

Palm Beach

An Architectural Legacy



Casa de Leoni





PREVIOUS PAGES Casa de Leoni's water facade displays its typical Venetian watergate, an architectural feature that allowed visitors to arrive comfortably by boat.

Casa de Leoni, one of Addison Mizner's most distinctive homes, received a second Ballinger Award presented in 1995. Built in 1921 for Leonard Thomas, Casa de Leoni was a departure from Mizner's trademark Spanish style. For Casa de Leoni's location at the very water's edge of Lake Worth, Mizner chose the Venetian Gothic style. In another departure from his more usual homes, Casa de Leoni was a relatively small house. With its intown location, limited site, and waterfront orientation, Casa de Leoni defined the essence of a Mizner town home.

From the water Casa de Leoni's outstanding feature was its water gate. Another prominent feature was Mizner's early use of trefoil-arched windows, a theme frequently found on his later homes. Casa de Leoni was designed in a u-shape with a waterfront courtyard between the two major wings of the house. The courtyard originally featured broad steps down to the waterfront, which were later replaced by a lakeside balustrade. From the land side Casa de Leoni announced itself with a pecky cypress door surmounted by an arch depicting the Lion of Saint Mark, from which the house derived its name. An addition by Marion Sims Wyeth in the



1950s provided a compatible pool wing and pool for the house. When Casa de Leoni was landmarked by the Town of Palm Beach, the documentation provided for Casa de Leoni called it "more innovative" than many of Mizner's larger homes and said, "Casa de Leoni in short, is a gem."

The exacting restoration was completed in 1992 under the architectural direction of Jeffery Smith of Smith Architectural Group. The interior design was created by Howard Slatkin of New York. Slatkin's exuberant, dramatic interiors resonate with

Mizner's contrasts of light and shade and heighten the romance of Mizner's conception. The restoration relied on precise details such as the lion theme that appears in wood, cast stone, tile, and brass. In particular the brass hardware that was reproduced or newly designed is one of the glorious features of the restoration.

The two Ballinger Award winners in 1995, both intown homes on relatively limited sites, demonstrate the enormous potential of historic restoration. The Brazilian Bungalow and Casa de Leoni stand today as symbols of all the reclaimable homes in the heart of Palm Beach. They are a testament to their owners' vision of what these homes could become.



OPPOSITE Casa de Leoni's restored front door.

ABOVE An early photograph of Mizner's entrance shows the Lion of St. Mark's ensconced over the doorway. Leonard Thomas, the first owner of Casa de Leoni, had diplomatic postings in Madrid and Rome. He planned, according to historian Dr. Donald W. Curl, to hire an Italian staff for Casa de Leoni and to import Italian furniture and even a gondola.



TOP An exterior plaque in a della Robbia style decorates a plain wall.

ABOVE As this historical photograph shows, originally Mizner's design provided broad steps descending to the waterfront.

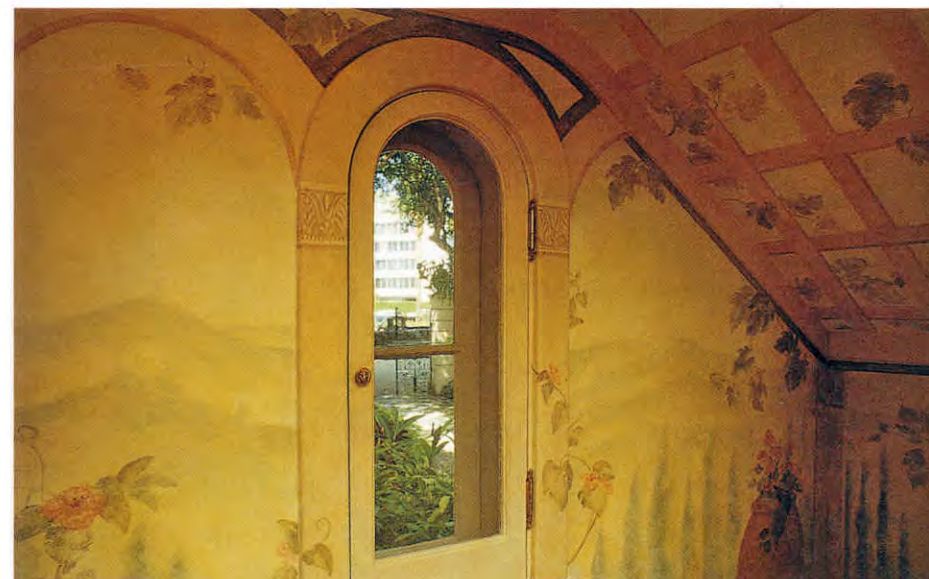


OPPOSITE A corridor lit by arched windows provides a cool contrast of light and shadow.
 ABOVE In the dining room at Casa de Leoni, Howard Slatkin draped the room with a tent of striped silk. The fabric was imported from Italy.
 RIGHT Detail of tiny bells sewn onto the valance of the dining room drapes.





