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## The Florida Architecture of F. Burrall Hoffman Jr., 1882-1980

by DONALD W. CURL

**E**VERYONE interested in Florida's architectural history should know of Francis Burrall Hoffman Jr. and his connection to Miami's great villa Vizcaya. Few realize he had a distinguished Florida career spanning over sixty years and designed buildings in several sections of the state. In fact, when the United States entered World War I in 1917, the thirty-five-year-old Hoffman may have been, in terms of cost of commissions, Florida's most successful domestic architect. In only eight short years of private practice, Hoffman had designed Vizcaya, the Biscayne Bay mansion, for industrialist James Deering, large oceanfront residences in Palm Beach for Mrs. Frederick Guest and her brother Henry Carnegie Phipps (their father had been Andrew Carnegie's partner), and probably had received the commission for the elaborate music room of Pittsburgh industrialist Joseph Riter, which he completed at the war's end. Moreover, Hoffman returned to Florida to design several houses and Our Lady of Mercy Chapel on Boca Grande; a half century later he began to winter on Jupiter Island where he completed his last major commissions.

Hoffman, the son of F. Burrall Hoffman Sr. and Lucy Shattuck Hoffman, was born in New Orleans on March 6, 1882. Both he and his father were named for Frances Amelia Burrall, the great-grandmother of the younger Burrall Hoffman. Although his father's firm, Shattuck and Hoffman, did most of its business in the South, the Hoffman family came from a distinguished line of New Yorkers that began with Martin Hermanzen Hoffman who immigrated to America from Sweden in 1657.<sup>1</sup>

Burrall Hoffman Sr.'s father had begun the family association with New Orleans during the Civil War where he served as a colonel on the staff of General Benjamin Butler. His son said that when he first arrived in the city in the early 1880s a delegation from the

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1. William Wickham Hoffman, *Eleven Generations of Hoffmans in New York: Descendants of Martin Hoffman, 1657-1957* (New York, 1957) 1-2, 25.

Boston Club, "the best and oldest Club in the city," called to tell him he had been elected to honorary membership. When he asked why this great honor, a delegate said: "Don't you know what your father, Colonel Wickham Hoffman, did for us here? He gathered up all the family silver which had been looted by officers and soldiers and returned it to its owners." Shattuck and Hoffman, his partnership with his brother-in-law, Albert Richardson Shattuck, served as merchants and negotiators of loans on improved farm properties. It also owned a sugar plantation on the Bayou Teche and a cotton plantation on the Mississippi River. Until the turn of the century, the Hoffman family maintained residences on St. Charles Avenue in New Orleans and on East Sixty-second Street in New York City.<sup>2</sup>

Although the younger Hoffman began his schooling in New Orleans, his parents enrolled him in Georgetown Preparatory in 1893. After a year at Georgetown University, he entered Harvard, his grandfather Wickham Hoffman's alma mater, in 1899. As a member of a wealthy and socially prominent New York family, Hoffman easily gained membership in Spee, Hasty Pudding, and the *Lampoon*. In 1898 his father built a large limestone-fronted town house at 58 East Seventy-ninth Street in New York City. The house was designed by Carrere and Hastings, who, in the decade since completing the Hotel Ponce de Leon in St. Augustine for Henry Morrison Flagler, had become established architects with nearly one hundred commissions including that for the New York Public Library on Fifth Avenue. Hoffman, perhaps inspired by the firm's work for his family, became interested in an architectural career, and finding that Harvard had no degree program, spent his senior year in the Carrere and Hastings office. From 1903 to 1907 he attended the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and after receiving his diploma with honors, returned to the Carrere and Hastings office in 1907.<sup>3</sup>

Hoffman remained an apprentice architect, working in the Carrere and Hastings drafting rooms for two years. While there he helped design Mrs. E. H. Harriman's enormous French Renaissance manor house in Arden, New York, and later completed the

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2. *Ibid.*, 22, 26, 29.

3. *Ibid.*, 35-36; F. Burrall Hoffman Sr. to the Rev. Haven Richards, January 11, 1894, October 3, 1894, and October 2, 1897, in Alumni files. University Archives, Lauinger Library, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C.; David Gray, *Thomas Hastings, Architect: Collected Writings Together with a Memoir* (Boston, 1933), 32-34.

design for the gates of the Harriman family cemetery in Arden. In the fall of 1910 he left Carrere and Hastings and entered into an association with Harry Creighton Ingalls, a former student at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, who became a well-known theatre designer. In 1911 Ingalls and Hoffman received the commission for the Little Theatre (now the Helen Hayes Theatre) in New York City.<sup>4</sup>

Over the years, Hoffman's commissions often came from members of his own family such as the commission for St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church in Lenox, Massachusetts, where the family often spent summers. Many also came through friendships he gained at Harvard. These included several commissions for Henry Francis du Pont and a number of projects for New York banker Clarence Dillon and members of Dillon's family.

