

301 Ridgeview Drive



DESIGNATION REPORT

January 22, 2025

Landmark Preservation Commission

Palm Beach, Florida

DESIGNATION REPORT

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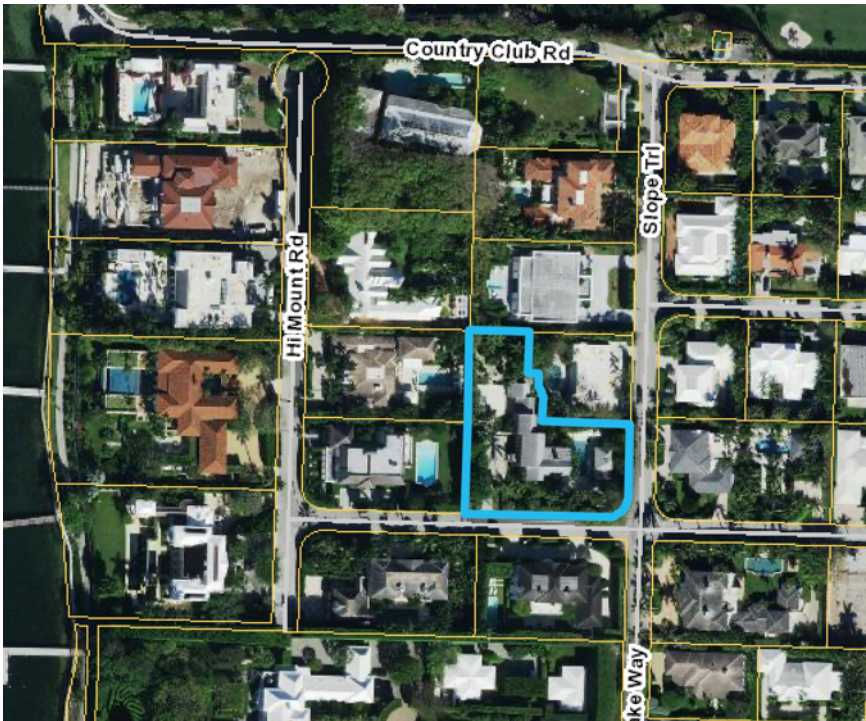
Report produced by Murphy Stillings, LLC

I. General Information

Location:	301 Ridgeview Drive Palm Beach, Florida
Date of Construction:	1936
First Owner:	Guernsey Curran, Jr.
Current Owner:	Donald Carmichael Residuary Trust #1, Anne P. Carmichael, and David Strong, Trustee
Architect:	Wyeth & King
Builder:	Benjamin Hoffman
Present Use:	Residential
Present Zoning:	R-B
Palm Beach County Tax Folio Number:	50-43-43-10-04-000-1130
Current Legal Description:	Mark Rafalsky Tract Lot 113 & Lot 116 (Less Nly 100 Ft of Ely 117 Ft As In Or5176p1982)

