



COURTESY PHOTO

The Tropic Cinema

Tropic Cinema: Key West's cinematic superstar

BY LAURA RICHARDSON
Florida Weekly Correspondent

Once upon a time in Key West, we had two movie theaters; two dark, cavernous establishments in which to seek respite from the blazing summer sun and indulge in a supersize popcorn (extra butter, please, and thank you) and either a box office blockbuster or an art house film about people who are cooler than you will ever be. Then, on a dark and stormy day (literally), Big, Bad Hurricane Irma came and blew one of those cinematic havens down.

All dramatization aside, a little over a year ago we lost Key West's Regal Cinema to the ravages of a storm that wreaked devastation from Key Largo all the way down to Mile Marker 0. And although the Keys have bounced back from Irma and are stronger than ever, Key West has gone from a two-theater town to one that relies solely on the Tropic Cinema (416 Eaton St., www.tropiccinema.com), one of the shiniest gems in Key West's crown of interesting attractions, for its motion picture education.

The Tropic Cinema opened as a two-screen nonprofit theater in 2004 with the singular goal of bringing independent and international films and cinematic classics to Key West's artistically diverse island community. Over the last decade and change, the Tropic has evolved into not only a respite from the tropical heat, but a relaxing refuge from the barrage of noise, traffic and turmoil outside the welcoming cinema doors. The films are top-quality, the special events are plentiful, and the popcorn is always popping in the lobby. Oh, and did I mention you can grab a glass of wine or a beer and bring it to your seat with you? Let us not discount the therapeutic qualities of a gorgeous glass of pinot noir, a gourmet bar of chocolate, and a

SEE CINEMA, A14 ►

A gorgeous look at the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Garden



COURTESY PHOTO

Self-guided tours take visitors off the beaten pathway.

Beauty

on display

BY MAXINE LOPEZ-KEOUGH
Florida Weekly Correspondent

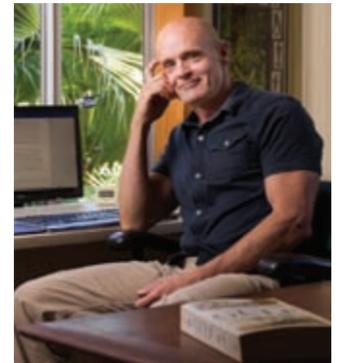
THESE ARE CERTAIN ODD BITS of historical knowledge that any collector of random or obscure trivia must know. Which U.S. president installed a mechanical horse inside his bedroom closet during his tenure at the White House? Easy: Calvin Coolidge. Which is the only state in

SEE GARDENS, A10 ►



Music

Sanaris Peacock: D.J. in demand. **A6** ►



Top Picks

Meet author Jack E. Davis and much more. **A8-9** ►



Real Estate

Shark Key Luxury at 35 Sea Lore Lane for \$2,450,000. **A18** ►



Fantasy Fest

Queen candidate Jennifer Hughes is here to help. **A7** ►

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OFF OFF DUVAL

The most traveled and visible street in Key West is only the beginning, the surface, of what the town has to offer. Ask the locals about their favorite spots, stroll through quiet neighborhoods or down alleyways off Duval and you'll begin to dive deeper into the quieter, more diverse and less readily apparent offerings. Here are eight spots you might not see at first glance.

Better than Sex, 926 Simonton St. 305-296-8102; www.betterthanssexkeywest.com. A great place for couples. Swing by this dessert-only, adults-only restaurant late in the evening. Indulge your senses with chocolate dipped wine glasses and cheeky, homemade desserts and beverages such as an Ephemere Apple Spiced Ale in a tall beer glass with a signature caramel rim-job. Lick it good.

Mellow Café and Gastro Pub, 1605 Roosevelt Blvd. 305-745-3874; www.mellowventureskeywest.com. Near the water in Old Town Key West, the café is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner and offers unique island fare with a mellow atmosphere to match. The menu items are crafted with fresh, locally sourced ingredients and include a fresh catch, Havana roasted pork, romaine leaf plates and caramelized banana chocolate tacos. Drink options include a large selection of craft beers, 11 rotating tap beers, wine, house-made sangria and champagne cocktails. They have a great happy hour daily from 5-7 p.m., and delivery is available.

Cuban Coffee Queen, 284 Marga-



COURTESY PHOTO

The Mellow Café and Gastro Pub is open for breakfast, lunch and dinner.

ret St. 305-292-4747; www.cuban-coffeequeen.com. The strong Cuban coffee at this hole in the wall is also rich in Key West heritage. A café con leche paired with a classic Cuban sandwich or some Havana rice and beans will keep you going long into a Key West night.

Firefly, 223 Petronia St. 305-849-0104; www.fireflykeywest.com. Being that Key West is home to the southernmost point of the continental United States, it's fitting that the island is home to a Southern-inspired restaurant. Firefly's plantation-style look and its menu give it the most down-home feel of any culinary experience on the island. The shrimp and grits, fried chicken and bacon-wrapped meatloaf are a few fan favorites.

Key West Island Bookstore, 513 Fleming St. www.Keywestisland-

books.com; 305-294-2904. This decades-old boutique bookstore offers a surprisingly varied wealth of current and used titles, from bestsellers to rare titles. Often open late, it's an inviting place to browse the crowded stacks.

La Rubia Fine Hats, 510 Fleming St. 305-296-6059; www.larubiakeywest.com. This is the Florida Keys' only importer of authentic Panama hats. The owners developed the boutique to carry on the centuries-old tradition of hand weaving hats (which come from Ecuador, not Panama, by the way). There are styles for men and women in a wide array of colors and weaves. There's also a nice selection of wearable fair trade crafts such as jewelry, ikat wraps and shigra bags.

Little Pearl, 632 Olivia St. 305-204-4762; www.littlepearlkeywest.com. Nestled in the heart of Old Town Key West and away from the bustling downtown streets sits this excellent spot for fresh local catch and innovative cuisine with a tropical twist. It's new and it's hot. Reservations are required.

Nancy Forrester's Secret Garden, 518 Elizabeth St. 305-294-0015; www.nancyforrester.com. Ms. Forrester has a secret, and it's not her garden, per se: It's what she keeps there. The longtime environmentalist has been caring for orphaned parrots for more than 30 years. She invites the public to meet them, take pictures, hold them and listen as she educates the community about her fine feathered friends. ■

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Getting around Key West

1. Southernmost Point

The corner of South and Whitehead streets
www.southernmostpointwebcam.com
 The city of Key West erected this concrete buoy in 1983 to denote the southernmost point in the continental United States.

2. Conch Tour Train

303 Front St.
 305-294-5161 or 888-916-8687
www.conchtourtrain.com
 The iconic train has been winding its way through the streets of Key West since 1958.

3. Sloppy Joe's

201 Duval St.
 305-294-5717
www.sloppyjoes.com
 A Key West tradition since 1933, this bar's famous patrons include Ernest Hemingway and rum runner Habana Joe.