The design of Vizcaya, Hoffman's first large commission and the major commission of his career, came as a result of his Harvard connections. He later recalled entering into it almost by accident. Sometime in 1912, Deering's art adviser, Paul Chalfin, stopped by Hoffman's office on East Fortieth Street and asked "if I would be interested in doing a house for a client of his— an art collector. But he didn't tell me who the client was."<sup>5</sup> Chalfin, a fellow Harvard graduate and a student of painting at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts, had served as curator of Asiatic arts at the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. He had returned to New York in 1909 to write art criticism when interior decorator Elsie de Wolfe asked him to organize a lecture series on art, decoration, and architecture for the women of the Colony Club, which she had decorated. One speaker Chalfin scheduled fell ill just before the lecture and a friend recommended Hoffman as a substitute. Hoffman later said that he had never met

4. Brendan Gill, "F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr.: A Gentleman Architect in the Beaux-Arts Tradition," *Architectural Digest* 50 (July 1993), 32-42. In the period before America entered World War I, while Hoffman was associated with Ingalls, they completed two additional theatres: the Neighborhood Playhouse for the Henry Street Settlement and the Henry Miller Theatre; and three churches: St. Ann's Roman Catholic Church in Lenox, Massachusetts, the Queen of the Most Holy Rosary Church in Bridgehampton, New York, and St. Brigid's Roman Catholic Church in Westbury, New York. Hoffman also submitted a proposal for the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception in Washington. His mother headed the women's committee to raise funds for the shrine. His proposal failed to win acceptance.

5. *Ibid.*; *Miami Herald*, January 21, 1979.

Chalfin before the lecture and had no further contact with him until asked to design Vizcaya.<sup>6</sup>

James E. Deering, the heir to a farm machinery fortune, had hired Chalfin as his art expert on the recommendation of their mutual friend and Chalfin's employer, Elsie de Wolfe. When Chalfin failed in his career as an artist and critic, de Wolfe employed him as a decorator. Deering asked de Wolfe to recommend someone knowledgeable in art who could travel with him and monitor his collecting. Deering planned to build a winter residence in Miami where both his father and brother had houses. He employed Chalfin to help select the art and furnishings for his mansion. They began collecting for the new house on a European trip in the summer of 1910. At first, Deering planned a Spanish house, though later he decided it should be "of the Italian villa type." The two men then spent a year in Italy and discovered the Villa Rezzonico, one of the historic sixteenth-century buildings on the Brenta River. The villa, with its four massive corner towers and somber exterior contrasting its sumptuous interior and monumental central courtyard, served as the prototype for Deering's Florida mansion.<sup>7</sup>

Deering and Chalfin's collecting produced warehouses full of architectural and decorative artifacts by 1912. Hoffman later recalled that Chalfin asked him to "make plans for his client Mr. Deering in such a way that use should be made of the many treasures of antiquity that had been acquired." When the thirty-year-old Hoffman saw the "ceilings, mantels, grilles, statues, fountains, furniture, tapestries, carpets, and so on" in the warehouses, he realized the extent of the design problem he faced.<sup>8</sup>

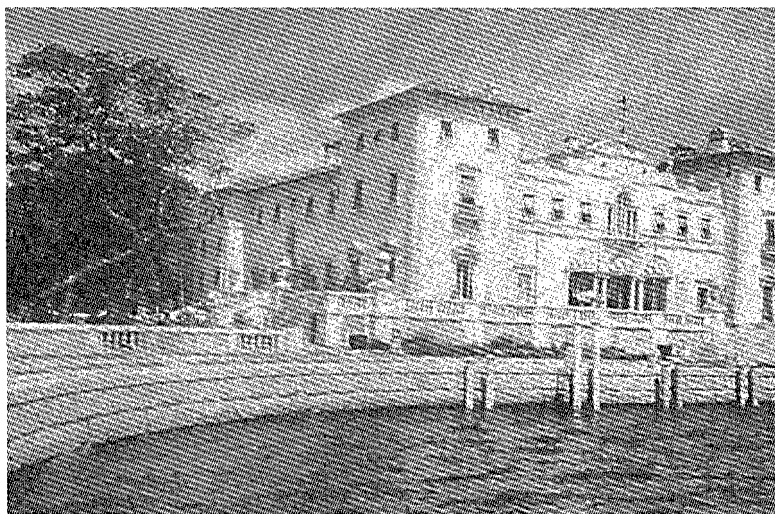
A massive twenty-foot-high three-tiered carved white limestone French Renaissance mantelpiece determined the proportions of the largest reception room of the villa. A set of wrought-iron gates with an imposing carved stone surround from the Palazzo Pisani in Venice also set the height of the tea room and in turn the entire

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6. James T. Maher, *The Twilight of Splendor: Chronicles of the Age of American Palaces* (Boston, 1975), 180-81. For his chapter on Vizcaya, Maher interviewed both Burrall Hoffman (April 14, 1965) and Diego Suarez (April 20 and June 4, 1965); Kathryn Chapman Harwood, *The Lives of Vizcaya: Annals of a Great House* (Miami, 1985), 16-17.

7. Maher, *The Twilight of Splendor*; 178-80; Ellen Edwards, "Blueprints of Another Time," *Miami Herald, Tropic Magazine*, 1977, undated clipping from collection of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach, Antonio Canova, *Ville Venete: Catalogo Della Mostra Fotografica* (Vicenza, 1984), 122-23.

