

Report of the First Combined National Trust for Historic Preservation and Hemingway Preservation Foundation, Inc. Technical Team Visit to *Finca Vigía*

October 2005

The first of our Technical Team work sessions took place at the *Finca Vigía*, Ernest Hemingway's estate in Havana for more than 20 years, on September 7, 8 and 9, 2005. These historic meetings were the first of their kind to occur between Americans and Cubans since the Cuban revolution of 1959.

Four architects, one engineer and two Hemingway Museum professionals represented the Cubans. Four architects, one landscape architect and one engineer comprised the American team. Leland Cott, FAIA and Henry Moss, AIA – from Bruner/Cott & Assoc. Architects led the effort for the Hemingway Preservation Foundation and William Dupont, AIA and Mary DeNadai, FAIA, principal of John Milner Architects represented the National Trust for Historic Preservation. Patricia M. O'Donnell, FASLA, AICP, principal of Heritage Landscapes, Preservation Landscape Architects and Michael Henry, PE, AIA, principal of Watson & Henry Associates, were invited to participate in the multi-disciplinary team by both the Hemingway Preservation Foundation and the National Trust. The meetings and field reviews were of a collegial and friendly nature. A spirit of close teamwork, cooperation and mutual respect was firmly established between the Cuban and American preservation professionals during this visit.

At the outset, the leader of the Cuban delegation, Gladys Rodriguez Ferraro noted, and all agreed, that the preservation of *Finca Vigía* is a complex undertaking addressing the entire property and all its resources. The purposes of the technical review by the US team were multiple and basically followed the agenda prepared by the Cuban team that began with the projects underway on the Main House and listed a series of resources and preservation initiatives to address. The agenda began with a report by the Cuban team that analyzed the structural deterioration and sources of rainwater penetration in different parts of the Main House. There was a thorough study of the corrugated asbestos cement roofs added by Hemingway and the complicated section comprised of this overlay on earlier roofs and suspended ceilings that varied in height from room to room below.

A second presentation featured the work of the Cuban team's structural engineer whose analysis of construction of added portions of the Main House known as Mary's Room explained the pattern of cracked wall and ceiling plaster, floor tiles, and spalling at reinforcing rods in concrete corner columns.

Subsequent agenda items widened the discussion to include the site as a whole, with its landscape changes during the Hemingway tenure and after their departure. In addition, the U. S. and Cuban teams, the latter including technical professionals and the museum's management staff walked the site and considered the preservation requirements of the

Guest House and Garage, the Pool and Poolside Cabanas, Hemingway's boat- *Pilar* and its protective shed. This group also considered the proposed location for the conservation workshop, the Taller in relation to the site's entrances, historic uses, and future circulation patterns for vehicles and pedestrians.

An initial objective was to gain an understanding of the comprehensive roof repair work on the main house, already in progress and to offer technical advice that may aid in the functionality, durability and detailing of that project. The Cuban team had prepared detailed PowerPoint presentations explaining their general approach and their detailing of the roof replacement. Notable elements of these excellent presentations were the forensic findings about a double roof system, the reuse of sound antique timbers and the conceptual approach to improved drainage. The U. S. technical team presented observations and concepts for refinements after the presentations and while examining the roof and parapet details up on the roof and looking into attic spaces. The work underway is sound and agreement among the professionals on refined detailing should improve the project and the long-term preservation of the Main House.

Other issues addressing the Main House were secondary to the roof and drainage failures in terms of concern. The Cuban team is focusing on completing the house and then will move on to additional projects. The cracking of the walls and floors in Mary Hemingway's bedroom was a topic of interest and a second, professional presentation with a forensic approach clarified the causes of failure for the first time and displacing the hypotheses of earlier engineering analyses. Discussion of structural stabilization and repair of these cracks provided a conceptual basis for stabilization and repair and the two teams began to concentrate on details for remedial work.

The broader property and its individual resources were the topics of a series of subsequent discussions. For example, a detailed approach to the study and preservation of the Hemingway landscape was presented noting that a clear sequence of steps can be followed over time. The Cuban team shared their work to date particularly on cataloging plant materials and controlling the spread of termites on the *Finca Vigía* trees— and subsequently into the buildings. The construction of a modest conservation workshop, or Taller was discussed and while desperately needed to carry out document conservation, raised some concerns. The siting of this workshop appears to be on a portion of Mary Hemingway's garden adjacent to the property's entry for buses and service vehicles.

