

QUEST



THE FANJULS AT ALFY'S HOUSE IN PALM BEACH

0 1 >

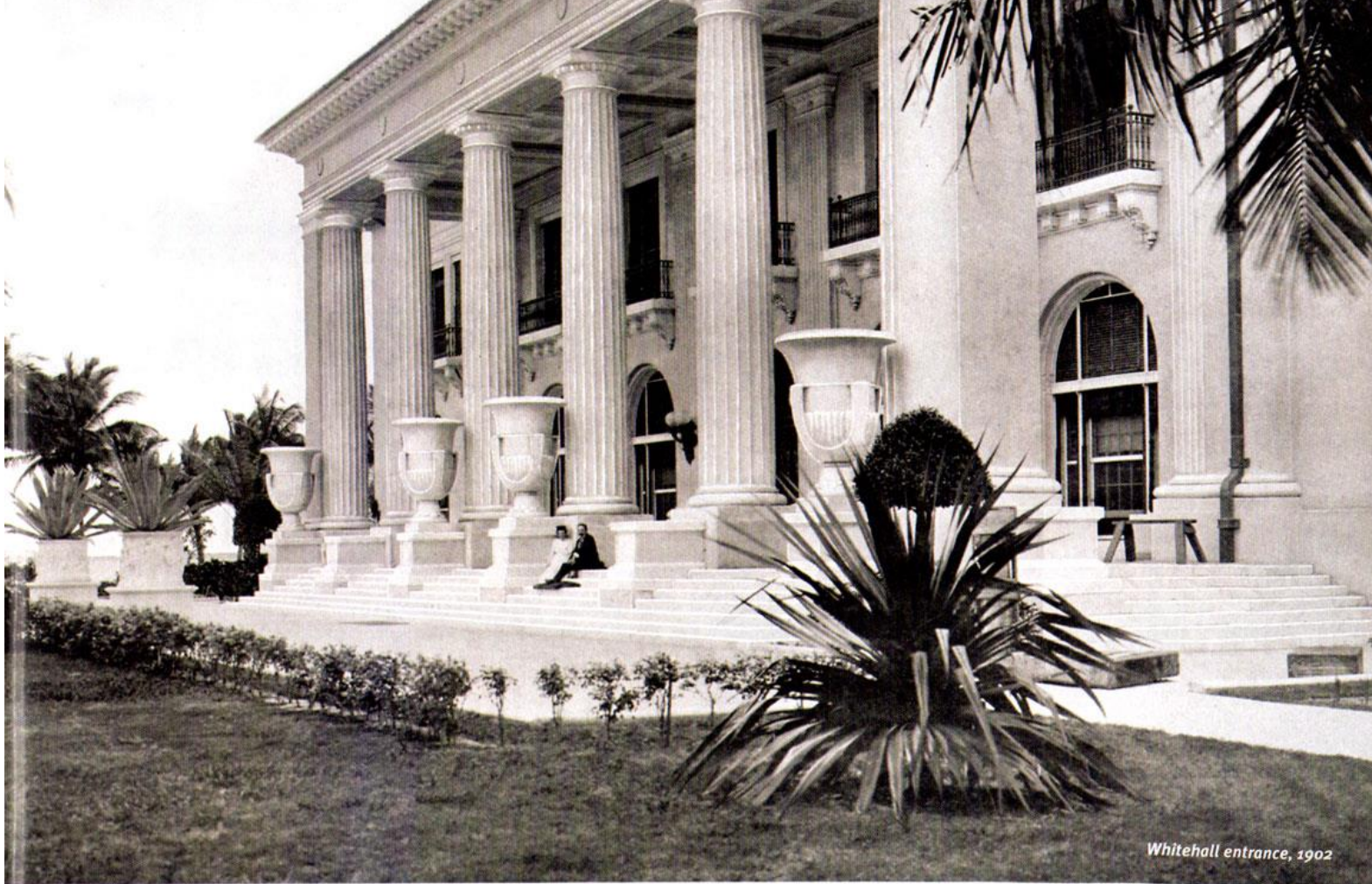


7 25274 89550 2

THE
PALM BEACH
ISSUE

THE
PALACES
OF
PALM BEACH

BY GARY LAWRENCE, AIA



Whitehall entrance, 1902

"IT ALL STARTED WITH A BUNCH of coconuts." When the *Providencia*, a ship on its way from Havana to Barcelona with a cargo of coconuts, ran aground here in 1878, early residents planted its payload on the beach. Those coconuts grew into the majestic palm trees that Palm Beach is known and named for.