8. Maher, *The Twilight of Splendor*, 181.



Vizcaya as seen from Biscayne Bay. *Photograph courtesy of Vizcaya Archives.*

first floor. Carved wooden and delicately molded plaster ceilings determined the size of the other rooms, while particular pieces of furniture, such as an Empire bed from the Palace of Malmaison, set the decor for different apartments. Paneling, French silk wall hangings with a palm tree design, painted panels, and a rug “dating from the time of Ferdinand and Isabella” all had to be accommodated into the design.<sup>9</sup>

Deering purchased 130 acres of mangrove swamp and hammock land on the shore of Biscayne Bay in December of 1912, and Hoffman began drawings at the site early in 1913. After a trip to Europe that summer he found that his original scale needed adjustment. “I had to redesign the loggias around the open court at the center of the house. I changed the number of arches along each loggia from seven to five. As a result, each arch was larger, and in better scale.” On this trip he also discovered on Lake Como the Villa Pliniana that featured a loggia that opened on two sides. “It

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9. *Ibid.*, 188; see also Merrill Folsom, *Great American Mansions* (New York, 1963), 5-7.

was perfectly beautiful. At Vizcaya I adapted it to serve as the loggia between the inner court and the terrace along the bay."<sup>10</sup>

Hoffman completed his part of the construction of Vizcaya by the fall of 1916. Already, Chalfin had taken over the site, as shipments of furniture and furnishings arrived from the New York warehouses. Because Deering insisted his house be finished by Christmas 1916, Chalfin directed a frantic installation of panels, ceilings, and the other decorative treasures collected by the two men. With the villa nearing completion, Chalfin now envisioned a career in architecture as well as decorating, and he asked Hoffman to make him associate architect of Vizcaya. Hoffman consented.<sup>11</sup>

When Deering arrived in Miami on his yacht, *Nepenthe*, on Christmas Day 1916 and tied up between the stone breakwater barge (with its carvings by A. Stirling Calder) and the bay front terrace of the house, Chalfin arranged the pageantry. He now had full charge of the final details of the house and supervised the completion of the gardens. By July 1917, when *The Architectural Review* published "Vizcaya, the Villa and Grounds: A House in Miami, Florida" and listed F. Burrall Hoffman Jr. and Paul Chalfin as "Associate Architects," Hoffman was engaged in camouflage training in the United States Army. In the section on the gardens, Chalfin failed even to mention Diego Suarez, the young landscape architect whom Deering and he had met in Florence and hired to design Vizcaya's grounds. After the magazine caught up with Hoffman, now on active service in Europe, he wrote Chalfin. "I told him what I thought of what he had done, I never spoke to him again."<sup>12</sup> At the same

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10. Maher, *The Twilight of Splendor*, 188; see also, Nicholas N. Patricios, *Building Marvelous Miami* (Gainesville, 1994), 149-51; Patricia Gabriel, *The Villagers' Book of Outstanding Homes of Miami* (Coral Gables, 1975), 29-33. Although Kathryn Chapman Harwood claims that Pliniana was the villa of Pliny the Younger, the historic site of his villa in Bellagio is today owned by the Rockefeller Foundation and there is no Villa Pliniana. Harwood, *The Lives of Vizcaya*, 19-20, and trip to the site on Lake Como by author, May 1997.

11. *Miami Herald*, January 21, 1979; Maher, *The Twilight of Splendor*, 203-204.

12. "Vizcaya, the Villa and Grounds: A House in Miami, Florida," *The Architectural Review* 5 (April 1917), 121-67; *Miami Herald*, January 21, 1979. A number of articles were published in 1917 on Vizcaya and its gardens; none mentioned Suarez. One lists Hoffman and Chalfin as "co-architects." See "The Gardens of Vizcaya," *Vogue* (July 15, 1917), 36-37, 75. Augusta Owen Patterson, *American Homes of To-day: Their Architectural Style, Their Environment, Their Characteristics* (New York, 1924), contains many photographs of Vizcaya which she credits to both men as co-architects, as well as a photograph of the Riter music room.

time, Hoffman the gentleman took no action to attempt to correct the article.

Chalfin continued to claim credit for Vizcaya's design, virtually ignoring Hoffman's contribution. Nonetheless, his architectural and decorating business failed, and Chalfin was residing, nearly penniless and almost blind, in Clinton, New Jersey, in 1953 when Dade County purchased Vizcaya from the Deering heirs. In March of that year, Aline B. Louchheim [later Aline Saarinen], the *New York Times'* architectural writer, interviewed him for an article on the new Dade County Museum. In it she said that originally Hoffman had been commissioned to design the house, "but happily James Deering met Paul Chalfin, who became associated and later said 'Hoffman did the plumbing, I did the house.'" She called Chalfin's skillful taste, "for all of its preciousness, flamboyance and exquisiteness, . . . sensitive and knowledgeable." Writing of the baroque grandeur of the gardens, Louchheim names various artists who completed individual details without mentioning Diego Suarez.<sup>13</sup>

Hoffman, the consummate gentleman, had ignored Chalfin and his claims of designing Vizcaya for over thirty years. Now the artist-architect felt he had to take action. An angry Hoffman and his attorney met with the publisher of the *New York Times* and told him that unless the newspaper agreed to run a correction, Hoffman planned to sue. Diego Suarez also prepared an indignant seven-page statement that attacked the article and gave a detailed history of the design of the house and gardens. He concluded: "I strongly object to Mrs. Loucheim's [sic] article. Her story is biased in so far that it only renders tribute to the imagination and genius of Mr. Chalfin. The massive ability and indeed the great achievement of Mr. Hoffman as an architect are not only ignored, but perhaps on account of inaccurate information, he is referred to in a manner which is not only offensive but untrue."<sup>14</sup>

On Sunday, May 17, 1953, under a picture of the Vizcaya breakwater, Hoffman received his retraction. After declaring it made an inadvertent error in the earlier article, the *New York Times* gave

13. Harwood, *The Lives of Vizcaya*, 289-96; *New York Times*, January 11, March 15, 1953. Three years later the *Miami Herald* still credited Chalfin with the major part of the design. *Miami Herald*, May 27, 1956.

