

## Davis' Plans Leave Lasting Impression

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David P. Davis planned Davis Islands as the quintessential 1920s Florida real estate development. He knew that, while Florida's sunshine would bring people to the area, he needed first class amenities to get them to buy into the Islands project. Always a grand thinker, Davis made big plans and bigger promises.

Many of the promises made by Davis and his company were realized, such as a golf course, hotels, apartments, canals and parks. One key aspect of the Islands plan, a business district, was also completed. Billed by Davis as "congruous with the plan of establishing on Davis Islands an ideal residential city complete in itself," the business section centered around the Bay Isle Building, located at 238 East Davis Boulevard and designed by noted Tampa architect M. Leo Elliot. Elliot followed Davis' requirement that the building "harmonize architecturally with the surrounding Island beauty." Completed in 1925, the Bay Isle Building is still the anchor of the Islands' business community.

Diagonally across East Davis Boulevard from the Bay Isle Building sat another commercial structure. Little is known about this second business building, except that it contained eleven store fronts; four facing Biscayne Avenue, five facing East Davis Boulevard and two opening south toward the neighboring property. A central arcade traversed the large building, which occupied four lots. The only evidence of this structure lies within the pages of the Sanborn Fire Insurance Company's maps of Davis Islands. It is possible that this market never existed. The words "from plans" run beneath the schematic of the building on the 1931 Sanborn Fire Insurance map. Aerial

photographs from the time are of too poor a quality to determine if this mystery structure actually stood on the southeast corner of East Davis and Biscayne.

Houses, too, began to dot the sandy landscape of the growing islands. The architecture of these single-family structures strictly followed the design guidelines set forth by D. P. Davis Properties. Mediterranean revival, Italianate and Spanish styles featured soft pastel colors and intricate tile and figural designs. Two houses, one located at 32 Aegean and the other at 116 West Davis Boulevard, merit special attention. Both homes are associated with Davis. The West Davis Boulevard home has long been cited as Davis' personal residence. The existing historical evidence suggests differently, indicating that the home on Aegean was where Davis resided. Both homes are roughly the same size (around 3,000 square feet), but the home on Aegean is directly across from Davis' office. The home on West Davis may have been a "company home," since two presidents of Davis Islands Incorporated (successor to D. P. Davis Properties) occupied the home in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Like so much in Davis' life, the answer to this question may never be known.

The Islands Plan included several hotel and apartment projects. The most noticeable are the Mirasol, Palazzo Firenze (Palace of Florence), Palmarin Hotel (now known as Hudson Manor) and the Spanish Apartments. The Mirasol, Davis Islands' tallest building, sits at the end of a canal and has its own yacht basin. The Palace of Florence drew its inspiration from the Palazzo Vecchino in Florence, Italy. Designed by Athos Menebun and M. Leo Elliot for Philip Licata of the Tampa Investment Company, the Palace of Florence incorporated a variety of materials, such as terra cotta, wrought iron and stucco and boasted a tower on each end of the front elevation.

Some early residential buildings, notably the Biscayne Hotel, Bachelor Apartments and Venetian Apartments, have since been demolished. Others, such as the Augustine and Columbia Apartments on Columbia Drive, and the Flora Dora Apartments and Boulevard Apartments on Davis Boulevard are still occupied. The Merry Makers Club, situated on land given to the club by Davis on the corner of Danube and Barbados, represents the only social club originally planned for the Islands.

The Davis Islands Coliseum, completed in 1925, embodied the largest project originally planned for the community. Funded through the sale of stock certificates, the Coliseum housed concerts, auto shows, conventions and many other events within its auditorium – among the largest of its kind in the southeastern United States. Located on Danube, the Davis Islands Coliseum was destroyed by fire in the mid-1970s.

Among the original buildings hidden from view on the islands is the Davis Islands Garage. Located at the northern tip of the main island near the site of the original tennis courts, the garage reinforces the notion that Davis Islands was designed for people with automobiles. Part storage facility, part repair shop, the Davis Islands Garage fits architecturally, thematically and functionally into Davis' idea for a self-sufficient planned community.

The vast majority of the buildings and amenities that Davis planned and his company, or Davis Islands, Inc., completed are still standing. Notable exceptions are the golf course, original tennis club and, as noted above, the Coliseum. Still, the notion that Davis had of an all-inclusive community survives to this day.