

Villa Dei Fiori

163 Seminole Avenue



DESIGNATION REPORT

February 17, 2023

Landmark Preservation Commission

Palm Beach, Florida

DESIGNATION REPORT

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163 Seminole Avenue**

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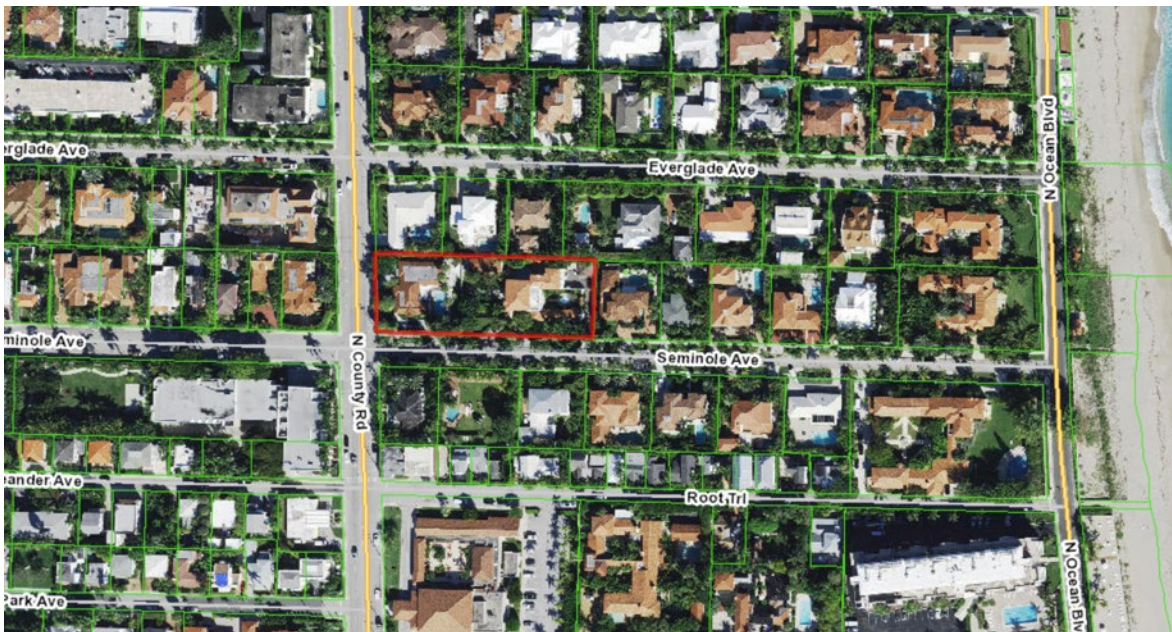
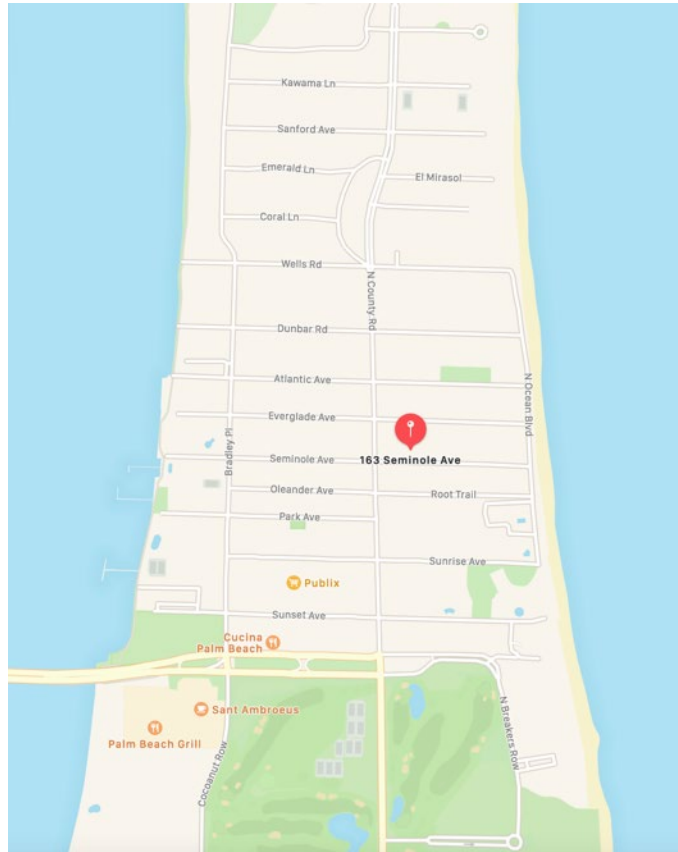
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I. General Information

