

Coral Gables news

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Villagers Holiday House Tour attracts record ticket sales

BY KAREN F. BUCHSBAUM

Hundreds of eager participants braved cloudy skies and showers while touring five unique historic Coral Gables homes during the 28th annual Villagers Holiday House Tour. This year's theme "Timeless Relevance" generated record-breaking ticket sales of more than 1,000.

Guests were guided through the homes by members of The Villagers, an all-volunteer not-for-profit group dedicated to raising funds for the restoration and preservation of historic sites in Miami-Dade County. The organization is recognizing its 50th anniversary with the catchphrase "50 Years of Saving Places."

The pairing of old and new worked flawlessly in the renovated Old Spanish home of José Valdes-Fauli and Shed Boren. The 1927 meticulously updated home blends an impressive art collection with Art Deco antiques and mid-century classics.

Oolitic limestone and coral rock excavated from what would become the Venetian Pool was used to construct the 1936 charming showpiece designed by architect E. Dean Parmalee as his own residence. Currently unoccupied, the cottage setting proved to be an ideal spot for guests to enjoy delicious homemade treats and a holiday gift boutique.

Country Club Prado was the location of another 1927 jewel. Restored with a passion by Susana and Juan Carlos Menendez, the home is designated an historic property. A general contractor by profession, Juan Carlos and Susana worked closely together selecting every detail of the one-year project. One nod to modernization is the beautiful crafted, 1920s-inspired dream kitchen, complete with beer-on-tap.

New York designer Kristen Swenson followed her sister to George Merrick's iconic Chinese Village. The purchase was the first for this property in the past 50 years. The Chinese Village is one of seven thematic villages planned by Merrick. The house was designed in 1926 by Yale-educated architect Henry Killam Murphy who was a scholar of Oriental architectural traditions. Visitors particularly enjoyed a glimpse inside this rare jewel.

The third house built in Coral Gables was a Vernacular coral rock home designed by architect H. George Fink. Also constructed with rock quarried from the Venetian Pool site, the home



Pictured during the Villagers' Holiday House Tour are (l-r) Rafael and Mary Arias, Villager Carola Bravo, and Hilary and Baldo Pellicer.

features high ceilings, porches and transom windowed interior doors to take advantage of prevailing breezes in the days before air conditioning.

Currently for sale and ready for updating, the home provided a good perspective of a 1920s home not yet renovated and with its significant architectural features intact. Black and white photos of the home's original construction were an added bonus.

Villager president Patricia Mederos and board members worked with House Tour co-chairs Renee Betancourt, Monica Fidel, and Laura Mullane as well as committee members Desiree Anthony, Martha Apolo, Gloria Villa, Sweet Pea Ellman, Alexis Ehrenhaft, Kathy Marlin, and Bonnie Hutton to make the event a success.

The next Villager events are the Historic Hunt on Saturday, Feb. 6, and the annual Garden Tour on Saturday, Mar. 5.

The Villagers were founded in 1966 and have contributed more than a million dollars in support of the preservation of local historic sites as well as scholarships to students pursuing careers in architectural preservation. For more information about The Villagers, upcoming events,

and/or membership options, visit <www.thevillagersinc.org>.



Local historian and author Arva Moore Parks McCabe (left) is pictured with Villager Sheila Revell.