4. Mallory Square Sunset Celebration

1 Whitehead St.
 786-565-7448
www.sunsetcelebration.org
 This nightly festival begins at water's edge an hour or two before sunset and includes street performers, local artisans, food carts, palmists and psychics.

5. Truman Little White House

111 Front St.
www.trumanlittlewhitehouse.com
 The Little White House adds a presidential luster to the Conch Republic. Originally built for Naval officers in 1890 and used as a command headquarters in three wars, the Little White House later served as lodging for President Harry S. Truman's winter retreats from 1946 to 1952.

6. The Ernest Hemingway Home & Museum

907 Whitehead St.
 305-294-1136
www.hemingwayhome.com
 Take the tour and say hello to one of the 40-50 six-toed cats, all descendants of Hemingway's cat, Snowball.

7. The Key West Butterfly & Nature Conservatory

1316 Duval St.
 305-296-2988 or 800-839-4647
www.keywestbutterfly.com
 More than 50 butterfly species from around the world and 20 exotic bird species coexist in this climate-controlled, glass-enclosed habitat that includes waterfalls, flowering plants and trees.

8. Mel Fisher Maritime Museum

200 Greene St.
 305-294-2633

www.melfisher.org

Exhibits include treasures from the Spanish galleons of 1622 discovered by Mel Fisher and his crew.

9. Mile Marker 0 Sign

490 Whitehead St. (corner of Fleming Street)
 U.S. 1 begins here in Key West and continues 2,369 miles north up the East Coast before ending in Fort Kent, Me. Stop here to commemorate your visit to Key West with a photo next to the iconic Mile Marker 0 sign.

10. Key West Express Ferry Terminal

100 Grinnell St.
 239-463-5733
www.Keywestexpress.net
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11. Audubon House and Garden

205 Whitehead St.
 305-294-2116
www.Audubonhouse.com
 Original lithographs by John James

Audubon are on display in this former home of shipwreck salvager Capt. John Geiger.

12. Key West City Cemetery

Bordered by Angela, Frances and Olivia streets and Windsor Lane
 305-292-6718
www.Friendsofthekeywestcemetery.com
 Stop by the sexton's office near the entrance at Passover and Windsor lanes and pick up a map that includes a free walking tour.

13. Fort Zachary Taylor State Park and Beach

At the ocean end of Southard Street and bordering the Naval Reservation.
 305-295-0037
www.Fortzacharytaylor.com
 "Fort Zach" is known to locals and tourists alike as one of Key West's best beaches. In addition to the expansive beach, the 54-acre park has nature trails, bike paths, picnic tables and grills and Historic Fort Zachary Taylor. Enjoy the beautiful view of the Atlantic Ocean and the Key West Shipping Channel. ■

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MUSIC SCENE

Sanaris Peacock: D.J. in demand

BY JENNIFER WHITE
Florida Weekly Correspondent

The moment I sit down with Sanaris Peacock, I am immediately consumed by his happy, go-lucky energy and charismatic personality. Sanaris laughs a lot when he talks. It helps to set the tone, easy-going. He also likes to dance when he disc jockeys. It helps to set the mood, carefree and fun. So, it comes as no surprise to me that he is one of the most sought-after DJs in Key West during the holidays. I recently saw this quote by celebrity DJ Tiesto: "DJs are the new rock stars." It could very well be true of Sanaris. He seems to be living in his moment right now as he becomes more well known around the local music circuit. In the past few weeks Sanaris has played at the Marriott Beachside Christmas party, at the Star Wars premier after party, for the Keys Collection season soiree and at Mary Ellen's Whoville event while at the same time keeping a day job.

Despite his packed calendar Sanaris retains a positive energy about him and it shows in his D.J. performances. Energy is important when it comes to controlling a room with just one click of the keyboard.

"I like watching people have fun and entertaining them," Sanaris says. "It's all about the crowd."

One sign of a good DJ is when people dance, and Sanaris likes to dance as much as his audience. In fact, he says dancing is what brought him to DJ-ing

in the first place. It was back in "the good old days" of 2003 when he was on vacation in Key West for spring break. Days when the streets were ceremoniously closed down every night and all he did was dance, dance, dance. Those very memories eventually propelled him to move to Key West and to seek a job at Sloppy Joe's, the famous historic American bar on Duval Street. When suddenly a DJ position opened up and it was offered to him, he couldn't resist letting music be the choice. He hasn't looked back and has been building his experience ever since.

Sanaris now keeps a regular schedule of appearances at Dante's Pool Bar & Restaurant, Mary Ellen's, General Horselplan, and he is still performing consistently at Sloppy Joe's. He also works with SoundWave, a wedding DJ service owned and operated by long term party planners James and Joanna Cooper. Sanaris explained to me how much the Coopers have helped and influenced him in developing his career when he wasn't quite so sure of himself yet and a little hesitant. He's very thankful for their guidance.

His family was also a major influence. "For me, being a DJ started with dancing. I grew up with a bunch of female cousins and a sister who were always



was stationed during his military career and he fell in love with the island for and unique undeniable charm.

"I love the people here. Everyone is so friendly and there are so many more things to do than where I grew up. I know I'm from a small place, but we have so much more to do on here our 2-by-4-mile island."

"So what kind of music does a DJ listen to on their own time?" I ask Sanaris.

"I like old school, the funk and some of the '90s girl jams like Britney and Christina," he proudly admits.

"What do you think people should know about DJs?"

"That we are nice people. Some people think of us as pretentious, but we're not,"

he says. "Don't be afraid to talk to us and make requests, because we are here for you. The best way I love to get a request is through technology by showing me a picture of it, and the best thing that I could hear is someone say 'we had so much fun, we didn't want to leave!'"

Watch out for the of DJs Key West. They are what's happening. They always have been.

"DJs are incredible competition, musically. And they are the most musically creative and sensitive people in all the music charts. I am amazed." — Yoko Ono ■

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Jennifer Hughes is here to help

BY JENNIFER WHITE
Florida Weekly Correspondent

Jennifer Hughes is happy to be in a position where she can help other people — and I don't just mean with her customer service. Judging by her friendly voice, she's very good at what she does.

"Hi, sweetie, how are you?" she calls out to a gentleman who was just seated at a nearby table. "Will you be having your usual today?"

Jennifer has been a bartender at America's beloved diner, Denny's, in the Overseas Market in New Town since it opened in May 2017. Unlike the previous Old Town location, this Denny's has a liquor license for a full bar and an entire menu of adult beverages so that you can have a Bloody Mary to go along with your moons over my hammy or an ice-cold beer to wash down a spicy sriracha burger. It is almost twice the size as the original Southernmost Denny's and is busy when I arrive. Waiters run back and forth fetching orders while Jennifer single-handedly works the platform bar perched a few stairs up in the center of the sunlit dining room.

