

Florida

Retro Glam

Plundered by pirates, carved up by railroad barons, mythologized by literary luminaries, and adorned with Art Deco design, the Sunshine State sure has a glamorous past. We present America's golden girl



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EDITOR'S LETTER

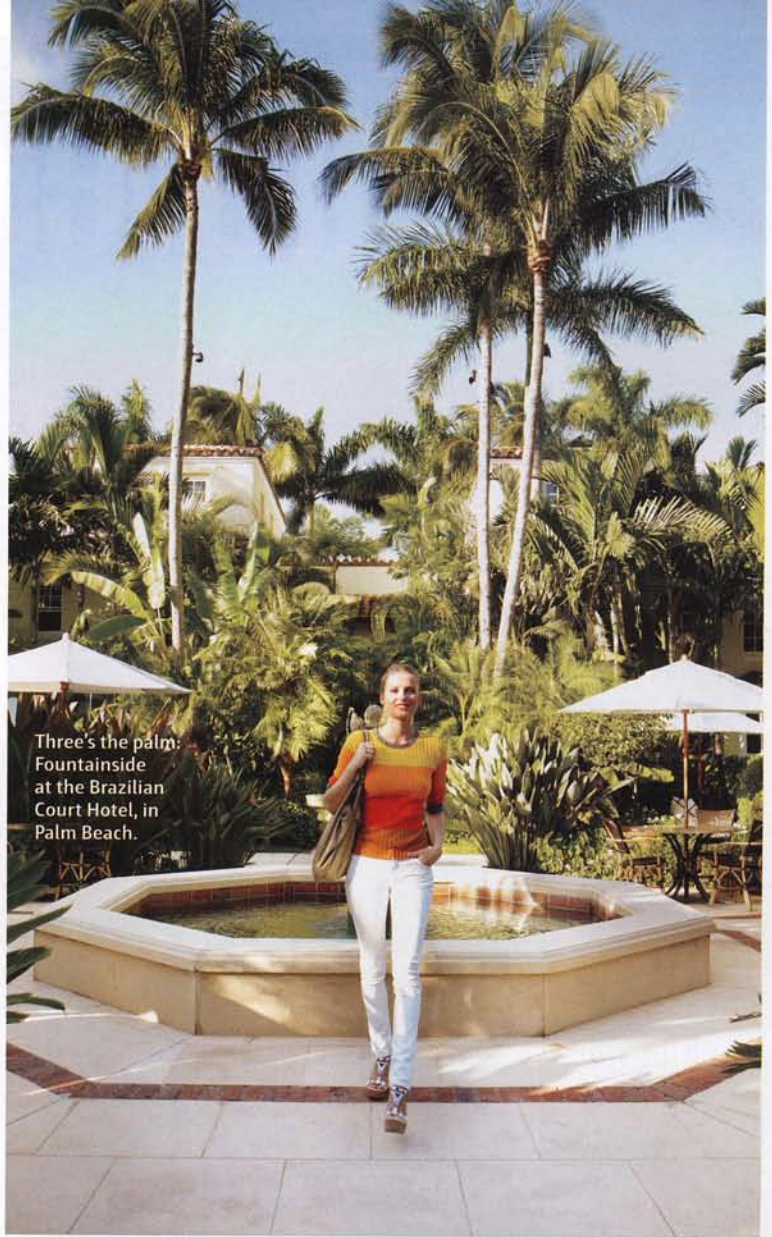
FLORIDA IS RENOWNED for many things: a certain polka dot-clad mouse, its spring-break and swing-state status, the plastic people of South Beach, and gator-filled swamps. But glorious Gilded Age architecture, wide beaches where you won't see another living soul, Victorian bed-and-breakfasts, and cities with sixteenth-century beginnings? Not so much.

We're all guilty of pigeonholing places we don't know well, and we typecast the Sunshine State more than most. So much so that when a colleague returned from Florida raving about seeing manatees, dolphins, sharks, and rays, I assumed that she'd been hanging out at SeaWorld. In fact, the editor had been boating off Gasparilla Island on Florida's Gulf coast, a seascape she likened to Belize's—you'll find her report on page B22.

The European colonizers and American industrialists who laid Florida's foundations had great taste (to name one, Henry Flagler, who left his stamp all over the state). Now it's your turn to discover its many charms. I'll see you there.

Klara Glowczewska

KLARA GLOWCZEWSKA Editor in Chief



Three's the palm: Fountainside at the Brazilian Court Hotel, in Palm Beach.