Location:	163 Seminole Avenue Palm Beach, Florida
Date of Construction:	1921
Historic Name:	Villa Dei Fiori
First Owner:	Orator Frank Woodward
Architect:	Addison Mizner
Builder/Contractor:	Theodore B. Eissfeldt
Current Owner:	Dale Coudert, Steven H. Rose Trust
Present Use:	Residential
Present Zoning:	R-B
Palm Beach County Tax Folio Number:	50-43-43-14-10-002-0180
Current Legal Description:	Ocean Park H W Robbins Addition Lot 18 (Less W 10 Ft N County Road R/W), & Lots 19 Thru 24 Block 2

II. Location Map

163 Seminole Avenue



III. Historical Information

Villa Dei Fiori, House of Flowers, at 163 Seminole Avenue was designed by Addison Mizner in 1921 for Orator Frank Woodward. By World War I, Henry Flagler had established Palm Beach as the winter capital of American high society. Most came by rail and stayed for the early January to February season at one of Flagler's luxury hotels, the Royal Poinciana or the Breakers. However, following World War I, this practice shifted as the season became longer and many of the society's wealthy built houses in Palm Beach. The early architect of choice was Addison Mizner who had come to Palm Beach with Paris Singer in 1918 and designed Singer's Mediterranean Revival-style Everglades Club in 1918-1919. The club not only became the new center of social life for Palm Beach's wealthiest and most socially prominent residents, but it also introduced Mizner's Mediterranean Revival style to the island.



163 Seminole Avenue is one of Mizner's earlier designs and is located in the Ocean Park subdivision which was established in 1917 and is one of the oldest platted residential areas in the Town of Palm Beach.¹ The original 125 residential sites ran from the ocean to the lake and were conveniently located near Palm Beach's popular hotels, as well as between two of Palm Beach's main shopping areas – Main Street (now Royal Poinciana Way) and the Fashion Beaux Arts plaza.

Orator "Frank" Woodward was the second of six children born in 1884 to Orator Frank and Cora Talmage Woodward in the Village of LeRoy, New

¹ The H. W. Robbins addition was created from land H.W. Robbins and his wife sold to Peter J. Mack in January 1917.

York. The elder father, Orator Frank Woodward, started inventing things at a young age with some early success and then started the Genesee Pure Food Company to market various packaged food products. The company had first-rate products and an excellent sales staff, but nothing became very profitable. Neighbors of the Woodwards in Leroy were the couple Pearle Bixby Wait and his wife May. They ran a cough syrup business but after years of barely scraping by, they decided to branch out into the food business and focus on desserts. They obtained a patent for powdered gelatin and started mixing it with their syrups to make the gelatin taste better and they named the dessert Jell-O.² Unfortunately, the Waits lacked the capital and experience to market their product and in September 1899, the couple sold the formula, patent and Jell-O name to their Leroy neighbor, Orator Frank Woodward, owner of the Genesee Pure Food Company for \$450. To promote the product, Woodward dressed his salesmen in fancy suits and had them offer free samples to homemakers. They employed many ways to get grocers to stock their shelves with boxes of Jell-O, yet sales still sagged. In 1904, everything changed when Woodward decided to take some of the money he earned from other products he made and invest it into ads for Jell-O in the national syndicated *Ladies Home Journal*. The ads were a huge success and sales quickly jumped to \$250,000. Soon beautiful hand drawn pictures marketing the product including the Jell-O Girl were everywhere in addition to recipe books and fancy Jell-O molds. What was once a dessert for the wealthy due to the elaborate and time consuming process of making gelatin was now available to the masses. Orator passed away in 1906 and Cora took over as president of the Genesee Pure Food Company working with her eldest child Ernest who later succeeded her as president. Due to brilliant marketing, Jell-O became one of the most well-known brands in America. In 1923, understanding the power of the name, the Woodward's changed the name of Genesee Pure Foods Company to simply The Jell-O Company. Two years later, in 1925, the Woodward's sold the company to Postum Cereal Company for \$67 million.³

² Gelatin, the main ingredient in Jell-O, was an after dinner delicacy for the wealthy dating back to at least the 15th century. During the Victorian era in Europe decorative gelatin molds were a symbol of high society and served to royalty. Desserts with gelatin were for the elite who had cooks and servants to labor through the elaborate and time consuming process of making gelatin. By the early 19th century gelatin dessert became popular with Americans and Thomas Jefferson was known to serve it at official banquets at Monticello. In the mid-19th century, gelatin was so high in demand that there was a need to make the creation of it easier. In 1845, a patent for powdered gelatin was obtained by industrialist Peter Cooper, that was easy to manufacture and easier to use in cooking, but it was not marketed well. It was not until the Woodward's took over the Jell-O brand that it became a great success.