"I just love the sense of family here. I love everything about it, from creating a cocktail to making someone's day and making them smile," Jennifer says. "I'm kind, funny, caring and sassy for sure. I'm constantly moving when I'm at work. I'm relaxed, entertaining and I do a lot of singing and dancing. Come see me. I'm an open book."

Although her resume says she has been working in the hospitality industry since 1988 (her first job was at a pizza

place), and she might even tell you herself that she makes a pretty mean martini, her job is not what makes her who she is. Jennifer wants to do as much good as she possibly can — even if it means hosting a 50/50 raffle between pouring refills of coffee.

Jennifer is a candidate for the title of Fantasy Fest Queen, a fundraising competition to see who can raise the most money for AIDSHelp by throwing parties, events and fun activities. Her upcoming events include Perfectly Paired Paint and Sip at Denny's on Wednesday, Oct. 10; Jenn for Queen Vibrator Races at Mary Ellen's on Thursday, Oct. 11; and Pirates and Wenches Rum Adventures at the Roost on Wednesday, Oct. 17.

A full schedule and further information on her charitable campaign can be found by visiting her Facebook page: "Jenn for Queen 2018."

Or if you prefer, you can visit Jennifer and donate to the cause during one of her daytime shifts at Denny's from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Mondays, Tuesdays and Fridays. If you go, don't forget to order her official campaign cocktail, the Royal Rubia, a sponsored blend of Papa's Pilar blonde rum, Chambord, pineapple juice and a splash of lime. It's like drinking for a good cause.

"I decided I wanted to run when everyone was leaving for SMART ride last year," Jenn says. "I was part of Tommy Ryan's team and I realized that I wanted to do something to give back as well. I'm also doing this to honor my grandfather who had HIV and passed away and for my son who just came out two years ago.

"I want to be an ambassador for stopping HIV."

Jennifer is also a survivor of suicide. "I wear my semi-colon very proudly. I'm thankful that someone saved me so I can continue my life. Now I have three beautiful kids (all sons, ages 25-23 and 21)."

Although she'll no doubt go back to bartending fulltime once the Fantasy Fest royalty is announced, at the end of the day Jennifer is most proud of being mom to her boys. She married her sweetheart of 28 years just this past year on Marvin Key.

Born and raised in Chicago, Jennifer lived all over the country, from Wisconsin to Nebraska, before landing in Key West.

Here, she says, "Everyone is just people."

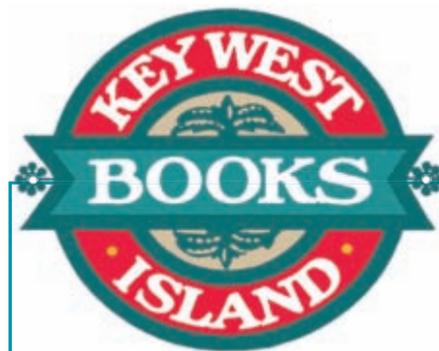
"When you move somewhere new it's sometimes hard to make friends, but not here. Here we are embraced with a sense of community."

When she's not bartending, spending time with her family or trying to save the world, Jennifer paints. Other than that, she insists that the number one thing she wants to do is to help.

"It's not about me. It's about everyone else."

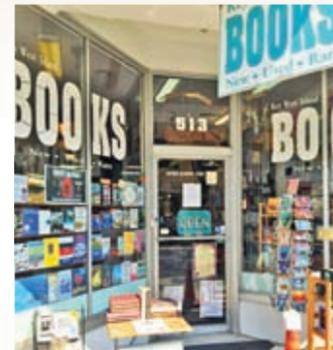
And with that, she continues to make certain that every customer enjoys their Denny's experience. ■

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This Week...

THURSDAY
October 4th

FRIDAY
October 5th



JOHN NOVOSAD

John Novosad, a.k.a. **Hippieman** is a stand-up comedian based out of the Comedy Works in Denver, Colorado. He's performed in clubs, theatres, and bars across the country for over thirty years. John grew up in Boulder, Colorado. Making his network television debut on The Late Late Show with Craig Ferguson, John followed that up with a second performance on the Ferguson show. He's also appeared on Bryon Allen's nationally syndicated Comedy.TV.

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KEY WEST CALENDAR OF EVENTS

SPECIAL EVENTS

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MARC House
1401 Seminary St.
www.marchouse.org

College Game Day and Beer Pong Tourney

Oct. 6, noon
Sidebar at Aqua
504 Angela St.
www.sidebarkeywest.com

Jack E. Davis-The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea

Oct. 5, 6 p.m.
Books and Books at the Studios
533 Eaton St.
www.booksandbookskeywest.com

Songwriters Speakeasy: Marjory Lee, Andy Westcott and Tony Roberts

Oct. 7, 7 p.m.
The Key West Theater
512 Eaton St.
www.thekeywesttheater.com

MUSIC

Green Parrot Bar

601 Whitehead St.
Live music nightly
Check the schedule at
www.greenparrot.com

Irish Kevin's

211 Duval St.



MICHAEL MARRERO / COURTESY PHOTO

Michael Marrero is a Cuban-American artist who was born and raised in Key West. His work has taken him from tropical paradises to shantytowns in Central America. A collection of his photographs can be seen in his ongoing "Homegrown" exhibition at Gallery on Greene, 606 Greene St. www.galleryongreene.com.

Live music nightly
Check the schedule at
www.irishkevins.com

Mary Ellen's

420 Appelrouth Lane
• Open Mic with Comedy Key West, Mondays, 9 p.m.
• Drunken Spelling Bee, First Monday of each month, 9 p.m.
• Trivia, Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.
• SIN Night (Service Industry Night), Wednesdays 8 p.m. to 4 a.m.

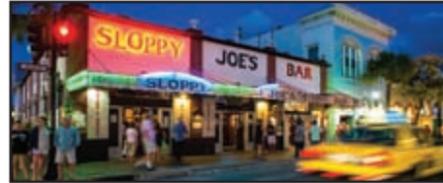
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Sloppy Joe's

201 Duval St.
Live music nightly

Check the schedule at
www.sloppyjoes.com

PHOTOGRAPHY

Photographs by Jorge de la Torriente

Ongoing
De La Gallery
419 Duval St.
www.delagallery.com
305-395-2210

Homegrown

Photographs by Michael Marrero
Ongoing
Gallery on Greene
606 Greene St.
www.galleryongreene.com

CINEMA

Tropic Cinema

416 Eaton St.
www.tropiccinema.com
Check the website for ongoing films

LGBT

Aqua Nightclub

711 Duval St.
• Aqua Idol for Fantasy Fest King and Queen
Tuesdays, 6:30 p.m.
• Drag Shows
Nightly, 7 and 9 p.m.
• Karaoke
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www.Aquakeywest.com

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JJ GREY & MOFRO
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AT SUNSET GREEN EVENT LAWN



