Marion Sims Wyeth 1889-1982

Marion Sims Wyeth was born in New York City, the son of a prominent surgeon and political activist. He graduated from Princeton in 1910, spent four years in Paris at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, and one year in Rome as secretary to the American Ambassador. When he arrived in Palm Beach in 1919, his first large commission was Good Samaritan Hospital in West Palm Beach, the first hospital in Palm Beach County. The twenty man firm designed most of the large downtown buildings in West Palm Beach, including the Sea Board Railroad Station. Commercial buildings in Palm Beach are the Murray Building, Palm Way Building, Old Daily News Building, Town Hall and Fire Station, and Palm Beach Stores, Inc., all located in Town Hall Square. There were only four Palm Beach residential buildings designed by the firm. When the building boom of the 20s ended, Harvey and Clarke was dispersed and the partnership dissolved in 1927.

Howard Major 1882-1974

Born in New York City, Major was educated in architecture at Pratt Institute and the New York atelier of Henry Hornbostel of the Society of Beaux-Arts Architects. After practicing for years in New York along the East Coast, he came to Palm Beach in 1925. Even though he executed several Spanish style designs for some of his clients, a 1934 newspaper article titled “New Era for Palm Beach” gave Major credit as a pioneer in popularizing British Colonial designs. Major Alley, a set of six apartments on Peruvian Avenue, was once the architect’s home and is an excellent example of his work in the British Colonial style.

Addison Mizner 1872-1933

Addison Cains Mizner, born in Benicia, California, traveled the world (Central American, Spain, Alaska, Hawaii, Australia, China) seeing its architecture before arriving in Palm Beach. Mizner apprenticed in the San Francisco office of architect Willis Pollk (1883-1896) and practiced architecture in New York City and Long Island from 1906 to 1917. Palm Springs and his designs Addison Mizner to Palm Beach in 1928. Composition of the Everglades Club the following year marked the beginning of Mizner’s influence with the prominent winter residents of Palm Beach. His success in adapting the Mediterranean Revival style to resort life brought a new era to South Florida.

John L. Volk 1901-1984

After working with the New York architectural firms of Friedlander and Knowlton, and Watkins and Volk, John L. Volk came to Key West in 1925 to design several office buildings. The economic dislocations caused by a hurricane in 1926, along with the collapse of land values, led to his relocation to Palm Beach. In Palm Beach, he formed a partnership from 1928 to 1935 with Gustav A. Maas. In 1939, he started his own firm. His early work was frequently in the Mediterranean Revival style, while later he helped popularize the British Colonial, Georgian, and Bermuda styles.

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Originally named the Lido Venice, the charming Mediterranean Revival hotel was designed as a European bed and breakfast where guests could enjoy a fully inclusive Palm Beach season in an intimate setting. The architectural authenticity of the hotel was not lost during Florida’s boom and bust growth periods. The most historically significant restoration was completed by John Volk in 1937 under the ownership of inventor Alwater Kent.

In 1954, the site for the Brazilian Court consisted of a few pre-existing bungalows. Rosario Candela was commissioned in 1925 to design the Brazilian Court. He designed a two-story complex of 136 apartments centered on a courtyard in the Mediterranean Revival style. In 1936, the architectural firm of Treanor and Fatio designed the south wing, adding a 49-room annex and penthouse suites on the third floor, extending the complex from Brazilian Avenue to Australian Avenue.

As Mizner’s first building in Palm Beach, the Everglades Club established the Mediterranean Revival style as the standard for the finest homes and clubs of Palm Beach. The building was conceived as a convalescent home for officers during World War I but ultimately became a private club. The Everglades Club features Venetian Gothic windows, Moorish lattice wooden balconies, and a copper derived from the Spanish missions of the American Southwest.

The two original Worth Avenue vias, Via Mizner and Via Parigi, were created as a shopping complex in the 1920s and built in the style of a Mediterranean village, complete with intriguing pedestrian vias, lushly planted courtyards and a colonnade of covered arches on Worth Avenue. Apartments occupy the upper floors of the complex with Mizner’s personal residence, Villa Mizner, located in the tower which dominates the north side of Worth Avenue.

