

CASA GRANDE HISTORY

Casa Grande was designed in 1947. The architect was well-known - C. Dale Dykema of Grand Rapids. Dykema had an architecture practice ever since his graduation from Michigan in 1924. He married a girl from Chicago and they had three children.

He designed war plants during WW2 and then returned to Florida to resume his practice there.

Beach Close Up

C. Dale Dykema, Redington Beach architect, has a physique like a football player and an imagination like Rodin.

Dykema, who planned beautiful Church-By-The-Sea, Madeira Beach; Sandpiper Apartments and Sabalo Apartments, Redington Beach, came here from Ft. Lauderdale where he practiced for several years. A former resident of Grand Rapids, he studied architecture at the University of Michigan.

Among the Ft. Lauderdale buildings for which he drew plans are The Idlewild, Casa Grande Apartments, and the Lang Building. He also was assistant architect on the \$350,000 Marie Antoinette building.

Dykema's clients for Casa Grande were Walter H Semeyn and his wife Leolyn. The complex consisted of three adjoining buildings. The north and south building were completed in 1949; the west building in 1950.

The north and south building each have four apartments. In the west building there were two apartments on the upstairs level and on ground level, two efficiencies - referred to as 'hotel rooms'. They had no cooking facilities but each had its own bathroom.

On completion, all the apartments were sold to people from Grand Rapids. The Semeyn retained one apartment for themselves plus the two 'hotel rooms' which were rented out for short vacation stays. Mr & Mrs Semeyn also undertook managerial responsibilities for the complex, plus that of helping the out-of-town owners find vacation renters for their apartments.

Walter and Leolyn had both been born in 1895 so were in their fifties when they commissioned Casa Grande. The couple had two sons.

In March, 2004, the prestigious magazine HOME FORT LAUDERDALE devoted a two-page special, with text and photographs, to Casa Grande. The magazine referred to it as 'a Mid-Century gem.'

Some quotes:

“ *The grouping of connected two story buildings sits graciously on its site, taking full advantage of its deep canal views...*

“ *The building boasts 'floating' staircases, wide sun-shielding overhangs and wraparound casement windows - all hallmarks of its era...*

“ *Upper units are connected to a central stair via a floating bridge which visually ties the open end of the courtyard to the other three structures...*

Examples of other buildings designed by C. Dale Dykema



Fabulous Mandalay Shores, Clearwater Beach, Florida



MARIE ANTOINETTE APARTMENTS, 2222 N. ATLANTIC BLVD. FORT LAUDERDALE, FLORIDA



C. Dale Dykema was best known for resorts, residential buildings and 'living spaces'.

He died in 1986.

Casa Grande - an ecological mid-century modern building on Hendricks Isle

In addition to being an excellent example of mid-century architecture, Casa Grande also demonstrates admirably the ways in which architects can design buildings specifically for their use - in this case for the South Floridian weather.

When looking at Casa Grande from above, (see the screenshot from Google Maps below) it is immediately apparent that this trio of buildings is not, as it first seems, in an exact U shape. You can see how the north and south buildings turn in towards each other as they face east towards the ocean.

This has the effect of forming a 'funnel' so that when winds come to shore from the ocean, the wind is directed to the open spaces at either side of the west building and directed away from the property.

Casa Grande was designed prior to domestic air conditioning being widely available and Dykema's design strongly reflects this. All windows and doors are protected from the sun. The upper story's windows are shaded by the roof overhang which keeps the upper apartments cool.

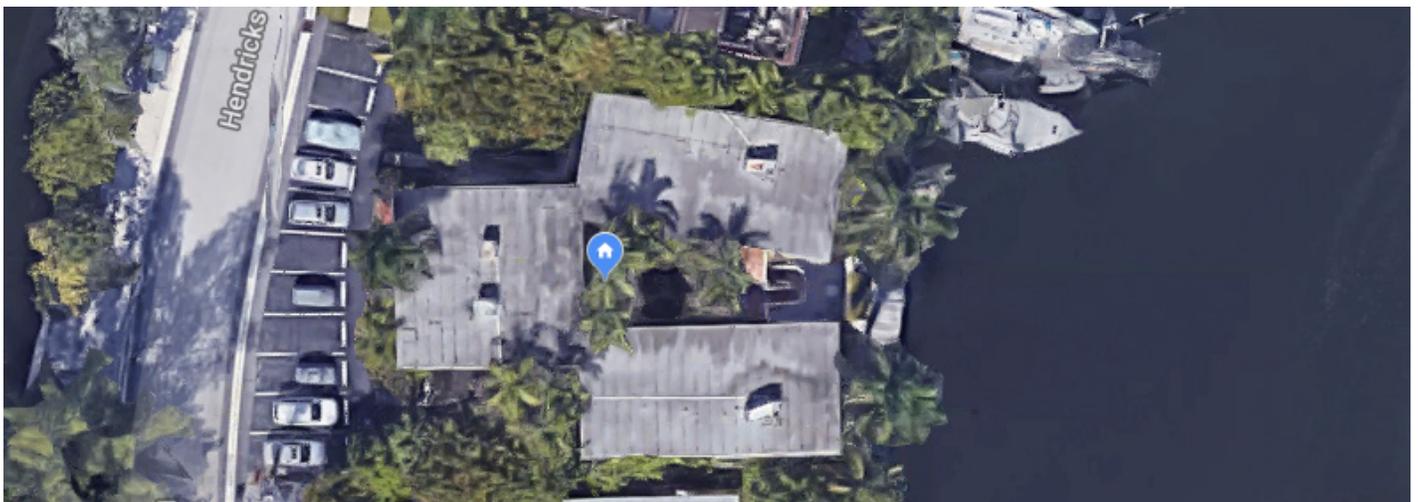
At the lower level, the windows are shaded by the 'eyebrows' featured above each window and, for those facing the central courtyard, the underside of the mosaic catwalk which connects the three buildings.

