

Preservation Foundation's Del Sol seeks joy



Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach CEO and President Danielle Del Sol said she first was introduced to historic preservation while working as a real estate and business reporter in Little Rock, Arkansas.

MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS

New CEO sees historic homes as habitable art

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Palm Beach Daily News
USA TODAY NETWORK

For Danielle Del Sol, preserving historic buildings isn't just about keeping a location stuck in time. It's about recycling historic structures that define a city and bringing joy to residents.

"A beautiful streetscape can evoke such joy and peace, and I think that's really important in the modern world," said Del Sol, the new president and CEO for the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach.

Del Sol, who started her new job Aug. 8, grew interested in preservation in the mid-2000s, when she worked as a real estate and business reporter in Little Rock, Arkansas.

During that time, she split her time covering small historic preservation projects, as well as large suburb developments outside of town. The differences couldn't be starker.

She found that while suburban developments destroyed natural land to create cookie-cutter, poor quality homes, preservationists were creating new living and commercial spaces out of the buildings that defined the local area.

"It's so smart in terms of the environment and economics," she said. "Here's a house that already exists, and no natural materials are being destroyed to create it; it's built with solid materials that have already lasted 100 years. If you keep them up, they'll last more."

Fueled by her newly discovered passion, Del Sol moved to New Orleans in 2010 and acquired a master's degree in preservation studies from Tulane University.

While at Tulane, Del Sol joined the Preservation Resource Center of New Orleans as an intern for its print magazine, *Preservation in Print*. From there, she steadily rose through the ranks, becoming the magazine's editor in 2014, before becoming the head of the center in 2018.

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At the center, much of Del Sol's efforts centered on "democratizing" preservation, and helping property owners rehabilitate and care for their historic buildings as a means of lifting low-income communities.

In Palm Beach, Del Sol faces a slew of new challenges.

Unlike Louisiana, Florida does not have a state preservation system that helps fund the repairs and rehabilitation of historic buildings, she noted. That's on top of the lengthy process landmarked property owners must undertake to renovate or repair their buildings, even when following best practices.

Historic properties in Palm Beach also are threatened by the explosion of development that's hit the county in recent years, she noted.

But Palm Beach has worked to address these concerns, and Del Sol commends the town's recent effort to streamline the application process for those renovations.

"Those are great, and we love to support the town in any way we can, to help with preservation policies," she said. "But it's definitely a steeper climb here."

To address these challenges, Del Sol said the Preservation Foundation will try to educate Palm Beachers about the benefits of owning a historic home and provide advice and information for residents rehabilitating landmarked properties.

Part of that push is reemphasizing not only a landmark home's historic value, but its value as piece of habitable art, Del Sol said. She compared owning a historic home to owning a work from Claude Monet.

"When you purchase one of those buildings, you become a steward of a very important piece of art," she said.

Del Sol also noted that landmarked homes can become valuable economic assets, noting the work of renowned economist Donovan D. Rypkema which presented that those buildings often sell at a value



While the town has the financial means to support historic development, Danielle Del Sol said the lack of support for landmark homes means residents often shy away from landmarking their historic buildings. MEGHAN MCCARTHY/PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS

over 10% higher than non-landmarked buildings.

The new leadership position serves as a return to Palm Beach County for Del Sol. Though she spent most of her youth in South Carolina, she was born in Wellington and traveled regularly to South Florida to visit family.

It was during those trips that Del Sol would first see the Spanish Colonial and Mediterranean Revival architectural style that she says continues to be her favorite.

"The Addison Mizner vias are so fun and whimsical and have such joy in them," she said, citing the emotional power of architecture. "A beautiful streetscape can evoke such joy and peace, and I think that's important in the modern world, and so, I just think there is an inherent element of joy in his architecture."