If the coconuts were the seeds of Palm Beach's natural beauty, Henry Morrison Flagler, a northern industrialist, was the father of the island's manmade landscape. With the southward expansion of his railroad lines and hotel development, he built the Atlantic coast of Florida into a winter resort destination. In 1901, as a wedding present for his third wife, Mary Lily Kenan, Flagler constructed Whitehall, the first of many Palm Beach palaces that would follow and turn the area into a playground for the rich.

Within only a few years, future Palm Beach legends appeared on the scene. In 1918, Paris Singer, the sewing machine heir, met Addison Mizner, a down-on-his-luck architect, and hired him to design the Everglades Club on Worth Avenue. Eva Stotesbury, Palm Beach's undisputed social leader, was so impressed with the outcome that she hired Mizner to design her new home. The Stotesbury commission made him Palm Beach society's architect of choice, and a legend. Many other notable architects and designers followed, including Marion Sims Wyeth, Maurice Fatio, Howard Major, John Volk, and Joseph Urban, whose collaboration with Wyeth produced the Mar-a-Lago for Marjorie Merriweather Post.

Here are five homes that have made history in Palm Beach:

WHITEHALL The first official "Palace" of Palm Beach was designed by the prominent New York architects Carrere & Hastings in 1902. Built on Lake Worth, this fifty-five-room, 60,000-square-foot, white stucco mansion with two-story pillared entrance, is a Southern plantation married to a Newport marble cottage—Scarlett meets the Vanderbilts. While the exterior is all white and cool, the opulent interiors are an eclectic mix of European styles. Whitehall's heyday, however, was shortly lived when, in 1913, Flagler slipped down its marble stairway and died shortly thereafter at age eighty-three. In 1917, Whitehall became a hotel and stayed that way until 1959 when it faced possible demolition. Flagler's granddaughter, Jean Flagler Matthews, rescued it by forming the Henry Morrison Flagler Museum, which restored the home and opened it to the public.