³ Postum Cereal Company was founded by C.W. Post. After his death in 1914, his daughter Marjorie Merriweather Post and her second husband E. F. Hutton ran the business. The Jell-O Company was the Postum Companies first major acquisition. In 1929 they acquired the frozen food company owned by

O. “Frank” Woodward, as mentioned previously, was the second son of Orator Frank and Cora Woodward, and was a young man during his family’s successful venture with the Jell-O brand. With profits from the thriving business, Frank started spending the winter season in Palm Beach and in 1921 commissioned Mizner to design a house for he and his first wife Persis Earle Davis who he married in March of 1909. Together, they had two children, Orator Frank, Jr. and Ruth. With his second wife Mary Trask, he had a son Ernest. The house stayed in the Woodward family until 1947 when O. Frank Woodward sold it to Karl W. Krause and his wife Rose. Rose and their daughter Annette were both accomplished artists who often contributed to shows at the Norton Museum of Art and the Society of the Four Arts. During the 1950s Annette Krauss Rose was chair of the Palm Beach Art League and was instrumental in establishing an open-air art fair that permitted local artists to show their work around Memorial Fountain. In March of 1958, Annette and Dr. Steven Rose were married at Villa Dei Fiori. Dr. Steven Rose, originally of Hamburg, came to New York when he was 13 and was a graduate of New York University College of Arts and Pure Sciences and of New York Medical School where he obtained a degree in dentistry. After the passing of her parents, Annette Krauss inherited the house and she and her husband Dr. Steven H. Rose moved into Villa Dei Fiori. Annette passed away in 1990 and three years later he met and married Dale Coudert. At about the same time, Rose retired from dentistry and took up sculpting where he became very accomplished and displayed his work in the patios of Villa Dei Fiori.⁴ The current owner, Dale Coudert, founded the Coudert Institute in Palm Beach in 2001. The institute is a non-partisan, non-ideological organization designed to tackle ideas and drive positive global change. For over two decades, the institute’s programming has united the Palm Beach community, with many of the lectures and meetings taking place in the Villa Dei Fiori house and gardens.⁵

In circa 1932, O. Frank Woodward commissioned Frank E. Geisler to photograph Villa Dei Fiori’s interior, exterior and grounds. F. E. Geisler was an accomplished and sought-after professional photographer based in New York City. He began his career in 1886 specializing in society portraiture, theatrical photography and architectural photographs. From 1919-1921, as one of his theater projects, he worked with Flo Ziegfeld photographing the Ziegfeld

Clarence Birdseye called General Foods Company, and in 1932 they changed the Post company name to General Foods Corporation. Since then there have been numerous acquisitions and mergers.

⁴ Dr. Steven Rose passed away in 2017.

⁵ This information is found on the Coudert Institute website.

Follies. Ziegfeld spent much time in Palm Beach and convinced Geisler to operate his New York studio on a seasonal basis and spend the winter in Palm Beach photographing high society and resort architecture. Geisler began spending the winters in Palm Beach in the early 1920s and in 1928 he was commissioned to photograph the architecture of Addison Mizner, which was compiled into the book The Florida Architecture of Addison Mizner, which documented a number of Mizner's great Mediterranean Revival estates. After its completion Geisler continued to photograph houses of many of the top Palm Beach architects as commissioned by the owners until his death in 1935. The Villa Dei Fiori photo album is an excellent example of Geisler's work and an important resource in documenting the history of the property.⁶

III. Architectural Information

Villa Dei Fiori was built in 1921 in the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture and is currently sited between two patios as well as between the ocean and the lake in Palm Beach's Ocean Park subdivision. The original dwelling was designed by Addison Mizner with later additions by Maurice



⁶ Dale Coudert has the leatherbound Villa Dei Fiori photo album, and the Historical Society of Palm Beach County has copies of the photographs. The date is circa 1932 because the photos include the later Howard Major patio, though the photos could have been taken anytime from 1932-1935. The historic photographs in this report are photographs taken of the photographs in the photo album at the house.

Fatio of Treanor and Fatio and Howard Major.⁷ Unlike most houses, Mizner sited the house facing west, perpendicular to Seminole Avenue.

The Mediterranean Revival style is an eclectic style incorporating architectural elements derived from the area around the Mediterranean Sea including Spanish, Italian, Portuguese and Moorish elements. The style is found most frequently in states that have a Spanish Colonial heritage, but its use gained national popularity after the Pan-American Exhibition held in San Diego in 1915. In Palm Beach, the style was first popularized in 1919 by Addison Mizner's design for Paris Singer's Everglades Club, and Mizner soon became the most sought-after architect to design Mediterranean Revival style estates in Palm Beach. The popularity of the style soared in the 1920s for both commercial and residential buildings and the style remained a pervasive influence on building designs until World War II. Buildings of this style are often decorated with ornate cast-stone, arched openings, clay barrel tile roofs, balconies, irregular floor plans, asymmetrical massing and windows of varying sizes and shapes.

