March 2019 Key West Home Tours™

Our final Home Tour for this season will be held on March 15 and 16, 10 am to 4 pm, and it promises be one of our best tours—ever!

The March Tour pairs art and architecture as perfectly as Champagne and caviar. Mostly concentrated in the Casa Marina District, it may take both days to savor the museum-like art and decor and to visually take in the stunning houses and compounds.

A few highlights …

**South Street:** Whimsical sculptures add to the landscaping and gardens in this 11,202-square-foot lot. Equally mesmerizing is the art and décor inside the large, single-story home—easily enough room to double as a museum.

**Johnson Street:** A crisp contemporary house built in 2015. Travertine patios, glass walls and spacious rooms boast intriguing art objects.

**Laird Street:** An exotic mix of art and architecture, antiques and artifacts, which don’t fit into any mold.

**Von Phister Street:** An artistic compound indoors and out. While not all the buildings are open to tourgoers, the central courtyard alone affords hours of viewing pleasure.

**White Street:** Swimming pool and sculpture garden centers the primary residence and guest house that were rebuilt and redesigned in the late 1980s.

**Gardens Hotel:** The fabulous Peggy Mills home-turned-hotel is the bonus sixth property on the tour.

Go to www.keywesthometours.org for more information and tickets.
Key West’s Oldest House Newsletter
March 2019

The Porter Family in Key West

The Oldest House now has several interesting museum items relating to the Porter family who were a prominent naval family stationed in Key West for several years during the early 1800’s.

The latest addition to our collection of historic photographs came from the Porter County Public Library, located in Indiana from where the Porter family originated. The library kindly loaned an original color negative of Commodore David Porter who spent much of his naval career down in Key West and the Caribbean, fighting the scourge of pirates who terrorized shipping in this area during the early to mid-nineteenth century. Below is a print from the original negative of David Porter in full dress naval uniform, holding a ceremonial sword.

In addition to this handsome portrait, we also unearthed an amazing 5-part color negative of Commodore David Porter’s flagship, aptly named “USS Seagull”. The following inscription on the photograph provides some detail of the ship:

USS SEAGULL 1823-1840
First Steam-powered Warship in the US Navy, and Flagship of Commodore David Porter’s West Indies “MOSQUITO” Fleet. This famous paddle steamer was based on the Island of Key West and used exclusively in suppressing Piracy.

Follow Us On The Web

In addition to the information posted on our websites and included in each newsletter, we also use social media to disseminate historic preservation-related news, fun facts, press releases, photos of historic Key West places, and other items of interest to the community.

We have a variety of pages and feeds you can follow:

Websites
www.OIRF.org
www.KeyWestHomeTours.org
www.TheGardenattheOldestHouse.org
www.OldestHouseMuseum.org

Facebook: www.facebook.com/OldestHouseandGardensKeyWest/

Twitter: www.twitter.com/KeyWestHomeTour

Pinterest: Oldest House and Gardens Key West

Become an OIRF Supporter
Help Us Achieve Our Goals

Old Island Restoration Foundation is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization founded in 1960 and dedicated to preserving and promoting the architecture and cultural heritage of Key West. Through private donations and memberships from individuals, business, and public agencies the Foundation is working to raise funds to preserve and maintain the Oldest House in south Florida, provide innovative programming, and provide grants for significant and worthy historical restoration projects in Key West. There are three ways you can help.

Become a Member - Support us with an annual membership and enjoy membership benefits.

Cash Donation – Your donation will be used to maintain the Oldest House and further historic preservation in Key West.

Volunteer – Your time and talent can be utilized in a variety of ways. Become a docent at the Oldest House Museum on Duval Street and tell the story of Captain Watlington and his family who lived in the house in the 1800s. It’s a great opportunity to meet and talk with visitors from all parts of the world.

We welcome your participation! For more information about becoming a member or donating go to oirf.org/join.
OIRF’s Garden Lecture Series

Key West Architecture, Presented by Snow Philip on January 31

Snow’s lecture drew an audience of over 100 on a perfect evening for an outdoor lecture. The following is a brief synopsis of the Snow’s lecture:

Key West’s Historic District is small, but contains a remarkably diverse collection of architecture styles. The word “architecture” is derived from two classical Greek words: archi meaning chief and tekton which means builder or craftsman.

It makes sense then that our most noted architecture is Greek or Classical Revival, a type of structure based on ancient Greek ideas of what makes a building functional as well as attractive. Most of us can visualize the Parthenon which has crowned Athens’ Acropolis for nearly two and a half thousand years: a flat foundation plinth, vertical columns which hold up the roof, a roof that is pitched, and ends in triangular pediments at each end of the building. The symmetry of this temple when copied in a smaller wooden house in a hot climate lends itself brilliantly to facilitating airflow; and pre-air conditioning, the people who lived here needed air flow in their homes and businesses.