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JANUARY 25
AT SUNSET GREEN EVENT LAWN



THE BEACH BOYS
APRIL 4
AT SUNSET GREEN EVENT LAWN

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KEY WEST CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Bobby's Monkey Bar
900 Simonton St.
Karaoke, nightly, 9:30 p.m.
Bobby's Monkey Bar on Facebook

Bourbon St. Pub
724 Duval St.
• Just Jeff (Moss), Thursdays-Sunday, 8-10 p.m.
• Ronnie, Monday-Wednesday, 3-8 p.m.
• The Men of Bourbon, nightly
www.BourbonSt.pub.com

801 Bourbon Bar
801 Duval St.
• Drag Shows, Nightly, 9 and 11 p.m.
• Happy Hour Drag, 5 p.m. Saturday
• Drag Karaoke, 4 p.m. Sunday
• Messy Mondays with Mulysa, 1 a.m. Monday
Fierce and Fabulous/Dragalicious, 1 a.m. Wednesday
www.801bourbon.com

Sidebar at Aqua
504 Angela St.
Kristen McNamara, Wednesdays and Saturdays, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.
www.sidebarkeywest.com

La Te Da
1125 Duval St.
• Christopher Peterson, Oct. 6, 9 p.m.
• 3Sum, Oct. 4, 5, 6 and 7, 8:30 p.m.
• Ronnie Lively, Oct. 8, 8:30 p.m.
• The Fabulous Spectrelles, Oct. 9 and 10, 8:30 p.m.
• Tea Dance, Sundays 4 to 6:30 p.m.
www.Lateda.com

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305-395-1435
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Free Nutrition Sessions
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Monroe County Library
700 Fleming St. ■

■ A sea of pumpkins, ready for carving. It's the **10th annual Remarcable Pumpkin Patch**, Oct. 4, 9 a.m., MARC House, 1401 Seminary St.
— www.marchose.org

10.5
■ Come out for a reading and discussion with author **Jack E. Davis** of "The Gulf: The Making of an American Sea," Oct. 5, 6 p.m., Books and Books at the Studios, 533 Eaton St.
— www.booksandbookskeywest.com

■ **Songwriters Speakeasy: Marjory Lee, Andy Westcott and Tony Roberts.**
Enjoy an intimate evening featuring local songwriters and their original works.
Oct. 7, 7 p.m., The Key West Theater, 512 Eaton St.
— www.thekeywesttheater.com

10.6
■ **College Game Day and Beer Pong Tourney**, Oct. 6, noon
Sidebar at Aqua, 504 Angela St.
— www.sidebarkeywest.com

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GARDENS

From page 1

the U.S. whose name can be typed on one single row of keys? Duh! It's Alaska. Stevie Wonder's birth name? Steveland Judkins, of course. What does a phillumenist collect? So obvious: matchboxes. Location of the only frost-free arboretum and botanical garden within the continental United States? That would be the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens, an undeveloped hardwood hammock and tropical paradise that just happens to be located on the same little island that resides at the southern end of the famous Overseas Highway. (If you didn't get the answer to that one, maybe trivia isn't a good fit for you. Try bocce instead.)

Unlike some botanical gardens, which lure visitors via promises of manicured lawns and topiaries trimmed to look like rabbits, the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Gardens is a passive, natural resource-based, publicly owned space. Translation: expect to wander through lush forested areas and wild-looking gardens via a series of paths that crisscross the property's 15 acres. In addition to a helpful little visitor's center where you can watch an introductory video and buy very cold beverages, the garden is home to an impressive canopy of tropical palms and trees, two wetland habitats, an acre's worth of butterfly gardens, a tropical plant-laden waterfall wall trickling musically into a turtle pond, a rotating fleet of outdoor sculptures, a "nature chapel," an unexpected exhibition of Cuban "Chug" refugee boats, and two of the last remaining fresh water ponds in the Keys. It's a popular spot for all sorts of rare and migratory birds, which explains its



Beautiful flowers will greet you on your journey.

COURTESY PHOTOS

inclusion on the 2,000-mile Great Florida Birding Trail, which connects over 500 of the state's premiere bird spotting sites — great news if you're the type of person for whom the words "red-legged honeycreeper" produce paroxysms of joy.

Included within the hardwood hammock reside seven champion or challenger-ranked trees, which, for those sad readers unaware of the American Forest-

sponsored designation, is a really big deal in the tree world. Getting oneself listed on the National Register of Big Trees is worth a lifetime of arboreal bragging rights, as only the largest recording living specimen of any of the 826 species recognized by the American Forests organization are awarded the title of either champion (highest number of points earned by combining height, trunk



Extraordinary biodiversity abounds.

circumference, crown spread and physical health) or challenger (silver medal to the champion's gold). During your trip to Key West, if you happen to overhear an island resident bragging about the size of his Wild Dilly, simply congratulate him on the girth of his trunk — then go visit the garden to get an in-person view of the magnificent specimen itself (scientific name *Manikara bahamensis*), currently ranked the National Champion of its kind.

The garden was founded in 1936 under Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal, intended to reinvigorate the island's flailing economy with a much-needed infusion of new tourism-derived funds. Since then, it has achieved nonprofit status; a nominal entrance fee, which includes parking, remains the primary source of funding for maintenance and programming; a staff of enthusiastic volunteers handles the bulk of the garden's day-to-day maintenance and operations. After passing through an imposing, much-needed new iron gate and paying the entrance fee at the visitor's center (take a second to watch the videos on display, they're short and give a wonderful overview of the property's greatest assets) the garden becomes as active or

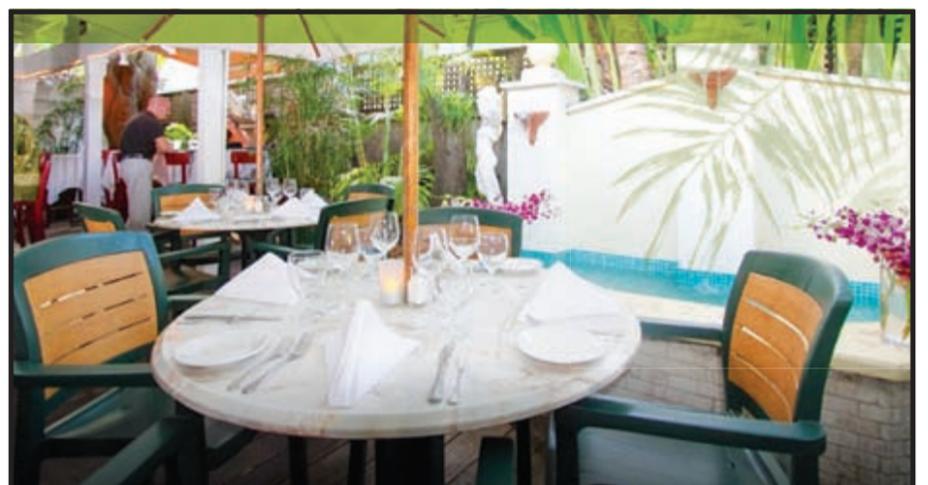
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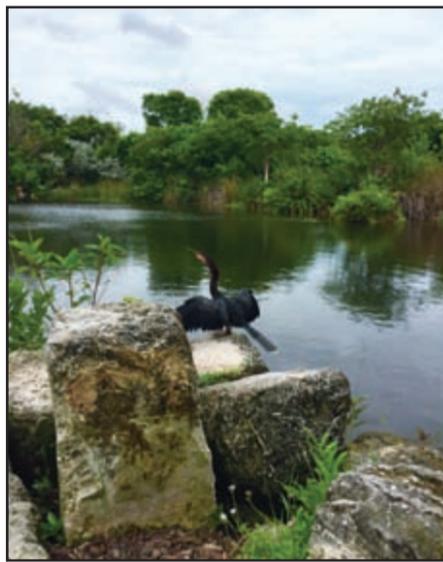
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lazy as you like. Visitors may choose from a variety of public, self-guided tours, or call ahead to schedule a private one led by one of the property's friendly docents, who are all too willing to go traipsing through the undergrowth while pointing out interesting specimens of plants and creatures along the way.

