

Bellevue Mido Resort Hotel

The White Queen of the Gulf Celebrates 100 Years

—Clearwater

The majestic Mido flourishes after a century of change.

COURTESY THE BELLEVUE MIDO

An elegant lady stands proudly, adorned in her Victorian splendor, overlooking a harbor of calm, sheltered waters by the Gulf of Mexico.

With eyes of age, she has watched a changing landscape. But, her years become her: A century of genteel hospitality has nourished her character, yet her face is as charming now as in the days of her youth.

The regal mistress that is the Bellevue Mido Resort Hotel in Clearwater is celebrating her centenarian birthday this year. Placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980, the oldest operating resort hotel in Florida is still very reminiscent of her early glory days.

She was born on January 15, 1897, to a visionary named Henry B. Plant, who would become largely responsible for the development of the central and western parts of the state through his network of rails, known as the Plant System.

As was the fashion of the day, a railroad company was expected to own lavish hotels along the railway to entertain the wealthy elite. To oblige this custom, Plant set to create a magnificent addition to his family of tropical resorts he called his West Coast Hotels.

Desiring the ideal spot for his new belle of a hotel and the perfect view to be seen through her windows, Plant spent seven years researching climate and location. His findings revealed that upper Pinellas County enjoyed more days of sunshine per year than any other area. In addition, Plant was captivated by an

intriguing bluff in that same region, which proved to be the highest coastal rise in Florida.

Orange, tangerine and grapefruit trees, waving banana and coconut trees, camphors, rubber trees, cacti and curious shell mounds left by the Seminoles graced the area.

The view and atmosphere were absolutely delightful from this pleasant, lofty knoll that elevated 45 feet above tide water and terraced down to the bay. It was written that "the caprice of wind and wave seems to have anchored here" on "this pink-shelled, sun-kissed coast." His belle with a view was destined to be erected on this rare site.

When the Hotel Bellevue was completed, each of her 145 rooms was located "in a way that enables the eye to survey the harbor from every room in the building, extending as it does lengthwise eastward, from the brow of the bay."

She was billed as "a gem in modern architecture and finish," built of "only the best of material, from cellar to dome," with wide halls, rich carpetings and curving staircases of the old colonial style. She was constructed from heart of pine lumbered in North Florida and south Georgia, and her finishings were of polished cedar, cypress and curly pine.



The Bellevue Mido in her fledgling, construction-filled days.

An early brochure boasted indoor plumbing, with some suites having a connecting bath. Every bedroom in the house had three incandescent electric lights, a mantle of polished cedar with handsome tiling surrounding the fireplace, polished floors and oak or cherry furniture.

The picturesque hotel, modern for her day, quickly became the place to go to see and be seen. Arriving in style in Plant System parlor car trains, her rich and distinguished guests disembarked at the very doors of The Bellevue.

Turn-of-the-century rates at this posh seasonal destination were an exorbitant \$4 per night, \$25 a week for two people.

Through the past 100 years, Bellevue has seen the face of change, and the face was not always a pleasant one. Used during World War II as an auxiliary barracks, the once-noble lady whose corridors had formerly been filled with laughter and music was neglected and abused. She

then lay idle, stripped of her pride and every bit of her furnishings— until she was bought and given new life to once again greet visitors for the 1947 season.

Her current adoptive parent, the Mido Development Company, gave her a \$10 million dollar face lift in 1991. Once again, she smiles.

Today, she's feeling like her old self again, but only better: The charm of yesterday glows, but she now also has state-of-the-art amenities to pamper and please even the most discriminating guests.


While staying in one of the 292 guest rooms, 40 of which are suites, visitors can take advantage of the fun, sporty or down-right decadent offerings at the resort. Enjoy the championship, 18-hole golf course and its new golf clubhouse, four all-weather, red-clay tennis courts and indoor/outdoor pools and jacuzzis. Browse through the on-site art gallery or relax in the award-winning spa and fitness center.

