

Palm Beaches

The Post

Renovating Lennon Mansion an Architect's Dream

It's the kind of assignment for which many architects would kill.

Take a house on the ocean in Palm Beach, a house designed by the town's most famous architect and owned by a person famous worldwide, and renovate it — authentically — sparing no cost.

Jacqueline Albarran's eyes sparkle as she describes her satisfaction in overseeing the rebuilding of the Mizner house at 720 S. Ocean Blvd., purchased in early 1980 by John Lennon and his wife Yoko Ono before Lennon's death. It's like reviving a small piece of history.

"Because the Lennon house is designated a landmark house," she says, "the exterior walls had to remain the same. And for any change we wanted to make, we had to appear before the Landmarks Commission, which we did almost every month."

The "we" in this case includes Ray Johnson, a tall, slim sculptor and house restorer from New York who is the renovator-in-residence

Fran
Hathaway



and liaison with his friend Yoko Ono.

"The excitement of the house is that it's being completely redone," he says. "We live in such fabricated times. Nobody does homes authentically today."

Johnson and Ms. Albarran have worked closely the past six to eight months, and expect their part of the job to be completed in August. Then, Yoko Ono's interior decorator will tackle the task of embellishing the inside.

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When the 1919 mansion is finished down to the last detail, few people will be as eager to view it as Jackie and Ray. Today, they can see the beginning of the end of their phase, the design phase. And anyone can see this is a first-class operation, clearly no patch job.

For example, all wiring, airconditioning and plumbing is new. Even many of the walls have been replastered. All windows are being replaced with cypress, all hardware is solid brass. Pecky cypress ceilings have been taken down, restored and put back up. Roofs throughout the estate will sport red clay tiles exactly like the first ones used. The dining room is so large it will require castle-scale furnishings. There are nine new bathrooms.

The original coquina bordering the swimming pools, still in good shape, will be matched on the surrounding patios by precisely simulated coquina. The 20-by-50-foot pool in the back yard lies between the house and a teahouse. The pool in front has a view of the

ocean.

Jackie's favorite room is the ballroom, a spacious room with graceful, arched windows offering views east and west. Its pecky cypress ceiling is hand-stenciled in a variety of muted colors.

"Mizner collected beautiful details from buildings when he traveled," Jackie said, "and then incorporated them in the houses he designed."

Ray Johnson has lived in the house since renovations began, selecting subcontractors — "the right people just seem to surface" — and weaving his life around the dozens of workmen who come and go.

Jackie, of Philip Steel & Associates, also lives in Palm Beach in a home she restored. She moved here three years ago when word of her mansion-restoring expertise spread and when commuting from Miami, where she lived then, became tedious. She grew up in Havana, Cuba, Washington, D.C., and Bogota,

Colombia, and studied architecture in Colombia, where her architect father was affiliated with the InterAmerican Development Bank.

The Lennon house is one of two Mizner houses that Mizner actually lived in. Over the years, its owners have included the Harold Vanderbilts and socialite Brownie McLean. Fatio, another famous architect, added the north wing for service quarters. Mrs. McLean added a Florida room.

Since John Lennon was killed more than two years ago, Yoko Ono and her young son reportedly have stayed close to their New York City residence. When work on the Palm Beach house is finished, will they spend time here?

"She has other estates," Johnson said, "but the indication is she'll visit."

If she does, will we — media and curious residents — leave her alone to enjoy it? One would like to think so.

But one doubts it.