The U. S. team presented the concept of clustering contemporary facilities near the parking area and the tourist shop. The potential for a larger, more comprehensive Taller to address Hemingway's thousands of documents and the presentation of Hemingway's life and legacy at an exemplary visitor education center within such a cluster also came under discussion. The use of the *Finca* by an expanded number and variety of school groups seems inevitable, and this realization added weight to questions about the proposed siting of the Taller.

The Garage and Guesthouse was cited as the subject for preservation and stabilization after the completion of the Main House. The program for this building and the possibility

of shifting its uses arose in the discussion between the *Finca Vigía* management team and the U. S. team's architects and landscape architect.

Hemingway's boat, the *Pilar* was viewed under its damaged weather cover on the tennis court and the need for planning a comprehensive conservation program was identified. While the Pool is in good condition, details for repainting the surface, repairing its pumps and well equipment and the potential for youth swimming programs was discussed.

The arrival of a few elderly men from the neighborhood, who had played two-base ballgames on the entry lawn with Hemingway, provided an engaging interlude. The layout of the field was located and anecdotes about play with Hemingway and his visiting sons were interspersed with memories about earlier conditions at *Finca Vigía*. These men had known the *Finca Vigía* before Hemingway moved there, had known the house and grounds during his stay, and were able to identify changes that had occurred after the Hemingways' departure.

There is considerable follow-up required to provide detailed information on projects underway and to add preservation planning and technical expertise to the future sequence of undertakings. Much progress was made and the three-day meeting concluded with the establishment of a listing of priorities for current and future work efforts on the main house and on *Finca Vigía* in its entirety. These are set out in the following list of priorities, tasks, and responsible parties:

Main House: Mapping and documentation, of all areas of concern, including but not limited to:

Roofing and rain drainage

1. Study hurricane rain- and wind-related issues related to the new corrugated asbestos cement roof taking particular care to detail the attachments to adequately resist suction and uplift from 100 mph + winds. (Cuban team architects and engineers)
2. Evaluate and design the proper drainage systems for the roof taking into account simplicity of operation and cost-effective maintenance. (Cuban team architects and engineers with support from U. S. team)
3. Detail all copper gutters and downspouts for expansion and contraction due to high temperatures and fluctuations. (U. S. team send typical details for Cuban team to adapt to their specific installation)
4. Devise strategies for the control of termite infestation of all wood in the house taking into account the different kinds of ground and airborne termites already prevalent at the site. (U. S. team provide advice and identify products for detection, deterrence, and extermination based on studies commissioned by NCPTT and entomology departments at U. S. and Canadian universities.)
5. Provide designs for physical access to roof crawl spaces for proper visual access and maintenance. (Cuban architects and engineers based on discussions with U. S. team.)

6. Devise schemes for the proper ventilation of the spaces between the two roof structures while protecting against the entry of insects and birds. (Cuban architects and engineers based on discussions with U. S. team.)

Mary's Room

1. Monitoring of all cracks in walls and floors
2. Monitoring of the soils in the vicinity of Mary's room for corrosion and/or movement.
3. Devise strategies for the creation of control joints to allow the movement of the structure.

Completion of the work

1. Provide designs for new electrical systems as required (Cuban architectural and engineering team)
2. Provide designs for new museum quality lighting (U. S. team guidelines and possible fixture guide for Cuban team design development and installation)
3. Devise historically compatible strategies for placing window screening on the windows and doors that will allow visitors to look into the room displays. (Cuban architects with support from U. S. team)
4. Devise methods of allowing the public to view Mary's room from the building exterior where windows are above eye level. (Cuban architects with support from U. S. team)
5. Provide paint analysis (U. S. team to produce plan for paint analyses for two purposes: (a) confirmation of the sequence of construction of different parts of the Main House; and (b) confirmation of paint colors of exterior and primary interior walls during Hemingway's residence.)
6. Continue to deal with the importation of materials for the restoration (U. S. team to work with Cuban counterparts to identify materials important to the restoration that are not available to the Cuban builders, then explore sources that are consistent with the constraints of the embargo, then to verify those that are not.)
7. Recreate the museum in the newly restored house (Cuban museum management and curatorial team with input from indoor environmental specialists on U. S. team)
8. Provide information about the control and protection against termites. (Cuban team install protection and access for future treatment according to guidelines for control produced by the U. S. team.)

General Site Conditions (To be accomplished simultaneously with ongoing work)

1. Protection of ground surfaces, pavement, and plant materials during the work on the Main House.
2. Documentation and evaluation of the Finca Vigia landscape at different periods of the Hemingways' tenure. (Cuban museum team with guidance from the U. S. team)
3. Rodent damage assessment and rodent control (Cuban museum team)
4. Replanting as part of the implementation of a new cultural landscape restoration and conservation plan (Cuban museum teams with guidelines from U. S. team.)

