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Home FOR THE Holidays

Annual Home Tour Raises Funds for Amelia Island's Museum of History

WORDS BY JULIET JOHNSON :: PHOTOGRAPHY BY AGNES LOPEZ

The inhabited history of Amelia Island goes back 2,000 years. So far. Thanks to a prominent geographical position and a deep port, Fernandina has had ships take safe harbor from impending storms and to restock before heading north, south, or inland for many generations. Ships from almost every country have visited at some point in the colorful history of the "Isle of 8 Flags." Since 1562, Fernandina has raised the flags of France, Spain, Great Britain, the Patriots of Amelia Island, Florida's Green Cross, the Confederate States of America and the United States; it is the only U.S. municipality to have flown that many.

New residents soon come to realize that their own forefa-

thers may have passed through. When they look for a chance to get involved, the Amelia Island Museum of History has a variety of options. Without their volunteers, the four full-time and three part-time staffers would not have been able to preserve as much of what has been uncovered to date. "It is not long before everyone develops a passion and profound appreciation for all there is to learn about the island's rich heritage," says museum education director Thea Seagraves. The Holiday Home Tour has grown to become the museum's biggest fundraiser of the year. Between 1,800 and 2,000 people attend the event, which raises approximately \$50,000 when the tour is Downtown, and \$65,000 when it is held at the beach with oceanfront homes on display.



Red velvet ribbon draws your eyes to the front porch of 120 N. 6th Street, which was built in 1876 by Josiah Prescott, thanks to a land grant signed by Ulysses S. Grant. Window wreaths match the red Adirondak chairs on the side porches.

THE HOUSE:
120 N. 6TH STREET



While Dawn Tiura and Steve Gustafson are the current owners, the grand Fernandina Historic District 1876 residence was built by Josiah Prescott, on land granted by Ulysses Grant. Prescott was a Yankee, who served as a second lieutenant during the occupation of Fernandina during the Civil War. Later, he owned a boot and shoe store in a nearby building which changed hands in 1903 and became the Palace Saloon. The saloon remains today, and is considered the oldest surviving bar in Florida. Originally the home consisted of two rooms on the first floor and two rooms on the second floor connected by a side hallway and stairway. After many additions, the home is now an expansive, elegant residence on four combined lots. The Victorian detail includes gingerbread spindle work, a stained glass front door, bay windows and an ornamented veranda punctuated with cherry red Adirondack chairs on both levels.

Many a Realtor will claim a home has a chef's kitchen. This one—with its bright, sunny layout, windows on all four corners, open to the family room, with ample counters and six-burner and griddle Thermidor stove—will be used by PBS favorite French chef Jacques Pépin next year when he and his wife do a two-month residency program on Amelia Island. Dawn's family will decamp to a friend's beachfront condo.

It is said that the house is haunted. Both Dawn and the previous owner have become aware of a spirited little girl. The previous owner met her. Dawn's experience was more of mischief, perhaps caused by consternation that, following a renovation, the back staircase had been removed and replaced by a pantry on the first floor and a vanity in the master bathroom above. The little girl hasn't been seen or felt since Dawn went into the new pantry, shut the door and had a conversation. Dawn reassured the girl that the home was in good hands and the new family's intentions were honorable. After all, Dawn had her own little girl, aged eight at the time. There has only been one incident since.

Above: Family stockings hang from the coat rack under the Edison chandelier, for Santa's convenience (should he use the front door this year). Stunning landscapes from retired engineer, Milt Shirley hang over gold garland around an antique rocking horse on the hall bench. Right: Ornaments custom created by friend, Natalie Nelson, of Nelson Trading Company complement the dramatic pair of shell photographs by John Kuss.

Opposite: The pool house, aka conservatory, has rustic a metal topped table with long box decorated in assorted pines and cones with invisible twinkling lights.





11TH ANNUAL HOLIDAY HOME TOUR

DECEMBER 1 & 2
10 AM-4 PM

ameliamuseum.org

*Tickets are \$25 per person
in advance; \$30 at the door*





THE HOMEOWNER

Christmas has been Dawn Tiura's favorite season since she was a child, when she started collecting decorations. Her mother encouraged her, giving her—each year—a teddy bear with the year embroidered on a foot and a place setting of Christmas dishes. She now has more than 30 of both. In fact, Dawn's Christmas collection is so extensive that it has its own storage unit and is both delivered and picked up by professional movers.

Dawn hails from Michigan, yet was married at The Ritz-Carlton, Amelia Island when it first opened. In 2011, she moved her family to the island and settled in the home at 120 N. 6th St. The home is part of the City of Fernandina Beach Downtown Historic District and so is governed by council guidelines up to the hedge behind the deck, and partially through the master bathroom upstairs and guestroom downstairs. But the Historic District Council only has sway over the exterior of the home, and all that one can see from the street. "They were more than accommodating," says Dawn. "We were granted permission to replace the windows and remove a pair of side porches to put in a laundry room and bathroom. Other than that we were allowed to gut and renovate the whole home."

The front parlor was left the same as the original, but most other rooms have been modified and, in most cases, updated. The brick fireplace in the middle of the master bedroom was painstakingly dismantled and reassembled as the chimney to a new firepit outside and with brick walkways abound on the property the firepit fits right in. Jasmine and wild roses rampage across pergolas covering those walkways which terminate at points of interest, like a trickling Italianate fountain, the pool, the firepit and a lower lawn and garden—all with an appropriately 19th-century feel.

Period detail can be seen everywhere—most particularly in the narrow French doors into the parlor and a much lower stair rail going up the low-rise, tall staircase. "People were smaller in 1876," laughs Dawn.

The home does have larger rooms now, though they remain classic, decorated in an eclectic style—"like we are," says Dawn, who travels extensively to Europe, Latin America and China on business. She is the president and CEO of the SIG—a 10,000 member networking and educational association for executives from the sourcing industry. How ironic to live in a meticulously preserved home from 1876 while you arrange conferences and certification around robotics and artificial intelligence. For Dawn, AI is no longer her geography but her avocation as well.



This page, clockwise from top left: The dining room's silver theme is lit by a chandelier from Mrs. Howard; the kitchen's aqua-glazed subway tile informs a palette of turquoise with greenery, white poinsettia and roses; Rustic whimsical trees gather below a wooden plaque of seasonal wishes, next to an outdoor dining on the deck (below) with antique sled, cubes and an iron candelabra.





THE DESIGNER

Susan Dowling has been an interior designer since graduating from Ole Miss. She moved to Fernandina in 2001 and met Dawn Tiura while they volunteered for a wine tasting event for their children’s school. While Dawn and Susan have worked on a variety of projects since then, this will be the first time Susan has decorated the home for Christmas. “It’s such an honor,” says Susan, “in all ways—helping the Museum, making this pretty house shine and sharing in the fun of Dawn’s incredible Christmas decorations.”



THE DECORATIONS

Susan’s concept was to stay true to the traditional classics of swags and trees, finding fresh, imaginative ways to combine and deploy Dawn’s extensive collection. Most rooms started with a color theme, this year tying in to aspects already prominent in each space, with the exception of the front parlor where Dawn’s fiancé Steve Gustafson’s walking workstation with long treadmill, raised standing desk and multi-screen computer have taken over the bay window. (Steve and Dawn both walk upwards of 15 miles a day while working long hours.) *



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