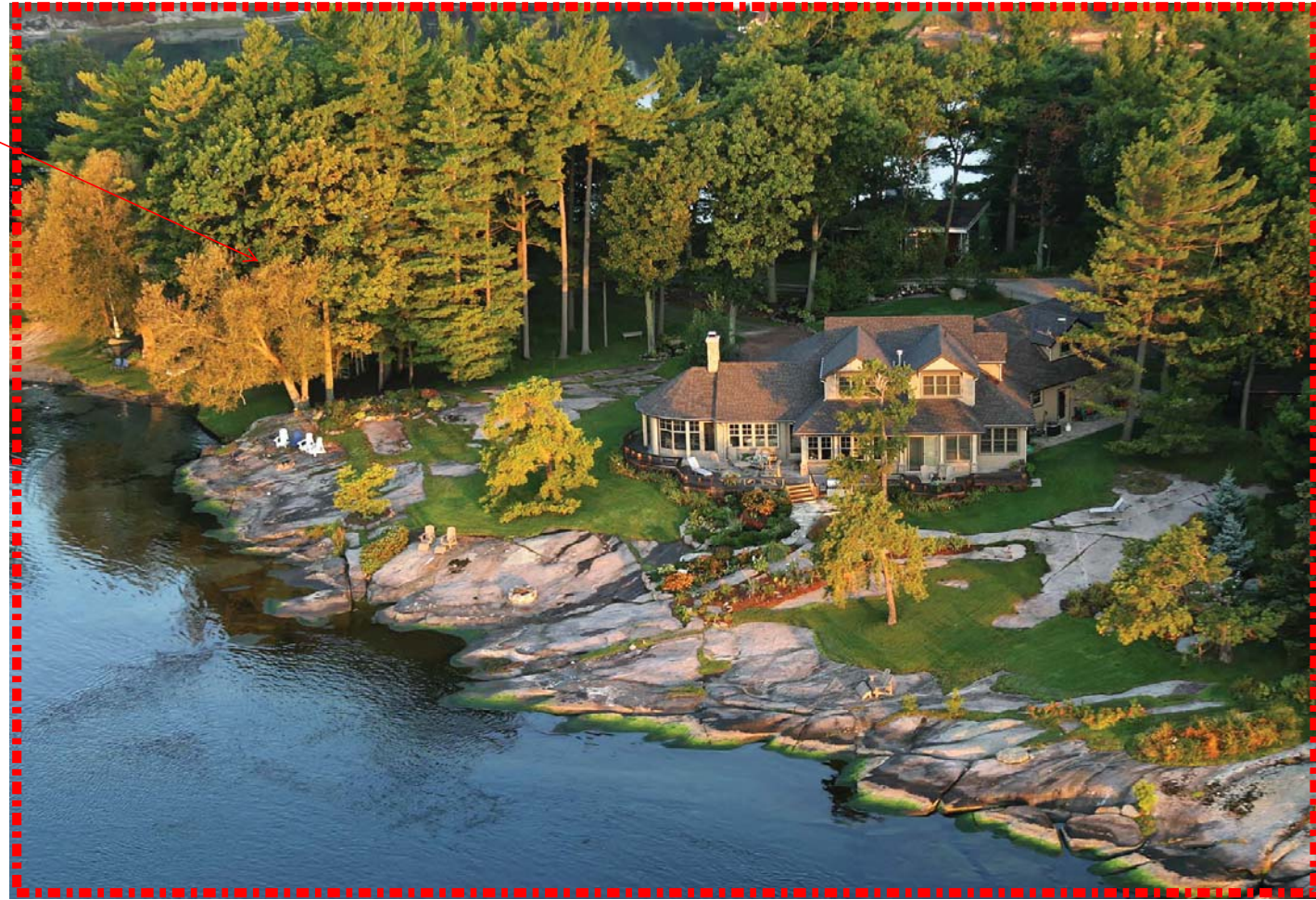
Down below us, islands carved from granite are scattered like jewels amidst the cerulean water. A mosaic of patterns are painted by the current, the reflection of the sky and the steep slopes dotted by pine and spruce. We have marched up a gravel road that climbs a hill overlooking Chippewa Bay in the eastern reaches of the 1000 Islands.

High above the waters of the St. Lawrence, the wind rustles through the trees and birds strike up a chorus. A rustic cottage fills one island, while a teal clapboard Victorian mansion with domered windows, a wraparound porch and a candlesnuffer roof is on another. Terra cotta-tiled turrets sprout from a stand of cedar on yet another—it's Singer Castle on Dark Island, a few miles upstream from Brockville, Ontario. It boasts an electrical plant designed by Thomas Edison, secret passageways, a nine-bedroom boathouse and a dungeon. It is like a bit of Europe snugged down in a river as full of history and boaters as it is full of surprises.

Anywhere else in the Great Lakes, a neo-Gothic castle would be an anachronism. Not in the 1000 Islands. This palace was built by Frederick Bourne, one-time president of the Singer Sewing Machine Co. and commodore of the New York Yacht Club. By no means is Singer Castle the only—or most famous—château in these parts. Boldt Castle, near Alexandria Bay, New York, sees more yearly visitors.

The islands are full of contrasts. One morning we see two kayakers sharing the water with a freighter 740 feet long beside a sailboat next to a mahogany runabout riding the wake of a great white tourboat. They float along within view of Boldt Castle, with its red conical roofs and stag-decorated stone gate. All on a river that stretches from Lake Ontario to the ocean 800 miles east.

"The islands themselves are the extremely ancient roots of mountains," says Don Ross, a Hill Island resident and author of *Discovering the Thousand Islands*. They form a geological



bridge that joins the Canadian Shield with the Adirondacks, and even the region's name falls considerably short of how many islands it holds. "We have closer to 1,800 islands here," says former tourism rep Suzanne Bixby. "And some we haven't even counted."

The official definition of an island here is anything with two trees that remains above water all year. We're out on the water on the *19th Hole*, a beautifully maintained Egg Harbor 33 with Bixby and Ron Mowers, who lives on Tennis Island. Bixby points toward a small isle near Boldt

Castle from the boat's flybridge. A cottage there has a 7-foot slab of granite for a front porch, and the foundations around back are actually in the river. Nearby is a single tree. "Doesn't qualify," Bixby says.

Delightful ports are scattered along the

(previous pages) In the late 1800s and early 1900s, many of the most successful tycoons from the post-Civil War industrial boom gravitated here, spending summers in Fantasyland. World War I ended the party, but many of the grand cottages, yacht houses and châteaux, such as Boldt Castle, remain, attesting to an unimaginable Gilded Age.

(left) Whenever weather permits, this is many islanders' "room" of choice for conversation, cocktails and meals with a view. The cottage serves as a last resort.

(above) The islands are actually the roots of ancient mountains, part of a geological fault known as the Frontenac Arch. Here at Fernbank in the Brockville Narrows, a cottage sits in harmony with its surroundings, perfectly placed to view the parade of ships passing just a few yards from shore.