Sprinkled throughout the many meandering, occasionally mosquito-plagued trails are markers telling you precisely what type of leafy plant you're staring at, but the true stars of the garden are its non-permanent residents: stoic-looking white ibises plucking their way through the reeds, 30-some species of butterflies, towering osprey, medicinal plants, rare towering palms, lizards of all sizes, and a series of visiting lecturers who use the so-called "living museum" as an outdoor classroom. At any time of the year, there is guaranteed to be an extraordinary amount of biodiversity on display within the grounds — special attention should be given to Desbiens Pond, an entirely rain-fed pond the color of over-steeped tea, along whose banks resides a really magnificent collection of green buttonwood trees. A few minutes of quiet contemplation can yield a substantial amount of visiting bird life, as the pond serves as one of the southernmost fresh water wetlands in the continental U.S.

To the right of the visitor's center lies the garden's permanent Cuban "Chug" boat exhibition, perhaps the only one of its kind. After Fidel Castro's ascent to power, tens of thousands of Cuban citizens have since risked their lives to travel to the United States in the hope of attaining citizenship; with the Florida Keys only 90 miles away, the islands remain a consistent entry point for refugees who have dared to make the treacherous boat trip. If they are fortunate enough to avoid detection by border patrol, or worse, Cuban



COURTESY PHOTOS

You never know what you will discover around the next corner.

refugees are granted the chance to avoid deportation from the U.S. and apply for an expedited legal permanent residency status thanks to the country's "wet foot, dry foot" policy, which states that those Cubans caught while traveling across the ocean (with "wet feet") are to be sent home or to a third country, while those who makes it to shore ("dry feet") can apply to stay in the country.

As the Cuban government closely monitors the ownership and use of marine vessels of any kind, escape via sea travel means Cubans must flee in the dead of night without any of their possessions, with many having to resort to assembling "boats" from all manner of detritus. Called Chugs, these vessels are often barely watertight—some little more than tarps tied down to Styrofoam blocks or tires. Many drown during the voyage, but for those who are able to safely reach dry

land, the evidence of their journey lies in the vessels they abandoned on the shore. While most are simply towed as garbage, a careful selection has been installed at the garden, a haunting assembly of long-abandoned flotsam set against a backdrop of almost clichéd tropical paradise. Almost nothing is known about the travelers who used these particular ships to attempt the journey to asylum; some may have been caught before reaching land, others drowned or dead from dehydration, leaving their boats to wash ashore, beached and waiting to be discovered by passing boaters or Coast Guard members. To walk amongst the wreckage, taking note of which vessels (even those lacking an engine) were nevertheless painstakingly adorned with tokens of luck, American flags, the names of loved ones and messages of faith — is a truly humbling experience.

It's a rare thing to stumble upon a space that — amidst the hotel-laden, bar-sodden streets of Key West, where land is at a premium and the streets almost constantly populated — feels untouched. Indeed, many describe entering the garden as the closest one can come to experiencing the true "Old Key West," before Flagler's incredible railroad brought with it an endless supply of building materials and bodies. There may, in fact, be no other scenic location on the island where a visitor might spend an entire afternoon with only birds and striped-shell turtles to keep them company. And true, most make the pilgrimage to Key West to partake in non-hermetic activities; you don't travel here if you're looking for solitude. But in the event that the bustle and bawdiness of Duval Street feels momentarily tiresome, the Key West Tropical Forest and Botanical Garden is surely your best bet. ■

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www.Boathousebarandgrill.com
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www.Conchrepublicseafood.com
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www.Danteskeywest.com
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www.Geigerkeymarina.com
- Green Parrot Bar** 
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www.Greenparrot.com
- The Grand**
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www.Keywest.lucysretiredsurfers.com
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- Mary Ellen's Bar** 
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www.maryellensbar.com
- Mellow Ventures Café and Gastropub** 
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- Sand Bar Sports Grill** 
511 Greene St.
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Sandbarkeywest.com
www.Sand Bar Sports Grill Key West on Facebook
- Santiago's Bodega**
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www.Santiagosbodega.com
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Portraits, quilts in the spotlight at The Studios of Key West

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

The Studios of Key West's new season kicks off with two shows everyone's talking about: "Heads Up Key West, Then and Now" by Key West photographer Tom Flip, opening in the Sanger Gallery, and "Color is the Muse" by Key West quilter Marge Holtz in the XOJ Gallery.

The public is invited to the opening reception for both at The Studios, 533 Eaton St., during the First Thursday event Thursday, Oct. 4, from 6-8 p.m.

Six years ago, Thomas Filipkowski, aka Tom Flip, laid out for himself an ambitious task: Over several months, he set up his photography studio in different locations, inviting anyone and everyone on the island to sit for a black and white portrait.



CURT RICHTER / COURTESY PHOTO

TOM FLIP

All in all, Flip was able to document a wide cross-section of the island, photographing more than 600 people who make their lives in Key West.

This year he revisited "Heads Up Key West," inviting the same subjects to sit for him again.

"Then and Now" illuminates the changes that time and circumstance have had on the lives of these individuals, providing a clear-eyed look at ordinary people coping with a constantly changing reality of what it means to live in paradise.



"Heads Up" portraits by Tom Flip

"For this project, I've photographed and spoken with hundreds of Key West locals," said Flip. "And I learned that no matter what the adverse situa-

tion — devastating hurricanes, a severe housing shortage, lack of a livable wage — the spirit of community is what shines brightest."

Holtz has been quilting for more than 30 years. "Color is the Muse" in the XOJ Gallery contains a collection of her intricate, colorful abstract creations.