The original Villa Dei Fiori Mizner designed house is two stories in height and constructed of hollow clay tile covered with stucco. The original floor plan included a front entry hall flanked by the living room on the south and dining room on the north with a loggia behind the living room, a bath off the center hall, and a pantry and kitchen behind the dining room. The second floor included five bedrooms and two baths, with several small servants' rooms and a bath.⁸ This was a significant house built for a wealthy client, but it was not a grand estate like others that Mizner was also designing at this time.⁹

Early photographs of Villa Dei Fiori show an asymmetric design, irregular massing, a mix of rectangular and arched casement windows, large arched loggia openings and a roof with wide overhanging eaves, exposed carved rafter tails all covered with red clay barrel tiles. The front facade included the off-centered entrance with a stone surround with Corinthian columns topped by a

⁷ Though the plans for the 1928 addition are from the office of Treanor and Fatio, Maurice Fatio was the architect based in Palm Beach and would have been the architect designing or overseeing this project, while Treanor was based in New York.

⁸ According to Donald Curl, author of *Mizner's Florida: American Resort Architecture*, the floor plan for the Woodward's house was similar to the one he utilized for Alfred Kay's house, Audita at 582 S. Ocean Boulevard (now 89 Middle Road) and Charles J. Winn's house at 121 El Bravo Way, both also designed in 1921.

⁹ In 1921, Mizner designed Casa Bendita, a grand estate for John S. Phipps at 434 North County Road. It has since been demolished.

broken pediment flanked by finials and entered through a heavy paneled wood door.¹⁰ Other features of the original front facade include rectangular and arched divided-light casement windows and a large exterior chimney south of the front entry that reaches high above the roofline with arched openings in the top and covered by clay barrel tiles. The side and rear elevations contain a mix of rectangular and arched wood divided-light casement and double-hung windows many which are paired. Several of the arched casement windows have slender Corinthian pilasters between them. Originally the rear loggia behind the living room had three large arched openings and one smaller arched opening also with Corinthian pilasters between them.¹¹



In addition to designing Villa Dei Fiori, like many of his other commissions, Mizner also provided many of the interior decorative building materials as well as furniture and ornamentation. At Villa Dei Fiori, Mizner hired decorator Charles of London to fill the public room interiors with early English antiques, many of which remain at the house today, contributing to the ambiance of the

¹⁰ At some point, three arched windows on the first story were replaced with a bay window and the front door surround and pediment were altered to its current design. This may have been done by Howard Major in 1932 or Marion Sims Wyeth in 1936,, but there are no drawings to document this in the Town's microfiche and the early photographs are not dated. Further research could be conducted.

¹¹ The earliest photographs found are from the March 1923 publication of *The Architectural Forum*. It provides a photo of the original entrance, a general view from the street looking northeast and a view of the rear garden and loggia looking northwest. This article inaccurately states that the house was completed in 1920. In 1923, Cooper Lightbown took out a permit # 85 for a \$5000 addition to the house. Lightbown did many commissions for Mizner as well as in his own designs, so this may have been a Mizner designed addition or one that Lightbown designed. Unfortunately, there are no found drawings of what this addition entailed. Previous reports stated that Lightbown was the contractor for the 1928 Fatio addition, but this is not correct. The Lightbown permit is dated March 28, 1923, not 1928. The builder for the Fatio addition was R.C. McNeil, Inc.

original Mizner design. Original floors, ceilings and light fixtures also remain providing authenticity to Mizner's vision for the house.

In 1928, O. Frank Woodward wanted to enlarge the dwelling and hired Maurice Fatio to design a den and loggia addition and a two story garage apartment. The small den was constructed on the southeast corner of the original house abutting the original rear loggia to the south and providing a connector for the new loggia that stretched to the east creating an east wing to the house as well as forming the south wall to a formal patio. The new loggia had seven bays of shouldered arched openings with square columns meeting a scalloped crown with gabled and hipped roofs covered with clay barrel tiles and exposed rafter tails. The south wall of the loggia featured arched windows with decorative turned wooden spindles on the interior. The loggia provided space that took advantage of Florida's mild winter climate by providing integrated interior and exterior living, dining and entertaining areas. The design also included a chimney at the east end to provide warmth if the temperatures dropped. At this same time, Fatio designed walls to the east and north creating a formal patio. The eastern entry for this patio is a substantial Spanish style gate with a large ornate carved wooden door topped with a decorative arched wrought iron transom, a clay barrel tile roof, and a decorative metal gate on the east side which is seen when entering from the east driveway.¹² Within this landscaped patio is an attractive fountain with a statue of a minstrel boy in the tiled pool.