II. Location Map

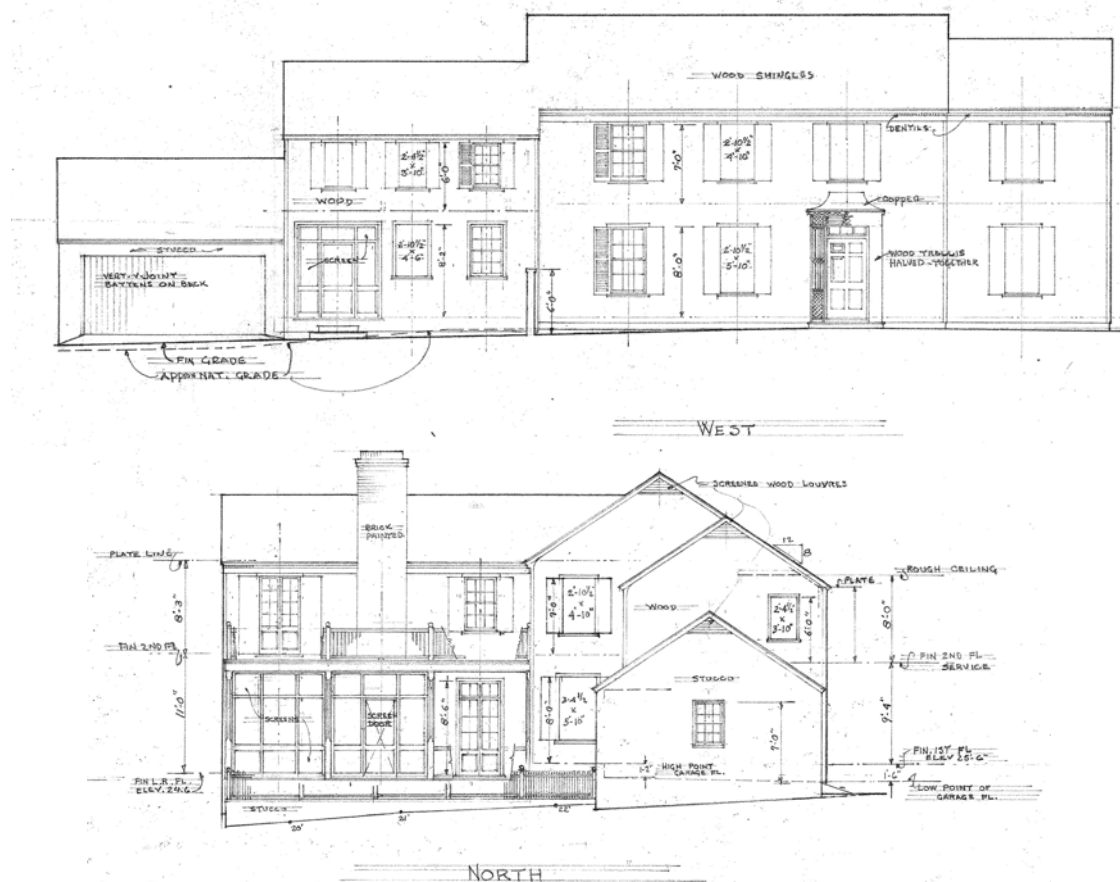
301 Ridgeview Drive



III. Architectural Information

The two-story residence located at 301 Ridgeview Drive in Palm Beach's north end was designed in the Colonial Revival style in 1936 by the prominent Palm Beach architectural firm of Wyeth and King and built by contractor Benjamin Hoffman on the northwest corner of Ridgeview Drive and Slope Trail.¹

301 Ridgeview Drive has an L-shaped form and is sited with its main façade facing west, perpendicular to Ridgeview Drive. The home was constructed of wood framing originally surfaced with wood board-and-batten and clapboard siding with multiple gable roofs surfaced with cypress wood shingles. Wyeth's design included dentil fascia at the roof line, a decorative wood trellis and copper roofed entrance portico with a paneled wood door, symmetrical fenestration with six-over-six sash windows, an attached stucco finished garage, a screened servant's entrance porch on the west facade, a painted brick chimney and loggia on the north façade, and a bay window on the east facade.



Wyeth & King, 1936

Courtesy of the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, Wyeth Archives

¹ Town of Palm Beach Building Permit # 7536 dated May 7, 1936.