"My quilts are love letters to color," she said. "I enjoy designing and crafting quilts and working with fabric, but color is my true muse."

Holtz' quilts are included in corporate and private collections around the world. Organizations such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, George Washington University and Washington Hospital Center also display her works. ■

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"Swingin' Squares" by Marge Holtz.

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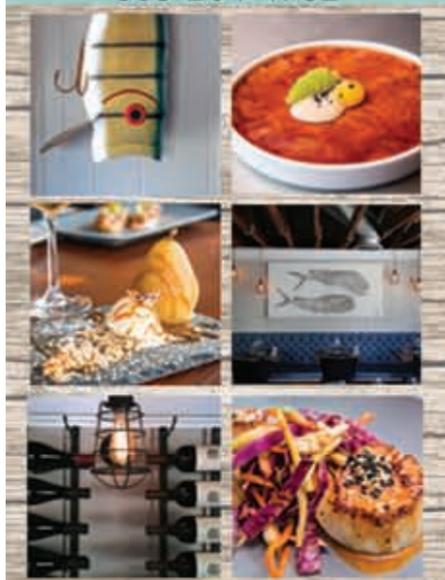
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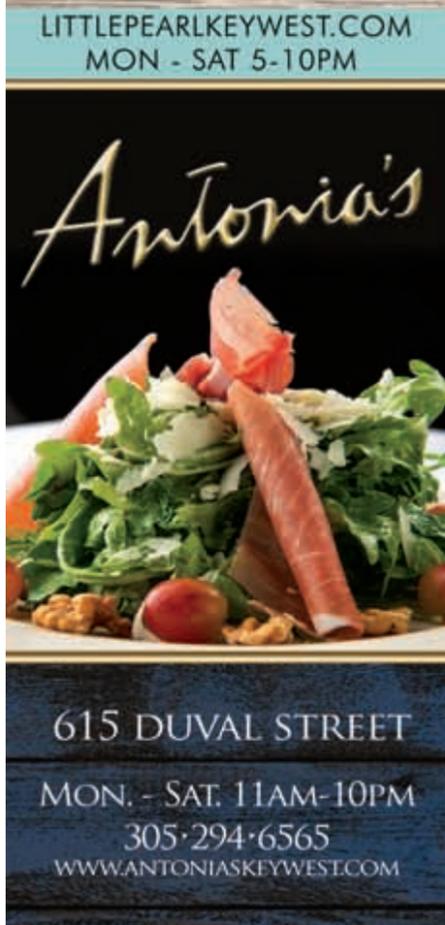


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CINEMA

From page 1

film that transports you to another world altogether.

For 14 years, Key West's Tropic Cinema — consistently voted one of the best in the state of Florida, thanks to its dynamite mix of special programming, charming décor, dedicated volunteer staff, curated film schedule and mouth-watering concessions — has soared under the watchful leadership of its tight board and the diligence of its impeccable staff. And Michael Marrero, the newly appointed executive director, intends to maintain the Tropic's sterling reputation.

After a tiny facelift, that is. Beginning Oct. 1, the Tropic will be closed for minor renovations. But fear not. When the theater reopens (tentatively at the end of October, though management hopes to complete the upgrades even sooner), moviegoers will once again be able to catch the summer festival season's indie darlings, Oscar favorites and all of the upcoming holiday blockbusters.

Uniquely, most of the people who work at the Tropic are volunteers. They typically rotate during the course of the year, but the Tropic Cinema has about 200 active volunteers who do everything from take tickets to pop popcorn (served with real butter, natch). The huge volunteer base is a real testament to the community's love of cinema in general and the Tropic in particular.

For such a small cinema (the Tropic has one large screen, typically reserved for Hollywood blockbusters and special events, and three smaller screens), the quality and range of films the Tropic screens is impressive. As more and more people seek out comfort and theater



COURTESY PHOTO

The Tropic Cinema is closed this for minor renovations.

quality, movie studios have had to evolve their historic film distribution practices. For decades, studios and big commercial movie chains have engaged in an unwritten practice called "clearance exclusives." This means that commercial cinemas, like the oft-maligned Regal Cinemas out in New Town, have dibs on the initial release of big studio films, and independent cinemas like the Tropic don't get to show them until they've left the chain cinema. For example, the Tropic finally got to show "The Revenant" from 20th Century Fox after Regal Cinemas had screened it for six weeks. Today, four major studios, including Fox, have rejected clearance exclusives, so filmgoers have the opportunity to have a choice where they see a movie. And since the Regal Cinema has been closed since September of 2017, the Tropic is now the only game in town for all new releases, no matter the budget.

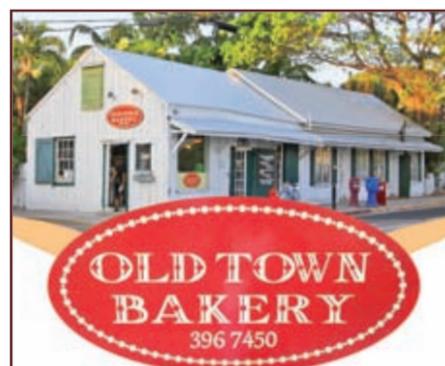
In addition, small distributors are increasingly releasing amazing films most cinemas have never had access to before. The Tropic has been screening filmed ballet and opera for some years, but now they also screen filmed museum tours, architecture programming and artists' monographs. A couple years ago, the Tropic also began screening Broadway musicals and plays and more. And just about every season, the Tropic hosts niche special events like the always sold-out screenings of "Rocky Horror Picture Show" — props included, costumes highly encouraged.

One of the most wonderful things about the Tropic is its magical community component. Sure, you can watch a movie at

home, but there's something about watching a film in an auditorium with other people — even strangers — that brings it to life, and that makes it more true and real. And it bears repeating that the people are what make the Tropic unique: Volunteers, members, the board of directors and staff, visitors from all over the world all bring the Tropic to life. The Tropic really does belong to the people of Key West, and that's a special place to hold in a town so populated with transients and visitors year-round.

The Tropic is so special because it is all about our community. The Key West Film Society started with a simple idea: show good films for people to watch together. That core idea is at the center of all the Tropic does, but it has grown so much over the last decade plus. The theater hosts film education programs, visiting filmmakers (unsurprisingly, filmmakers love to come to Key West), birthday parties, concerts and, of course, they like to say that they show the best films in the world. Sure, they might be a little artsy or independent, but don't forget that the Tropic curates films for Key West in all her eccentricity. From Art House and independent films to Hollywood blockbusters, no cinema I know has a better range of films than the Tropic.

And the icing on the cake? Freshly popped popcorn topped with actual, real, made-with-milk-from-a-cow butter. It might sound trivial, but after trying the Tropic's popcorn you'll never be able to eat commercial movie theater popcorn ever again. So, grab your glass of wine or an ice-cold beer, a snack, and enjoy the show at the Tropic Cinema. ■



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— Capt. Artie Duplessis
1801 S. Roosevelt Blvd., Key West
305-744-7957
www.wildbillkeywest.com



■ **Capt. Scott Irvine:**
Determination pays off. Bonefish on fly last week with Lori and Neil Sunday!

