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*The Preservation
Foundation celebrates
40 YEARS*

PAULINE PITT

PRESERVING PALMBEACH

PAST PRESERVATION
FOUNDATION DINNER
DANCE CHAIRS FROM
LEFT: HILLIE MAHONEY,
KIT PANNILL, TALBOTT
MAXEY, DARLENE
JORDAN, KARIN LUTER

*As it approaches a significant
anniversary, the Preservation
Foundation of Palm Beach
renews its promise to preserve
and progress*

BY JUDY MARTEL | PHOTOGRAPHY BY NAVID

“*They’re tearing down history all over the country, and I think it’s important to preserve it for future generations. Children need to learn that they have a part in conserving the world.*”

—KIT PANNILL

On a sparkling afternoon in Palm Beach, a group of elegantly dressed women gathers in Bradley Park. They’ve come to the recently renovated space to have their photos taken and reminisce about the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach’s four decades of success in protecting and promoting the culture and architecture of the small town with a big history.

The 4.5-acre park at the base of the Flagler Memorial Bridge anchors the historic main street and was once the location of Colonel E.R. Bradley’s Beach Club and residence. The \$2.7 million beautification project, completed in 2017, will be the site of the foundation’s annual dinner dance in March to mark its fortieth anniversary.

The park abounds in local significance. A limestone fountain—donated by Mrs. Frederick E. Guest from her Palm Beach estate, Villa Artemis, in 1938—centers the space. A Gilded Age-era tea house partially frames the noted water feature, while a sweep of lawn invites wanderers with gravel paths that curve toward the Lake Trail. “I walk the Lake Trail every day,” says Karin Luter, who joined the foundation about five years ago because she was impressed by what the members of the nonprofit had accomplished. “Their vision tugged at my heartstrings.”

“Bradley Park is such a gift,” says Darlene Jordan, another of the relatively new members recruited by John Mashek, the organization’s late former chairman who served in the role for 27 years. Both Jordan and Luter agree that the park was in desperate need of renovation. “We’ve been in Palm Beach 20 years,” continues Jordan, “and I used to push my daughter in a stroller on the trail and never even thought of stopping here because it was just a little sad-looking and unkempt.” These days, she and her family often pause at the park when riding bikes or walking.

Given its location at the town’s entrance, the park is a prominent feature, says Jordan, adding that she was especially touched by the masses of American flags covering the park grounds to commemorate Veterans Day last fall. “My father was in the Army and my husband was in the Navy, and I can’t tell you how moved I was to see those flags.”

Today the island boasts a unique architectural amal-

gam, but the creation of Palm Beach as a perfect paradise more than a century ago was the mission of a single man, Florida developer and Standard Oil partner Henry Flagler. Over the years, as the town grew from a lush, semitropical seasonal resort centered on grand hotels for America’s aristocracy to a thriving year-round enclave, the architectural baton passed from one visionary to the next. The result is a distinctive legacy of design, including Beaux Arts symmetry, Mediterranean and Georgian Revival, Moorish flights of fancy, and American bungalow.

Fast-forward to the decades following the Roaring ’20s, when many of the town’s historic homes and buildings had been razed or languished in a state of neglect, including such prize properties as Flagler’s private residence, now the Flagler Museum, and Mar-a-Lago, home to cereal heiress and businesswoman Marjorie Merriweather Post, now a private club and residence of President Donald Trump. “Beginning in the 1950s, some of the vast homes that were built in the 1920s were considered white elephants because they were designed for formal entertaining, and families were more interested in smaller homes to accommodate the new technologies developed in the mid-century,” explains Pauline Pitt, chairman of the Preservation Foundation’s board of trustees. The organization was formed in 1980 with the mission of saving Palm Beach’s architectural legacy.

Bradley Park is just the latest of the Preservation Foundation’s accomplishments. Past projects include the restoration of the circa-1886 Sea Gull Cottage, the oldest existing residence on the island, as well as the creation of Pan’s Garden adjacent to its headquarters on Peruvian Avenue. A recent acquisition of 45,000 plans and 4,000 photos from the estate of architect John Volk, valued at more than \$1 million, has greatly enhanced the foundation’s extensive archives, which are currently being digitized. “From the 1920s to the 1980s, he was one of the most prolific architects,” says executive director Amanda Skier.

Pitt, who became friends with the legendary Volk and is a longtime member of the foundation, was approached about taking the helm after Mashek passed away in 2016.

OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM LEFT: PAULINE PITT, CHAIRMAN OF THE PRESERVATION FOUNDATION’S BOARD OF TRUSTEES; ELIZABETH SCHULER, TRUSTEE; HILARY GEARY ROSS, TRUSTEE.