Whitehall Music Room, 1902



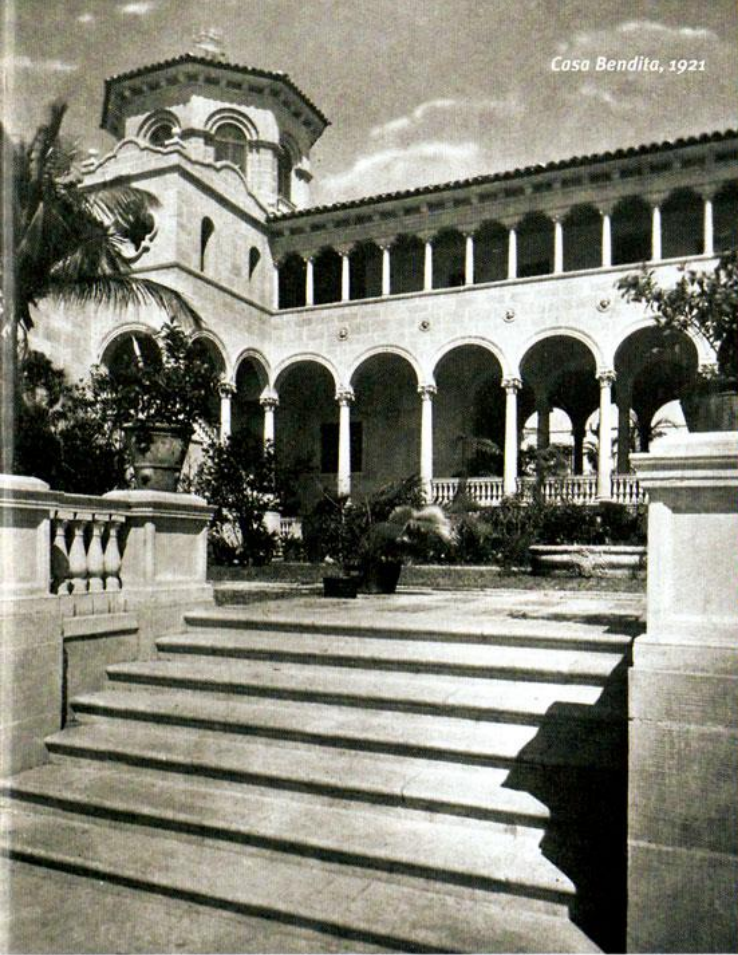
Playa Riente, 1923

EL MIRASOL “The Sunflower,” home of Edward Townsend Stotesbury and Eva Roberts Cromwell Stotesbury, was the epicenter of Palm Beach society. Eva, known for being a gracious hostess, was the chatelaine of two other palaces. When someone once commented on her gold bathroom fixtures, she responded that they were actually economical, since gold does not need polishing. The 1919 Mizner design for El Mirasol started out as a forty-room Spanish mission-style villa, modeled after a convent outside of Burgos, Spain, but was always being remodeled. A local story goes that Eva would add on to the house whenever another house in town strove to eclipse hers. The forty-two-acre estate on North County Road included a forty-car garage, a zoo, outside dining loggias, a garden court, and a spectacular ocean view. Thirteen years after Eva’s death, the house was demolished. All that’s left is the entrance gate and a few outdoor fountains.

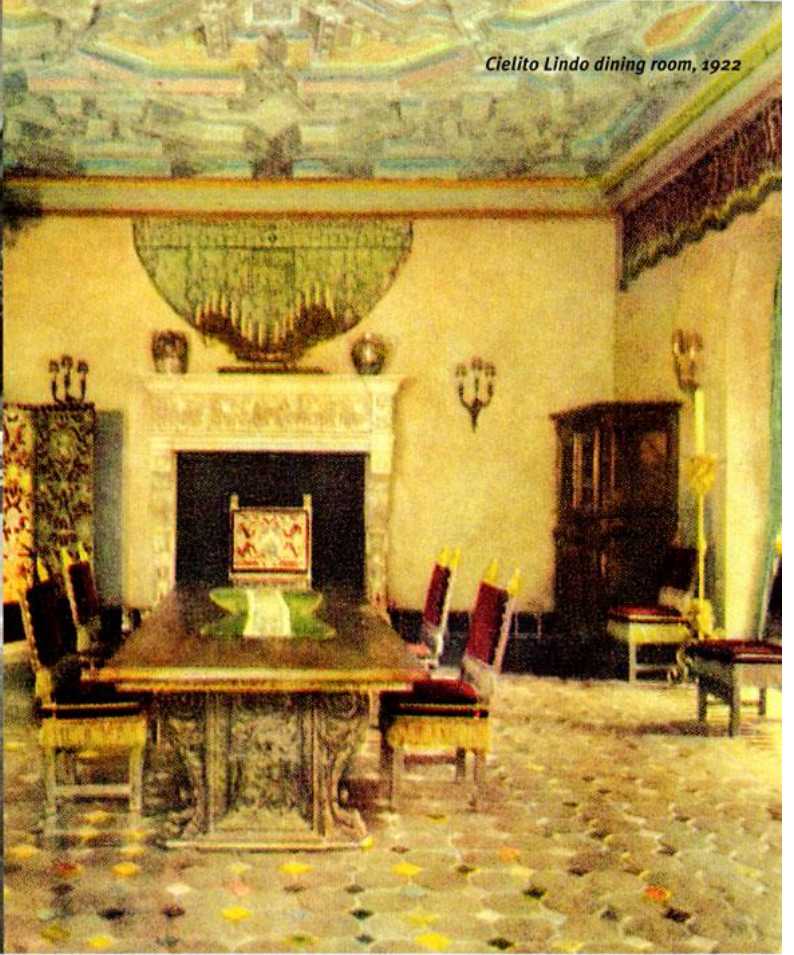
CASA BENDITA “Blessed House” was built in 1921 for John S. Phipps. The Phipps family, whose fortune was made in steel, was at one time one of the largest landowners in Palm Beach. With a four-story tower, long open colonnades, and two swimming pools, it was one of the showplaces in Palm Beach and locals often referred to it as “The Castle.” The North County Road palace was demolished in 1961, and a new house designed by prominent local architect Jeffrey Smith occupies the site today.