14. *Miami Herald*, January 21, 1979; Statement of Diego Suarez, 1953, copy of original in Vizcaya archives.



Hoffman full credit for the design of the “fabulous palace.” “In 1912 F. Burrall Hoffman, a well-known architect, was engaged to design a villa for Mr. Deering in such a way that use could be made of the treasures [collected by Deering and Chalfin]. All the plans for Vizcaya were drawn up in Mr. Hoffman’s office and his name alone appeared on them as architect with that of Harry Ingalls as associate. After the work was completed in 1916, Mr. Hoffman gave his consent to Mr. Chalfin’s name being joined to his as associate architect.”<sup>15</sup> After thirty-five years, Hoffman finally received national recognition for his design of Vizcaya.

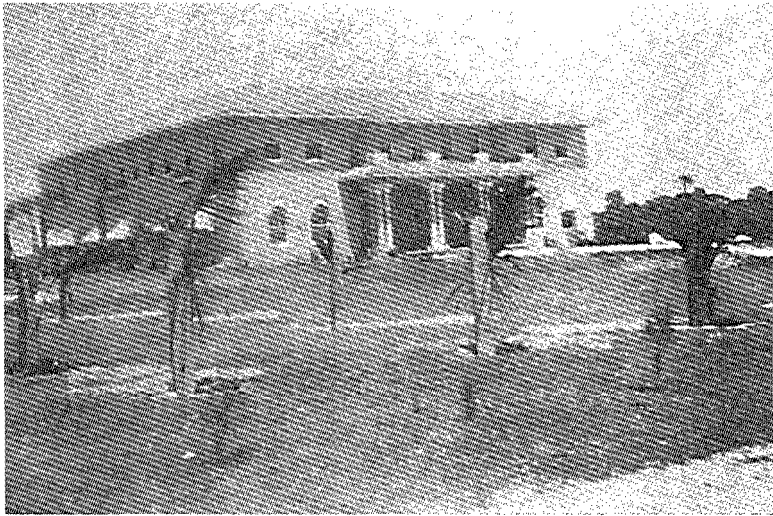
With hindsight, it is possible to say that Paul Chalfin contributed the dream and the vision that convinced Deering to attempt the grand project that became Vizcaya. Without his training and connoisseurship the dream might never have become reality. At the same time, no one today questions the role played by Hoffman. Architectural historian James Maher says that Burrall Hoffman’s wit and resourcefulness allowed Vizcaya to escape the dour rigor of its inspiration, the Villa Rezzonico, and achieve in its architecture a spirited yet serene baroque lyricism which showed Hoffman’s particular gift of “adapting and subtly recombining old forms in new ways.”<sup>16</sup> Carl J. Weinhardt Jr., an early director of Vizcaya, said that “it is the finest house ever built in the United States, and that the whole complex is among the most brilliant achievements in the history of our national domestic architecture. . . . In this one commission, . . . F. Burrall Hoffman Jr. established a permanent place in the history of our country’s architecture.”<sup>17</sup>

Before Hoffman completed Vizcaya, Mrs. Frederick E. Guest and her brother, Henry C. Phipps, both commissioned large ocean-front houses in Palm Beach from the architect. In 1916, Palm Beach remained a hotel resort and few vacationers owned their

15. *New York Times*, May 17, 1953.

16. Maher, *The Twilight of Splendor*, 180.

17. Harwood, *The Lives of Vizcaya*, ix; see also, Carl J. Weinhardt Jr., “Vizcaya, Miami, Florida,” *The Magazine Antiques* 121 (January 1982), 312-21; and “Villa Vizcaya, Miami, Florida,” *Harper’s Bazaar* 142 (July 1917), 40-43. It has been pointed out that Vizcaya also contributed greatly to the development of Miami and south-east Florida. The labor force, sometimes numbering close to a thousand, contained numerous skilled workmen who remained in the area and were necessary components of the great building boom of the early 1920s. Metropolitan Dade County Office of Community Development, Historic Preservation Division, *From Wilderness to Metropolis: The History of Architecture of Dade County, 1825-1940*, 2d ed. (Miami, 1992), 60-61.



Heamaw, Henry C. Phipps's 1916 house in Palm Beach as seen from the north. Photograph courtesy of Historical Society of Palm Beach County, West Palm Beach.

own residences. Those who did, with only minor exceptions, built on the lakefront. Mrs. Guest's Villa Artemis and Phipps's Heamaw were the first of the resort's large oceanfront mansions and inaugurated the trend that after the war transformed Palm Beach into a "cottage colony" in the style of Newport and Bar Harbor.<sup>18</sup>

Both the Villa Artemis and Heamaw, like Vizcaya, had large interior patios completely surrounded by the rooms of the house. The major reception rooms of both Palm Beach houses faced the ocean with windows and French doors opening onto porches and terraces. Both were also entered from the side. From their construction until the 1928 hurricane, Ocean Boulevard separated the estates from the beach. After the hurricane destroyed the road, the landowners in this section successfully petitioned the town government to abandon the roadway.<sup>19</sup>

There are no detailed historic photographs of the Villa Artemis though the severely plain white house with turquoise trim had

18. Donald W. Curl, *Mizner's Florida: American Resort Architecture* (New York and Cambridge, Mass., 1984), 61-62; *Palm Beach Post*, April 12, 1916; see also Donald W. Curl, *Palm Beach County* (Northridge, Calif., 1986), 59-71.