— Capt. Scott Irvine
Historic Seaport, Key West
www.timeflysfishing.com
305-797-5638



■ **Gulfstream Fishing Key West:**
Nice mix of fish for all this week.

— Gulfstream Fishing Key West
1801 N. Roosevelt Blvd., Key West
305-296-8494
www.gulfstreamkeywest.com



■ **Key West Florida Fishing:**
The dolphin fishing has been fun.

— Capt. Mike Weinoffer
305-395-3474
www.keywestfloridafishing.com



■ **Zia Charters:**
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KEY WEST GALLERY GUIDE

SALT Gallery features works by Sarah Plaia Davidson

SPECIAL TO FLORIDA WEEKLY

For the month of October, SALT Gallery will feature "Atmospheric Tendencies," a new collection of serene oil paintings and block prints by local artist Sarah Plaia Davidson. An opening reception takes place from 6-8 p.m. Friday, Oct. 5.

Davidson's informal artistic education began at a young age. As the daughter of a painter and letter writer, she says, creating has been a part of her process since her earliest memory.

She has worked in multiple media throughout her artistic career.

"My painting hero is Agnes Martin," she says. "Even her writings inspire me. But," she adds, "I'm inspired by all art, honestly."

"The spark and the creative flow personally arise from a narrative. Painting, sculpture — whatever medium I'm working with — is just a story that has to be told. Mostly, my finished pieces feel like an old friend I haven't seen in a long while ... they're always welcomed."

A visitor to Key West since the 1990s, Davidson pulls a lot of her inspiration from the tropical landscape.

"Well, first there's the water," she explains. "As they say, it soothes the savage beast, and I am no exception."

"Secondly, the salt. Elementally, it removes what is not wanted. The salt is also a great conductor, so I find Key West to be quite magical in that way. Endless sky and water speak to me as an artist because my work organically



Mike Marrero



"Conch Baby"

Photograph on archival paper

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KEY WEST GALLERY GUIDE

moves toward the minimal. I love the soft palette, the soft ground plane. It's both empty and full at the same time."

Gallery co-owner Laura Richardson says Davidson's pieces "convey a palpable sense of tranquility.

"We are so excited to reintroduce Key West to such an incredible artist whose pieces are so evocative of the calmness of our island home."

The exhibition at SALT, titled "Atmospheric Tendencies," consists mostly of oil pieces but also includes Davidson's block-printed prayer flag notecards.

"The images arose from marks made responding to recurring sounds available on the island," the artist explains. "I've been spending a lot of time listening, particularly since the storm last fall. My color palette is referential to the location of the sounds, sort of like a time stamp. This body of work really

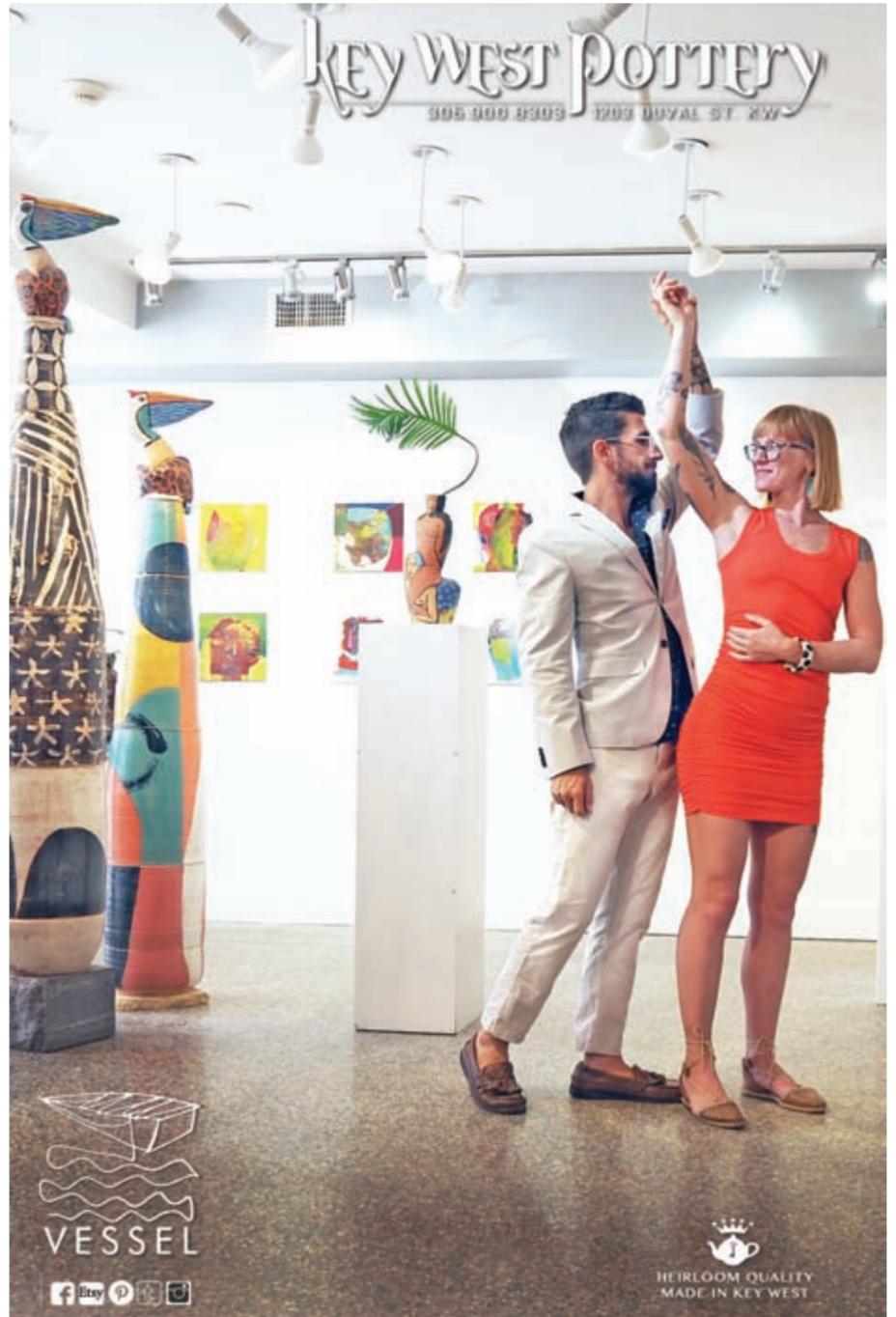
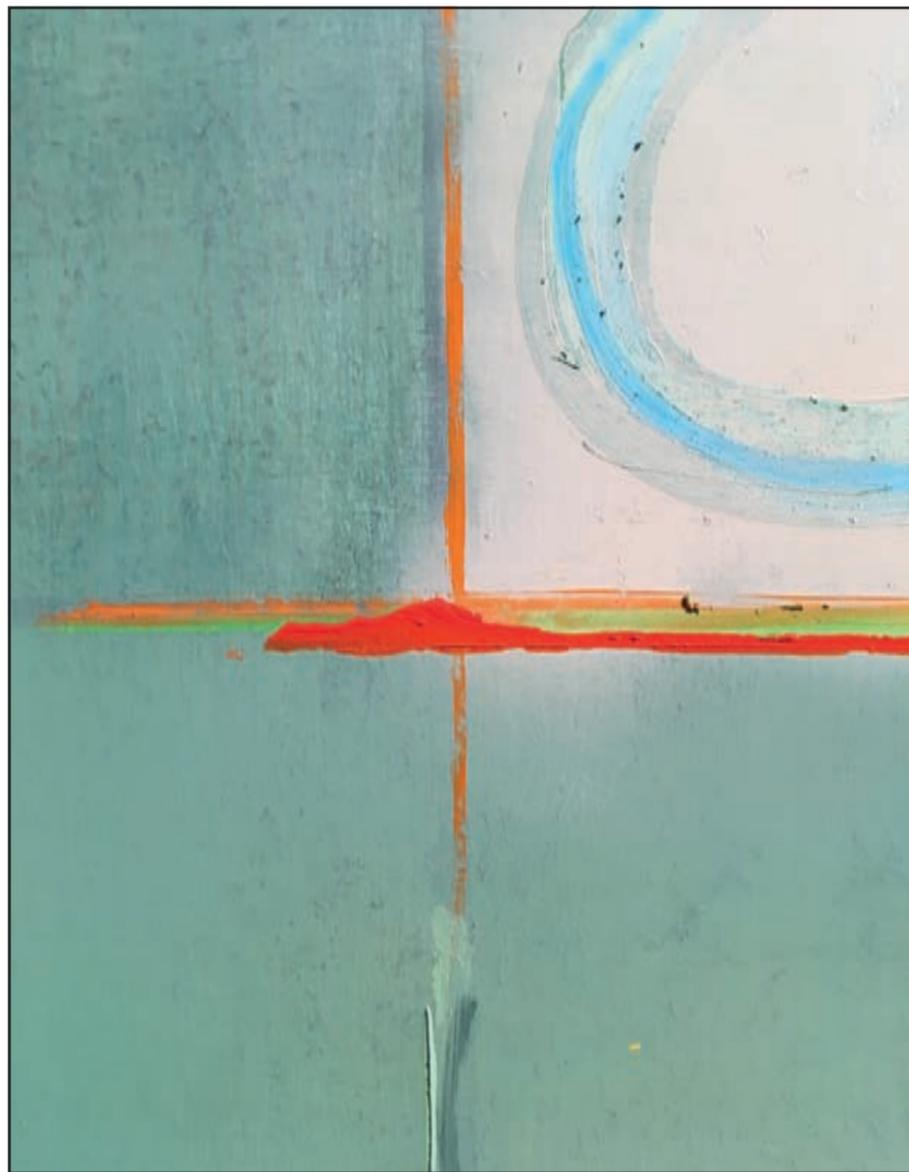
speaks to the idea of surrender, surrender, surrender.

