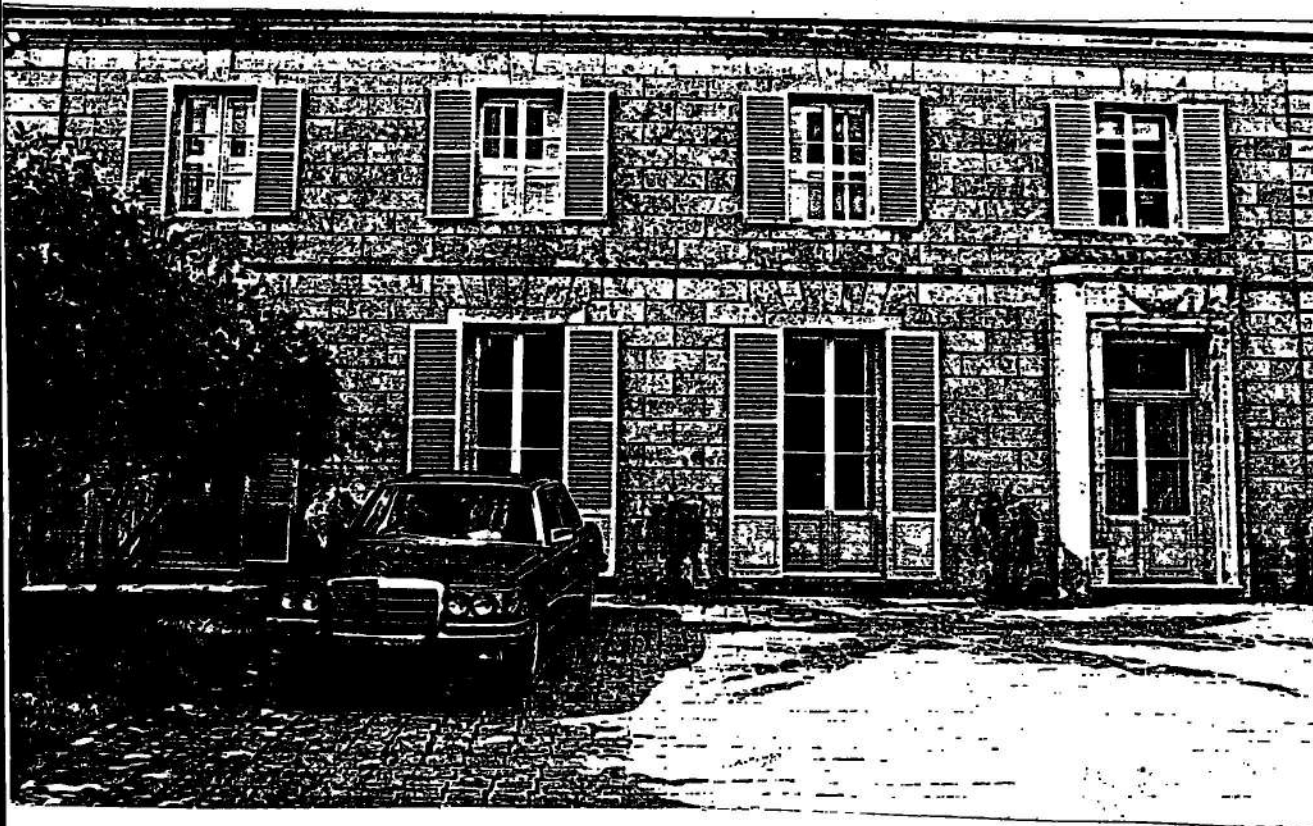


124 VIA BETHESDA



Designation Report

FRIDAY, FEBRUARY 16, 1990



LANDMARKS PRESERVATION COMMISSION
Palm Beach, Florida

DESIGNATION REPORT: 124 Via Bethesda

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Report prepared October 1989 by Eric Egan, Preservation Consultant, Town of Palm Beach.

Report edited by Timothy M. Frank, AICP, Planner/Projects Coordinator, Town of Palm Beach, and James Edward Sved, AIA, Preservation Consultant.

I. General Information

Location: 124 Via Bethesda, Palm Beach, Florida

Date of Construction: 1930 (Permit #5630, April 26, 1930)

Architect: Howard Major

Present Owner: Henry P. IV & Susan R. McIntosh

Present Use: Residential - Single Family

Present Zoning: R-B

Legal Description: E G PENDLETON TR, E 1/2 OF LT 16 & UNMBRD
LT LYG E OF LT 16

Palm Beach County Tax Folio #: 50-43-43-23-01-000-0161

Classification in the "Historic Building Survey of Palm Beach":

"This Louis XVI house is unusual for Palm Beach in both its style and its stone facing. It is the work of an important Palm Beach architect, and its sober Classical style shows the reaction against the picturesqueness of the Mediterranean Revival that had formed by the end of the 1920's. Grade: B."

