

The Kampong gets a little TLC

HIGHLIGHTS

The Junior League of Miami recruited designers to help restore the historic Coconut Grove property

The grounds, once home to David Fairchild, will open Thursday for a special showing of the interior work by more than 20 volunteer decorators and suppliers

Funds raised during the League's 2016 Showhouse will go toward league programs that help women and their families



BY ANA VECIANA-SUAREZ

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Stroll through the leafy gardens of The Kampong, sit in one of its cottages' airy rooms, breathe in the faint scent of the bay lapping on its watery borders, and the idea of time-travel is hardly a stretch. Here, in this 11-acre Coconut Grove oasis, where noted horticulturalist David Fairchild once made his home, the past is ever present. Old Miami, and possibly a more genteel one too, beckons with effortless charm.

So it seemed only natural that another South Florida institution, the Junior League of Miami, would pair up with The Kampong to restore the century-old historic landmark and open it up to the public for a home and garden showcase that begins Thursday. The 2016 Showhouse will feature the work of more than 20 interior designers and corporate donors as well as dozens of volunteers who have donated their time and talent to restore the iconic property to its former glory. In return for this sweat equity, money raised from Showhouse will go to Junior League-sponsored programs that help women and children in the community.

“We wanted to do something different than our traditional galas” for fundraising, said Emilie Goldman Wernick, Junior League president and head of Center Street Communications, a marketing and public relations firm. “So we started looking at the possibility of showcasing some new houses. At the time The Kampong wasn’t even on our radar.”

THE KAMPONG, DAVID FAIRCHILD’S FORMER HOME, IS INCLUDED IN THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AND IS ALSO ONE OF ONLY FIVE NATIONAL TROPICAL BOTANICAL GARDENS.

ADVERTISING

However, another Junior Leaguer, interior designer Hillary Littlejohn Scurtis, was involved in The Kampong, which is included in the National Register of Historic Places and is also one of only five National Tropical Botanical Gardens. She knew it could benefit from a facelift.

“A typical showcase is one cube,” said Littlejohn Scurtis, “but there are multiple buildings on this property. It was a great opportunity.”

For both organizations and in more ways than one.

The months-long effort to decorate The Kampong coincides with its 100th birthday and the Junior League’s 90th birthday. It also comes during the garden’s concerted push to raise its profile. Though The Kampong hosts numerous cultural and scientific events — this Sunday it celebrates its 22nd annual Bali Ha’i, a garden party with handcrafted cocktails and exotic food — it is considered, even by its staff, “Miami’s secret garden.”

“The Kampong is delighted to work with the Junior League,” said interim director Mike Maunder, who is also associate dean of research engagement. “Part of our commitment is to do more collaboration with a broader part of the Miami community and this fits in well with that effort.”

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Kampong interim director Mike Maunder

When the collection of interior designers began working their magic, The Kampong was also busy with its own restoration project. About one year into a three-year renovation job, The Kampong is using a state grant for structural repairs. Hence, the offer to spruce up its interior dovetailed perfectly with its other refurbishments.

The Kampong has a storied past. Home to hundreds of tropical and aromatic plant species (part of a collection originally planted by Fairchild), the property is named for the Malay or Javanese word for a village or cluster of houses. It changed hands several times before Fairchild and wife Marian, daughter of Alexander Graham Bell, purchased the land in 1916 and gave it its name.

Fairchild, considered one of the most influential plant collectors of his time, used The Kampong as a winter home and as a place to introduce new varieties of plants to South Florida. In 1928, he and his wife constructed a house (that still stands) and moved in permanently from Washington, D.C. Three years later, Marian Fairchild’s sister, Elsie, and husband Gilbert Grosvenor bought the land next to the Kampong.

DAVID FAIRCHILD, CONSIDERED ONE OF THE MOST INFLUENTIAL PLANT COLLECTORS OF HIS TIME, USED THE KAMPONG AS A WINTER HOME AND AS A PLACE TO INTRODUCE NEW VARIETIES OF PLANTS TO SOUTH FLORIDA.

With the Fairchilds as hosts, The Kampong saw its share of personalities, including Bell, Thomas Edison, Henry Firestone and Henry Ford. After their deaths (Fairchild in 1954 and Marian in 1963), Edward Cleaveland Sweeney and wife, Dr. Catherine Hauberg Sweeney, bought the property and worked to save the gardens. It was Dr. Sweeney, often referred to as “the Savior of The Kampong,” who labored to include it in the National Registry of Historic Places. In 1984 she gifted it to the then-Pacific Tropical Botanic Garden, the predecessor of the National Tropical Botanic Garden. (The Grosvenor property was eventually added to the property, which stretches from Douglas Road to Biscayne Bay.)

This history was not lost on the Junior League, an organization founded in 1926 to empower women and children, or the designers its members recruited to do the work.

“The Kampong gave us certain restrictions, so when we went looking [for volunteers] we wanted people willing to work within certain elements,” said Carla Crossno, co-chair with Littlejohn Scurtis of the Junior League’s Showhouse committee and CEO of marketing strategy firm Hatched. “Most were very excited to participate.”

Three buildings — the Fairchild-Sweeney House, the Barbour Cottage and the Sausage Tree Cottage — as well as two garden areas benefited from the help of the interior designers. Among the decorating touches:

- The den, powder room and outdoor living room at the Fairchild-Sweeney house was done by sisters Kim Hernandez and Lois Holbrook Russo of The Gallery Interiors. The duo aimed for “an informal and quietly refined” look with conversational nooks, Asian-influenced tables and a silver leaf ceiling.
- The kitchen in the Fairchild-Sweeney house, done by Littlejohn Scurtis’ HLS Design, features a cream, white and walnut palette. To ensure a “vintage-modern” look, Littlejohn Scurtis had the terrazzo floors polished, the high-end and coveted St. Charles cabinets painted and the countertops replaced.
- In the cozy Barbour Cottage, Peeples Rionda Interior used furniture, fabrics and artwork with natural materials and botanical motifs in the main bedroom to underscore The Kampong’s history. In the living room and kitchen, Margaux Interiors used a bright palette and Asian motif to revive

the common areas.

- Outdoor works of arts by landscape architects Julie Moir Messervy Design Studio and Fernando Wong Outdoor Living Design as well as a 16-foot elephant sculpture by Taylor & Taylor will be on display.

- As a bonus, scale models made by students at Design and Architecture Senior High School will be exhibited. The models are proposed designs for the revamp of rooms at Inn Transition North, a transitional housing shelter for survivors of domestic violence. It is owned and funded by the Junior League of Miami.

While some of the furnishings used during the three-week run of the Junior League's Showhouse will return to suppliers, the impact of the changes is sure to last.

“It's not only about bringing together corporate and individual donors and interior designers for a common cause,” said Goldman Wernick, “but the renovations to the kitchens and bathrooms and the wallpaper stay behind too.”

IF YOU GO

What: Junior League of Miami 2016 Showhouse presented by Mercedes-Benz of Coral Gables & Mercedes-Benz of Cutler Bay.

Tickets: www.eventbrite.com/e/2016-junior-league-of-miami-showhouse-tickets-20034637139.

When: April 7-24, 11 a.m.-5 p.m. Tuesdays through Sundays.

VIP Preview Event: Showhouse Opening Party, 7 p.m. April 6. Join community leaders and meet the designers responsible for the Showhouse.

Information: www.miamishowhouse.org, www.facebook.com/MiamiShowhouse/.



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