



IN PRINT: **FRIDAY:** NEW HOMES: NEW COMMUNITIES | **SUNDAY:** RESIDENCES: REALES & GREAT DEALS
 ONLINE: **LOOKING FOR A HOME?** SEARCH NEARLY 3,000 NEIGHBORHOODS. PalmBeachPost.com/floridahome

Palm Beach County: Celebrating 100 years (An occasional series)

Mar-a-lago

By BARBARA MARSHALL ■ Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

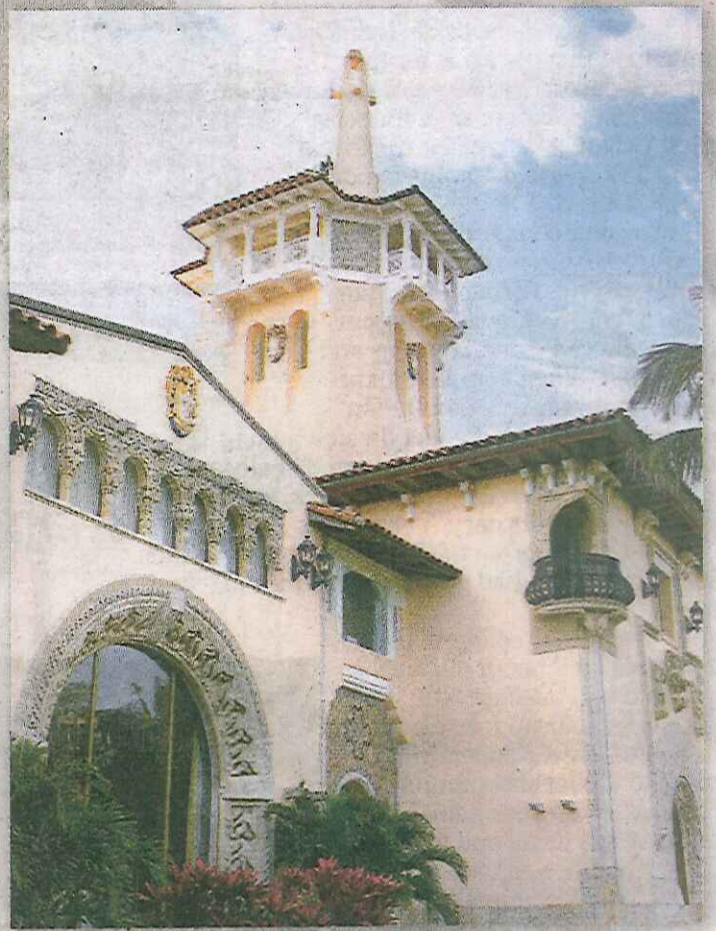
The 600-year-old tiles lining Mar-a-Lago's baronial entrance read "Plus Ultra" — the Age of Discovery's rallying cry of "More Beyond" as sailors pushed past the boundaries of the known world.

But "Ne Plus Ultra" — "No More Beyond" — is a more suitable slogan for Palm Beach's biggest and most famous mansion because the unapologetic splendor of Mar-a-Lago will never be surpassed.

Still nestled on its original 17 acres, it's the last of the majestic estates carved from beach jungle by the self-made plutocrats who created Palm Beach in the 1920s. The others, including Playa Rienta, El Mirasol and Cielito Lindo, were bulldozed or subdivided decades ago.

That Mar-a-Lago survived intact as a museum of Jazz Age exuberance — and excess — is due to its two strong-willed and charismatic owners: Marjorie Merriweather Post and Donald Trump.

Marjorie Merriweather Post was Mrs. E.F. Hutton when she decided that her house on the Everglades Club golf course was too small for the future "Queen of Palm Beach." In 1924, she started looking for a large tract where a huge house could be anchored to the ancient coral reef under the barrier island. According to her biographer, Nancy Rubin, author of *American Empress: The Life and Times of Marjorie Merriweather Post*, the heiress, her real estate agent and carpenter crawled through the beach jungle on hands and knees before finding the perfect spot between the ocean and Lake Worth (today's Intracoastal Waterway), where Southern Boulevard



Palm Beach Daily News file photo

PRIDE IN OWNERSHIP: In 82 years, Mar-a-Lago has had just two owners. In the 1920s, cereal heiress Marjorie Merriweather Post (above) created the magnificent mansion. In the mid-1990s, Donald Trump (right) re-created it, transforming the gilded Jazz Age palace into a private club.



Staff photos by RICHARD GRAULICH



THE GOLD STANDARD: Boaters have long used Mar-a-Lago's 75-foot tower (top and above) to navigate the Palm Beach coastline. The mansion's name means 'sea to lake.' Top left, a view of the living room of Palm Beach's most famous estate, decorated with frescoes copied from a Medici palazzo in Florence, Italy.