III. Architectural Information

The house at 124 Via Bethesda, with its severe, symmetrical facade has been alternatively defined as "Louis XVI" (B. Hoffstot, "Landmark Architecture of Palm Beach") and "Creole-French Classical" (Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach). The stately residence is finished in a naturally rusticated Cuban stone which is quite similar in appearance to the quarry key stone used throughout Palm Beach. The rustification of this stone contrasts with the crisp lines of the detailing used throughout the house to create an unusually complex design.

The north elevation of this residence is a four-bay, two story design. Shuttered french doors lead from the first floor onto the Belgian Granite motor court. Above, the stone lintels form decorative arches. The stone entrance at the western end of the facade projects from the wall surface and is adorned with a festoon. The double entrance door is topped with a leaded glass transom.

The stonework at 124 Via Bethesda is laid in smooth, regular courses. Quoins define the corners of the facade, rising through the moulded watermark and second story to just below the roofline where they meet the smooth/stone/moulded cornice. The casement windows on the second floor have stone lintels as on the first, but are topped only with a keystone.

124 Via Bethesda maintains near symmetry throughout its design. The "L"-shaped house was wrapped around the central courtyard. Arched loggias decorated with pilasters looked out to this outdoor space which was enclosed by dressing rooms on the south side and an eastern wall. This wall contained three arches decorated with quoining and wrought iron grilles through which the lawn could be seen.

Renovations in 1965 obliterated the sheltered feeling of this courtyard by destroying the east wall and south dressing rooms in order to provide easier access to the swimming pool. Happily, the north facade, which is visible from the street, was left untouched.

IV. Historical Information

124 Via Bethesda was built in 1930 with building costs that totaled \$ 50,000. Although it is obviously a custom-designed house, the owner is listed on the permit as the "Via Bethesda Corporation". The owner in 1950 is listed as Mrs. Joseph Snyder. Joseph Snyder may have been the original owner. In 1965, Philip Hulitar changed the house, with \$ 20,000 in alterations designed by Allen Babcock. Andrew Fuller purchased the house in 1972. 124 Via Bethesda is currently owned by H.P. McIntosh.

V. Statement of Significance and Criteria for Designation

Statement of Significance

124 Via Bethesda lies at the east end of Via Bethesda adjacent to Flagler Avenue. It is a unique structure well scaled to its neighborhood. The style employed in this house is the only one of its kind in Palm Beach; nevertheless, through prominent use of cuban stone, 124 Via Bethesda coexists peacefully with its Mediterranean and British Colonial neighbors.

The building was designed by Howard major and is a valuable asset to the community. This house is worthy of individual study because of its unique, high quality design and is deserving of the protection and special consideration it would be afforded if designated a Town landmark.

Criteria for Designation

Section 16-38 (a) of the Town of Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Ordinance #2-84 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 criteria which relate to this property and justification for designation.

(a) "Exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, county, or town."

Toward the end of the 1920's, the Mediterranean Revival style of architecture gradually fell into disfavor in Palm Beach. Local architects were forced to experiment continually with new styles that would appear different from the Mediterranean Revival styles, yet maintain the standards of grandeur and opulence to which the wealthy classes of Palm Beach were accustomed.

Howard Major was among the first Palm Beach architects to experiment with styles other than Mediterranean in Palm Beach. His Bahama styled "Major Alley" was built in 1926, years before the other Palm Beach architects turned to the Bahamas as a source of architectural inspiration. 124 Via Bethesda is another experiment with new styles of architecture for the wealthy. The severe styling of the house is a departure from the more freely designed Spanish and Italian influenced houses, but maintains a relationship with them through the use of an imported stone cladding which closely resembles the quarry key stone often seen in Mediterranean Revival houses in Palm Beach.

(c) "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."

124 Via Bethesda is perhaps the only building of its type in Palm Beach. Its unusual design combines an extremely formal French design reinterpreted by an American architect executed in an imported stone which is by nature rough and imperfect. The tension created by the juxtaposition of the rough stone and the fine elements of design has resulted in a house which blends with surrounding structures while asserting its individuality. Current architects in Palm Beach should be forced to study its example.

(d) "Is representative of notable works of one or more master builders, designers or architects whose individual ability has been recognized to have influenced their age."

PLEASE SEE HOWARD MAJOR BIOGRAPHY, AS ATTACHED.

HOWARD MAJOR BIOGRAPHY

In any consideration of Palm Beach architecture, the name of Howard Major, architect and author on architectural subjects, must be included. Major (1883-1974) received his training at the Pratt Institute and the atelier of Henry Hornbostel of the Society of Beaux Arts Architects. After practicing in New York City, he came to Palm Beach in 1925. Although he, too, designed Spanish houses in Palm Beach and Gulfstream, Major became the earliest critic of the style. In newspaper interviews, an article in Architectural Forum, and his book, The Domestic Architecture of the Early American Republic: The Greek Revival, Major condemned Spanish architecture as inappropriate for Florida because of climate, and because it failed to express American "national character". Although Major believed the Greek Revival, "our independent creation in architecture " fulfilled "every requisite of climate, convenience, and nationalism", he accepted British Colonial or West Indian style architecture as appropriate for Florida. These styles became his trademark and provided an alternative style for the future architecture of Palm Beach.

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