

PALM BEACH COTTAGES & GARDENS

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Deconstructing Palm Beach

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DECONSTRUCTING PALM BEACH

BY LINDA MARX



FROM ITS ARCHITECTURE TO ITS PEOPLE, PALM BEACH IS BECOMING YOUNGER AND MORE ACCEPTING OF CHANGE AS NEW RESIDENTS ASSERT THEIR OWN TASTES

THE RICH, HISTORIC TRADITION OF owning a large Spanish Mediterranean home is alive and well on the 13-mile-long barrier island of Palm Beach. Only now, a new, younger crowd is moving in, rubbing elbows with the Old Guard. Like their predecessors, they are choosing Palm Beach for the right reasons: the beauty of the island, its strict preservation codes, its philanthropic opportunities and its accessibility to golf, tennis and boating. Most continue to believe that a home on Palm Beach Island remains an airtight investment in a limited-edition town.

“Part of what keeps Palm Beach so unique is its historical tradition,” says local architect Thomas Kirchoff. “The styles of Palm Beach’s most famed architects—John Volk, Addison Mizner, Marion Syms Wyeth and Maurice Fatio—are present everywhere. While certain aspects of the lifestyle here have evolved with changing trends and the influx of younger families with children, much of the island’s original charm and character are still intact.”

Still, the area, which attracts 30,000–50,000 additional residents during the winter season, has become a larger melting pot of diverse residents with an appetite for living that is quite different from the followers of oil baron Henry Flagler. He fell in love with the beauty of this pristine piece of land in 1890 and invited his friends to follow him down for the winter season.

These days, instead of Vanderbilts, Melons, Phipps and Carnegies (and later generations of families with marquee names such as Dodge, Ford, Firestone and Kimberly, who lived here on inherited wealth), Palm Beach now shares its coveted soil with super-achievers from all over the world—entrepreneurs who have made their money in Internet companies, manufacturing, land development, law and oil. They include Jim Clark of Netscape; entrepreneur-collector Bill Koch; Sydell Miller (co-founder with her late husband of a \$250 million personal products empire); art collector Beth DeWoody; designer Vera Wang; baseball Hall of Famer Jim Palmer; developer Llwyd Ecclestone; musician Jimmy Buffet; singer Rod Stewart; and Howard and Michelle Kessler, he of affinity credit card fame. And then there’s Donald Trump, who restored Mar-a-Lago, the erstwhile Marjorie Merriweather Post estate, into a private club that opened the once-closed Palm Beach club scene to all who can afford the \$150,000–\$175,000 joining fee and \$7,500 annual dues.

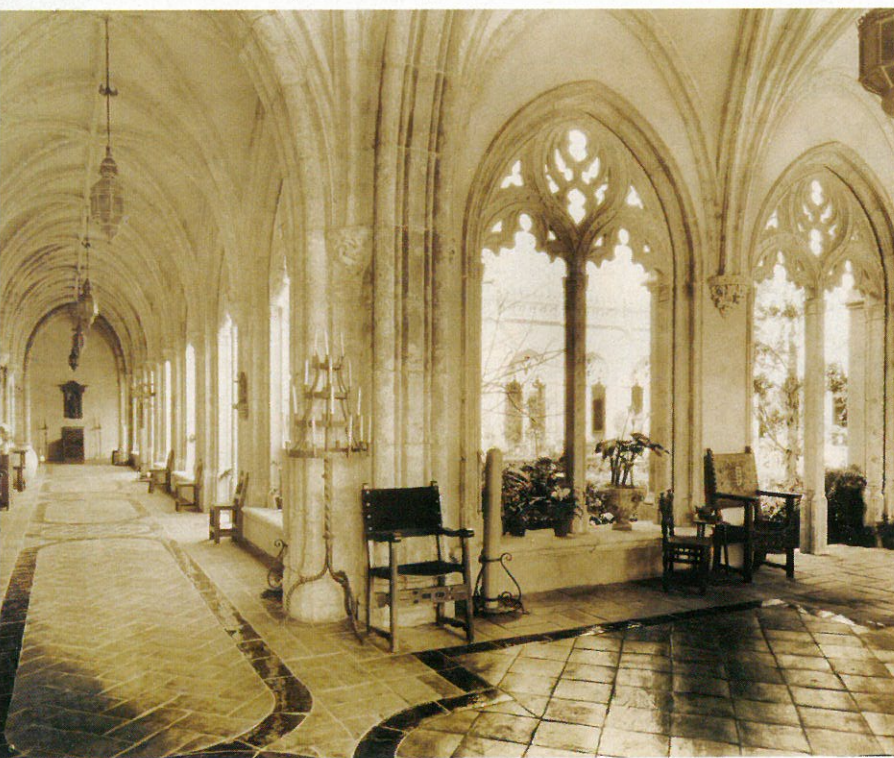
All have left their mark on today’s society. And they are specific about how they want to live.

