



THE FRENCH COUNTRY HOUSE OF LEE
SCHRAGER AND DR. RICARDO RESTREPO

HISTORIC HOMES

THAT MAKE THE CITY BEAUTIFUL



A GLIMPSE INTO THE VILLAGERS' ANNUAL HOUSE TOUR

BY KAREN F. BUCHSBAUM

The Villagers, a nonprofit which supports preservation efforts county-wide, recently held its annual House Tour in Coral Gables. This signature fundraiser – the 37th House Tour in the organization’s 56-year history – allows participants to enter private historic homes.

From formal to playful, December’s Holiday House Tour showcased five “Gables Gems from the Roaring 20s.” Hundreds of local history lovers supported the cause of historic preservation while experiencing an insider’s peek into homes built from 1924 to 1928. Villager House Tour Co-Chairs Marlin Ebbert and Sweet Pea Ellman put together a tour that included three homes from George Merrick’s iconic thematic Villages. Villager members were on-hand to explain the unique details and history of each home. What follows are four of those five homes.

The Villagers began in 1966 when a group of dedicated preservationists organized to prevent Douglas Entrance from being bulldozed for a supermarket. From work on that project, to preserving the fountain at the Biltmore, to painting the fence around the Venetian Pool (their members are

not afraid to pitch in), The Villagers have fought to identify significant local historic properties for preservation and recognition by the National Register of Historic Places.

To date, more than 80 local sites and organizations have received Villager support, both with elbow grease and grants to organizations that help protect crumbling properties. In 1972, The Villagers helped create the Dade Heritage Trust to expand the reach and scope of preservation county-wide. They funded and worked on the Trust’s first project surveying historic area resources, identifying more than 875 sites. The group has also been a leader in funding Florida-based university scholarships, with annual grants to architectural students who focus on historic preservation.

The Villagers is the area’s longest-standing preservation organization. The all-volunteer group has no paid staff or office. Monthly meetings are held in many of the sites they helped restore and members can take advantage of specially curated historic day tours throughout South Florida. For details about how to join and help, visit thevillagersinc.org.

A FRENCH COUNTRY HOUSE

Residence of Lee Schrager and Dr. Ricardo Restrepo



The home of Lee Schrager and Dr. Ricardo Restrepo appropriately pays homage to their love of entertaining. Dr. Restrepo is the Chief of Pediatric Interventional Radiology at Nicklaus Children's Hospital and Schrager is the force behind the world-famous South Beach Food and Wine Festival. Their extensive patios and grounds provide a variety of settings, including a Tuscan-inspired pool area, covered patios, and courtyards. The theme of plates and cutlery inset on some of the walkways is carried forward to a colorful dining area also embedded with plates. Another tip of the hat to Schrager's culinary background was the array of sparkling food and wine ornaments on his Christmas tree.

The home reflects their collection of mid-century furniture and many items from their travels around the world. Of special note is the contemporary photography collection they have been building together for years.

The most entertaining room on the tour was their TV room. Designed around an enormous photograph of a ventriloquist's dummy ("Talking Heads" by Matthew Rolston), the décor plays off the red in the painting, pulling in other red accents through pillows, a vintage Coca-Cola dispenser, and a Superman figurine, topped off by a dramatic red ceiling.



TOP LEFT: TWO STONE CARVED DOGS GUARD THE FRONT DOOR
TOP: ENTERTAINMENT ROOM
ABOVE LEFT: SITTING AREA OFF THE LIVING ROOM
ABOVE RIGHT: MASTER BEDROOM

Photos: Jon Braeley

A DUTCH SOUTH AFRICAN HOME

Residence of Roxana Bruno and Seamus Lamb



Recent arrivals from New York, homeowners Roxana Bruno and Seamus Lamb are renovating one of the five homes in Coral Gables' Dutch South African Village Historic District. The couple wanted a historic home for their young family, and when they saw one become available in the Dutch Village, they jumped at the chance. "We are thrilled. This is one of our favorite Villages," said Bruno. "We want to preserve as much as possible."

Their work began with essential basics, such as a new roof and work on the pool. The home was designed by prominent Palm Beach architect Marion Sims Wyeth (who also designed the Governor's mansion in Tallahassee) and is one of four in a compound that shares a common exterior wall.

The distinctive exterior flourishes with circular chimneys, flat white surfaces, walled gardens, steeply pitched roofs, high domed arches, and scrollwork, which is carried through to the indoor stairs with detail on the newel post finial. Double Dutch doors lead into and out of the kitchen, a further nod to the farmhouse style of the original design.

"With historic homes the more you live in it, the more you learn how to use it," Bruno explained.



TOP LEFT: ENTRANCE HALL AND STAIRCASE DETAIL
TOP: REAR OF THE HOME FROM THE SWIMMING POOL
ABOVE: LIVING ROOM WITH BEAMED HIGH CEILING

Photos: Tiege Dolly

A FRENCH COUNTRY HOUSE

Residence of Liz Muraro



The turreted French Country home of Liz Muraro looks like it popped off the pages of a fairytale. A former resident of the French City Historic Village, Muraro – who “fell in love with French architecture” during her travels – bought the chateau-style home in 1997. The moment you pass beyond the quilted front door with its gargoyle knocker you know you are in a special place. Muraro has a diverse art collection, many with images featuring women and others with automotive themes. The entrance of this home is a surprise, tucked away behind wrought iron gates at what should be the back of the house.

Many of Muraro’s pieces were either purchased or inspired by her trips abroad, like the butterfly display cabinet she uses to store linens, and a distinctive copper and brass lighting fixture from Denmark that graces her garden room. A final touch of whimsy was spotted on the way out – a bright red British phone booth. During a trip to London, she heard someone had bought a stock and shipped them to the U.S. for sale. After buying it and taking years to put it together, it first graced the room of her growing son and now holds center stage in an attractive outdoor courtyard.



TOP LEFT: RICHLY DETAILED TURRETED ENTRANCE
TOP: SITTING ROOM IN WARM HUES AND BLUE FABRICS
ABOVE: A DIVERSE ART COLLECTION IS ON DISPLAY

Photos: Tiege Dolly

A MEDITERRANEAN REVIVAL

Residence of Kristine Wenzel and Roark Young



One of the homes was a Mediterranean Revival residence that is a fine example of how historic homes can be graciously expanded. Despite additions over the years, homes can keep their unique design elements and preserve their history, as evident in the luxurious home of Kristine Wenzel and Roark Young. Even though the home has now grown to more than 6,000-square-feet, the beautiful wrought ironwork seen throughout has been retained. Original stair banisters, interior balconies, and sconces all remain, but the stars of the show are the commanding gates leading into the formal dining room.

Wenzel can trace her family history back to their arrival on the Mayflower and keeps a portrait of an early American ancestor in her office. She loves to collect, and her home provides a wonderful backdrop to creatively display her eclectic art collection featuring Russian icons, glass paperweights, and silver. Her diverse artwork ranges from pieces by multidisciplinary artist Susan Campbell to impressionistic work by Cuban artists and includes contemporary artist Jack Amoroso, a founder of the Coconut Grove Arts Festival, and Purvis Young, a now famous, self-taught, contemporary-urban artist from Overtown. ■



TOP LEFT: ORIGINAL METALWORK AND SCONCES REMAIN
TOP: PERIOD FIREPLACE IN THE LIVING ROOM
ABOVE: THE OWNERS' ART COLLECTION IS ON DISPLAY
THROUGHOUT THE HOME

Photos: Karen Buchsbaum