MORE PICTURES FROM INSIDE MAR-A-LAGO, 2F

See MAR-A-LAGO, 2F ▶

Palm Beach County: Celebrating 100 years

(An occasional series)

Home was Post's refuge to the end

► MAR-A-LAGO from 1F

meets South Ocean Boulevard. After hiring architect Marion Sims Wyeth for the basic design, Post complained that his ideas for the mansion's decoration were too stodgy. She brought in Viennese architect Joseph Urban, who created theatrical sets for Flo Ziegfeld and his famous Follies.

Like a confectioner creating his native city's famous merengue-covered pastries, Urban iced Mar-a-Lago in gold leaf, gold bathroom fixtures, carved stone, frescoes and rare marble. When completed, the Spanish-Moorish-Venetian-Italian house had 55,700 square feet divided among 119 rooms, including 58 bedrooms and 33 bathrooms. All for a house open for just six weeks, from New Year's Day into February.

At the end, its price tag had risen to \$2.5 million, "far more than we had any even wild idea of," Post wrote afterward.

But despite the collapse of the Florida land boom during construction, Post kept 600 workmen employed for nearly four years, forever endearing herself to the local community.

In Post's life, other homes and husbands came and went (she eventually wed four times although Rubin says the philandering Hutton was the love of her life) but Mar-a-Lago remained a constant refuge where she reigned until her death in 1973.

Her will granted the estate to the U.S. government for use as a winter White House but not even U.S. presidents could afford to live like Palm Beach grandees.

"Thanks but no thanks," the government told the Post foundation, citing the mansion's \$1 million-a-year maintenance costs and its site under Palm Beach International Airport's flight path.

Mar-a-Lago lay mothballed for more than a decade, until Donald Trump paid \$10 million for it in 1985. He recently said one of his first acts as owner was to cancel the demolition contract on the mansion.

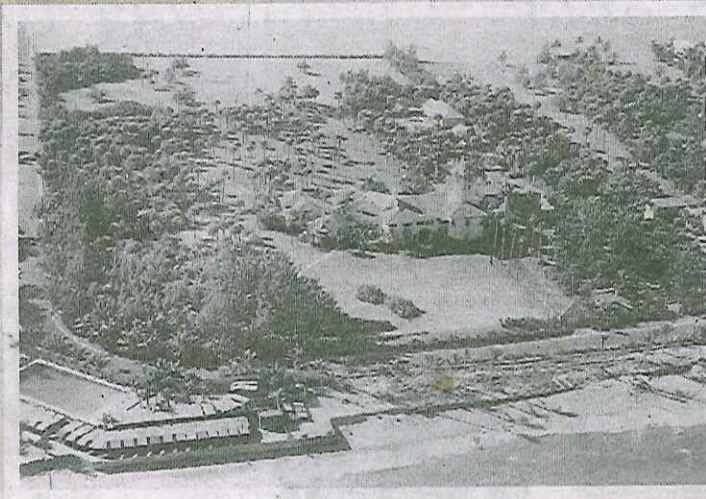
After spending millions in renovation, Trump embarked on a protracted battle with the town of Palm Beach to make the estate a private club. He won, and beginning in 1995 added a beach club, new ballroom, spa, tennis and croquet courts.

As the Club's season was winding down this year, Trump said he saved the dazzling mansion for two reasons: "One, for the architecture. It is a masterpiece, a work of art. And, two, because of Marjorie Merriweather Post. She created Mar-a-Lago as a happy place, a party palace. She would be so happy to see what we have done here."

Interested in joining the party? Initiation fees are \$200,000, not including the \$1,000-a-night rate to stay in Marjorie's magnificent mansion.

Mar-a-Lago.
Ne plus ultra.

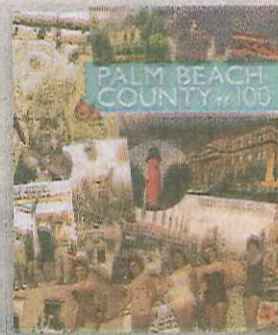
@barbara_marshall@pbpost.com



Courtesy of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County



Palm Beach Daily News file photo



About this series:

2009 marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of Palm Beach County.

To celebrate, *The Palm Beach Post* is publishing a history book — *Palm Beach County at 100: Our History, Our Home* — this fall, plus we'll be featuring stories on our distinctive architectural legacy all year in Florida Home: Neighborhoods on Saturdays..

