National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

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received

JUL 22 1986

See instructions in *How to Complete National Register Forms*Type all entries—complete applicable sections

1. Nam	ie			
historic Vine	eta Hotel (pref	erred); Lido Ven	ice	
and or common	Palm Court Hot	el		
2. Loca	ation			
street & number	363 Cocoanut	Row	N <u>/</u> 1	1 not for publication
city, town	Palm Beach	N/A_ vicinity of		
state	Florida co	de 012 county	Palm Beach	code 0.9.9.
3. Clas	sification			
Category district _X building(s) structure site object	Ownership public _X private both Public Acquisition in process being considered	Status _X occupied unoccupied work in progress Accessible yes: restricted _X yes: unrestricted no	Present Use agricultureX commercial educational entertainment government industrial military	museum park private residence religious scientific transportation other:
	er of Prope			
street & number	370 West Cami	no Gardens Bouley	ard	
city, town Boo	ca Raton	$_{ m N}/_{ m A}$ vicinity of	state _E	lorida
5. Loca	ntion of Leg	al Descripti		
courthouse, regis	stry of deeds, etc. Pa	lm Beach County (Courthouse	
street & number	300 North Dix	ie Highway		
city, town	West Palm Bea	ch	state _F	'lorida
6. Repr	esentation	in Existing	Surveys	
title Survey	of Palm Beach	has this pro	perty been determined eligi	ible? yes _X n
date 1980			federal state	county X loca
depository for su	rvey records Palm	Beach Landmarks (ommission	
city, town Pal	lm Beach		state	Florida

7. Description

Condition X excellent	deteriorated	Check one unaltered _X_ altered	Check one X original site moved da	ite
good fair	unexposed			

Describe the present and original (if known) physical appearance

Constructed in 1926, the Vineta Hotel, presently known as the Palm Court Hotel, is a three-story, stucco over wood and concrete building located near downtown Palm Beach, Florida. Reflective of its date of construction, the building embodies the Mediterranean Revival style, typical of the architecture of South Florida during the 1920's. Although the building has been altered several times since its construction, it retains sufficient integrity to convey its architectural and historical significance.

Located at 363 Cocoanut Row in Palm Beach, the Palm Court Hotel is a Mediterranean Revival style building dating from the Florida Boom period of the 1920's. The main body of the hotel rises three stories from a continuous poured concrete foundation. It features a U-shaped plan enclosing a walled interior courtyard (photos 1-3). A partial fourth story sits atop the south wing, barely visible from the street (photo 4). A two-story rectangular addition, constructed in 1967 and exhibiting a sympathetic, well-integrated design, extends from its northeast corner, adjacent to an oval swimming pool (photo 5).

The hotel expresses many of the salient features and materials of the Mediterranean Revival style. Located at the intersection of Australian Avenue and Cocoanut Row, its corner setting is dramatized and anchored by a tower, adding an additional story of height to its third floor. The tower features a triple arched opening topped by a modillioned cornice supporting a clay tile hip roof. The arches within it are highlighted by engaged, non-bearing columns and wrought iron balustrades (photos 6, 7).

The main facade of the building facing Cocoanut Row is interrupted by a wide and generously set-back courtyard. Given the hotel's proximity to the sidewalk and street, the courtyard gives the building a much less imposing and more open appearance than if the facade were an unbroken mass. Viewed from an angle, it further gives the impression that the hotel is really two separate buildings linked together only by similar architectural elements, decorative features and materials. The entrance to the courtyard is defined by a wall rising one story in height, linking the north and south wings of the building (photo 1). A semi-elliptical arched entranceway pierces the wall and provides entry to the courtyard. The east wing of the building, beyond the courtyard, is topped by a shed roof of clay tiles which replicate those of the tower (photo 1).