19. *Palm Beach Post*, April-June 1929.

neo-classical window and door surrounds with Grecian-style decorative panels above many windows. Loggias on both the first and second floor with Doric columns overlooked the pool, a small circular Greek temple, and the ocean beyond. In 1967 Villa Artemis's owners removed its second story and placed a glass roof over the central patio, creating a large, sunny living room.<sup>20</sup>

Heamaw's most prominent architectural feature was a large porch and sun deck on its oceanfront facade. In 1923 Addison Mizner designed a wing that included a two-story living room (often called the ballroom), a small library, and a sun room-loggia. In 1931 Maurice Fatio remodeled the facade of the original house and added a new, imposing entry. In 1972, after the death of Phipps's widow, Gladys Mills Phipps, the house was razed and the oceanfront portion of the estate subdivided.<sup>21</sup>

As his last commission in Palm Beach, Hoffman designed a large music room addition for Joseph Riter. In 1916, Riter purchased Bywater Lodge, which had been built by Arrow shirtmaker George Bywater Cluett on the lakefront in 1903. The room was completed by February 1920 when Riter hosted a concert for over a hundred guests. The 35-by-70-foot room, called a "miniature theatre," was decorated in the Italian Renaissance style with a cypress ceiling painted by Robert Winthrop Chanler, a friend of the architect's who had decorated Vizcaya's grotto pool area. The room contained a pipe organ and a sliding stage, "fully equipped for a professional performance." Riter's efforts to bring more cultural

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20. Villa Artemis drawings for remodeling, Marion Sims Wyeth Collection, Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach. When the contractor attempted to remove the second story walls he discovered that Hoffman had used reinforced concrete, rather than the usual hollow tiles. The expensive tempered steel drills required to break the concrete broke easily, greatly prolonging the job and, ultimately, bankrupting the contractor. Richard M. Hunter, draftsman for Marion Sims Wyeth, interviews with author, 1986-87; Diana Guest Manning, interview by David A. Hanks Associates, April 6, 1991, David A. Hanks Research Report, Canadian Centre for Architecture, Montreal. Hanks Associates researched Hoffman's commissions for the architect's nephew and his wife, Lindley and Judy Hoffman of Palm Beach.

21. Curl, *Mizner's Florida*, 83, 212-13; Alexandra Fatio, *Maurice Fatio: Architect, New York and Palm Beach* (Palm Beach, 1993), 128-30; *Palm Beach Post*, August 30, 1972; *Palm Beach Daily News*, August 31, 1972. In 1975 B.D. Cole, Inc., an insurance company, built a new office building in Belle Glade which included "sixteen tons of coral rocks...removed from [Heamaw along with] arches, columns, even the original doors." To complete the new building, the company brought an Italian artisan to "refit the stone pieces together properly." *Palm Beach Daily News*, April 12, 1975.

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activities to the resort during the winter season ultimately resulted in the founding of the Society of the Four Arts. Unfortunately, after his death in 1928 the house and music room were destroyed.<sup>22</sup>

The great period of Palm Beach development came in the 1920s. Addison Mizner, Marion Sims Wyeth, Maurice Fatio, Howard Major, and John L. Volk, along with many out-of-town architects who completed one or two commissions, created the Mediterranean ambiance that today means Palm Beach to the world. Hoffman, after executing commissions for Guest, Phipps, and Riter, certainly could have become one of the resort's leading social architects; instead, he disappeared from the scene. Perhaps the patrician Hoffman found the twenties' social maelstrom of nouveau riche, pretentious small town social leaders, and the truly old guard, all jockeying for position, just too distasteful. As the heir to generations of wealth and social position, he never depended on his architectural career for his living. Brendan Gill has also suggested that Hoffman's career as a "gentleman architect" in the tradition of Lord Burlington or Thomas Jefferson, designing projects for family, friends, and neighbors, and accepting only those commissions he found interesting, began in the 1920s.<sup>23</sup>

In 1921 Hoffman entered into a partnership with his younger brother Murray and they completed a number of New York City town houses and Long Island country estates. In this period he also cooperated with New York architect Lafayette Goldstone in the design of three luxury upper East Side apartment buildings. In 1928 they designed a fifteen-story building with delicate wrought-iron detailing at 132-140 East Seventy-ninth Street. According to William Hoffman, the apartment won a city prize as "best of the year." Hoffman specially designed a penthouse in this building for his

22. Mrs. George B. Cluett Diary, 1900-1917, Cluett House and Museum Archive, Troy, New York; "Among the Palms," *Palm Beach Life* 26 (March 6, 27, 1917); *Palm Beach Post*, October 24, 1919, January 22, 1920, and June 12, 1928; "A Spacious Dignity Dominates this Palm Beach House," *Vogue* (February 1, 1920), 57; Harwood, *The Lives of Vizcaya*, 233-36.

