

Destin's White House

From concrete block house to ultra-modern beach rental

By Katy Houghton

Unlike the white-pillared mansion in D.C. with its lush lawns, Destin's White House comes with a contemporary look and a beach in the backyard.

"When I was growing up, the most special part of our times at the old beach house were creating memories with family," said Royce Kershaw, the owner of the unique looking home on Holiday Isle. "That was my goal with creating this house – to be able to make that happen for other families.

Kershaw's family was among the first to buy lots on Holiday Isle in the 1960's. His parents owned a beach home in Panama City during the 1950's, but displeased with the growth and development in the area, his father decided to take to the air.

"We had a small aircraft, so we decided we were going to fly the whole Emerald Coast and look at everything right down low along the beach," said the Alabama resident. "When we flew past Destin, we saw Holiday Isle and it looked like it was a new development."

As well as the harbor; the other thing that caught the pilot's eyes was the Destin Airport. It was just an unpaved dirt strip minutes away from the white beaches.

The Kershaw's built a single-floor, concrete block beach house on a slab. There weren't any requirements for pilings under

beach structures in 1964 when the home was built.

"Remarkably this house survived 31 years through many storms in the 60's until 1995 when Hurricane Opal took it out," Kershaw told The Log. "It didn't blow away or wash it away. The storm surge of water got under the concrete slab. There was nothing to support the slabs, so the house just collapsed."

For five years, the lot sat empty until 2000 when Kershaw decided to construct another beach house.

Already having an interest in contemporary architecture, "I saw an article in 'Coastal Living' magazine on a house that was built in Grayton Beach designed by Carey McWhorter," he said. "I like the style very much, and so I contacted him and started discussing designing a house for me in the modern style."

Building a rental home appealed to Kershaw because it gave him a way to still own the house, but also earn some income. And McWhorter took that into consideration with the plan.

"It meant everything needed to be very durable and bulletproof and it's really set up to accommodate a large group of people," he said. "The house can sleep up to 18 people in beds, not on sofas and fold-out beds."

In 2002, construction began on the three-story modern home, and after

two and a half years and a few storms the house was complete. The open-plan home has glass walls with a 180-degree view of the Gulf of Mexico and a white stucco exterior.

The White House has six bedrooms, six bathrooms, two living rooms and three-car garage. There is also an elevator that can be taken from ground level to the master suite located in a private wing on the third floor. The bunkroom has custom-made bunk beds that hold full-size twin mattresses.

The heated P-shaped pool is located beneath the house, which is raised 13 feet to meet the requirements for storm surges.

"Houses like this are more prevalent down in South Florida, Sarasota, Fort Lauderdale and Miami, but they're not as common in this part of Florida," Kershaw said.

The beachfront property has been featured in two books, "Dream Homes, Florida" and "Living with White," and recently received the AIA Florida Northwest 2010 Award of Excellence.

Looking back, "It's certainly not like the Destin I remember in the '60's and '70's. If my father could see it now, he wouldn't believe it."

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