

BRINGING A PIECE OF HISTORY BACK TO LIFE

by Rich Pollack



Found just east of the Palmetto Park Road Intracoastal Bridge and across the street from the former La Vieille Maison, Royal Palm Properties' new home is Morada Bonita – located at 741 East Palmetto Park Road, a historic Boca Raton home built in the mid 1920s that David Roberts purchased a little more than a year ago.

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Few know better than Diane Gates Benedetto, one of the last surviving members of a Boca Raton pioneer family, who actually lived in Morada Bonita for a few years soon after it was built in 1924.

The daughter of Vermont Realtor, Harley Gates, Benedetto grew up in a house named ‘Casa Rosa’ on the west side of the Intracoastal Waterway which was built by the Harris Brothers. Gates moved his family here in 1914 to continue his real estate business as well as start what was soon known as the Palmetto Park Plantation. This 30 acre plantation was the founding name for what we now call Palmetto Park Road.



Diane Gates Benedetto at eight years of age in 1924



Courtyard featuring Canary Island Date Palm Tree

The weather was hard on Gates’ plantation business and following the freeze of 1917 that wiped out his banana crop. Gates continued to build his real estate business and eventually sold Casa Rosa to a man named Jennings. That house stood until the 1970s when it was bulldozed to make room for the Wildflower restaurant.

Built by Gates as a spec house, Morada Bonita became the family’s new home. Benedetto recalls the charm of the house, which had a

small fishpond in the back yard.

Featuring hollow terracotta brick construction, Morada Bonita was designed to withstand hurricanes. In 1926 it was put to the test as the Gates family weathered a storm that is considered one of the most destructive in U.S. history.

Unfortunately, Harley Gates could not weather the storm brought on by the collapse of the stock market in 1929 and was forced that year to sell the home for \$7,000 and move the family to Miami.



Front entry way featuring iron door with impact glass proudly displaying the Royal Palm crest



The former sun porch of Morada Bonita is now being used as the conference room

Over the years, the small two-story home with a caretaker's cottage in the back served as a residence and eventually a business. Along the way, repairs were made and some of the original features were lost.

"When we bought Morada Bonita, it was a bit run down," Roberts says.

Still, Morada Bonita is on a valuable piece of property, so its not surprising that more than a dozen offers were received at the same time Roberts made his offer to buy the property, some of which included plans for demolition and new construction.

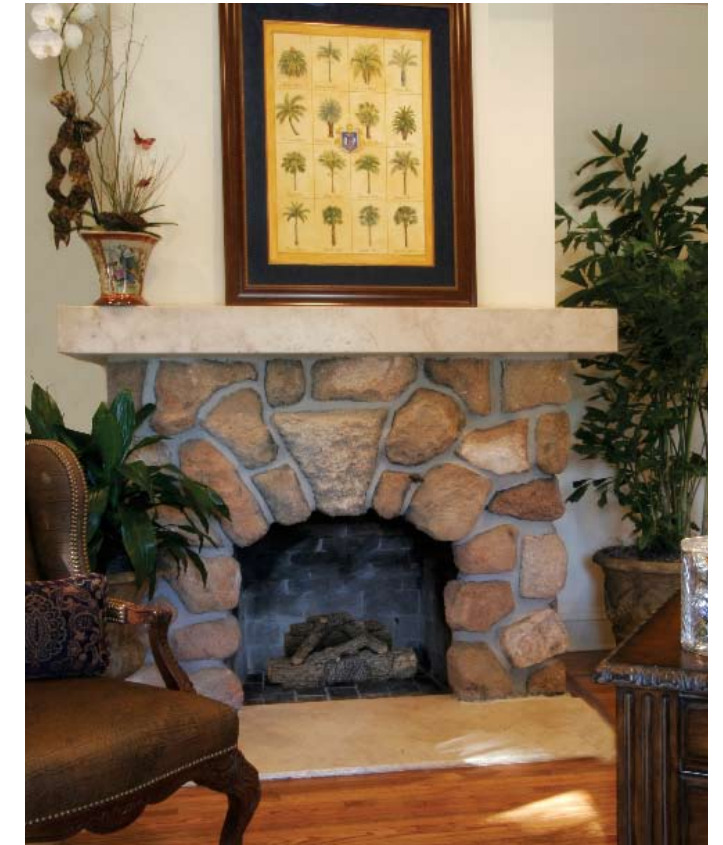
For Roberts, restoring the house back to as close to its original appearance as possible has been a labor of love.

"I just love the aesthetics," Roberts says. "It's a charming little house."

Using old photographs from the Boca Raton Historical Society and from Benedetto, Roberts has been able to restore the appearance of the original home, even finding barrel tiles for the roof that match the ones used by Gates.



One of the three original 100 year old oak trees in the courtyard



Original stone fireplace and hardwood floors in the former formal living room, now used as the reception area

"I really wanted the architecture of the home to be as originally built," he says.

Though some interior accommodations have been made for business purposes, visitors to Morada Bonita will still see the original fireplace, made out of stone, and hardwood floors. They'll also find three 100 year old oak trees in the courtyard behind the home.

Roberts is graciously offering Morada Bonita for charitable organizations to host parties and events, providing others an opportunity to enjoy a piece of Boca's history up close.