¹² Originally along the east wall of this patio flanking the entry gate were two windows with shutters and decorative carved spindles. These were moved to the loggia when it was enclosed.

In 1932, O. Frank Woodward hired architect Howard Major to create an enclosed garden and patio space west of the dwelling for the cost of \$20,000 with Smith & Riddle as the contractors. The design included pavilions, a twelve foot high brick perimeter wall capped with clay tile, a tea house, trellis, fountains and niches with statues.¹³ To enter the garden and patio space, Major designed a brick pavilion with a heavy stone arched door surround with a prominent keystone on both the north and south facades, arched wood entry door, a decorative wrought iron gate with an ornate transom, and a decorative brick cornice all covered by a hipped roof with clay barrel tiles.¹⁴ There is another similar pavilion on the southwest corner of the property that is connected to this entry pavilion by a twelve foot high brick wall capped with clay barrel tile that continues to wrap the patio. Once through the entry pavilion, one enters the large garden patio. To the west running the length of the patio is a trellis with square brick piers that terminate at the southwest pavilion. To the east is the original Mizner designed house and on the northern wall running east west is a tall, one story brick loggia teahouse with three large arched opening with keystones and a decorative brick cornice covered with a clay barrel tile roof. Statues of Venus and Diana are placed in niches along the north patio wall to the east and west of the teahouse. In the center of the patio and along the western wall are attractive fountains that provide picturesque water features. The walls of the patio and teahouse are lined with stunning imported Portuguese azulego antique tiles.¹⁵ Various ornate designs of the antique tile are used as wainscoting along the walls while above are panels depicting nobles and elegantly dressed ladies engaging in chivalrous acts in pastoral settings inspired by their Delft counterparts which are similar in color, design, format, and genre. These tiles, which are thought to be over 300 years old, make this tranquil patio a special place of art.

¹³ Within the archives housed at the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, there are numerous drawings from the Treanor and Fatio firm dating from 1926 -1928 for the O. Frank Woodward house on Seminole Avenue (this property). A number of these drawings show pavilions and a loggia tea house very similar to what was built in 1932 under Howard Major. Speculation would suggest that the owner asked Major to incorporate Fatio's designs into the new patio. This is subject to more thorough study of the 1926-1928 Fatio drawings.

¹⁴ The decorative wrought iron transom closely matches the transom on the entry gate of the east patio.

¹⁵ It is not known who purchased the Portuguese azulego antique tiles. They may have been purchased by the owner O. Frank Woodward as according to his son Orator E. Woodward, he traveled to Europe often. However, according to Augustus Mayhew, Howard Major utilized Portuguese tile murals to enhance his work at several Palm Beach residences (Palm Beach Social Diary, "America First: Howard Major at Palm Beach", January 12, 2017). Augustus Mayhew documented these tiles, and the photographs are now part of the archives at the Historical Society of Palm Beach County.

Over the years there have been additions and alterations to the property in addition to those already mentioned. The original rear loggia was enclosed and is now used as a sunroom, the Fatio east wing loggia was enclosed as was the loggia teahouse, providing additional interior living space. All of these loggias were enclosed in a manner that the original arches are apparent and could be reopened. On the original front facade, the front door surround and pediment above have been altered and arched windows were replaced by a bay window. On the property, the two-story garage was replaced with a one-story garage, a swimming pool was added on the north side of the dwelling, storage areas have been added and there have been roof repairs and replacement of most of the roof tiles.

Historic & Current Photos of East Wing Loggia



Historic & Current Photos of Teahouse



Historic & Current Photos of Entrance Pavilion



Historic & Current Photos of Courtyard, Trellis and Murals





IV. Architects & Builder's Biographies

Architects' Biographies

Addison Mizner

Addison Cairns Mizner was one of Palm Beach's most flamboyant architects from the time of his arrival on the Island in 1918 to his death in 1933. With Richard M. Hunt and Stanford White, he was known as one of the "great society architects." Mizner socialized with the wealthy, and through his contacts introduced Mediterranean Revival architecture to Palm Beach, revolutionizing the shape of the town.

Mizner was born in 1872 in Benicia, California, the son of a prominent California pioneer family. Although he never studied architecture at the university level, Mizner absorbed design concepts "in the field" while his father was an ambassador to Central America. Fluent in Spanish from his time in Guatemala City, Mizner travelled to Spain where he lived in Salamanca for less than a year. Despite the fact that his time in Spain was short, his travels left a lasting imprint on his life and work.