23. *Palm Beach Post*, February 2, 1921; see also Curl, *Palm Beach County*, 59-71; Gill, F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr., 32. A short newspaper article mentions another possible Palm Beach commission: "[Hoffman] is making plans and sketches for a fine place soon to be built on the ocean front with a unique swimming pool." *Palm Beach Post*, March 12, 1919. This possible residence has never been identified. A later article mentioned that Chalfin was designing an Italian villa for an ocean front location south of the Breakers. This commission was never completed. *Palm Beach Post*, March 21, 1919.

own use. The next year their fifteen-story building with neo-classical motifs at 4-10 East Seventy-second Street also received the “best of the year” award. In 1929 they also designed a second twenty-story neo-classical building at 730 Park Avenue. In that same year Hoffman, no longer associated with his brother, designed a lavish eight-bedroom Mediterranean-style house for Helen and Henry Potter Russell. Certainly his largest and most luxurious house since Vizcaya, it was for the Russells’ twenty-two-square-mile thoroughbred ranch, known as the Double H, in California’s Carmel Valley.<sup>24</sup>

In May 1927, Hoffman married Mary Virginia [Dolly] Kimball. From a wealthy Virginia publishing family, Dolly established a career as an interior decorator. According to Livingstone Elder, Hoffman’s longtime draftsman, the architect closed his office with the stock market crash in 1929 and used a studio he owned on East Seventy-ninth Street and Elder’s own office for his architectural work. He and Dolly also began to spend the spring in an apartment in Paris, summer in a small pavilion on the property of a chateau in the French countryside owned by Dolly’s sister, and fall in their New York City penthouse. Late each fall when Hoffman returned to New York, Elder said that he usually had one commission. “Just one. We never did more than one,” Elder commented. “I think he just didn’t want to be bothered.”<sup>25</sup>

Hoffman’s next Florida commission came in 1935 when he designed a house for M. Sheldon Whitehouse’s plantation in Monticello. Monticello had been the center of the antebellum cotton production in Florida. At the war’s end the land had given out and the area never regained its agricultural supremacy. By the end of the nineteenth century, many of the cotton plantations of middle Florida and southern Georgia had become quail hunting preserves for northern sportsmen. Whitehouse, a former ambassador to

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24. “Chronology of F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr.’s life,” Hanks Research Report, CCA; Hoffman, *Eleven Generations*, 36. William Hoffman does not indicate who granted the “best apartment prize.” Goldstone won the Gold Medal of the New York Chapter of the American Institute of Architects in 1914 for an apartment on East Sixty-second Street. *New York Times*, June 23, 1956; photographs of the various apartment buildings are found in the Vizcaya archives. Bruce David Colen, “Stonepine: Sophisticated Equestrian Retreat in California’s Carmel Valley,” *Architectural Digest* 44 (October 1987), AD Travels, 32-40.

25. Livingstone Elder, interview by David A. Hanks Associates, April 1, 1991, Hanks Research Report, CCA. Elder, a registered architect in New York State, remained associated with Hoffman for many years. The drawings for most of Hoffman’s projects were completed in Elder’s office until the 1960s.



M. Sheldon Whitehouse's plantation house, 1935, Monticello, Florida. *Photograph courtesy of Mr. and Mrs. W. Stanley Proctor, Monticello, Florida.*

Great Britain, asked Hoffman to design a "shootings bunks" on his twelve-hundred-acre estate. According to Livingstone Elder, the house had some very attractive rooms and a "wonderful flying staircase." He also recalled that Hoffman had used some very handsome old Spanish doors left over from the Deering purchases for Vizcaya. In general, the Hoffman design emulated many of the antebellum houses found in the area.<sup>26</sup>

Among Florida resorts, two patrician enclaves attempt to retain both anonymity and isolation from the tourist and social scenes. It is little wonder that Hoffman became associated with both resorts. Boca Grande, on Gasparilla Island on Florida's west coast, is connected to the mainland by a narrow private bridge with a toll high enough to discourage casual visitors. Since the late nineteenth century, the island has been a refuge for an American elite who enjoy yachting, fishing, and golf in a relaxed, informal atmosphere. This elite, often termed "the beachfronters," derived its island social po-

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26. Elder, interview; contemporary slides from Mr. and Mrs. W. Stanley Proctor, current owners of El Destino Plantation; see also Clifton Paisley, *From Cotton to Quail: An Agricultural Chronicle of Leon County, Florida, 1860-1967* (Tallahassee, 1968).

sition more through “family background” than wealth. The island has also long been associated with the du Pont family.<sup>27</sup> Boca Grande’s attempts at anonymity have been so successful that neither Cleveland Amory nor Stephen Birmingham in their social histories of American resorts mention its existence. Jupiter Island, which before its incorporation was called Hobe Sound after its mainland post office, is actually mentioned by both.<sup>28</sup> Amory later wrote about Jupiter Island: “There are big frogs from big puddles and big frogs from little puddles, but there are no little frogs from any kind of puddle.” Although only twenty-five miles north of Palm Beach, it has gained the reputation as more relaxed and “old-clothesy,” a place for old wealth, tired of the pretensions of its southern neighbor. Until recently only members of the Jupiter Island Club could purchase or build houses in the town; hence, it has remained, in the words of one observer, a place of “seclusion, solitude, and tranquility.”<sup>29</sup>

Shortly after the commission for the Whitehouse plantation, Hoffman received several commissions for houses on Boca Grande. Hoffman had visited the island many times with Harvard classmate Henry Francis du Pont. In 1938 he designed houses for his older brother, William Wickham Hoffman, a New York banker, and for New Yorker Mrs. Michael Van Buren. For William, Hoffman designed a two-story frame regency-style house with an ornate oval window in the attic eave of the entrance facade. A projecting wooden balcony provides shelter for the entrance door. He designed a Spanish colonial house for Mrs. Van Buren. Its U-shape enclosed a patio that today shelters a swimming pool. A large tower contains a guest bedroom. Two years later he designed houses for Florence Shaw and Holstead Lindsley. The Shaw house, a large stucco cottage with two wings separated by an outdoor passageway, and the Lindsley house,

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27. Charles Dana Gibson, *Boca Grande: A Series of Historical Essays* (St. Petersburg, 1982), 66-78, 83-84.