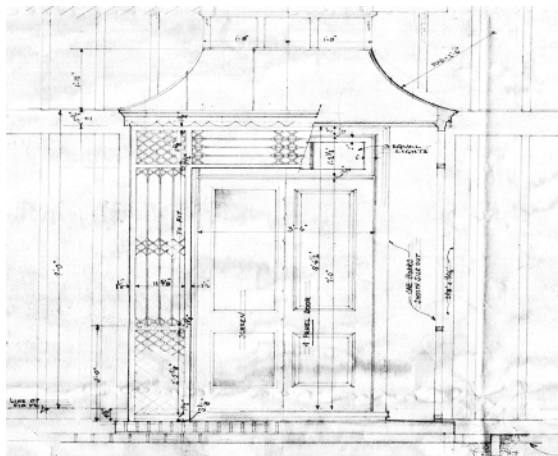
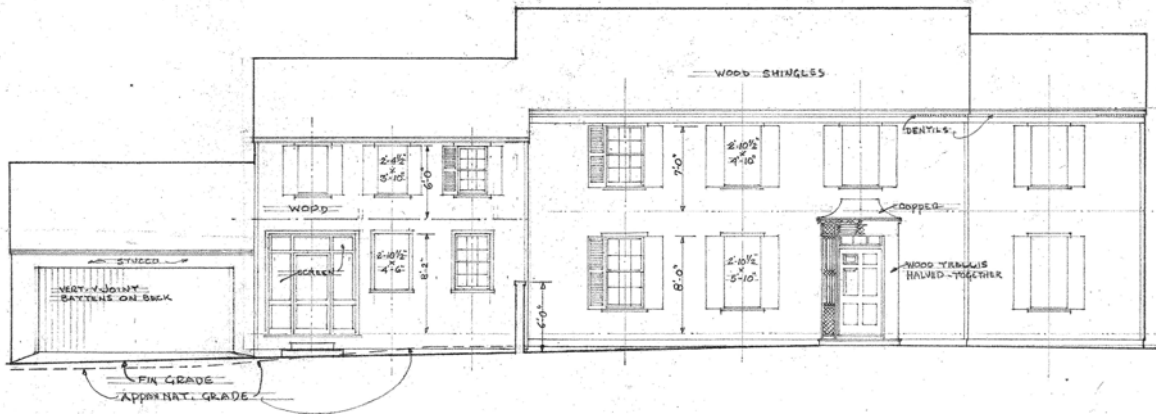
Since its construction in 1936, there have been alterations and additions to the home that have had an impact on Wyeth's original design. The most significant change was the addition of brick as the surface material for most of the exterior walls. While there is still board-and batten siding located on the north façade's second floor, brick was installed over the siding to the majority of the home at an unknown date.²



Photo Showing Existing Board-and-Batten Siding and Brick
Provided by Anne Carmichael

² No building permit information was found in the Town's records for the resurfacing of the structure with brick. The first mention of brick being a material used for exterior walls in a 1956 building permit for a porch and bay window addition. The current property owner's representative has provided photographic evidence of board-and batten siding located behind the existing exterior brick façade. This confirms that the board-and batten siding shown in the 1936 drawings was the home's original exterior material.

Other significant changes to the main façade are the replacement of the original entrance portico with a flat roof supported by pairs of round columns, the enclosure of the servant's porch which had been located to the south of the original garage, and modifications to the window openings located south of the servant's porch.



Detail of Original Entrance Portico



Current Entrance Portico



Detail of Original Servant's Porch & Windows



Current View of Area of Servant's Porch

Drawings Courtesy of Preservation Foundation & Photographs Courtesy of Anne Carmichael

Additional alterations and additions to the structure include the change of roofing material from wood shingles to asphalt shingles, a small addition to the south façade, rear additions that altered the original loggia, and a one car garage addition located to the north of the original garage. Changes to the site include the construction of a pool and a cabana structure to the east of the residence, hardscape changes, and the addition of new entrance columns.



IV. Historical Information

The residence at 301 Ridgeview Drive was built in 1936 during the Depression/New Deal Era of the mid-1930s. Palm Beach had established itself as a leading American resort and its development continued but without some of the magnificent excesses of the earlier era.³ The Depression/New Deal Era in Palm Beach saw a change in the development of the island. The largely undeveloped north end of Palm Beach saw the creation of new subdivisions and the end of the Boom Time Era had signaled architectural changes in the residences being constructed, with many owners seeking simpler residences in classic designs rather than the ornate Mediterranean Revival style estates popular during the 1920s. A November 22, 1936 *Palm Beach Post* article describes these changing times in Palm Beach,

³ Polly Anne Earl, Palm Beach Architecture: An Architectural Legacy, New York: Rizzoli International Publications, p. 18.

“Majority of homes now being erected are of moderate sized type; showplaces are now things of former years.