The resort also offers six restaurants and lounges, each with its own international flair—from traditional Chinese cuisine to seafood and steaks. Guests can dance the night away in St. Andrews Pub or go out for a night on the town. Either way, extras provided by the hospitable management and staff such as a babysitting service and car and boat rentals make any choice hassle-free.

Even resorts such as Disney's Grand Floridian Hotel have been fashioned after the Belleview and another of Florida's old hotels. Belleview's Director of Marketing and Sales Oliver Kugler says, "When you have somebody like Walt Disney World try to duplicate you, that's a compliment." Then he added, proudly: "But, we're the original!"

Come meet this lovely lady from an era past. A fascinating and revealing historical tour of The Belleview Mido, the largest occupied wooden structure in the world, is given every day at 11 a.m.

Each adult is charged \$5 for the tour. With an included lunch, the cost is \$13.50. The tour fee for 12- to 17-year-olds is \$3. Youngsters under 12 may tour at no charge. Lunch for the younger set is ordered a la carte. For guests staying here, touring the hotel is complimentary.

For additional information on tours, dining in her diverse restaurants, the spa, room rates in this four-star resort—including a summer special for Florida residents—or business meeting facilities, write the Belleview Mido Resort Hotel, P.O. Box 2317, Clearwater, FL 34617, or call (800) 237-8947, Locally, call (813) 442-6171. 

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About the Cover

This Marc-Michaels Interior Design, Inc. patio reflects the beauty and serenity of a Florida evening. Marc-Michaels is a Winter Park-based interior design firm specializing in architectural interiors for yachts, private residences and commercial projects such as clubhouses, models and office buildings. Photo by Kim Sargent.

FEATURE

8 **Louis...a Gainesville institution**, by Diane Fischler
Celebrating 100 years of life

TRAVEL FLORIDA HIGHWAYS™

- 13 **The Lake Okeechobee Territory**, by Bill Gregware
Florida's Freshwater Frontier
- 18 **Kissimmee Billie Swamp**, by E. Douglas Cifers
Explore the Everglades with the Seminoles
- 21 **The Springs of Florida**, by Bill Gregware
Rainbow Springs' waterfalls, boils and beauty
- 22 **The Belleview Mido**, by Cindy Lowe
Celebrating 100 years of luxury

OUR FLORIDA HERITAGE™, chapter 1

31-38

Stamping Florida, by Terrell F. Solana
The first Floridian on a U.S. stamp

The Maple Leaf, by Jeff Webb
Civil War ship sank in the St. Johns

All Aboard!, by Ann Burks
Pensacola's L&N depot

Reflections of the Past

From the Porch Swing

Footprints, by Brian Michaels
Ancestors on television

REAL FLORIDA FINDS™

- 4 **Up Front**, by John Paul Jones, Jr.
- 5 **Write Between the Lines**
- 24 **Calendar**,
with Pow-Wows, Marathons, Concerts
and Photography
- 47 **Marketplace**
- 48 **Florida Bookstore**
- 49 **Finance Matters**, by Stephanie Martin
Running with Mutual Funds
- 50 **Spirits**, by Don Simmons
The art of matching a wine with your meal
- 51 **Florida Dining**, by J. Ashley Helme
Hitting the aleworks on A1A
- 52 **Dining In**
Easy Pantry Cookin'
- 54 **FLM's Guide to Bed & Breakfast Inns**
- 56 **Homes & Gardens**, by Cherie Faircloth
The artistic side of furniture
- 58 **Winter Pool Care**, by Kristen M. Crane
- 60 **Statewise**
Everything You Wanted to Know, but...
- 62 **State Parks**, by Beth Lowery
Down (or up!) US1 to this Keys recreation area
- 64 **Greenways & Trails**, by Trish Neville
Palatka builds a community and a greenway network
- 74 **State Secrets**, by E. Douglas Cifers



Editor's Note: The Stephen Foster State Folk Culture Center is in White Springs. The location was noted incorrectly in the November 1996 issue, and former President Herbert Hoover was misidentified in the November "All Aboard!" article, page 35.