

## **‘Character and charm’ in a landmarked home**

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### **Palm Beach homes for sale: A landmark with ‘character and charm’ in Phipps Plaza**

**Originally two 1940s-era apartment buildings, a renovated house at 218 Phipps Plaza has been listed for sale at \$15 million.**

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Special to the Daily News



Artist Bob Hiemstra and his late husband, interior designer Michael Formica, carried out an extensive renovation at their Palm Beach home at 218 Phipps Plaza, which came with an outbuilding said to have once been part of the famous E.R. Bradley's Beach Club, the long-demolished private club and gambling casino that operated on the island from 1898 to 1945.

"We bought the property (in Phipps Plaza) in 2013 and renovated it with the intention to stay a long time," Hiemstra says. "But since my husband passed away unexpectedly last year, downsizing is now my plan."





As such, the three-bedroom, three-and-a-half-bath house — with 4,744 square feet of living space, inside and out — has been offered for sale through agent Tina Roberts, who also goes by the name Christine Gibbons, of Sotheby's International Realty. The house is priced at \$15 million.

Dating to the late 1940s, the house is a town landmark, thanks to its location in Phipps Plaza, one of the town's few designated historical districts. A block north of Royal Palm Way, the plaza was developed in 1924 by John S. Phipps as a commercial-and-residential enclave.

Clustered around a central median, the enclave features buildings by a who's who of first-generation architects, including Addison Mizner, Maurice Fatio and, in the case of Hiemstra's home, Belford Shoumate, who had his office next door in the plaza.

It's good that Hiemstra and Formica both had an eye for — and were good at — renovations, considering the shape the house was in when they bought it.

"Because of the kind of property it was and how it looked, it had been on the market for a while," Hiemstra says. "But when we saw it, we both had the vision of what it could be. We looked at each other and said, 'This is it.'"

They hired architect Jeffery Smith's Smith Architectural Group, which is located in Phipps Plaza, with Bill Boyle serving as their project architect.

“Given the fact that we had experience renovating previous residences and because of Michael’s professional career, we knew pretty much what we wanted to do,” Hiemstra says. “We wanted to preserve all of its character and charm — it has a lot of it — and we wanted to take it into the 21st century.”



The house’s history involves a tale of two side-by-side apartment buildings, which were built in 1948 and combined in 1994.

According to Marie Penny, the archivist at the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, Plaza Court Inc. commissioned Shoumate to design the two buildings at 218 and 220 Phipps Plaza as apartments. Shoumate lived and worked next door at 222 Phipps Plaza.

The original apartment buildings had 15 feet between them, each with two apartments, Hiemstra explains.

“They were identical on the outside and mirror images on the inside,” Hiemstra says. “And in the middle it was an open area with plants.”

He adds: “Someone built the middle part out to make it into one big house and also added onto the back to make it even bigger.

“That’s what we came into: a house with two staircases and four fireplaces.”

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In the northwest quadrant of Phipps Plaza, the house is set back from the street, thanks to its front courtyard.

The foyer, flanked by two stairways, is central to the floorplan. To the south are the living room and the library. To the north are the family room, the kitchen and the dining room.

The exposed brick around the fireplace in the dining room was already in place when the couple bought the property. But in the living room, the fireplace is surrounded by cypress paneling repurposed from another area in the house.

The couple also replaced the original double-hung picture windows but retained their look.

Upstairs, the master bedroom suite has a sitting area to the south, with two guest bedrooms to the north. Each room opens to a balcony, and the homeowners used one of the guest bedrooms as an office. The office features a high-pitched pecky-cypress ceiling, as does the master sitting room.

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The basic reconfiguring of the floorplan had already been done when they bought the house, but Hiemstra and Formica reworked three small rooms to create the new kitchen and opened it up to the family room.

"We didn't do much else in the way of moving walls, and we preserved all the (original) architectural details. We loved the four fireplaces. They were wood burning; now they are gas. In both (west) bedroom suites, we raised the ceilings as high as we could, which opened them up quite a bit," he says.

Flipping the master bathroom and its closet also made the space more efficient.

Floors throughout the downstairs rooms have travertine. Upstairs, the flooring in the master sitting room is the original Dade County pine. New hardwood floors were installed in the master bedroom during the renovation.

The bathrooms feature custom tile commissioned from Herpel Cast Stone and Column Co.

The kitchen is finished with the custom Herpel tile, too. Other details in the kitchen include custom cypress cabinets with a cerused finish to give them a two-tone look. The counters were cast from concrete, and the appliances are professional grade.



Much of the house's infrastructure is new, including the plumbing, electric and air-conditioning systems. The homeowners also installed a new roof and impact-resistant windows.

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The gardens were redesigned by Keith Williams of Nievera Williams Landscape Design.

"The entire back yard was paved in brick. We saved it, and Keith reused it, mixing it with Herpel stone," Hiemstra explains.

So what about that outbuilding that may have been part of the original Bradley's Beach Club, which operated on the site of today's Bradley Park at the corner of Royal Poinciana Way and Bradley Place?

Citing a 1984 article from the Miami Herald, Penny said, Shoumate sometimes incorporated incorporated architectural elements from salvaged Palm Beach buildings into his projects.

"When Col. Edward Bradley's gambling casino closed in the 1940s, Shoumate put the balconies and loggia on his house," the article said.

Is it possible that another remnant of the casino could have ended up in the backyard of the apartment buildings next door?

Whatever the truth, Hiemstra and Formica used the structure as a pool cabana.

"Anyone who wants a house by Belford, they will be moved by its quirkiness," he says.