To preorder a copy of *Palm Beach County at 100: Our History, Our Home*, go to gallerypalmbeach.com

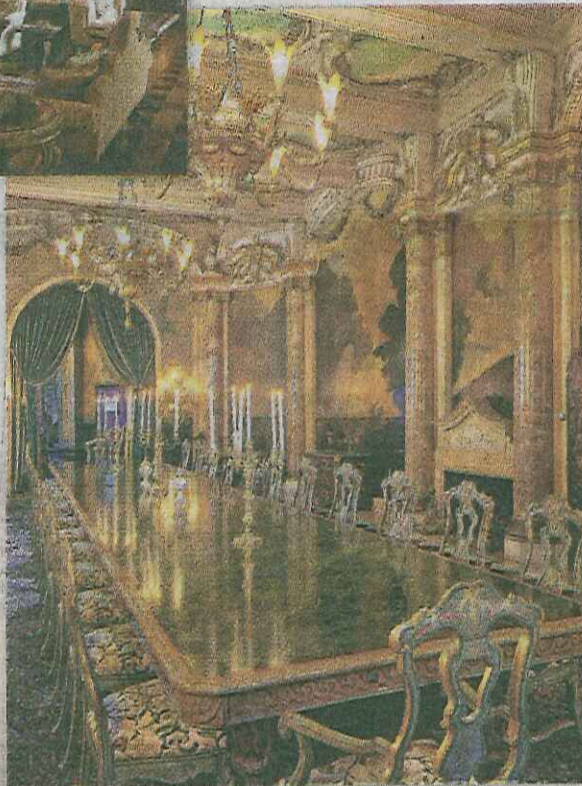
'THE QUEEN OF PALM BEACH': At top left, the estate in 1937. Marjorie Merriweather Post (top right) was one of the country's wealthiest women. Rare pink and gold marble (left) adds femininity to her dressing room, which served as her office and exercise room. Far left, the living room's carved, 34-foot ceiling is covered with gold-leaf.



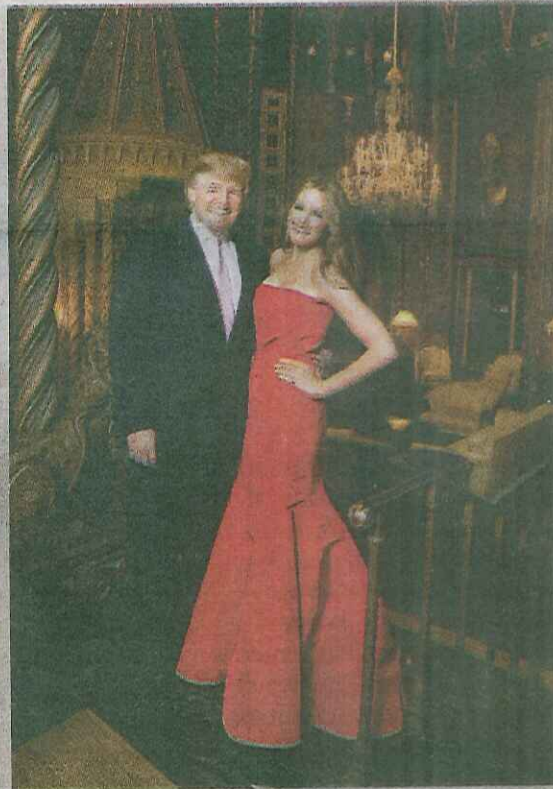
Palm Beach Post file photo



Palm Beach Post file photo



Palm Beach Post file photo



RICHARD GRAULICH/Staff Photographer



COMING
THIS FALL!



RICHARD GRAULICH/Staff Photographer

We had hoped to bring you the butler's tour of Mar-a-Lago, with Tony Senecal, who served both Marjorie Merriweather Post and current owner, Donald Trump. However, the club has only a skeleton staff working this summer. We hope to bring you the tour, in Senecal's own words, sometime this fall, when the club reopens and Trump and his guests return.



Palm Beach Daily News file photo

WORK OF ART: Merriweather Post originally thought she could build her Palm Beach sandcastle for \$1 million — until she hired architect and theater designer Joseph Urban to add some pizzazz to Marion Sims Wyeth's design. 'But, Mrs. Hutton ... eet iss so beootiful' was the 250-pound Austrian's response every time Marjorie tried to cut costs. In the end, Mar-a-Lago cost \$2.5 million — and according to her biographer, perhaps her marriage to E.F. Hutton, who disapproved of his much-richer wife's spending. (Although he was also apparently sleeping with her French maid, among other women.) In Marjorie's day, the dining room (above, left) contained this 2-ton stone dining table, now in the Hillwood Museum, her former estate outside Washington, D.C. Current owner Donald Trump and his wife, Melania, in the living room in April (above, right). The entry hall, where guests arrive (above).