28. Cleveland Amory, *The Last Resorts: A Portrait of American Society at Play* (New York, 1948), 136-50; Stephen Birmingham, *The Right Places (for the Right People)* (Boston, 1973), 98, 233.

29. Cleveland Amory, “The Last Stand of the Rich,” *Saturday Evening Post* 225 (November 1, 1952); see also *Palm Beach Post*, April 18, 1976; Linda Marx, “Hobe Sound: Where the Blood is True Blue but Cameras Rarely Flash,” *Palm Beach Life* (February 1982); *Palm Beach Post*, December 11, 1983; *New York Times*, March 10, 1985.

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a more formal residence in Mediterranean style with red tile roofs, are still typical of the Boca Grande houses of this era.<sup>30</sup>

In his book *Eleven Generations of Hoffmans in New York*, William Wickham Hoffman says that his brother Burrall would have been a greater success in his architectural career if he had not participated in the two world wars. Certainly, what seemed like a growing practice in Boca Grande vacation houses ended with these commissions. Although he later completed drawings for a proposed guest house for Charles W. Englehardt on the island, his only other commission came in 1949 when he designed Our Lady of Mercy Mission. The small Roman Catholic chapel in spare Italian Renaissance style, with its elegant entry's old wooden doors taken from the same Spanish monastery as those at the Whitehouse plantation, coral keystone surround, and small bell tower, remains a fitting capstone to his island designs.<sup>31</sup>

After the war, the Hoffmans continued their schedule of spring and summer in France and fall in New York, though now they usually spent the winters in Florida, arriving shortly after Christmas. In this period Hoffman also published his first book on classical architecture in Tennessee, collaborating with Gifford A. Cochran. Published in 1946, the volume contains a short history of the state and its architecture from pioneer days through the period before the Civil War, as well as histories and drawings, both floor plans and facades, of its most architecturally notable structures. He also designed a chapel for Portuguese fishermen in Bermuda, planned further alterations for Christ Church and memorial library in the Winterthur Museum for Henry Francis du Pont, completed extensive alterations for the Fifth Avenue apartments of Pierre David-Weill, head of Lazard Freres, and Amory Houghton, and the Washington house of C. Douglas Dillon. Dillon, secretary of the treasury

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30. Hoffman, Van Buren, Shaw, and Lindsley houses, Hanks Research Report, CCA. A recent visit to the island by the author found that all four houses still exist, though there have been alterations and additions made in several cases. The Hoffman house is on the north side of Twelfth Street on the Gulf; the Van Buren house is on the north side of Tenth Street and extends through to Eleventh on the Gulf; the Shaw house is on the north side of Eleventh in mid-block; and the Lindsley house is on the south side of Thirteenth Street on the Gulf.

31. Hoffman, *Eleven Generations of Hoffmans*, 36. Hoffman served as a civilian employee of the Special Services Division of the Bureau of Aeronautics, Department of the Navy from 1942 to 1945 and in 1946 received a meritorious Civilian Service Award from the navy. See Hanks Research Report, CCA. Mrs. Michael Gavin of Long Island and a long time Boca Grande resident, commissioned the chapel.



under President John Kennedy and later ambassador to France, was the son of Clarence Dillon, the architect's Harvard classmate. Over the years Hoffman received a number of commissions for Clarence Dillon including in 1954 a vacation residence at Round Hill in Montego Bay, Jamaica. The house, made up of a group of pavilions, each with its own hipped roof, was an early version of a style the architect later used in several Florida houses. In 1962 Hoffman also completed a memorial chapel for St. Luke's Episcopal Church in Peapack, New Jersey, in memory of Mrs. Dillon.<sup>32</sup>

In 1965 he and Dolly decided to build on Jupiter Island. The Jungle is the first of four island houses that he designed in the next five years. A cottage by earlier standards, the elegant and classically austere Regency villa made up of three joined white stucco pavilions, overlooked the club golf course. The entry, centered in the large middle pavilion, is reached by double Palladian-style steps leading from the walled motor court. A small entrance hall opens into the impressive sixteen-foot-high living room. Originally the house had no dining room, though later the guest bedroom became a dining room and Hoffman added a new guest house by the swimming pool. The southern wing of the house contained two bedrooms that opened onto a small pool-side terrace. Contrary to the usual practice of large room-sized closets for expensive resort houses, the Hoffmans, who spent so much time in Europe, preferred armoires to closets, though there were large closets off both master bathrooms. The northern wing of the house contained a pullman-style kitchen without a window and two small staff bedrooms. Brendan Gill says that the Jungle "possesses, both inside and out, an air of dignity that falls just short of grandeur. Moreover, one senses that the degree of this falling short has been exquisitely calculated to establish the nature of the social relationships that the structure means to make possible."<sup>33</sup>

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32. Gifford A. Cochran in collaboration with F. Burrall Hoffman, *Grandeur in Tennessee: Classical Revival Architecture in a Pioneer State* (New York, 1946); Elder, interview, Hanks Research Report, CGA. The Montego Bay house is now the vacation home of Ricky and Ralph Lauren and although refurbished by the late decorator Angelo Donghia, remains little changed from the original design. Steven M. L. Aronson, "High Style in Jamaica," *House and Garden* 156 (October 1984), 12-27, 230, 232, 234; "This Man Has an Island," *Town and Country* 146 (March 1992), 68-82.