Styling: Katherine Lande
Hair and makeup: Deborah Koepper, Deborah Koepper Beauty, Palm Beach





**LEFT: KARIN LUTER, DARLENE JORDAN
OPPOSITE PAGE:
HILLIE MAHONEY,
TALBOTT MAXEY,
KIT PANNILL**

the foundation's archives, which will be more readily available once digitized. But a quick tour around the historic main street, Royal Poinciana Way, reveals the domino effect of preservation efforts surrounding Bradley Park. To the south, the Volk-designed Royal Poinciana Plaza has undergone a renaissance with new shops and restaurants. To the east, the Frisbie Group and The Breakers Palm Beach have completed the new Via Flagler by The Breakers, a mixed-use development that includes Mizner-inspired vias and fountains. The former Bradley Park Hotel is scheduled to reopen this year as the White Elephant.

The idea of maintaining history as a crucial part of a town's identity is not lost on longtime residents like Kit Pannill, a foundation member of more than 30 years. "They're tearing down history all over the country, and I think it's important to preserve it for future generations," she says. "Children need to learn that they have a part in conserving the world."

As a member of The Garden Club of Palm Beach as well as the foundation, Pannill has played a dual role in the beautification of Bradley Park and notes that every year the garden club brings a group of schoolchildren to the park to plant a tree and learn about the importance of cultivating nature. Similarly, Hillie Mahoney, who says she's been a member of the foundation "since forever," has traveled around the world and noticed the decline in places that don't value preservation. The Palm Beach resident says she wants to maintain the island's culture because "everybody realizes it's paradise."

In addition to preserving historic properties, the foundation is continuing to expand its focus to include land, with the half-acre Pan's Garden presenting a microcosm of Florida's native, unspoiled beauty for more than 25 years. Open to the public, the garden showcases hundreds of thriving native species, some endangered, and none touched by pesticides or herbicides, says Skier. On a tour of the garden, she strolls along the pathways connecting areas representing Florida's upland terrain and wetlands. Small

A philanthropist and treasure trove of knowledge regarding the history of gracious living in Palm Beach, Pitt remembers when people dressed in black tie every night, even if they were dining at home. Her grandfather, Charles Munn, known as "Mr. Palm Beach," owned a 1920s home he named Amado (Spanish for "beloved") on North County Road, designed by the architect perhaps most synonymous

with the island: Addison Mizner. "I used to tear up a little when it was time to go home," Pitt says of childhood visits to the estate.

She adds that she views the foundation as both a guardian and an educator. Newcomers to Palm Beach get a sense of the importance of preservation with the highly publicized winners of the Polly Earl and Ballinger awards recognizing historic renovations and through



2018 PRESERVATION FOUNDATION
DINNER DANCE CO-CHAIR RAYSA
FANJUL AND TRUSTEE AUDREY
GRUSS IN FRONT OF THE VILLA
ARTEMIS FOUNTAIN

signs identify the flora, ranging from the prosaically named red oak and cabbage palm to the more exotic alligator flag, Southern frogfruit, and elephant's foot.

"The garden provides a habitat for pollinators," Skier says as she indicates a small red caterpillar hidden among the leaves that will transform into the native Atala butterfly. "They have black wings with blue spots and red bellies. They're just beautiful."

The garden is a somewhat hidden gem that nevertheless attracts a fair amount of attention ranging from Audubon Society groups to local residents looking for ideas on easy-to-maintain native landscaping. A charming statue of Pan, the Greek god of wild nature, guards the main entrance. Behind him is a colorful mosaic wall with tiles from Addison Mizner Industries that originally graced the Casa Apava estate. It's a popular backdrop for small weddings and other events.

As the foundation widens and adapts its reach and influence, Talbott Maxey, who joined the foundation nearly 20 years ago, envisions an even stronger role in preservation. "I'm most proud of the voice we have," she says. "We have evolved over the years, but we have a voice."

The respect the foundation has earned ensures a place at the table on discussions about any potential threats to the town's property, including weighing in on global issues such as the rising sea levels encroaching on oceanfront establishments up and down the coast. Pitt lives on the Lake Trail and has noticed a marked difference in the number of higher-than-usual tides, called king tides. Skier says the foundation is also working with the town on a new historic site survey to replace the last one from 2010.

Combining preservation and progress is no easy task, but Skier believes Palm Beach can rise to the challenge. "We want to accommodate change, while at the same time not lose Palm Beach's sense of charm," she says. "Preservation is about the management of change and seeing progress as another chapter of development within the context of the history of the town. Through public-private partnerships, the foundation is able to fulfill its mission of preserving the incredible beauty of Palm Beach." «

