

## CUBA

### **Embargo hampering restoration effort of Hemingway villa in Cuba**

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**By Ruth Morris, Staff Writer**

San Francisco de Paula, CUBA -- The bullfighting posters have been packed away, the famous Royal typewriter stored in a dry place. His Cinzano bottle is gone, too, and his hot jazz collection.

Restoration has begun on the Cuban hilltop villa where Ernest Hemingway hung his hat and hunting trophies for 21 years, from 1939 to 1960. The swashbuckling author, known to many as 'Papa,' produced some of his most brilliant works at the house where he lived after leaving Key West.

It's also where he threw some of his most legendary parties. Cuban boxers and French existentialists raised glasses on the vine-draped verandah; movie star Ava Gardner reportedly skinny-dipped in the pool.

But as repairs progress, U.S. conservationists say the project lacks funding and materials they are eager to supply -- assistance banned under the terms of the 40-year-old U.S. embargo on travel and trade with the communist island.

What's more, they say the home may suffer irreparably if they aren't allowed to play a larger role. A Cuban team launched emergency preservation efforts earlier this year, drying sodden walls and adjusting sagging ceiling beams. But it's a major job, with limited resources.

"The house is treasured by the Cubans. They're not going to let this house sink into the ground and rot," said Jenny Phillips, co-founder of Boston-based Hemingway Preservation Foundation, which was denied a U.S. license last year to help fund restoration efforts.

"But in a resource-deprived economy, the work may not be done at the highest standards," she said. "That is why we feel a sense of urgency and responsibility to get on board."

The foundation sent a team of experts to Cuba last week to study needed repairs under a special travel license issued by the U.S. Treasury Department. Even when they finish their feasibility study later this year, though, it's unclear how they will put their findings to work. The group will reapply to the Treasury Department for a restoration license in November, Phillips said, but has no guarantee of receiving one.

Termite-bitten and bedraggled by time, the home sits in scruffy splendor among mango and guava trees, just south of Havana. Cuba's National Center for Cultural Patrimony estimates it will cost up to \$3 million to preserve the villa, known as *Finca Vigia*, or "Lookout Farm." The complex includes the spacious home, a four-story lookout tower, Hemingway's wooden fishing boat and his books and belongings. So far, the Cuban government has allotted \$340,000 for first-phase restoration of the main house.

The structure also serves as a museum, although most of Hemingway's belongings have been removed during restoration. When fully operational, it offers visitors a chance to peer through open windows onto scenes that seem suspended in time, as if Hemingway, shirtless and in Bermuda shorts, had just stepped away from his desk.

The writer's 9,000 books are arranged in no particular order, the way he liked them. A Cole Porter disc sits on the record player. Hunting magazines lay about. In the bathroom, visitors can see meticulously kept records of Hemingway's weight and blood pressure, which he etched on the wall.

"Hemingway left a footprint in this place. There are still people here who knew him as children. Many people say they feel Hemingway's spirit here," said museum director Ada Rosa Alfonso Rosales.

The U.S. Treasury Department, which oversees U.S. embargo regulations, allows Americans to travel to Cuba for educational and humanitarian purposes, but not to promote tourism. It deemed the Hemingway house a tourist draw, and thus banned financial help.

"We should be focusing on rebuilding the shattered lives of poor Cubans, rather than fixing buildings for one of the world's richest dictators, Fidel Castro," said Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen, R-Miami, a steadfast supporter of the embargo, in a recent press statement.

Hemingway has in fact drawn plenty of tourists to Cuba. Visitors from around the world beat a track to his favorite Havana bar, El Floridita, to order his favorite drink, a daiquiri made with grapefruit juice. The nearby fishing village of Cojimar, where he gathered string for his novella *The Old Man and the Sea*, sees busloads of tourists every weekend.

Foundation lawyer Tom Herman said, however, that tourist revenue generated by restoring Hemingway's home would be nominal.

"This project will not channel more resources to the Cuban government. It will channel resources to restoration of *Finca Vigia*," he said. Saying the house is as much an educational institution as it is a tourist destination, he added, "If *Finca Vigia* is lost, it will be lost forever."

For now, the U.S. government has agreed to allow foundation members to travel to the Hemingway house to write a feasibility study of needed restorations. Also, the Treasury Department has given the green light to a joint U.S.-Cuban effort to preserve and scan Hemingway's Cuba-based books and correspondence. Digital copies will be delivered to the John F. Kennedy Library in Boston.

Licenses or no, Cuban conservationists have had to steam ahead. The floor in the bright blue bedroom of Hemingway's fourth wife, Mary Welsh, had cracked open as if the chamber were sliding away from the main house. The roofs are leaky and window seals have chipped away.

The U.S.-based National Trust for Historic Preservation listed the house as one of its "most endangered places" recently, even though it sits on foreign soil.

"This has nothing to do with politics. We have to preserve it for the world," said Gladys Rodriguez, a former Hemingway museum director. "Unfortunately we can't wait for them to authorize a license."

Scholars say Hemingway, who put down shallow roots, seems to have felt more of a connection to *Finca Vigia* than any other place, including the Key West home where he lived in the 1930s.

The Cuban villa houses more of his personal belongings, including three typewriters and a war correspondent's uniform, plus his library.

In addition to writing his Nobel-winning *The Old Man and the Sea* here, he also penned *Islands in the Stream* and *A Moveable Feast*.

Some of the original manuscripts were found in the basement, notes crammed in the margins. Heaps of letters are here too, and recipes Hemingway jotted down for his kitchen staff.

He would leave Cuba for medical treatment in 1960 and settle again in Ketchum, Idaho, where he committed suicide in July of 1961. Before departing, he ran into the young revolutionary Fidel Castro at a fishing tournament.

Today, the photograph memorializing that encounter hangs in most tourist spots. And despite his celebrity pool parties and privileged lifestyle, Hemingway is largely remembered here as a writer of the people.

"Hemingway had a lot of friends here," said Marcelino Martinez Garcia, 68, a musician in Cojimar, the fishing village Hemingway made famous. "He talked to everyone. He didn't care about class, and everyone liked him."

Sitting on a stone wall, his guitar case held together with fishing line, Martinez said he had retired from his government job as an administrator, where he took home \$10 a month. Now he makes slightly more, strumming ballads about the sea for tourists.

"I sang for him several times," Martinez insisted. Then the old man tilted his head and put his ear to his guitar. "He always asked me to play this one," he said, slipping into a soft song.

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