

Preserving old Florida at Palm Isle Village

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HOLMES BEACH — Developer Pat McConnell held a completion ceremony last week for Palm Isle Village, one of the most unique developments on the Island.

The project is unique because McConnell, along with his designer, Emily Anne Smith, did something no other developer on the Island has done. He took 11 run-down, old Florida beach cottages, located in the 3200 block of Gulf Drive, and renovated them into bright, colorful new beach cottages, not only keeping the cottages one story and ground level, but enhancing the old Florida style.

"I tried very hard to be a good citizen and maintain the character of the Island to provide something people can live in that's affordable," McConnell said.

Smith, who said she is an incurable historicist, noted, "I believe design is best when rooted in history. Traditional forms and elements create the historic allusion, preserving cultural heritage — creating a bridge across time.

"My design approach to the facades of these structures was to create a nostalgic melody using the architectural details and elements of the past as the musical noted which create the melody."

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SUN PHOTO/PAT COPELAND

The colorful and lushly-landscaped units at Palm Tree Village are completely furnished from the books on the shelves to the towels in the cupboards.

Mayor Rich Bohnenberger, who cut the ribbon on the project exclaimed, "This is remarkable. It's the best development I've ever set foot in."

The vision

McConnell, a third generation Floridian, said his family moved to Lakeland when he was 3 years old and came to Anna Maria Island in the summers.

"I was gone for seven years and when I came back, I saw what had happened," he explained. "I had come to realize that Floridians would not be able to own Gulffront property unless they already owned it."

He said he knew that the value is in the land and reasoned that if he spread the cost between two families and used an existing structure, he could make it affordable.

"I love the informality of the Island and I didn't want to lose that and only have billionaires be able to live here," he said. "I wanted to make something that's first class and available to people."

According to the city's code, McConnell said he could have built six to seven two-story units on stilts, but he was committed to preserving the character and uniqueness

of the Island.

The 11 units of the village include five duplexes and one freestanding house. The colorful exteriors of pink, blue, green, yellow and orange bring vibrancy to the once drab area and lush landscaping surrounds the units.

Each unit is completely furnished from the books on the shelves to the towels to the pots and pans. The art on the walls is all by Florida artists, some signed and numbered, and the books are family-friendly.

"They can walk in here with a toothbrush and groceries and start living," McConnell pointed out.

Each unit has a view of the beach, either from the inside, the outside or from one of the charming widow's walks perched on the roofs of the units. Private gardens complete with chairs, lounges, tables and heaters open onto the common pool area.

"We had hoped that our buyers would be people who wanted to be here full time," McConnell noted. "But we found that some want a cash flow from renting the unit part time so they can help pay for it, so we started a rental program."

Prices range from \$970,00 for the stand-alone unit to \$899,000 to \$629,000 for the duplex units. Island Real Estate is handling the sales.



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The view from one of the widow's walks shows visitors at the completion ceremony mingling around the common pool area.