The biggest clashes in Palm Beach society generally occur between denizens with established fortunes versus what they see as interlopers



72 | **Volk's Art** | A brick and tile tower is a signature of Palm Beach architect John Volk, who designed this Hispano-Moorish-style house (PREVIOUS SPREAD LEFT) in 1928. The home is now owned by Dudley L. Moore, an Atlanta insurance entrepreneur, and his wife Peggy. **Care Free** | Newer Palm Beach residents have been asking for less formal décor. Interior designer Lisa Erdmann created a family room (PREVIOUS SPREAD RIGHT) with pine furniture and a sisal rug for a casual feel. **Passing the Baton** | Originally built for Mrs. Edward Swanson in 1938 by Marion Sims Wyeth, the plantation-style mansion (TOP) was restored in the 1990s by Jeffrey Smith and is now home to Leonard and Evelyn Lauder. **Traditional Meets Modern** | Architect Thomas Kirchoff designs traditional spaces, such as those found in a Georgian Revival (ABOVE), along with more modern kitchens (OPPOSITE).





with new money. The disputes are often showcased in the arena of historic homes and real estate. In the past 10 years more than 100 historic structures have been demolished, according to published reports, because new owners want to rebuild to suit their own lifestyles.

In 2002, people worried about what would happen when Sydell Miller tore down a Neoclassical manse to build her nearly 40,000-square-foot, \$100 million home. But with architect Jeff Smith's design and Peter Marino's interiors, it turned out to be a stunner. Donald Trump was smart to hire architect Gene Lawrence to redesign the main house of the 11-bedroom, Euro-Regency, former Abe Gosman estate he bought to restore and sell. Four Winds, purchased for \$20.5 million three years ago by Stephen Schwarzman, co-founder of New York's Blackstone Group, was a 1930s relic of white wood siding and green shutters before it was razed to create a new and tasteful home, following the original design.

"People like Jim Clark, Bill Koch, his twin David Koch, who bought an old Mizner, Donald Trump with Mar-a-Lago and Dan Swanson, who developed the Phipps Estates, have done a great job with their homes and projects," says Palm Beach preservationist Bob Eigelberger, former Chairman of the Landmarks Preservation Commission. He sings the praises of Sydell Miller's home. "It's wonderful. Jeff Smith does quality work. And Four Winds will be magnificent, even though the landmark status is gone."

Eigelberger—who is married to Suzy Phipps and lives in her father's 1960s, Volk-designed home—and others who have lived in Palm Beach for more than 30 years see new people, especially on the island's north end, maximizing the house and minimizing the land. These new residents add on Mediterranean details such as arched windows, fake crown moldings and clay tile roofs. Preservationists cringe when they see rectangular Georgian homes being done on the cheap with dry wall on the interior.

"In some cases, there is no brick work, no cast-iron columns, no quality," observes Eigelberger, who did a masterful job of redesigning the landmarked Warden House into a condo development more than 20 years ago. "People pay so much for the ocean or lake today, and they want their houses *big* to make the most of their investments. There is a structure across the street that looks like a Howard Johnson's motor lodge."