The Hotel opened in 1947 and is considered to be the last grand resort built on the island. The 90-room boutique hotel has hosted numerous elite guests including the Duke and Duchess of Windsor, Frank Sinatra, John Lennon, and Presidents Ford, Clinton, H.W. Bush, and Bush. The Royal Room was one of the United States’ top cabaret supper clubs.

In 1929, the U.S. Government granted $80,000 to the Town for a new Post Office in exchange for the donation of land. By 1933, the Florida East Coast Railroad removed the tracks from Main Street and renamed it Royal Poinciana Way. The Company proposed the east end of the street as the new site for the Post Office. The original plans for the Post Office were completed by Mizner, however due to his untimely death, a scaled down version was completed by Louis Simon, the supervising architect for the Treasury Department. The privately-owned Post Office interiors contain murals by Charles Rosen that depict the early history of Palm Beach.

Originally featuring a Moorish façade designed by Marion Sims Wyeth, the First National Bank Building, a series of six buildings, evolved over time through alterations and additions by two contemporary architects. Maurice Fatio was the second architect to work on the building in 1927. John Volk designed the Neo-classical addition on the north side of the bank in 1937 and in 1955 replaced Wyeth’s Moorish façade with another Neo-classical temple front.

The Town Hall Square Historic District is the center of local government. Visually, the area remains as much as it did in the 1940s and 1950s. One, two, and three-story shops of varied architectural styles create a visually complex urban environment. Town Hall and Memorial Fountain center the district. Amongst the supporting structures framing Town Hall are the Old Daily News Building at 204 Brazilian Avenue and the Buckley Building at 363 South County Road.

The Poinciana Playhouse began as a development venture of the Phelps Family. In 1924, Addison Mizner was commissioned to design a series of shops and apartments on South County Road, known as The Plaza Building. The Plaza Building, where shops like Brooks Brothers and Bonwit Teller were located, became the anchor for Phelps Plaza. Uniquely built around an elliptical-shaped green space, rather than the usual linear or grid style, Phelps Plaza is an early example of urban design incorporating mixed-use of commercial and residential establishments. From its earliest days, Phelps Plaza has been the colonial for architects, designers, and art lovers, and is even today.

The Paramount Theatre was designed by Joseph Urban, known for his work at Mar-A-Lago and the Bath and Tennis Club in Palm Beach. He began his career as a theatre designer whose work included the Ziegfeld Theatre in New York. The theatre’s interior was once awash in greens, blues, and silver-toned silk murals and served as a popular location for movie premiers. At the height of its popularity, box office went for $3100 a season. Slated for demolition in 1960, the building was saved through an adaptive reuse project that converted much of the theatre into office space.

Bradley Park is four and a half acres of land on the north side of Royal Poinciana Way. The site originally held the world famous Beach Club run by Colonel E.R. Bradley which provided gambling opportunities for hotel guests starting in the 1900s. Upon his death in 1946, Bradley willed the land to the Town of Palm Beach. The first attempt to preserve the historic tea house was once a part of Bradley’s private residence, and the Ames Foster House has marked the northernmost entrance to the Town since December 1938.

Organized in 1936, the Society of the Four Arts commissioned Maurice Fatio to design a gallery space that same year. The O’Hagney Gallery, designed by Mizner in 1925, was purchased by the organization in 1947. Originally known as the Embassy Club, the structure was modified to accommodate galleries and an auditorium. Fatio’s building later became the King Library. The King Library’s lobby has murals illustrating the “four arts” of drama, visual arts, music, and literature. The nearby demonstration gardens were designed by the Garden Club of Palm Beach in 1936. The Deering Education building served as an addition to the Campus and once served as a school originally constructed in the 1920s by William Marly King.

The cast-stone church is the third reincarnation of Bethesda-by-the-Sea in Palm Beach. In 1922, James Townsend Russell envisioned a Gothic church surrounded by palm trees and flowers inspired by the Latin Cathedral in Spain. Clevelin Memorial Garden, located behind the church, was designed by Walter Thomas and reflects an Italian influence.

The Parish house is connected to the church by a cloistered walkway.