Photograph by Jim Franco. Sweater by Anna Sui; pants by McQ by Alexander McQueen; shoes by Miu. Styled by Elodie Ozanne. Hair/makeup by Paola Orlando/Artists by Timothy Priano. Map by Håkan Husséin



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BARRIER BEAUTY

BAREFOOT CHIC

*Shell-strewn white sand beaches, sea life, and the odd socialite set the tone at **Boca Grande**, the west coast's unspoiled isle*

THE SCENE It's been a popular vacation spot for almost a century, but fierce zoning laws and an off-the-beaten-highway location have kept Gasparilla Island, said to be named for nineteenth-century pirate José Gaspar, and commonly known by its town Boca Grande, low-rise and low-key. While the islands of Sanibel and Captiva, directly to the south, have succumbed to mass tourism, here you're more likely to see dolphins frolicking in the balmy waters than Jet Skis. Boca is the tarpon fishing capital of the world, so pack your rod and your muscles (tarpon can exceed 200 pounds), and prepare to pinch yourself repeatedly—it's hard to believe that this isolated beauty really is part of the Sunshine State.

THE RIDE Dump the car and hire a golf cart to navigate the island. Note the absence of traffic lights, and watch out for frequent stop signs. An eight-mile bike path on the former railway bisects the island; find your steed at **Island Bike n Beach** (941-964-0711; \$19 for two days).

THE SLEEP The **Gasparilla Inn & Club** is Old Florida personified—it's been going strong since 1913, and a face-lift every summer keeps her candy stripes, gingham, and florals looking youthful. Draws include an 18-hole golf course on its own island and a spa. Want to avoid *famille* Bush? Don't come between Christmas and New Year's, when W. and clan descend (941-964-4500; doubles, \$375–\$505). If you're on a budget, check into its sister motel the **Innlet on the Waterfront**, where rooms have kitchenettes and dock spots—look out for the friendly snowy heron watching over the boats (941-964-4600; doubles, \$130–\$170).

THE BITE Have breakfast at the Innlet's **Outlet**—order the buttermilk pancakes with strawberries and maple syrup (941-964-2294; pancakes, \$6)—or the new **Third Street Café**, where the corned beef hash with poached eggs makes up for slow service (310 E. Railroad Ave.; 941-964-0155; breakfast, \$4–\$13). For dinner, the **Pink Elephant** has a pubby feel and fabulously fresh

fish (491 Bayou Ave.; 941-964-4540; entrées, \$20–\$28), while **Temptation** lives up to its name with creative dishes like grouper with pancetta, brussels sprouts, and turnip puree (350 Park Ave.; 941-964-2610; entrées, \$27–\$36). Afterward, the raucous crowd moves to the next-door bar (from the same owners).

THE SHOP Florida gal Lilly Pulitzer sells her bright-hued beachwear at **The Palm on Park** (444 Fourth St.; 866-964-4448), while mini fashionistas find cute caftans at **Sea Squirts** (433 W. Fourth St.; 941-964-0311). For all your preppy needs—Vineyard Vines polos, Patagonia shorts—plus fishing equipment, hit **Gasparilla Outfitters** (431 Park Ave.; 941-964-0907), and for going-home gifts like sand dollar notelets and freshwater pearls, try **Ruhama's Books in the Sand** (333 Park Ave.; 941-964-5800).

THE EXCURSION Boca native **Rob Hayes** runs (fishing optional) charters to neighboring Cabbage Key, home to an eponymous restaurant where Jimmy Buffett possibly wrote "Cheeseburger in Paradise" and where the walls are papered with 70,000 one-dollar bills (those that drop off are donated to charity)—as well as to Cayo Costa, a mangrove- and pine-studded, sand-fringed nature reserve circled by sharks, dolphins, and rays, with great hiking and birding (941-815-6120; half-day charter, \$375 for up to three people).

THE BEACH Come in the off-season (August through October) and you might not see another soul on Cayo Costa's nine miles of white sand. On Gasparilla, between the two lighthouses, you'll find the best beaches on the south Gulf coast plus crowds of cormorants and plenty of shells (shelling is a wonderfully distracting pastime that's as important as fishing here). Afterward, head to **South Beach Bar & Grille** to sip frozen Rum Runners as the sun dips into the ocean (777 Gulf Ave.). □

Photograph by Christian Heeb/Laif/Redux

Photograph by © Yin Yin/dpa/Corbis

It's all white: Boca Grande Lighthouse.