ABOVE AND (DETAIL) RIGHT The master bedroom with its Moorish arches and gold egg-and-dart molding demonstrates Howard Slatkin's approach of patterns and more patterns everywhere throughout Casa de Leoni. The master bedroom at Casa de Leoni shows architectural forms employed as a surface for decorative patterns.



ABOVE Vibrant patterns are a theme in a lakeside sitting room.
LEFT Delicate, hand painting enhances a window view.



OPPOSITE Casa de Leon's living room, an incredible blending of texture, color, and pattern, with a remarkable stenciled ceiling, is a fitting stage for the glorious lake views outside.

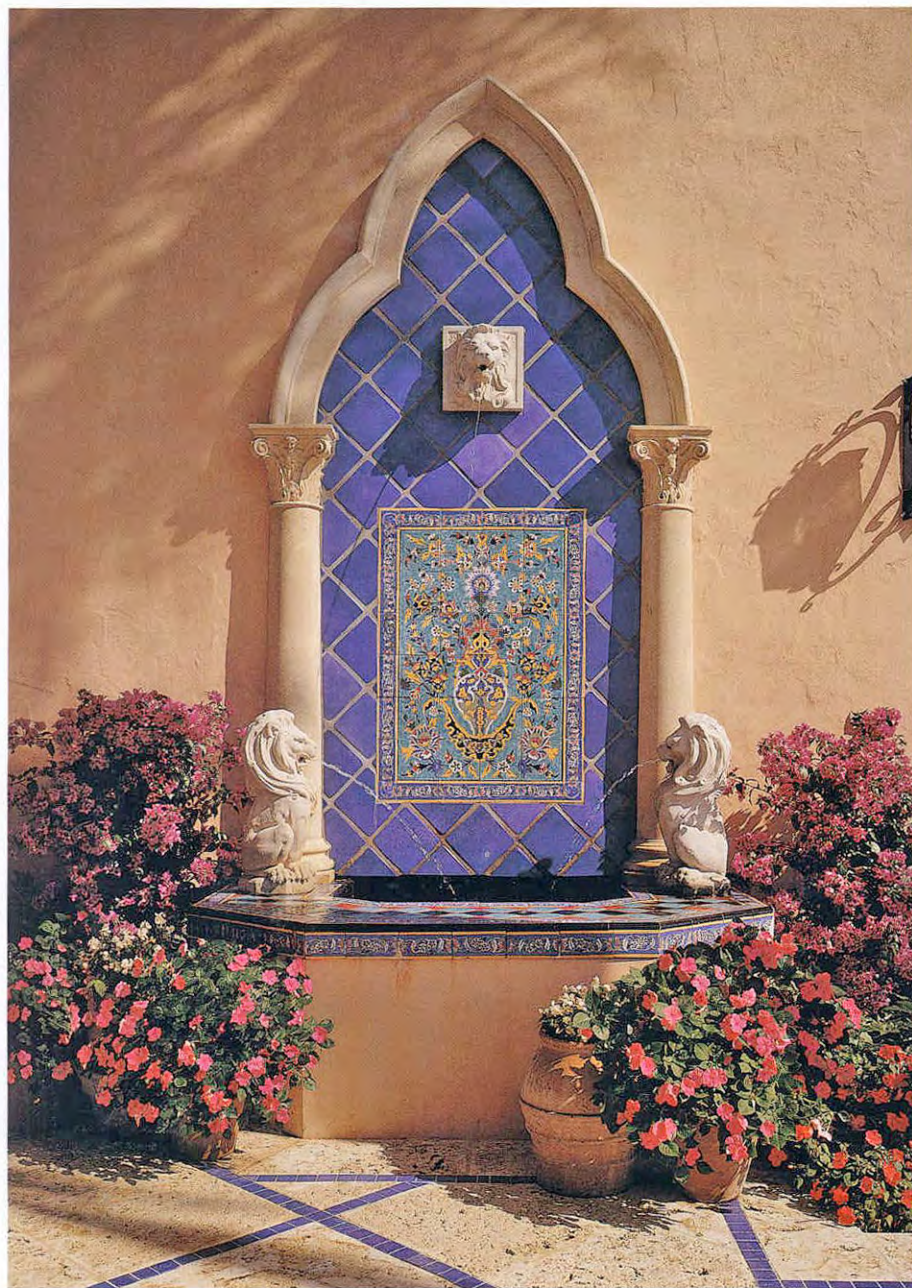
TOP AND RIGHT Casa de Leoni displays a great variety of form in its hardware. It would have been only too easy to use standardized hardware, but the owner and decorator delighted in the diversity of many shapes and subjects. A starfish theme is frequently found in the intricately detailed custom hardware. Over 1500 brass hardware designs were created for Casa de Leoni. The lion's head motif is found throughout Casa de Leoni; brass lion heads were custom cast by a P.E. Guerin.





LEFT An inner courtyard relies for effect on both simple and complex arched forms.
OPPOSITE One of the three private courtyards at Casa de Leoni.





ABOVE A tiled fountain is a focal point for the central courtyard at Casa de Leoni.
RIGHT Cast stone balustrades are an important design feature on the lakeside of Casa de Leoni.