With nearly 60 new residences as a permanent addition to the winter colony, Palm Beach passes into the third season of its third architectural era. For through a few spasmodic instances of the Colonial motif had been noted over a period of several years, it was not until the summer of 1934 that the definite trend away from the Spanish became an accepted fact. As construction has steadily mounted in 1934, 1935 and 1936, the white of the Colonial and the classic has replaced the pastels of the Spanish: simplicity of line and design has succeeded the elaborate.

In brief, Palm Beach houses are becoming homes rather than showplace. The current cycle of architectural fashion has replaced the Spanish, just as after 1918 Addison Mizner’s palatial designs took the place of the early, bleak and barn-like structures of the pioneer era.”

301 Ridgeview Drive was designed by the architectural firm of Wyeth and King for Guernsey Curran Jr. and his wife Florence. The Curran’s were from New York and Mr. Curran’s parents had been wintering in Palm Beach since 1900. The Curran’s named the residence at 301 Ridgeview Drive “Hillbrooke” and owned the property until 1956, a couple of years after Florence’s passing in 1954. John and Virginia Paul purchased the property from Guernsey Curran Jr. and owned it until 1980 when it was sold to Richard and Gabrielle Bromley. The Bromley’s owned the property until it was purchased by Donald Carmichael in 1984 and it is currently held by the Donald Carmichael Residuary Trust #1.

V. Architects and Builder’s Biographies

Architects - Wyeth and King

Marion Sims Wyeth

Marion Sims Wyeth was as one of Palm Beach’s foremost architects in a career that spanned over fifty years. Wyeth was noted for his "quiet, subdued and rational" interpretations of both the Spanish and Italian styles. With Addison Mizner, Maurice Fatio, Joseph Urban and John Volk, he is credited with creating the "Palm Beach Style".

Wyeth was born in 1889 in New York, a son of Florence Nightingale Sims and Dr. John Allan Wyeth. Dr. Wyeth was a Civil War poet, surgical pioneer, and founder of New York's Polyclinic Hospital, the first postgraduate medical school in the United States. Marion’s grandfather, Dr. James Marion Sims, founded the field of gynecology and the first woman’s hospital in history. Marion Sims Wyeth began his architectural studies at Princeton University and completed his classic training at

the École des Beaux-Arts in Paris in 1914. At the time, the École was considered the one of the finest schools in the world. It was a style of education based on studying the classics, mostly Roman architecture. After completing school, Wyeth served as secretary to the U.S. Ambassador in Rome. Upon his return to New York, Wyeth became associated with the architectural offices of Bertram Grosvenor Goodhue and later with Carrere and Hastings, the firm that designed Whitehall for Henry Flagler.

Arriving in Palm Beach at the age of 30, Wyeth met with immediate success. From 1920, Wyeth shared a New York office with Frederic Rhinelander King, a friend from his student days in Paris, until 1934 when they formalized the relationship with the Wyeth and King partnership. William Royster Johnson joined Wyeth's Palm Beach office as a draftsman in 1924. In 1944 he became a partner and the firm name changed to Wyeth, King, and Johnson. Over the years, the firm designed buildings ranging from Mediterranean Revival to classical Georgian, French, and Colonial styles.

The socially popular Wyeth was a prolific craftsman and more than 100 of his designs have graced the Island, including eight built on El Brillo Way. Some of his well-known Palm Beach designs include Qui Si Sana, Casa Juanita, Hogarcito, Casa de Los Arcos, Vita Serena, Southwood, and the Betheseda by the Sea rectory. His largest and most impressive project was Cielito Lindo, a 45,000-square-foot Spanish Moorish-Revival-style mansion built for James Donohue and Jessie Woolworth Donohue in 1927. In 1946-1947, it was sold to developers, who split the property and created five houses. And while Joseph Urban is credited with Mar-a-Lago, Wyeth's association with the project was essential for its original design and completion. Wyeth also had an impressive list of prominent works outside of Palm Beach. Some of these include Good Samaritan Hospital and the Norton Gallery of Art in West Palm Beach, the Governor's Mansion in Tallahassee, and Doris Duke's Shangri La in Honolulu.