The grouped arches of the tower above the north wing are repeated at ground level on the south wing. There, arched windows with fanlights separated by engaged pilasters flank a centrally placed entrance. The

8. Significance

Period prehistoric 1400–1499 1500–1599 1600–1699 1700–1799 1800–1899 1900–	Areas of Significance—C archeology-prehistoric agriculture architecture art commerce communications	community planning conservation economics education		literature military music philosophy politics/government	religion science sculpture social/ humanitarian theater transportation other (specify)
Specific dates	1926	Builder/Architect E.	F.	Munden, builde	r

Statement of Significance (in one paragraph)

The Vineta or Palm Court Hotel, also known briefly as the Lido Venice, fulfills criteria A, B and C for listing in the National Register of Historic Places. The building is architecturally significant as a good example of the Mediterranean Revival style, the model for Florida architecture during the Land Boom of the 1920's. It has commercial significance because of its close association with the Boom, a pivotal event in the development of Palm Beach and other areas of South Florida, and through its association with Atwater Kent, an important inventor and entrepeneur. Moreover, it has significance in the area of tourism as a representation of the many resort hotels which developed in Florida, and most especially Palm Beach, during the 1920's. While it has lost some of its architectural integrity, it retains to a large extent its original physical appearance.

The Palm Court Hotel, constructed in 1925-1926 and originally named the Lido Venice, is architecturally significant through its embodiment of an important period and style of architecture, the Mediterranean Revival style. The hotel is also significant in the area of commerce through its association with the Florida real estate boom and in the area of tourism for its association with the development of Palm Beach as a seasonal resort during the 1920's. Originally known as the Lido Venice, the hotel was both a product of the great South Florida real estate boom and a yictim of its collapse. The town of Palm Beach awarded the building permit for the hotel's construction to E. F. Munden on August 17, 1925, the very day that the Florida East Coast Railway declared an embargo on freight shipments of nonperishable goods to Miami The company's action effectively signaled weakness and South Florida. in the bubble of speculative real estate and construction activity that had developed during the post World War I period in Florida, particularly along the state's southeast coast. Though the lot on which the future Lido-Venice was to be constructed had been unoccupied, real estate records reveal that in the few short years before the building appeared, the property had changed hands many times. Expectations were running high in South Florida and the proposed hotel was but one of a number of such establishments launched at the time. None, however, could have been so improvidently planned. The embargo and the economic troubles that followed by year's end surely delayed construction and probably caused business problems, for numerous court suits involving owners, builders, and subcontractors appear in local property records.1

9. Major Bibliographical References

See Continuation Sheet

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national	state	x_ local			
s the designated State Histor 65), I hereby nominate this pr ccording to the criteria and p	roperty for inclusion in the rocedures set forth by the	e Național Re	gister and certify		
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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For MPS are only
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Continuation sheet

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Item number

7

Page -2

pilasters have bas-relief panels with vase and ascending plant motifs and are topped with ornate, composite capitals (photos 8-10). This ornamentation may have been purchased from the workshops of Addison Mizner, which produced many of the decorative elements applied to similar buildings in Palm Beach.

Matching entrances on the north and south wings of the main facade feature full entablatures. Providing additional emphasis to the entrances are open two-story inset staircases. The staircases feature wrought iron balconies at the half-story level and are terminated by segmental arches below centrally placed cartouches. They provide circulation and were a functional aspect of the original design in the pre-air conditioned age of the building's construction (photo 11).

The main roof of the hotel is flat, built up, with a parapet featuring inset, cast stone panels in a pierced imbricated pattern. The north and south wings of the facade have centered, broken parapets in the Mission style highlighted by cartouches with festoons and swags (photos 8, 12).

The exterior walls are finished in textured stucco. The textured finish, along with projecting balconies at the second floor level and projecting window sills throughout, adds depth to the building. The balconies feature cast stone bases atop metal scroll brackets. The balustrades are of wrought iron with a central diamond pattern. Additional relief is provided by canvas awnings held out from the wall by metal spears (photos 8, 13).

Three horizontal bands wrap around the building at the water table, stringcourse and frieze levels, softening its verticality and integrating its overall design (photo 6). Contrasting colors, another noteworthy feature, are expressed through pink walls, white trim, faded orange tiles and red and white striped awnings.

Since the building occupies so much of the property, landscaping is minimal, consisting mainly of palm trees. They range in height and are located primarily on the west side of the property. One rises from the middle of the courtyard, providing a visual reminder of the hotel's name (photo 2).

The hotel has gone through many changes of ownership with attendant additions and alterations. The two-story addition at the rear of the building is done sympathetically with a textured stucco finish, simply pilastered walls, horizontal bands, fanlights and a projecting balcony (photo 14). Original windows and doors have been replaced over the

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

2

Item number

7

Page 3

years and some of the window openings blocked off or altered in size. The windows, originally multi-light casements, are now primarily double-hung sash in a 1/1 light pattern. The doors which originally led to the balconies have been shortened into windows.