5. Drainage and storm water management plan from roof of the Main House and Guest House to fountains, cisterns, and irrigation systems. (Cuban museum teams with guidelines from U. S. team.)

Workshop

1. Continue with the current plans to construct the workshop on the site of Mary's garden but recognize that if future funding becomes available, an expanded workshop, with a more ambitious program, could be constructed elsewhere on the Finca Vigia site. Such a relocation would allow for the alteration of the currently planned project, reinstatement of the excavated site, and the re-establishment of Mary's garden site. (Cuban team with ideas from the U. S. team)
2. Assess the environmental requirements of the Taller's workshop, conservation lab spaces, and archival storage areas. (Cuban museum team's conservators, architects and engineers with support from U. S. team's environmental specialists.)

Priority Areas after Main House Restoration and Cultural Landscape Issues are Resolved

Bungalow and Garage

1. Study the current condition of this multi-story building and document its conditions (Cuban architectural and engineering team)
2. Set out maintenance, repair and conservation plans to address current deterioration. (Cuban architectural and engineering team)
3. Explore possible visitors' orientation center, administrative offices, Guest House display, and storage areas in layouts that are compatible with the existing building. (Cuban museum team with their architects and support from the U. S. team)
4. Define probable uses and relate repair, building services, and restoration plans to design for future occupancy. (Cuban museum team with their architects and support from the U. S. team)

The Yacht Pilar

1. Assess the current condition of the Pilar (U. S. team)
2. Produce repair and maintenance plans for Pilar (U. S. team)
3. Study wind resistance and repair uplift damage of corrugated roof covering Pilar. (Cuban team architects and engineers)

Poolside Structures

1. Assess and document the current condition of the Cabanas and Pergola. (Cuban museum and technical teams)
2. Assess and document the condition of the Hemingway-era wooden poolside furniture. (Cuban museum and technical teams)

The Pool

1. Assess and document the current condition of the pool. (Cuban museum and technical teams)
2. Provide specifications for paint (U. S. team)
3. Study the condition of the filters and pump (Cuban engineers)
4. Identify possible water sources (Cuban museum team and civil engineers)
5. Define possible uses (Cuban museum team and San Francisco de Paulo)

The Windmill Structure and Elevated Cisterns

1. Inspect the structural condition of the windmill base and elevated cisterns and propose maintenance and repairs. (Cuban architects and engineers)

Oral Histories

1. Continue to take oral histories that provide references to the site, house, and the Hemingways' way of living there. (Cuban museum team)

Landscape and Site Design

1. Workshop location and strategy for future relocation and expansion. (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
2. Bus, van and service vehicle approach, circulation and parking (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
3. Automobile parking (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
4. Pedestrian circulation for the site in general (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
5. Interpretive paths that communicate the Hemingway era to visitors at the Main House and on portions of the site beyond (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
6. Landscape restoration plan including tiled patios, paved walkways, terrace retaining walls, orchards (Mangoes and Almonds), vegetable gardens, canopy and specimen tree planting, flowering plants at Main House patios and terraces, and privacy screens of bamboo (U. S. conceptual plan with Cuban museum team)

Management Plan

1. Study the capacity of the Cultural Landscape to accept more intensive visitation in relation to the overall site plan and at the Main House and Tower more concentrated foot traffic at windows and door openings. (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
2. Prepare a disaster management plan for the site and its buildings. This should focus on hurricanes and fire. (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
3. Maintenance plans for the individual buildings, starting with the Main House. (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)
4. Maintenance plans for the Tower, the Guest House, and the Poolside Cabanas. (Cuban team with support from U. S. team)

Ongoing Working Relationship to Protect *Finca Vigia* and the Hemingway Collection.

Once the architectural feasibility study is complete the Hemingway Preservation Foundation, Inc. and the National Trust for Historic Preservation will apply for another license from the US Department of Treasury. This license would allow for the exchange of skilled specialists, equipment (i.e. sensors and humidity monitoring devices) and some materials that are not available in Cuba (i.e. chemicals for termite control). Under this new license work previously mentioned could be continued. It would also allow for further development of the environmental aspects of the Main House as container for the collection of Hemingway artifacts on display and in storage in other locations at *Finca Vigía*.

To those individuals who have made financial contributions, we thank you. For those who would like to provide financial support support in helping us preserve *Finca Vigía*, Ernest Hemingway's beloved home please click http://hemingwaypreservationfoundation.org/how_help.html

Thank you.