From 1893 to 1896 Mizner expanded his knowledge of Spanish style architecture by serving an apprenticeship with a leading proponent of the style, Willis Polk, in San Francisco. His apprenticeship taught him draftsmanship and construction techniques and eventually led to a partnership with Polk. From California Mizner traveled to New York City where he benefitted from a friendship with Stanford White, who helped him become established in the city.

Mizner first visited Palm Beach in 1918 while recovering from an accident. Already established as a New York architect, he stayed with Paris Singer, son of Sewing Machine mogul Isaac Singer and husband of dancer Isadora Duncan. Singer was interested in developing Palm Beach as a resort for the wealthy of New York. Mizner received a \$6000 per year retainer from Singer to encourage his New York society cliental to build vacation homes in Palm Beach.

The Everglades Club, designed in 1918, was Mizner's first project and set the tone for the new Palm Beach. Addison Mizner moved away from the shingle cottage style town of Henry Flagler and moved toward a resort of fashion and elegance.

In the Town of Palm Beach, Mizner buildings included dozens of mansions, Via Mizner, Via Parigi, office buildings, apartments, and shops. One of Mizner's unique attributes was his ability to adapt to circumstances. When the elements of his Spanish style buildings became unavailable (iron work, tiles, etc. that help define the Mediterranean Revival style) he established Mizner Industries to produce the needed materials. Eventually he produced the new and "antique" furniture to decorate his houses.

After the collapse of Mizner's project in Boca Raton, and the failure of the Mizner development there, he continued to live in Villa Mizner but had financial trouble maintaining his lifestyle. Mizner died of a heart attack on February 5, 1933.

Maurice Fatio

Maurice Fatio was one of the Palm Beach's top architects from the 1920s to the early 1940s. His firm, Treanor & Fatio, was one of the largest architectural firms in Palm Beach and Fatio's distinctive designs can be seen throughout the Island, in Boca Raton and Miami, Florida.

Fatio was born in 1897 in Geneva, Switzerland. He studied architecture under Karl Moser at the Zurich Polytechnical. After graduation in 1920, Fatio came to America and apprenticed with Harrie T. Lindeberg, a prominent New York architect of Norman and English style country houses.

In 1921, Fatio formed a partnership with William A. Treanor, another architect in Lindeberg's firm. They quickly achieved a great deal of success, constructing

numerous houses, primarily Colonial, on Long Island as well as buildings in Manhattan, including Beekman Tower on the East River.

Fatio's association with Florida can be traced to his employment with Lindeberg, when he received the commission for eight small houses in New Smyrna, Florida. In October, 1923, Treanor and Fatio were asked to be the architects for the Olympia Beach development, now Jupiter Island. The next year Fatio opened an office in Palm Beach.

Fatio's many commissions for houses and commercial buildings in Palm Beach were based on his reputation in New York as well as his charm, good looks, and European manner. During his career in Florida, Fatio designed in many diverse styles. Mediterranean Revival, more specifically, Italianate houses incorporating tower blocks, were designed for William McAneeny (195 Via Del Mar), the Coopers (801 South County Road), Mortimer Schiff (920 South Ocean Boulevard), and Daniel McCarthy (550 South Ocean Boulevard). More horizontal, symmetrical, and formal Florentine houses were designed for Otto Kahn (690 North County Road) and Joseph Widner (1500 South Ocean Boulevard) all between 1928 and 1930.

In addition to Fatio's many commissions for houses and commercial buildings, he also was hired to design additions and alterations to numerous existing buildings. Despite the 1926 Florida land bust, 1928 was an extremely busy year for Maurice Fatio. In a letter written on April 14, 1928, Fatio states, "I find myself with nineteen building sites and a work volume three times bigger than last year's. It is the best year which we have ever had - about two million dollars in construction."¹⁶ At least ten of these projects, including the addition for 163 Seminole Avenue, were additions to existing residences.

In the mid-30s, Fatio began designing in the Georgian and British Colonial styles. Large commissions for Albert Worswick (1860 South Ocean Boulevard), E. F. Hutton (1768 South Ocean Boulevard), and Wolcott Blair (1960 South Ocean Boulevard) with their simple materials and uncluttered lines reflected the sober, economic climate and set the pace for the smaller Colonial and Regency commissions that followed them.

¹⁶ Alexander Fatio, Maurice Fatio, Architect (Stuart, Florida: Southeastern Printing, 1992 p. 62.)

During this time, Fatio also worked in the modern style, producing such modern masterpieces as "The Reef" built for Mrs. Barclay Douglas (Jo Hartford). Other modern houses were designed for Messmore Kendall, aviator pioneer Grover Loening, and Prince and Princess Zalstem-Zalessky (Evangeline Johnson Merrill).