When people first came to our fair island in the early 1820’s and for decades following that landfall, Key Westers built houses that echoed that iconic Greek temple. These houses were modeled on homes in the east coast seaports of the USA: Boston, Newport, Charleston, cities from which droves of Key Westers emigrated. Our houses are built of Dade County pine, a dense and resinous pine whose nasty taste repels termites. The builders for the most part were carpenters who built houses as they would build wooden ships - that is without using metal which would rust and cause a wooden ship to fall apart. Instead they used expert joinery such as mortice and tenon, wooden doweling, and dovetailing. That hundreds of these houses are still here, many of them over a hundred years old, testifies to the wisdom and skill of these builders. I’ve been told that this absence of metal allows these houses to give just a little bit in hurricanes. Thus Dade County pine and ship building techniques marry nicely to thwart termites and windstorms – the two major threats to wooden houses in the tropics.

Across the southern United States from sea to shining sea, the major influence of early buildings came from Spain. In spite of Key West’s early settlers having come from Cuba, there is remarkably little Spanish architecture here. Porches built out over the façade of a building and supported by struts are typical of thousands of structures in Spanish Galicia; we have a few such porches or verandahs here. The San Carlos Institute’s façade with its curvy lines is typical of much Spanish colonial architecture; and the wonderful brick building, formerly a bank, at the corner of Duval and Front Street is reminiscent of Moorish-influenced buildings in Cordova and Granada.

We have William Kerr, Irish born, Boston educated by Henry Hobson Richardson, to thank for our wonderful Custom House at the foot of Whitehead Street. This is a rare brick building in Key West - nearly a million bricks – and its Richardsonian Romanesque style makes it unique, The Romans added the arch to architecture borrowed from the Greeks, and our Custom House has plenty of arches. Kerr also designed other public brick buildings in Key West, among them Old City Hall on Greene Street.

In the early Twentieth Century, Key Westers branched out to build grand houses like the Curry Mansion and what we now call The Southernmost House. They are what we call American Queen Anne style with their complicated roof lines and curved porches. Later came what is now the Pegasus Hotel with its Art Deco pilasters and other non-structural elements adding visual interest to its otherwise dreary facade.

Are you a member of OIRF?

Through private donations and memberships from individuals, business, and public agencies we are working to raise funds to preserve and maintain the Oldest House in south Florida, provide innovative programming, and provide grants for significant and worthy historical restoration projects in Key West. You can help us make it happen here: www.oirf.org/join
Bahama Village Photograph Exhibition

Bahama Village Photo Documentation

This project was conceived, sponsored, and financed by Old Island Restoration Foundation (OIRF), and will revive the 1999 photo exhibition after 20 years in obscurity.

The photographs in this exhibit depict many of the old and unrestored houses in Key West. Some are still lived in by descendants of the original settlers from the Bahamas in the 1800’s.

The photo team purposefully avoided photographing new restorations or “gentrified” homes in order to give the viewer a feel for the historic structures and their continued place in the history of Key West.

The address and dates or origin are approximate.

Photographers: Thomas Butler, Richard Weatherwax and Scott Wilcox

Creative/Art Director: Dick Moody

The AIPP (Art in Public Places) and OIRF Boards are collaborating to coordinate a public reception to view photos taken of homes in the Bahama village neighborhood during the early nineties. The theme is a “Village with a Voice” and the tentative date for the event is June 1, 2019 at 5:00pm at the Frederick Douglass Gymnasium. We intend to invite the City Commission, the surviving photographers and their families and the entire community to this reception. We have asked the Bahama Village Music program to provide entertainment for the event, and have coordinated a short program that will include the Bahama Village African Dance Troop, homeowners of the homes in the photographs that will give a short history of their neighborhood as well as speakers from the Village Voice and the Sacred Circle of Elders. We are currently coordinating the filming of some short interviews by local residents courtesy of the students in the KWHS AV Program that will play during the reception as well. This will truly be a great day of celebration.

Our Tropical Garden:
The perfect setting for your special event

Key West’s Oldest House Museum and Garden offers the perfect setting for your memorable event, whether it is a grand, lavish affair or a perfect private ceremony. This secluded paradise is ideal for weddings, vow renewals and commitment ceremonies; birthdays and anniversaries; and special events for organizations and companies.

A private setting in the heart of historic Old Town, our garden can accommodate an elegant and extravagant event or a small intimate occasion. We can serve up to 120 seated diners or 300 for a cocktail party.

The facility includes our large garden with lawn, brick pathways, pavilion, clean modern restrooms, and magnificent mature tropical foliage. Tables, chairs and linens are available. For more information call 305.294.9501, e-mail admin@oirf.org or go to www.TheGardenAtTheOldestHouse.org.

OIRF 2019 –20 Key West Home Tours™

Many of our Home Tour patrons ask us about our dates for next season so they can make their vacation plans. Here are the dates for our 60th season:

60th Key West Home Tours™ 2019-20 Season

December 27-28, 2019, 3 - 6 pm
January 17-18, 2020, 3- 6 pm
February 14-15, 2020, 10 am - 4 pm
March 13-14, 2020, 10 am - 4 pm