Bruce Helander, a collage artist and former commissioner of the Architectural Review Commission (ARCOM), agrees. "A daily reminder at the Town Hall of our collective short-sightedness and greed is the original, preserved porch step where the town's charter was signed. A porch step—instead of a history-making vintage

PHOTOGRAPHS: THIS PAGE TOP, KIM SARGENT; BOTTOM, COURTESY HISTORICAL SOCIETY OF PALM BEACH COUNTY; OPPOSITE, KIM SARGENT

Art and Soul | More Palm Beach residents are incorporating edgy art into their interiors. A Franz Marc painting (TOP) presides over the living room of George and Frayda Lindemann's Southeast Asian-inspired home designed by New York architect Peter Marino. **Ghosts of Palm Beach** | Playa Riente (ABOVE) was designed in 1923 by Addison Mizner for Oklahoma oil king Joshua Cosden. The house was demolished in 1957 to make way for something newer. **Inspired Style** | Thomas Kirchoff designed a Mediterranean-style loggia (OPPOSITE) patterned after Mizner's architecture.



Paradise on Earth | The garden of Tom Quick (BELOW) includes water lilies and sea grape trees. Quick is the son of Leslie Quick, who formed the brokerage firm Quick & Reilly, which was sold to Fleet Financial. **All that Glitters** | Donald Trump's Mar-a-Lago Club (OPPOSITE TOP) was originally built for Marjorie Merrineather Post. **Go West** | Art collectors Marvin and Elayne Mordes turned a former dental supply warehouse in West Palm Beach into a sleek, modern residence (OPPOSITE BOTTOM).





house—is an unfortunate circumstance that we need to prevent from happening again. I am thankful that, at the end of the day, the history of this community’s built environment has not been completely lost.”

The interiors of Palm Beach homes are evolving. Younger homeowners are referencing upscale design magazines—not the taste of their mothers or grandmothers. They are collecting contemporary art, requesting state-of-the-art kitchens and media rooms and adopting a more casual (but still sophisticated) attitude about design.

Allison Paladino, a local interior designer, says she sees more sisal rugs than Orientals. “My clients are younger and want less formal interiors,” she explains. Perhaps because they themselves are less formal. “I have one client who gets off her private jet in shorts and flip-flops and tells me not to dress for meetings. I am tickled pink!”

Sleek plasma and flat screen TVs and huge movie screens with surround sound are changing interiors. “People want audio visual, lighting controls and numerous home computer locations,” says Bruce Bierman, a New York-based interior designer, who has been coming to Palm Beach since college. “Tastes are changing.”

Other recent symbols of change are apparent in West Palm Beach. The Norton Museum is winning new adherents by showing more contemporary art. Last year, two galleries specializing in contemporary art and emerging artists opened side by side on South Dixie Highway. Mulry Fine Art is operated by Fecia Mulry and Megan Mulry Huisinga. Next door, the eponymous Gavlak Gallery features currently hot artists Wade Guyton and Marilyn Minter. Both galleries are being supported by young, wealthy collectors from across the bridge.

As for the dark cloud formed by the Mark Foley scandal, it is only a temporary upset, according to many Palm Beach socialites. “This story will be history once the season begins,” argues a popular doyenne. “Palm Beach has weathered its share of bad behavior over the years. Besides, this stuff happened in Washington—not Palm Beach. We’ve got a busy season ahead and we won’t be looking back.”

Tastemaker John Loring has studied the changes taking place in Palm Beach. The design director of Tiffany & Co. wrote *Tiffany’s Palm Beach* (Harry N. Abrams) last year, a coffee table book illustrating Palm Beach homes and the people who dwell in them. He believes new Palm Beach residents are making a positive impact.

“Any old thing used to do in Palm Beach,” recalls Loring, who is convinced that the island town is now a more interesting place. “People here have modernized their homes and want beautiful, sophisticated interiors. Without the new houses and their inhabitants, I could never have written my book.” ☀