Wyeth served as a trustee of the Society of the Four Arts (1936-1969) and as its president (1956-1961). He became the first Palm Beach architect to be elected a fellow of the American Institute of Architecture in 1954 and received the Test of Time Award from its Palm Beach Chapter in 1981. Marion Sims Wyeth passed away in 1982 at the age of 93.

Frederic Rhinelander King

Frederic Rhinelander King was born in New York City on April 13, 1887. He was educated at St. George's School in Newport, Rhode Island and received a cum laude AB degree from Harvard in 1908. He studied architecture at Columbia University

from 1908 to 1911, and at the École des Beaux Artes in Paris from 1911 to 1914, where he befriended Marion Sims Wyeth. King worked as a draftsman and designer for McKim, Mead & White in New York City from 1914 to 1917. He worked for Marion Sims Wyeth in Wyeth's New York office from 1920 – 1934. King applied for Florida Architectural licensure on March 24, 1933 and was granted Certificate #AR0000977 on June 17, 1933. In 1934, the Wyeth & King partnership was formed, with King running the New York office at 18 East 48th Street and Wyeth running the Palm Beach office. Frederic King rarely came to Palm Beach, except on vacation. Quite social and civic-minded, Frederic fulfilled his side of the partnership by designing significant church and institutional buildings in the New York area, while “feeding” client contacts to the Palm Beach office for their clients’ winter home mansion designs. Frederic King was very active in the American Institute of Architects in the New York area and was named a Fellow (FAIA) for his design excellence. Frederic King was Edith Wharton’s cousin and the executor of her American estate. He passed away in March of 1972.

Builder

Benjamin F. Hoffman

Benjamin F. Hoffman was born in 1875 in the District of Columbia and worked there before moving to Palm Beach in ca. 1917.⁴ Prior to moving to Palm Beach and setting up his business, Hoffman had spent time in Palm Beach visiting with his family.⁵ He lived and worked in Palm Beach as a building contractor for nearly thirty years before passing away in 1947. During these years, Hoffman was a prominent and sought-after contractor working with Palm Beach’s best architects, including but not limited to Addison Mizner, Marion Sims Wyeth, and Bruce Kitchell, as well as constructing buildings of his own design.⁶ Hoffman’s business was bustling during the 1920s building boom when he was hired by many of Palm Beach’s wealthy and prominent residents to construct, alter or add to their properties. One of his first big Palm Beach commissions was Casa de Ensuenos at 800 South County Road for Arthur Claflin at a cost of \$65,000. This was one of Mizner’s elaborate designs in 1923, the year the scale and splendor of Mizner’s designs raised Palm Beach’s architectural profile to greater grandeur.⁷

⁴ Benjamin F. Hoffman is listed in the 1918 Palm Beach City Directory and likely moved to Palm Beach in 1917.

⁵ A November 12, 1916, Palm Beach Post article stated that Benjamin Hoffman and his mother of Washington, DC were spending the winter in Palm Beach.

⁶ A May 10, 1922, Palm Beach Post article lists other dwellings that Hoffman likely designed and built: Benjamin F. Hoffman builder residence 16’ x 25’ on lots 164 & 165 Floral Park \$4000; Benjamin F. Hoffman builder residence 44 x 24 on half of lot 15 and all of lot 16 Bungalow Park, \$8000.

⁷ Palm Beach Daily News, January 21, 2020.

VI. Statement of Significance

301 Ridgeview Drive is a stately Colonial Revival style residence in the north end of Palm Beach that was designed by the prominent Palm Beach architectural firm Wyeth and King and built by well-regarded contractor Benjamin Hoffman in 1936. This was a time of changing architectural styles and development in the north end of the Town.

However, due to alterations made to the structure over the years, the home does not retain its architectural integrity and therefore does not currently convey its historic significance. It is possible that if the home was renovated and character defining features of the original design were reintroduced that the residence may in the future meet criteria for landmark designation.

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