El Mirasol living room, 1919



Casa Bendita, 1921



Cielito Lindo dining room, 1922

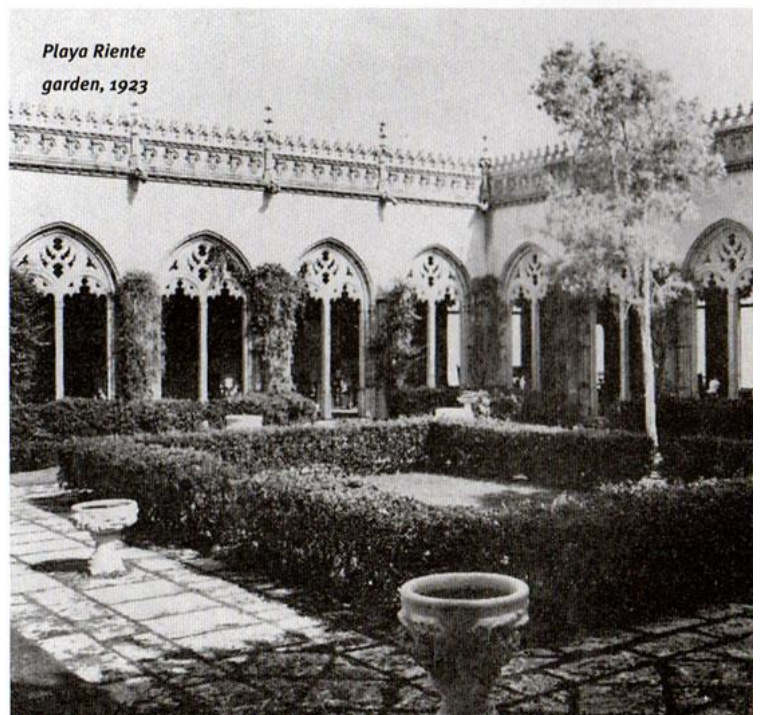
PLAYA RIENTE “Laughing Beach” was generally considered to be Mizner’s masterpiece. It was originally built in 1923 for Joshua S. Cosden, an Okalahoma oil millionaire, on twenty-seven ocean-front acres. In 1926, automobile titan Horace Dodge’s widow, Anna, bought the villa after marrying actor Hugh Dillman. They expanded the house and went on European spending sprees to fill the seventy rooms with rare treasures. The well-appointed house had an enormous gothic entrance hall, a music room with a dramatic set of Jose Sert murals. Anna was said to have claimed that Hugh taught her how to spend and enjoy her money.

By the mid-1950s, she decided to sell the estate, but could find no takers for it as a residence. After the city refused to allow her to sell it for nonresidential use, she auctioned the contents of the house and had the North Ocean Boulevard villa demolished, much to the disbelief of the community. New houses occupy the site and only the beach retaining wall remains today.

CIELITO LINDO (“A little bit of heaven”) Unlike Anna Dodge Dillman, who needed a little help spending her fortune, Jessie Woolworth Donahue was a natural at it. The daughter of F. W. Woolworth, Jessie inherited a mega fortune for her time. Jessie and her husband James P. Donahue owned a private railroad car, fleets of automobiles, jewels, furs, old masters on the walls. They also had a vast Fifth Avenue apartment, and a sixty-five-room Southampton mansion. Cielito Lindo, which they built on sixteen ocean-to-lake acres along South Ocean Boulevard, was a 45,000-square-foot Mediterranean Xanadu. Designed by Marion Sims Wyeth in 1927, it housed a sixty-foot living room and adjoining patio overlooking a palm-lined lawn. The house was elaborately decorated in various period styles.

But all of this magnificence was shattered in 1931 when James committed suicide. In 1948, Jessie sold the estate to developers, who partially demolished the house, splitting it in two, and subdivided what was left. Today, Kings Road goes directly through the former living room of Cielito Lindo.

The era of palace-building came to an end toward the late 1920s, but today a renewed interest in grand living means that many new palaces are being built by a new cast of architects and wealthy patrons, ensuring that Palm Beach is and might always be a “little bit of heaven.” ♦



Playa Riente garden, 1923