Lennon Home Restored To the Elegance of Old

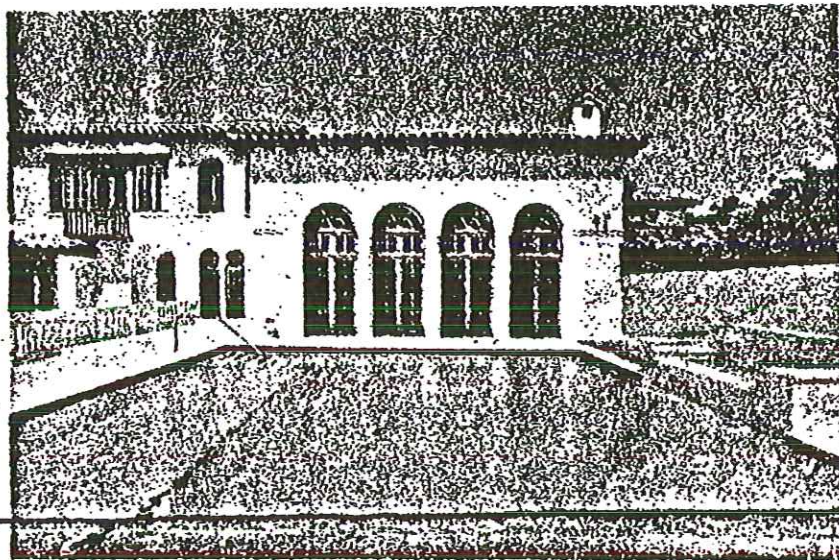
By Linda Duffy

Staff Writer

The newcomers call it the Lennon mansion, but anyone who's been around Palm Beach for more than five years remembers the house at 720 S. Ocean Boulevard for its lavish parties, loads of famous guests, and the scandal that only Brownie McLean could get away with.

Now the mansion is up for sale again, restored beautifully and seeking its eighth owner in 65 years at an asking price of \$8.3 million. The Lennons, John and Yoko and Sean, were the last to own it and seemed to treat it as the dilapidated jock, Brownie's husband, died in 1975. But before its Lennon period, El Salano had been one fine party house.