Some of the more inharmonious additions were removed and a more consistent theme carried out throughout in the latest work, done in 1985-6 by Py-Vara architects of Milwaukee. The interior of the building has generally been preserved. The original floor plan, including the lobby and first floor restaurant, remain as do the original rooms, consisting of a living room, bedroom, kitchenette, and bath (photos 15, 16).

Resources Inventory

Contributing Resources: 1 Building Non-Contributing Resources: 0

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For RPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

1

Item number

8

Page

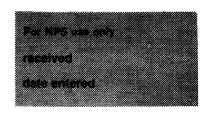
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At the beginning of 1925, few saw clouds on South Florida's economic Palm Beach, one of the focal points of the Boom, had grown spectacularly since the century's turn. Located on a barrier island bordered by the Atlantic Ocean and Lake Worth, Palm Beach was a small settlement when Henry M. Flagler brought his Florida East Coast Railway to an area just west of there in 1894. Flagler, who had earned a fortune in partnership with John D. Rockefeller at Standard Oil, began in the 1880's to expand his railroad interests in Florida and to develop resort hotels and even cities to accommodate the passengers that his trains carried into the state. Beginning in St. Augustine, he extended his railroad southward along the Florida coast to warmer regions, reaching the Palm Beach area in the 1890's. By the time the first train arrived, an enormous hotel, the Royal Poinciana, had been completed in Palm Beach by the Flagler interests. Construction of other resort facilities and sumptuous mansions led to the emergence of Palm Beach as the premier winter resort for America's wealthy leisure class.2

The city's reputation and the social habits of the wealthy elite who spent "the season" in Palm Beach were well established by 1925 when The property on plans for the construction of the Lido Venice were made. which the building was to be constructed had been purchased in January, 1925, by one C. A. Estey, who, in turn, conveyed it to a Herman Feldblat on August 17, 1925, the day the building permit was issued. "apartment-hotel" and a "little-sister" to New York City's popular Lido Venice Hotel for which it had been named, the building was publicly opened on February 8, 1926. By then, its ownership had once again changed hands, having been sold on November 7 to the Lido-Venice Corporation. Feldblat may have been a member of the corporation that assumed ownership, but later records reveal that its principal was one David M. Smith of New The Lido Venice Corporation issued a two-year operating lease to the Venice of Florida Corporation in June, 1926 in return for a minimum annual rent of \$30,000 and 22.5 percent of concessions. agreement implies that construction of the building had not been completed at that time.3

The Lido Venice, proclaimed by contemporary newspaper reports as one of the handsomest structures in Palm Beach, enjoyed a busy inaugural season. Physical construction and improvements were continuing even as the second "season" began in late 1926. The Venice of Florida Corporation employed an experienced hotel manager, H. Dow Van Vechten, to direct its operations, which, in addition to the hotel, included a supper club that featured live music provided by the orchestra of Paul Specht, who had previously played at the New York Lido Venice. The Palm Beach Daily News described the Lido Venice as "one of the most attractive hotels in the

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

Item number

8

Page 3

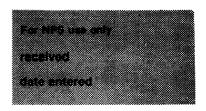
resort community" and pronounced its buffet table to be "the best... seen anywhere in Palm Beach this season." By the end of the hotel's second season, the Boom had collapsed, but the Lido Venice remained busy. A well-attended New Year's Eve celebration at the hotel attracted newspaper attention.4

In anticipation of the 1928-1929 season, the hotel was redecorated and given a new name, the Vineta. Dining and entertainment were provided then, as now, in the Rose Room and the courtyard. One room catered to golfers, the buffet luncheon and dinner continued to be served, and Curaso's New York Orchestra provided music. Under a new manager in 1929, the Vineta offered hotel services on the "European" plan and was advertised as "one of the very pleasing small hotels of Palm Beach noted for The Great Depression, which the particular care that is given details." set in that year, cast its pall over Palm Beach, like elsewhere, and the Vineta suffered economically in the early 1930's. Court records raise doubt whether the business had ever achieved prosperity. Suits filed by plumbers, electricians, the Otis Elevator Company and other contractors and subcontractors against the Lido Venice Corporation and David Smith appear in early 1926 and continue to 1929 when the Central Farmers Trust Company acquired the mortgage on the property. Following a judgment against that institution in early 1934 in favor of a plumbing company and the trust company's own suit against David Smith, the building was put up for sale at a foreclosure auction.5