The windows in all the apartments are fully adjustable to make the most of the ocean breezes.

As a contemporary of 'the father of Miami Beach', Morris Lapidus, Dykema created Casa Grande using features that were ahead of their time yet about to become popular in the next decade; features such as acute angles, jalousies, floating staircases, built-in planters, eyebrows, beanpoles, catwalks, mosaic; the originals of which still exist at Casa Grande.

As shown below, provision was made from the very start for the parking of residents' cars right outside Casa Grande. The original plans allowed for ten parking space. This meant that there were spaces for vehicles belonging to the occupants of the ten apartments as no provision for parking was made for visitors renting the two 'hotel rooms'.

In 1969 Mrs. Leolyn Semeyn had had the two 'hotel rooms' converted to one apartment and with the approval of the city, the parking lot was divided further to give eleven parking places.



Apartment Ownership

Initially all the apartments and the two efficiencies were owned by Walter and Leolyn Semeyn. The first tenants at Casa Grande were residents of Grand Rapids, Michigan, who rented the apartments to use during the winter season.

As most of these people were able to spend the majority of the winter down in Florida, they were invariably relatively wealthy professionals.

Mr & Mrs Semeyn retained ownership of various apartments and the two 'hotel rooms' but sold several of the apartments to the original tenants.

Walter Semeyn acted as the resident manager of the property until his death in 1960 and Mrs Leolyn Semeyn continued to run Casa Grande after her husband's death. (Note that Leolyn Semeyn lived to be 110 years old, dying in a retirement home Florida in 2005).

By 1970, Leolyn Semeyn owned only apartment number 9. Note that number nine was the two efficiencies in the west building that had been converted into a full apartment.

Historical Property on a Historical Isle

Hendricks Isle was one of the last 'finger islands' on Las Olas Boulevard to be developed. It was named to honor Dr. Elliot M. Hendricks. He was a Fort Lauderdale pioneer who was responsible for a large number of early initiatives in Fort Lauderdale.

Although Dr. Hendricks was primarily a successful physician, he was also an astute businessman and property entrepreneur. It is thanks to him that Hendricks Isle was developed.



DR. ELLIOTT M. HENDRICKS

Pioneer, physician and humanitarian, Dr. Elliott Miley Hendricks, arrived in Fort Lauderdale in 1925 and served as the first superintendent of Edwards Hospital, which would evolve into Broward General Hospital, and later, Broward Health. After the 1926 Hurricane, Dr. Hendricks worked around the clock treating the injured, using kerosene lanterns for illumination at night, while leading the development of health regulations for the "tent city" that sheltered displaced residents who had lost their homes due to the devastating storm. As one of Fort Lauderdale's earliest radiologists, Dr. Hendricks fought for improved healthcare for our community, advocated for clean civic government, and

worked to enhance quality of life for all. He was the public health officer for Port Everglades, the official physician for Coast Guard Base 6, and surgeon for the lower East Coast Seaboard Railway. Dr. Hendricks was a charter member of the Florida Radiological Society as well as the North American Radiological Society. His numerous business and civic contributions include helping to establish First National Bank and founding First Federal Savings and Loan. He served as president of the Kiwanis Club and was a member of the Elks and Masons. In the 1940s, Dr. Hendricks was part owner of H.A.K. Products which manufactured munitions to support the war effort. A leader in the growth of our community, Dr. Hendricks developed Hendricks Isle and Hendricks Heights and played an integral part in starting the City's first bus transit system. Dr. Hendricks dedicated his life to improving our City for future generations to appreciate and enjoy.

Until the development of the Las Olas isle that bears his name, Dr. Hendricks was well-known as a physician locally but became even more well-known for being the attending physician at Fort Lauderdale's only hanging; the execution of bootlegger and human-trafficker, Horace Alderman, 'the Gulf Stream Pirate'. The execution took place in 1929 on Fort Lauderdale Beach.



U.S. Coast Guard Base Six, where the Gulf Stream Pirate was hanged in 1929
(Fort Lauderdale Historical Society)

Although Dr Hendricks was a peaceable and law-abiding man, life in Fort Lauderdale in those early days brought him into contact with the criminal fraternity. In Dr. Hendrick's first years in Fort Lauderdale, Prohibition was strongly in force and Fort Lauderdale was one of the most important hubs of the illegal alcohol trade.

Being so close to the Bahamas, where alcohol was still perfectly legal, Fort Lauderdale was in an ideal position to form the base of operations for many illegal import concerns. In addition, the area to the west of the growing city and port was largely undeveloped and fugitives from the law - and those involved in illegal practices - found the area to be an ideal hideout. In the days before Alligator Alley, much of this area was swampland. Naturally, within this lawless area, there were often fugitives, bootleggers and bandits who were hiding out - often after having had altercations with the lawmakers of the time. On many occasions, these people needed medical help, not least because their chosen profession made them vulnerable to being shot by lawmen.

It's said that Dr. Hendricks was often unexpectedly 'escorted', blindfolded, to outlaws' hideouts in order to give medical attention to the wounded or sick.

Like Casa Grande, Dr. Hendricks was a fascinating part of Fort Lauderdale's almost-forgotten history.