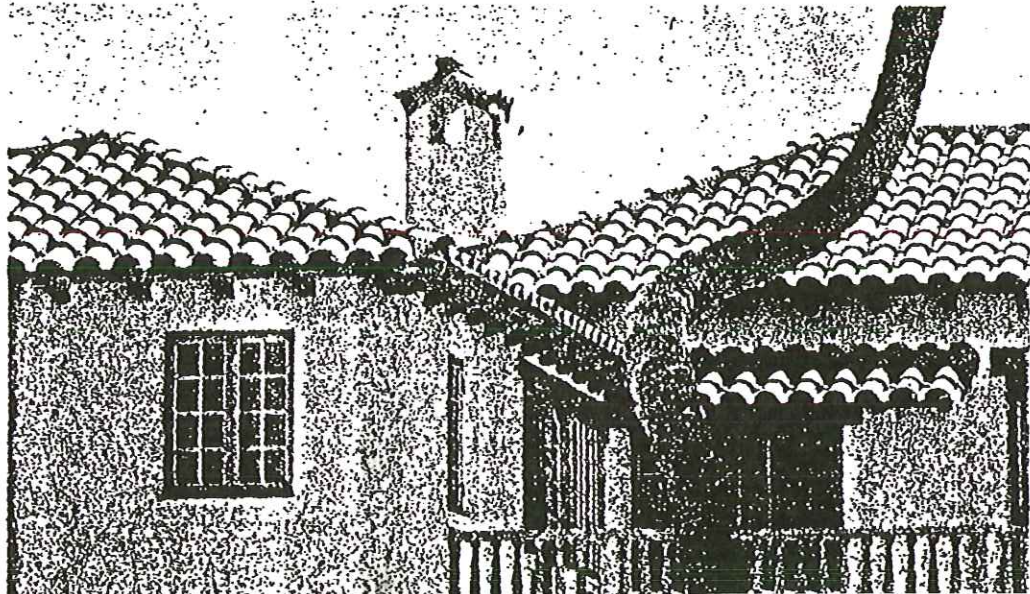
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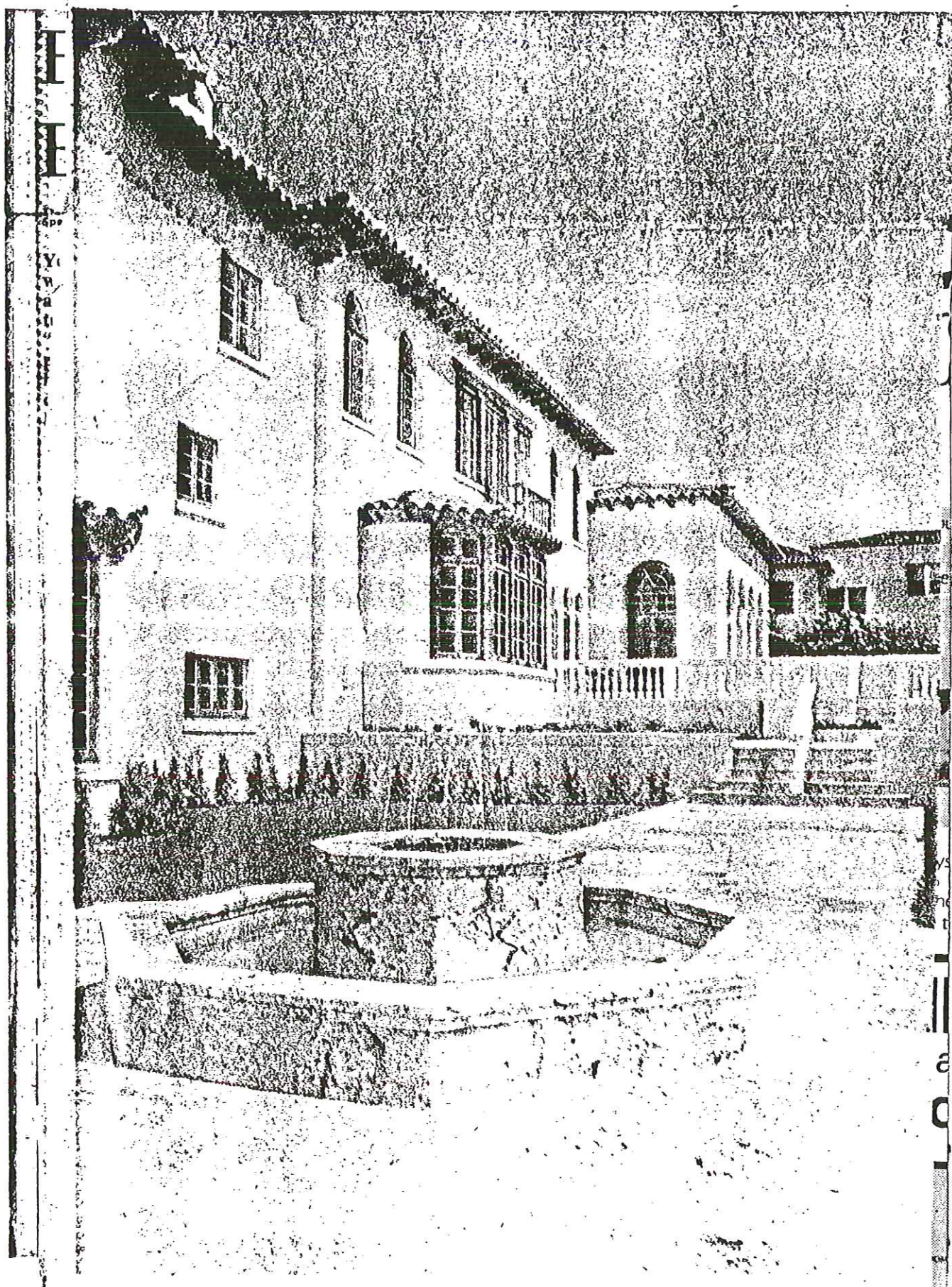


Rick Musacchio/THE POST

The morning pool, one of two pools at El Salano
... mansion former home to socialites, 'Hustler' publisher

A rock-walled fountain (below) graces the front of restored mansion, which faces the Atlantic Ocean. Roofs are made of barrel





LENNON HOUSE



Photos by C.J. WALKER/Staff Photographer

The 40-by-26-foot ballroom has some of Addison Mizner's architectural signatures: lots of light, good air circulation and an elevated, unobstructed view of the ocean. The room is visible from South Ocean Boulevard.