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Ca' d'Zan to get temporary 'guest'

By Harold Bubil , Herald-Tribune / Friday, January 9, 2015 [Follow](#)

SARASOTA

A spider-like icon of midcentury modern architecture will stand next to the John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art later this year.



The Walker Guest House, designed in 1952 by Paul Rudolph, is a Sanibel Island landmark. The Sarasota Architectural Foundation will build a copy of the house as an educational exhibit on the grounds of the Ringling Museum of Art. (Staff photo / Harold Bubil)

A full-scale copy of the 1952 Walker Guest House, a Paul Rudolph-designed landmark on Sanibel Island, will be erected on the Ringling grounds by the Sarasota Architectural Foundation.

“We are very interested in broadening our collection in many ways,” Ringling director Stephen High said. “One area is the understanding and documentation the midcentury Sarasota School of architecture.

“The Walker Guest House is such a classic piece by Paul Rudolph,” High said.

“It is feasible to re-create, and can expand the knowledge of the architecture

of that time.”

Janet Minker, the architectural foundation’s president, said Ringling officials expect the house to be viewed and appreciated as a piece of art.

Both High and Minker noted there already exists a connection between the Ringling campus and Rudolph.

In the early 1920s, circus magnate John Ringling hired Dwight James Baum to design his residence in Sarasota, Ca’ d’Zan.

Baum then sent employee Ralph Twitchell to Sarasota to oversee construction. When that work was finished, however, Twitchell stayed in Sarasota and opened his own architectural practice.

In 1940, he hired Rudolph fresh out of college and rehired him eight years later, after the younger architect completed his World War II service and graduate studies at Harvard University.

The Twitchell-Rudolph partnership lasted four years, and the Walker Guest House became one of Rudolph's first designs after he formed his own practice.

Mobile exhibit

After about 11 months of display, the cottage will be disassembled so it can be shipped around the country to educate the public about the hallmarks of "Sarasota school" modernism.

When the tour is complete, the house will not become a permanent exhibit at the Ringling, High said.



The Walker Guest House, designed in 1952 by Paul Rudolph, is a Sanibel Island landmark. The Sarasota Architectural Foundation will build a copy of the house as an educational exhibit on the grounds of the Ringling Museum of Art. (Staff photo / Harold Bubil)

"The grounds are for permanent installations," he said. "I would like to have different exhibits on the grounds, but not permanently. The grounds are so beautiful that you don't want to overwhelm them."

Rudolph designed the 24-foot-by-24-foot guest house for Walter and Elaine Walker.

Dr. Walter Walker, who died in 2001 at 89, was the grandson of Minnesota lumber baron T.B. Walker and a noted champion of the arts.

He also was a director of the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, and wintered on Sanibel Island for nearly three decades.

The cottage wasn't the only work Rudolph did for the Walkers. He also designed a main house for the couple on Periwinkle Way, also on Sanibel Island, 30 minutes west of Fort Myers in Lee County. But it was never built.

As such, historians have only the guest house to consider.

With its shading flaps that move up and down on counterweighted pulleys, the Walker Guest House was an early Rudolph effort to adapt modernism to a subtropical, marine climate.

Most notably, he designed the structure to be above all sustainable. It has been.

Elaine Walker still winters on Sanibel Island and still uses it as a guest house.

Outboard posts and beams, which supply anchor points for the pulleys and ropes, create a wrap-around shade area, nearly doubling the living space in clement weather.

The superstructure gives the house its spider-like appearance.

High visibility

The foundation's project at Ringling is expected to cost about \$150,000, of which \$75,000 was donated by Dr. Michael Kalman of Sarasota.

The foundation is continuing fundraising efforts to pay for the balance.

At the Ringling grounds, the guest house will be in a prominent spot near a sidewalk at the northwest corner of the museum.

"As you are walking from the Visitors Pavilion to the Searing Wing, you will see it," High said.

"This is the main traffic route. The trams run past it," said Joe King, an architect and foundation member. "If you are coming down this long run, we will have the building at an angle and you will see it in three dimensions. You are not just facing an elevation. At first, we thought to locate it in the middle of the field, but this is better for accessibility."

Fort Myers architect Joyce Owens, who often visited Sanibel as a child, will be assisting the foundation. To that end, she has produced computerized drawings of the house.

"We have a model now in three dimensions based exactly on the Rudolph drawings," Owens said.

Because it will eventually travel, the house will be constructed in kit form so it easily can be disassembled and moved to other museums.

The assembly technique will have other practical applications, as well.

"We are going to build it first off-site," King said, "to make sure everything works, and then take it apart and



Architect Joe King and Sarasota Architectural Foundation leaders Elliott Himelfarb, Dan Snyder and Janet Minker, from left, plan the installation of a copy of the Walker Guest House on the grounds of Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota. SAF is paying for the educational exhibit, which will stand at Ringling for about 11 months, starting in late 2015, before being disassembled and shipped to museums in other parts of the nation. (Staff photo / Harold Bubil)

transport it to the Ringling Museum and reassemble it there.”

Foundation members say they intend to maintain the integrity of the home’s interior, too.

“The plan is to furnish it to the period,” King said. “Chairs and tables of steel and plywood will be rebuilt.”

Foundation members say they may also obtain director’s chairs, a nod to the furnishings originally found in the house.

King notes, too, that the project is “very unusual” in what it plans to

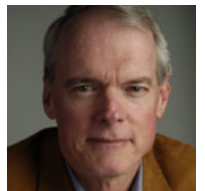
accomplish.

“Usually it’s an old building with rotted materials and all kinds of issues,” he said of preservation projects.

“But here, we’re take Rudolph’s drawings, Joyce’s drawings and building it fresh — just like in 1952. It is going to be sort of a time warp that way.”

Elliott Himelfarb, another foundation member, said the house will serve as a unique window into mid-century modernist design.

“Every other mid-century house is private and you have to talk your way inside,” he said. “This will be open to the public and you can go in and sit down and read the magazines.”



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