Another aspect of the commercial significance of the hotel is its association with inventor and entrepreneur Atwater Kent. The property was purchased by proxy in March, 1934 for the sum of \$48,000 by representatives of Kent. Like many other members of East Coast monied society, Kent traveled frequently to Palm Beach, which he had first visited in 1917. For some years, Kent had been actively picking up property throughout the city, where real estate values had declined precipitously after the 1926 collapse. At the time he purchased the Vineta, Kent was in the process of also acquiring sixty other parcels. Kent's ownership of the hotel provides a significant historical association to the building, for he was an important figure in American manufacturing and technology and their commercial applications.6

Born in Burlington, Vermont in 1873, Kent was the son of a physician who had served in the Civil War. A precocious student of mechanics, young Kent was enrolled in the Worcester Polytechnic Institute, but left after two years without a degree to work with a manufacturer in Lebanon, New Hampshire. In 1902 he moved to Philadelphia to establish the Atwater Kent Manufacturing Works, which began producing intercommunicating home telephones and small voltmeters. An inventor and manufacturer, Kent

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

E

Item number

- 8

Page 4

secured patents for numerous electrically related devices, including a jump start ignition, electric meter, spark coil vibrator, measuring gauge, automobile horn, and even a transmission system. During World War I, Kent's factory produced fire control instruments for gunnery. His inventive skills and factory were made to order for the radio industry, and in 1922 Kent began manufacturing radio parts and then receiving sets in large quantities. By 1926 he had sold more than one million of the devices. By 1929 sales from his Philadelphia factory, which employed 12,000 workers, exceeded 60 million dollars annually and in the following year, Kent became America's leading manufacturer of radios. 7

Kent also became interested in the quality of radio programming. In 1925 he began to sponsor the "Atwater Kent Hour," a network program that presented the best classical musicians of the era. established the Atwater Kent Foundation, which held nationwide auditions to discover talented young singers. Winners received cash prizes and scholarships to leading conservatories of music. A noted philanthropist, Kent's contributions at one time reached \$300,000 annually. In the Depression winter of 1931, he set up a private relief program to provide food, clothing, fuel, shelter, and medical care to 3,500 former employees of his factory, which like most businesses at the time, was forced to By 1936 his work force had shrunk to 800. Despairing of reretrench. suming profitable operations, Kent finally closed the factory and retired from manufacturing. Expressing a wish to enjoy "the simple life, on a grand scale," he did just that, acquiring estates in Philadelphia, Bar Harbor, Maine, Southhampton, Long Island, and Palm Beach. Kent died in 1949 at age seventy-five.8

Upon purchasing the Vineta, Kent poured \$16,000 in improvements into the building and employed a new manager, a veteran hotel operator, to direct operations. The Vineta offered guests both the American and European (rates that included meals) plans and advertised accommodations that included 65 "light-attractive guest rooms with a home-like atmosphere," a dining room that catered to the nonresident public as well as guests, and a combined lobby and card room. Kent retained control of the Vineta for ten years, before disposing of the building in January, 1944 to the 307-311 North Front Street Corporation at a price of \$95,000. For the next two decades, the Vineta continued to function as one of Palm Beach's special small hotels, though the quality of service and physical condition of the building gradually declined.9

Not until the mid-1970's, when Paul and Franciska Esterhazy, natives of Budapest, Hungary, purchased the building did efforts to restore the business and the facility resume. The two, who had earlier moved to Palm Beach to open an art gallery, mistakenly believed that the Royal Park

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form

For NPS use only received date entered

Continuation sheet

6

Item number

8

Page 5

Hotel, the name they gave to it, was a Mizner creation, and they so advertised the establishment. In their own words, the Esterhazy's poured a "labor of love" into the building before selling it in 1980 to another two former residents of Budapest, Anna and Jeno Flohr, who had shortly before moved to Palm Beach. The Flohrs owned a chain of small hotels that included the Pilot House in Boca Raton and the Cote d'Azur in Delray. Improvements they introduced consisted of a heated swimming pool, a new air conditioning system, and a revamped lounge. The hotel's scheduled reopening in 1982-1983 was delayed, however, and the building was sold again to Palm Court, Inc., a private firm that possessed both means and firm intention to return the hotel to its original purpose and place in Palm Beach social life. Renamed the Palm Court Hotel, and advertised as Palm Beach's newest "old world" hotel, the facility reopened on December 17, 1985, with a benefit celebration for the Hospice Guild of Palm Beach. Among those attending the reopening was Florida Governor Bob Graham.10

