

# Coral Gables news

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## The Villagers' Historic House Tour explores George Fink's architecture

BY KAREN F. BUCHSBAUM

Hundreds of history lovers enjoyed a picture-perfect day as they toured five unique and historic Coral Gables properties during the Villagers' annual House Tour.

This year's themed tour, "Finding Fink," invited participants to fall in love again with the original architecture of Coral Gables.

Carefully curated by Villager Brett Gillis, "Finding Fink" was an architectural journey featuring the work of Coral Gables visionary architect George.

A first cousin of Coral Gables founder George Merrick, Fink was part of the original Coral Gables design team and instrumental in implementing the Old Spanish and, later, Riviera and Mediterranean designs for which Coral Gables is known. His architectural work spanned six decades and includes modern designs.

"George Fink has not been given enough credit," Gillis said. "He was Coral Gables' official architect,

but few residents even know his name. Mr. Fink designed more homes and structures than any other architect in Coral Gables and was personally recognized by the King of Spain for his work."

Fink's own "Casa Azul," with its namesake blue tile roof, was Fink's family home and a starting point on the Villagers member-guided, tour. Completed in 1922, "Casa Azul" was one of the first homes constructed in Coral Gables and combines Arts and Crafts and Mission Revival elements.

The beauty of Old Spain was the inspiration for Fink's early designs. As Coral Gables grew so did the imagination of its architects, and Fink developed a style he named "Riviera type" or "Mediterranean." Often mistakenly identified as Mediterranean Revival, it was, in fact an original creation incorporating Spanish, Moorish and Italian architecture with modern building techniques.

A visit to Ferdinand Street, which was once a showcase for Fink-designed two-story model homes, included a stop at the street's first home built in 1923. Visitors stepped back in time to a beautifully restored "Castle in Spain" residence named "Alma," Spanish for soul. With easement sashes slung open, natural light and tropical breezes filled the home.

Tour-goers were also treated to a rare look inside Fink's original architectural studio on Ponce de Leon Boulevard. Recently purchased by the City of Coral Gables, the studio retains one of the few intact commercial 1920s interiors in the city and is considered by experts to be the best example of the Mediterranean style in Coral Gables.

A special guest at the tour was Elaine Fink Schumacher, the granddaughter of George Fink, who said, "I know that my grandfather would be honored that The Villagers have chosen several of his homes and his office to be showcased in their 2016 Annual House Tour. I would personally like to thank the City of Coral Gables for their decision this year to purchase and preserve the office that he designed and furnished in 1926."

The modern home on display was constructed in 1941, and traced Fink's progression into the Machine Age. Very functional and peaceful,



Curator and Villager member Brett Gillis and Villager president Mary E. Burke review some of the many details involved in this year's tour.



A popular part of the tour is the annual gift boutique featuring "Attic Treasures" overseen by Villager Sweet Pea Ellman (left). Sherry Jordan (right) coordinated the creation and sale of special angel ornaments commemorating The Villagers' 50th anniversary.

the home was recently renovated from pillar to post and features well-maintained Floridian accents and an Art Deco fireplace.

"We should all know more about George Fink because he really was a creative force behind the look that has stood the test of time and made Coral Gables the incredibly beautiful, unique place we love today," said Villagers president Mary E. Burke.

The only non-Fink designed home on the tour was called "The Eden Isle." The 1925 Old Spanish was restored faithfully by Villager Joanne Meagher and her husband over the past decade and beautifully decorated for Christmas. To the delight of guests, it was the perfect setting for chanteuse Kimona, pianist Elliot Sneider, and several Villagers dressed as "Fink's Follies."

President Mary E. Burke and Villagers board members worked with House Tour co-chairs, Brett Gillis, Monica Fidel, Nicole Lebon-Scagnelli and Loyda Lewis, as well as committee members Desiree Anthony, Martha Apollo, Sweet Pea Ellman, Alexis Ehrenhaft, Kathy Marlin and Bonnie Hutton to make the event a success.

The next Villagers event is the annual Garden Tour on Saturday, March 4, 2017.

For more information about The Villagers, upcoming events, and/or membership options, visit [thevillagersinc.org](http://thevillagersinc.org).