



Living architecture

Windsor is a New Urbanism development tucked away in one of Florida’s prettiest pockets

WORDS: PETER HOWARTH

Imagine a place that is immaculately turned out. Where the weather is balmy, palm trees sway and elegant wooden villas are arranged along peaceful avenues. At its centre is the striking modernist Town Hall designed by architect Léon Krier, and within walking distance, or a quick ride in your personal golf buggy, lie a links golf course and the ocean with a beautiful deserted beach, as well as 26 stables, a polo field and a health and fitness centre, where, in the unlikely event you should find yourself feeling stressed, you can have a massage on an open-air platform atop a clock tower. Oh, and did I mention the art gallery in which world-class artists regularly exhibit their work?

This is Windsor – not the town on the River Thames, but its namesake in Florida, about halfway between Miami and Orlando on the Atlantic Ocean. The moniker is however no coincidence, as the people who built this little piece of paradise – Canadians W Galen Weston and the Hon Hilary M Weston – named it after the royal town in England where they have a family home. ‘Somebody told us about Vero Beach, and we came down and saw it,’ explains Hilary today, sitting in her spacious villa, built around a central courtyard. ‘We were totally fascinated by how it seemed to have stood still in time – like it was in the 1950s and 60s. It was a classic English-American town.’ That was back in 1989. ‘This

whole area has wonderful citrus groves and they had suffered from bad weather over a number of years. A lot of farmers wanted to sell; we fell in love with the beach, with the atmosphere of the town, and bought some land.’

Hilary is an impressive, elegant, softly-spoken woman who exudes the kind of control and calm that you might expect of someone used to the public stage – she served as the 26th Lieutenant Governor of Ontario from 1997 to 2002, and is a high-profile philanthropist. As she tells the story of how she and her husband developed the 425 acres of barrier island between the Indian River and Atlantic Ocean that is now Windsor – first building a polo field and then a golf course – you realise that this is a family that thinks on a grand scale. But then husband Galen Weston is a hugely successful businessman, who owns or controls more than 200 companies, including George Weston Ltd, one of North America’s largest food processing and distribution companies, Fortnum & Mason and the Selfridges Group, of which daughter Alannah is chairman.

So when Hilary explains how they decided to build a village on the Florida site, it sounds like the most natural thing in the world. ‘We had heard of this very interesting idea called New Urbanism,’ she explains. ‘It was being pioneered by an urban planner and architect called Léon Krier from



Opposite The Town Hall was designed by Léon Krier. This page, from top The settlement boasts a links golf course; houses are built in an Anglo-Caribbean style; the community was founded by Galen and Hilary Weston

Luxembourg who was working with the Prince of Wales on his project in Poundbury in England. And, we discovered that American architects Andrés Duany and Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk were also promoting this idea – of a traditional-style planned development along a European model. So we thought, let’s interview these people.’

All were hired, and the result, created over three decades, is what the literature describes as “a private residential sporting club community”. Comprising some 350 “homesites”, Windsor village is made up of properties ranging from cottages and townhouses, to ocean-front villas and country estates. Some have been built by the Westons, but many have been created by residents who acquire plots and then develop dwellings with their own architects to their own specifications. The only rule is that in terms of exteriors, everyone has to follow the community aesthetic building code, which Hilary Weston describes as ‘Anglo-Caribbean’. The result is a harmonious low-rise settlement, radiating out from a village green, village store, concierge operation and amphitheatre, and comprising a beach club, clubhouse, two world-class restaurants (and wine cellar to match), as well as multiple sports facilities and a vibrant cultural programme.

In fact, I have come not to play polo or golf, but instead for the opening of the latest exhibition at The Gallery at Windsor, which is of Rose Wylie’s work. *Let it Settle* is the third and final instalment of an innovative three-year association between this small Florida art gallery and London’s Royal Academy of Arts that has previously seen both Grayson Perry and Sir Michael Craig-Martin exhibited at Vero Beach. Indeed, since opening in 2002, The Gallery at Windsor has hosted many museum-quality shows of contemporary art, showcasing works by the likes of Peter Doig, Ed Ruscha and Jasper Johns. Rumour has it that some of the pieces that have been presented here are now to be found hanging in the homes of Windsor residents.

However, it is undoubtedly sport that was very much at the heart of the Westons’ vision for Windsor. This place is all about healthy, outdoor living, and it boasts some impressive sporting credentials. The equestrian centre of 26 stables

and 14 paddocks, plus jumping, dressage and lunging rings, as well as a stick-and-ball field and full-size polo field, is run by Max Secunda, a high-goal polo player. The 18-hole links golf course was designed by famous golf course architect Robert Trent Jones Jr, and the tennis courts by Stan Smith, who younger readers might think of as a maker of trainers, but tennis players will know as a Wimbledon champion.

Hilary won’t say exactly who lives at Windsor, but allows, ‘We have a couple of high-flying digital people who can afford to live here.’ It’s apparently well-suited to families too, as there’s good schooling nearby. Most use it as a holiday destination, she says, and there’s a contingent of retirees who find themselves gravitating here for longer and longer periods. The community is quite discreet and doesn’t typically attract celebrities. It is, however, an open secret that former world no 1 tennis pro (and now keen golfer) Ivan Lendl has a home here – a fact corroborated by the record of the winners of the annual tennis competition that adorns the walls of the tennis club shop.

What is unusual about Windsor, though, is that while there are other similar-sounding schemes where residences have been pegged to a golf course or polo field or boating marina, here the emphasis is firmly on community. ‘My son met his wife here,’ says Hilary Weston. ‘In November, and in spring time, there are always one or two weddings going on. Usually between two members’ families.’ These take place in the Town Hall, which can do religious services when it is not being used for recitals by musicians from philharmonic and opera companies, or readings by visiting authors.

The place has matured over 30 years and it feels established and considered. Not rushed to exploit a market, but nurtured and grown organically. Like a village, in fact. So successful has Windsor been that the Westons are now developing another 40 residences. If you fancy it, plots of land currently range from \$625,000 to \$4,200,000, while finished houses are \$1,795,000 to \$10,500,000. The art is extra. ● *Let it Settle runs at The Gallery at Windsor, Florida, until 30 April 2020; for more information about Windsor, visit windsorflorida.com*



Paul Costello , Thomas Loof