The hotel continues to function much as it did when operations first began in the 1920's. Guests are offered accommodations on a daily, weekly, or seasonal basis, on the motif of a "European-style hotel." The renovations that were made did not alter the room configuration, which was designed for such use, and the locations of the lobby, card room, and dining room remain the same. Efforts have been made to install a dining service that appeals to the nonresident public as well as guests. Under the guidance of restauranteur Andre Surmain, previously associated with the Lutece Restaurant in New York and the Le Relais a Mougins in France, the name given to the facility in Palm Beach; the service obtained a five-star, the highest rating, from the Miami Herald's food critic, an indication that the Palm Court Hotel is reassuming its initial purpose.

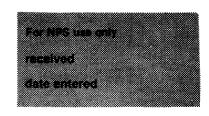
NOTES

¹ Town of Palm Beach, Building and Zoning Department, Building Permit 487, August 17, 1925; Donald W. Curl, Mizner's Florida, American Resort Architecture (Cambridge, Mass., 1984), p. 154; Palm Beach Post, August 16 and 18, September 11, 12, and 24, October 28, and December 5 and 10, 1925; Miami Herald, August 18 and 19, 1925; New York Times, December 29, 1925; Palm Beach County, Clerk of Court, Property Records, lots 1-4, block 6 (hereafter referred to as Property Records).

² Curl, Mizner's Florida, pp. 40-41.

³ Property Records, Book 305/Page 33; 294/313; and 381/407.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

7

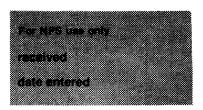
Item number

8

Page 6

- 4 Palm Beach Daily News, December 19, 26, and 30, 1926; January 1 and 2, 1927, and January 5, 1929.
- 5 <u>Ibid.</u>, January 5, 1929; Property Records, especially 12/251 and the Judgement awarded February 19, 1934.
- 6 Property Records, Master's Deed, March 19, 1934, lots 1-4, block 6.
- 7 <u>Time</u>, June 15, 1936, p. 60; March 14, 1949, p. 100; and June 15, 1936, pp. 66-70; <u>New York Times</u>, March 5, 1949; <u>Life</u> July 1, 1946, p. 96; Cleveland Amory, The Last Resorts (New York, 1948), pp. 301-304.
 - 8 New York Times, March 14, 1949.
- 9 Palm Beach Post, November 20 and 26, 1934; Palm Beach Daily News, March 31, 1940, April 6, 1941, and December 14, 1941; Album of Florida and West Indies Hotels (Miami Beach, 1938), p. 91; Album of Florida and West Indies Hotels, 1941 (Miami Beach, 1941), p. 179; Palm Beach Post-Times, January 9, 1944; Interview with Mrs. Lawrence S. Warren, seasonal resident of the hotel for 27 years, February 5, 1986; Palm Beach Daily News, December 22, 1985; Palm Beach Chronicle, December 5-11, 1985.
 - 10 Miami Herald, March 14, 1986.

National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

. 8

Item number

9

Page 2

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Palm Beach Daily News, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1934, 1949, 1985, 1986.

Palm Beach Post, 1925, 1926, 1927, 1934, 1949.

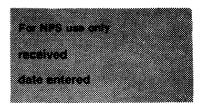
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National Register of Historic Places Inventory—Nomination Form



Continuation sheet

9

Item number

9

Page 3

Other Materials

Palm	Beach County.	Clerk of Cour	t. Property and	d Deed Records.
	Property Ap	praiser's Offi	ce. 1985 Proper	rty Tax Roll.
Palm	Beach Landmark	s Commission.	Correspondence	and site files.
	. Sanborn map	collection.		

Interviews

Knott, Judge James M. Palm Beach resident. Telephone interview, February 2, 1986.

Warren, Mrs. Lawrence S. Seasonal resident of the hotel for 27 years. Personal interview in Palm Beach, February 5, 1986.