World War II brought a halt to construction in Palm Beach. Although Fatio was already beginning to suffer from cancer, he entered the Office of Strategic Services in June of 1943. He died of cancer later that same year, on December 2, 1943.

Howard Major

Howard Brougham Major (1882–1974) was born in New York, the grandson of a lithographer and the son of a printer's artist. Major studied at the Pratt Institute and the New York Atelier of Beaux-Arts. As the chief draftsman for architect Charles Alonzo Rich, he designed a building at Dartmouth College and country houses for Long Island socialites. He opened his own firm on Fifth Avenue and married Katherine Clark (1899-1958) in 1920, with whom he traveled overseas during most of 1920 and 1921. In 1923 he joined Addison Mizner's firm and began his Palm Beach career by designing Spanish style houses for Nelson Odman and Richard Cowell in Palm Beach, and Howard Whitney in Gulfstream.

Although Major started his Florida career in the Spanish style he soon became disenchanted with the results and opened his own architectural office. In a 1926 article for Architectural Forum entitled "A Theory Relating to Spanish and Italian Houses in Florida." he suggested that other styles of architecture were more appropriate to the Florida climate and the "national character." Major also was the author of a book entitled Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic: The Greek Revival. He favored the Greek Revival style and was also a proponent of the British Colonial style and all its variants, including the Monterey style.

In Palm Beach Howard Major is best known for designing "Major Alley," a small complex of six Bermuda style town homes constructed on Peruvian Avenue in 1925. These homes are currently listed as Landmarks of the Town of Palm Beach. He also completed a home for Charles Merrill called "Merrill's Landing" that has been demolished. After the Depression, Major's more subdued style became more popular when showplaces may have been considered in poor taste. Some examples of Major's residential work that are

protected by the Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Commission, include Major Alley at 417 Peruvian Away, 235 Banyan Road, 234 El Bravo Way, 124 Via Bethesda, 745 Hi-Mount Road, 270 Queens Lane, 135 El Vedado Road, 224 and 228 Phipps Plaza, and 421 Peruvian Avenue. In 1929, Major renovated one of the earliest Palm Beach houses to be landmarked, the Vicarage on North Lake Way built in 1897, and the Majors lived there for many years.

Besides his work in Palm Beach, Howard Major did projects in Hobe Sound and Gulfstream, Florida. In Naples he laid out the development of Port Royal and designed the "Church of Trinity-by-the-Sea." In Nassau, Bahamas, Major designed the Porcupine Club and residences for Arthur Vining Davis and Edward Lynch.

The following excerpt from Gene Pandula's "Architects on Architects Talk" provides additional insight into the architectural career of Howard Major:

"Like Addison Mizner, architect Howard Major designed country homes on Long Island, N.Y., in the early days of his career before opening shop in Palm Beach. Major began working for Mizner's Worth Avenue office in 1923 and moved to Palm Beach two years later. The two could not have been more different in their professional approach and preferences. Mizner learned architectural design through an apprenticeship; Major gained a formal education in architecture in New York. Mizner was known for having a pet monkey and a more freewheeling design process. Though Mizner's design of The Everglades Club and other projects made Mediterranean Revival style the dominant style in Palm Beach, Major carved out a successful career designing homes in the Greek Revival, Georgian and British Colonial styles.

Major was a cerebral person. He did research. He formed theses and opinion and his practice was rigorous in putting these ideas forward. Major's book, The Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic: The Greek Revival, was published in 1926. He believed very strongly that America had a style of architecture. Major had two reasons for writing the book. One was to bring to light the fallacy of the impression that the 19th century was devoid of artistic expression. And the second was to place before the public irrefutable evidence that Greek Revival is America's national expression in architecture — the classic revival of the Greece and Rome styles perhaps more accurately called the federal style. Major didn't use the latter label because he didn't want to confuse people.

Though Major also designed Mediterranean Revival style houses in Palm Beach, he was the first to criticize it. The style became popular in Palm Beach but he believed it was not being refined for the United States from its origins.

