

Historic Sanibel Island property with famous guest house goes on the market

Jennifer Beeson, Fort Myers News-Press Published 4:18 p.m. ET Feb. 8, 2019

A property on Sanibel Island with a historic guest house nicknamed the “Spider in the Sand” is now on the market for the first time ever.

The beachfront property is home to the 576-square-foot guest house, known as the Walker Guest House, and is recognized throughout the nation as one of the most important creations of acclaimed architect Paul Rudolph and the Sarasota School of Architecture.

Built in 1954, the internationally known Walker Guest House and the 1.74-acres it sits on, along with a three-bedroom, 3 1/2-bath main house, is listed for \$6.79 million.



The guest home is nicknamed the "spider" because of the beams that were built off the home to hold the weights for the shutters. The Walker guest home and main home on Sanibel. The Walker guest house was designed by architect Paul Rudolph. The Cottage is considered the pedigree of mid-century modernism and was recognized by AIA Florida Chapter's Best Residential Building in the State of Florida. Also known as the "Cannonball House" and "Spider" because of the red cannonballs Rudolph used as weights to hold the signature wood shutters in place. *(Photo: Andrea Melendez/The News-Press/USA Today)*

“It is small but really cool,” said Ted Benjamin, co-listing agent with VIP Realty. “There’s not another property anywhere like the Walker Guest House.

Jim Hall of [VIP Realty – Sanibel](https://www.viprealty.com/) (<https://www.viprealty.com/>) is co-listing the property owned by the Walker family since the 1950s.

More: [Priciest SWFL home that sold for \\$48.8 million in June has been demolished \(/story/money/real-estate/2018/11/19/home-sold-48-8-million-naples-port-royal-has-been-demolished/2057482002/\)](/story/money/real-estate/2018/11/19/home-sold-48-8-million-naples-port-royal-has-been-demolished/2057482002/)



The only bedroom in the guest house. The Walker guest home and main home on Sanibel. (Photo: Andrea Melendez/The News-Press/USA Today)

Walter Walker was the grandson of an affluent Minnesota lumber baron, T.B. Walker.

When Walter Walker was in his 30s, he was diagnosed with tuberculosis and decided to move away from the cold and found himself buying property on Sanibel Island.

Shortly after his move to the Sunshine State, Walter and his wife, Elaine, hired Rudolph to design a small guest house on his property.

Rudolph, who was known for his use of concrete and complex floor plans, built the simple and tiny beach house using lumber, plywood and peg-boards with a minimalist floor plan broken up into four essential quadrants.

The beach cottage, also known as the Cannonball, includes one bedroom, one bathroom, a kitchenette and a small but cozy living space.

The walls of glass and eight large screened windows are shuttered by a unique pulley system that turns wooden flaps into shading panels when raised horizontally overhead.

“It is a floating pavilion with transparent walls and an external structure so thin it nearly disappears,” said Joyce Owens, a well-known Fort Myers architect and past president of AIA Florida who has studied and lectured on Rudolph's Florida work for many years. “When the flaps or panels, supported on this external structure, are raised it becomes a shady pavilion abundant with the sounds and smells of the sea and the breezes. When the flaps are lowered, the interior feels safe, snug, and intimate.”

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The Sarasota school's style of architecture, aka Sarasota Modern, gained traction for its organic characteristics of blending with the environment and using techniques to cool building interiors in the south Florida climate pre-air-conditioning.

“In this tiny beach cottage, Rudolph perfected the principles of space and construction he explored while practicing in Florida during his early years” Owens said.

Rudolph nicknamed the one-bedroom cottage the “Spider in the Sand” for its simple lines and leggy look when the shutters are raised. He considered the small cottage to be his favorite among all his works.

The cottage, which sits along West Gulf Drive, is also known as the “Cannonball House,” for the red, steel, cannonball-shaped weights that are part of the panel-raising mechanisms.

More: [Fort Myers home fetches record-breaking price of \\$7 million \(/story/money/real-estate/2018/11/09/record-breaking-home-sale-fort-myers-fetches-7-million/1921875002/\)](https://www.wftz.com/story/money/real-estate/2018/11/09/record-breaking-home-sale-fort-myers-fetches-7-million/1921875002/)



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The Walker Guest House was admired by so many that a full-size replica of the cottage was made in 2015, initially for display at the Ringling museum complex in Sarasota. It's now in Palm Springs, California.

Walt Walker vacationed at the Sanibel Island home from Minneapolis for nearly 20 years with his family until he built the second, larger home adjacent to the cottage.

The 4,000-square-foot main house, built in the 1970s, is a couple of hundred feet away from the guest house and is set back from the road covered with natural vegetation, shading the home and giving it a sense of privacy.

More: [Big homes sold for big bucks in Southwest Florida, breaking records in Lee and Collier \(/story/news/local/2018/12/21/recap-record-breaking-year-swfl-home-sales/2389632002/\)](#)

Walker, who donated the Walker Preserve to the Sanibel-Captiva Conservation Foundation and often volunteered at local conservation organizations, passed away in 2001. His wife, Elaine, died in December 2018, and their children have since decided to sell the property.



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Potential buyers have shown interest in the home and a few showings have already taken place since the home went on the market in January.

"We kind of think that the buyer is already living on Sanibel or they have some kind of connection to Sanibel," Benjamin said. "Or the buyer will be someone who absolutely loves Paul Rudolph and mid-century modern and they just want a piece of that mystery."

This is the first time the Walker Guest House has gone on the market and the family hopes the future owners will preserve the home and its history.

"The family is mainly interested in finding a buyer who will be as emotionally invested in the property as the Walkers have been," said Hall of VIP. "The guest house in particular should be committed to preservation. The family feels there a peaceful, spiritual vibe that they hope the new owners will honor."



The living area of the guest home. The Walker guest home and main home on Sanibel. *(Photo: Andrea Melendez/The News-Press/USA Today)*

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