33. Mary McDougall, "Seaside Urbanity," *House and Garden* 155 (December 1983), 133-40; Gill, "F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr.," 40; Susan Mary Alsop, "Hobe Sound Regency: The Florida Retreat of Mr. and Mrs. Douglas Auchincloss," *Architectural Digest* 53 (August 1996), 48-53. The Hoffman house is on Gomez Road.

The Hoffman house so “enchanted” the John A. Prossers that they asked the architect to design an exact copy next door. Hoffman the artist refused. While the room layout is similar, he designed larger living and dining rooms, and the exterior looks nothing like the Hoffman house. The new house had flat roofs with parapets topped with pineapple finials and a formal Georgian entry with a pediment over the front door, giving it an English Regency facade and creating two distinctively different houses.<sup>34</sup> In 1969 he designed another similar house on Beach Road for General Paul Peabody. Once more the exterior design, although including hip roofs over the major sections of the house, changed style. Neo-classical Ionic pilasters flank the front door and there are large keystones over the windows of the entrance facade.<sup>35</sup>

In 1970, Hoffman received his last major commission, his fourth winter vacation house for Jupiter Island. Harlequin House, designed for C. Douglas Dillon, sits on the highest site on the island. Brendan Gill calls it “the second-greatest work of [Hoffman’s] career” and says that it embodies the basic principles of the architectural profession: “beauty, utility, and fitness.”<sup>36</sup> It is a large one-story U-shaped house enclosing a sheltered swimming pool. From the entrance court the visitor enters the north wing through a formal porch with Tuscan columns, which in turn leads to a vestibule, and then through an arcade to a loggia overlooking the courtyard and pool. Beyond the loggia the large living room faces the ocean. In keeping with its relaxed informality, the house has no dining room. A master bedroom suite with office and dressing rooms and four additional bedrooms and baths complete its southern wing. Staff quarters and the kitchen are in an extension of the northern wing.<sup>37</sup>

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34. Tom Green, “Island Homes and . . . The Rewards of Diversity,” *Island Through the Years* (Hobe Sound, Fla., 1988), 76-83. Hoffman once said that the advantage the arts enjoyed over other professions was that they could be practiced in old age. While Hoffman continued to practice, he never opened a Florida office, choosing to use the facilities and draftsmen of Marion Sims Wyeth’s Palm Beach office. Hunter, interviews with author, 1986-87. Plans for some of the Jupiter Island commissions can be found in the Wyeth collection. Wyeth, one of Palm Beach’s original society architects and the designer of Florida’s Governor’s Mansion, had also graduated from the Ecole des Beaux-Arts. The Prosser house is on Gomez Road.

35. Peabody House, Hanks Research Report, CCA. The plans, in the Wyeth collection, were actually drawn by the then eighty-one-year-old Wyeth. The Peabody house is on Beach Road.

36. Gill, “F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr.,” 35.

37. See plans, Wyeth collection.

As in the case of Vizcaya, the architect designed an interior “of meticulous detail that rivals any on the Island.” He and Dolly, who served as the decorator (she had earlier decorated the American Embassy in Paris for the Dillons), found six of the living room’s antique Chinese wall paper panels in Paris. Hoffman then designed the rest which he had made in Hong Kong. Although both Hoffmans maintained a close friendship with the Dillons, several disagreements surfaced during the design and construction of the house. According to Richard M. Hunter, the draftsman for Harlequin in Marion Sims Wyeth’s office, Dillon found the proportions of the loggia’s Egyptian lotus capital columns disturbing and insisted they be redesigned after they had been installed. Dillon also told an interviewer that he had demanded more closet space and that Hoffman had only reluctantly agreed.<sup>38</sup>

Hoffman was eighty-eight when he completed Harlequin House.<sup>39</sup> During his sixty-plus-year career, his adherence to classical taste kept him true to his Beaux-Arts training. He also remained true to his status as a gentleman architect. From Villa Vizcaya in 1914 to Harlequin House in 1970, Florida architecture was enriched by Hoffman’s work. In his book on the Hoffman family, William Hoffman concludes his brother’s entry in the volume by telling of his architectural triumphs and his unusual talent for painting in water colors, though perhaps for the consummate social architect, Burrall Hoffman found the final comment more to his liking: “As a soldier he never failed in his duty, and as a sportsman he never turned from a fence.” Hoffman died on Jupiter Island at the age of ninety-eight in 1980.<sup>40</sup>

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38. Green, “Island Homes,” *Island Through the Years*, 82. During a tour of the house for the Founder’s Circle of the Canadian Centre for Architecture, February 26, 1994, Dillon pointed out how the new wall paper panels had faded much more rapidly than the original six panels; Hunter, interviews with author, 1986-87; Hanks Research Report, CCA. The Dillon house is on Beach Road.

39. Hoffman’s last known work, at age ninety-seven, consisted of planned alterations of a Georgetown house at 3018 Dumbarton Avenue, N.W. for himself and Dolly. In 1973 they had sold their Paris residence and divided the year between Washington and Jupiter Island. Mary McDougall, “Style of a Lifetime: Mrs. F. Burrall Hoffman’s distinguished house in Georgetown,” *House and Garden* 159 (March 1987), 178-83, 206.

40. Hoffman, *Eleven Generations of Hoffmans*, 37-38; *Palm Beach Post*, November 30, 1980; *Miami Herald*, December 1, 1980.