And he bases those comments on travels to Cuba, to Spain, to Portugal and other locales where he was very studious about crafting articles about essentially Spanish architecture. He claims it was not a simple matter for the Anglo-Saxon to assimilate to this form of architecture. Major even had a series of eight articles published in the Palm Beach Post dissecting Mediterranean Revival style that were designed to prod his cohorts into better design. He wanted architectural restraint.¹⁷

Builder's Biography

Theodore Eissfeldt

In the 1920 City Directory, Theodore Eissfeldt was listed as an architect but following that he was listed as a contractor working for many years in Palm Beach, West Palm Beach, and Lake Worth. Some of his Palm Beach commissions included 267 Atlantic Avenue (Landmark), 305 Seabreeze Avenue, 409 Seabreeze Avenue, and 337 Brazilian Avenue though he was associated with Mizner early in Palm Beach and likely had other early commissions. In 1925, Eissfeldt began construction of thirty houses in West Palm Beach's Northwood Hills neighborhood, including his own Mediterranean Revival style house at 3815 Eastview Avenue. In 1926, he is listed in the City Directory as President of High Mound Construction Company. By 1932, Eissfeldt was president of Northwood Millworks, Inc. and from 1935-1942 he was president of Builder's Supply Company.

V. Statement of Significance

Villa Dei Fiori is a very good example of Mediterranean Revival style architecture designed in 1921 by Addison Mizner, the architect who introduced the Mediterranean Revival style to Palm Beach. Early compatible additions creating loggias and outdoor patios by important Palm Beach architects, Maurice Fatio and Howard Major, add to the significance of the property. In addition, Orator Frank Woodward, the original owner, was a member of the family that was responsible for the early success of the Jell-O brand.

¹⁷ Rogers, David. "Howard Major 'Rigorous' in Putting Idea Forward, Pandula says in Architect's Talk." Palm Beach Daily News. 22 January 2011.

VII. Criteria For Designation

Section 54-161 of the Town of Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Ordinance outlines the criteria for designation of a landmark or landmark site and suggests that at least one criterion must be met to justify the designation. Listed below are the criteria which relate to this property and justification for designation:

(1) “Exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, county or town.”

Villa Dei Fiori at 163 Seminole Avenue reflects the broad cultural, economic, and social history of the Town of Palm Beach. The dwelling was built in 1921 during Palm Beach’s first building boom and at a time when many of America’s wealthiest came to Palm Beach for the winter season and commissioned a dwelling to enjoy the season and entertain guests. Orator Frank Woodward, the first owner who commissioned Mizner to design the house, was a young adult when his family took the Jell-O product from a fledging dessert to one of the most popular and well-known brands in the country. Jell-O provided access to a dessert that had formerly been a high end luxury dessert available only to the rich and made it accessible to the mainstream. The success of the Jell-O brand made it possible for Woodward to commission Palm Beach’s most sought after architect to design a house on a large property, and though not a grand estate, it was designed in the latest Palm Beach style and decorated with fine materials and antiques.

(3) “Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or is a specimen inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.”

Villa Dei Fiori is a very good example of the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture popularized by its architect Addison Mizner in during the Land Boom of the 1920s. Mediterranean Revival style elements of Mizner’s design include its asymmetric design, irregular massing, a mix of rectangular and arched casement windows some paired with slender Corinthian pilasters between, large arched loggia openings, an off-centered entrance, a large exterior chimney, and a roof with wide overhanging eaves and exposed carved rafter tails all covered with red clay barrel tiles. Key Mediterranean Revival features of the Fatio addition included a long arched loggia with clay barrel tile roofs and arched casement windows along with the Spanish style gate

pavilion at the east entry. In the Howard Major designed garden and patio space, the pavilions, perimeter wall, tea house, niches and gates were all designed in the Mediterranean Revival style to complement the original dwelling as well as the east patio. The beautiful decorative Portuguese azulego antique tiles add greatly to the patio's Mediterranean character. Villa Dei Fiori is an example of how both Maurice Fatio and Howard Major could add to an existing Mizner designed Mediterranean Revival house and enhance the overall design and livability of the property.¹⁸

(4) “Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual ability has been recognized or has influenced his age.”

Villa Dei Fiori is a notable work of renowned architect Addison Mizner with well-designed complimentary additions by two other distinguished Palm Beach architects, Maurice Fatio and Howard Major. Villa Dei Fiori is representative of the many Mizner houses that became larger as he and other architects added to them over the years. Maurice Fatio, in particular, was well-known for designing loggia additions to provide interior and exterior spaces to enjoy the mild south Florida climate.

Mizner's influential career in Palm Beach spanned only fifteen years but he is recognized as the creator of the Mediterranean Revival “Palm Beach” style. Prior to Mizner arriving in Palm Beach, most buildings were frame cottages, shingled bungalows, or classical revival designs. By 1925, Mizner's influence could be seen in almost every new structure built in town and even some owners of earlier houses remodeled to conform to the new style, illustrating Mizner's substantial influence.¹⁹

¹⁸ Research Atlantica, 163 Seminole Avenue Designation Report (Entry Gate). April 19, 2000.

¹⁹ Donald Curl, Florida Architecture of Addison Mizner. Page133.

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