"My last series of works were acrylic, but I was in the desert then — that's a whole other way of being," she adds. "So, I'm back in love with the lushness of oils ... it's incredible.

"Also, working with paintings entirely is new for me. I'm also a sculptor and I use 3-D as a particular vehicle for telling my story. It's been wonderful and challenging working strictly 'from the wall.'"

SALT Gallery features an eclectic collection of local art, sea salts, jewelry, pottery, wine and Florida Keys honey. Ms. Richardson and co-owner Maria Sharpe showcase a new artist each month. Davidson's work will remain on display through October.

For more information, call 305-517-6088 or visit www.saltislandprovisions.com. ■



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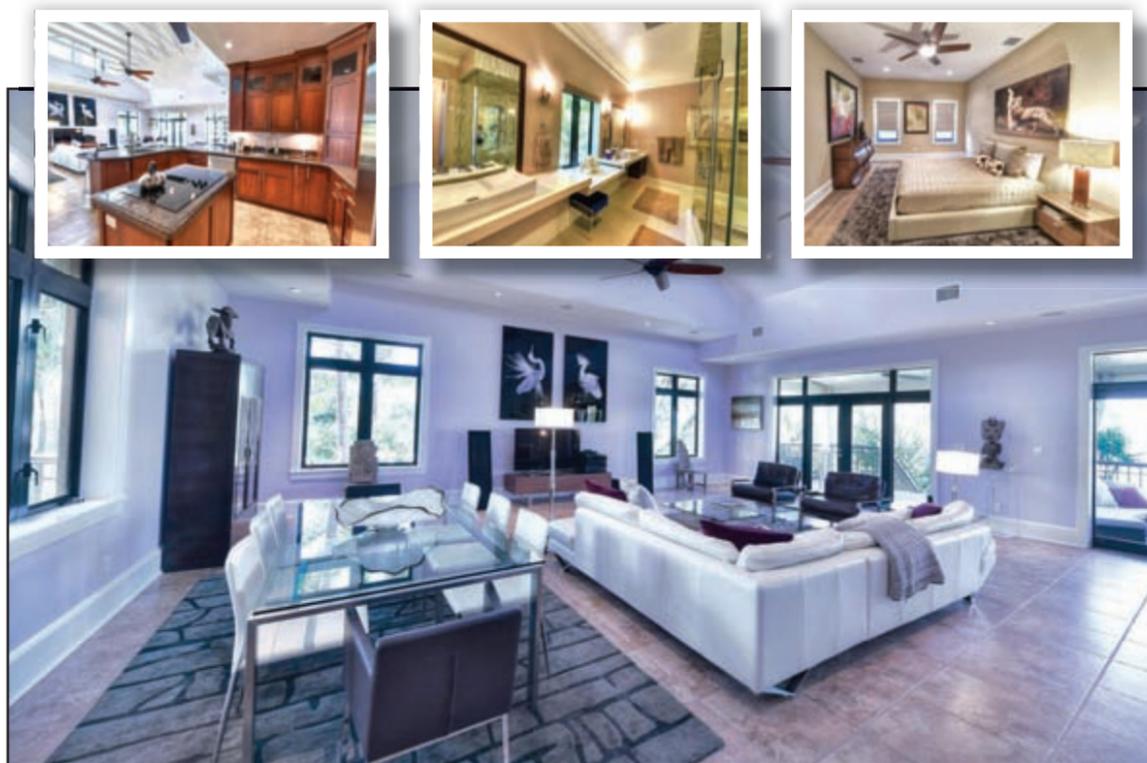


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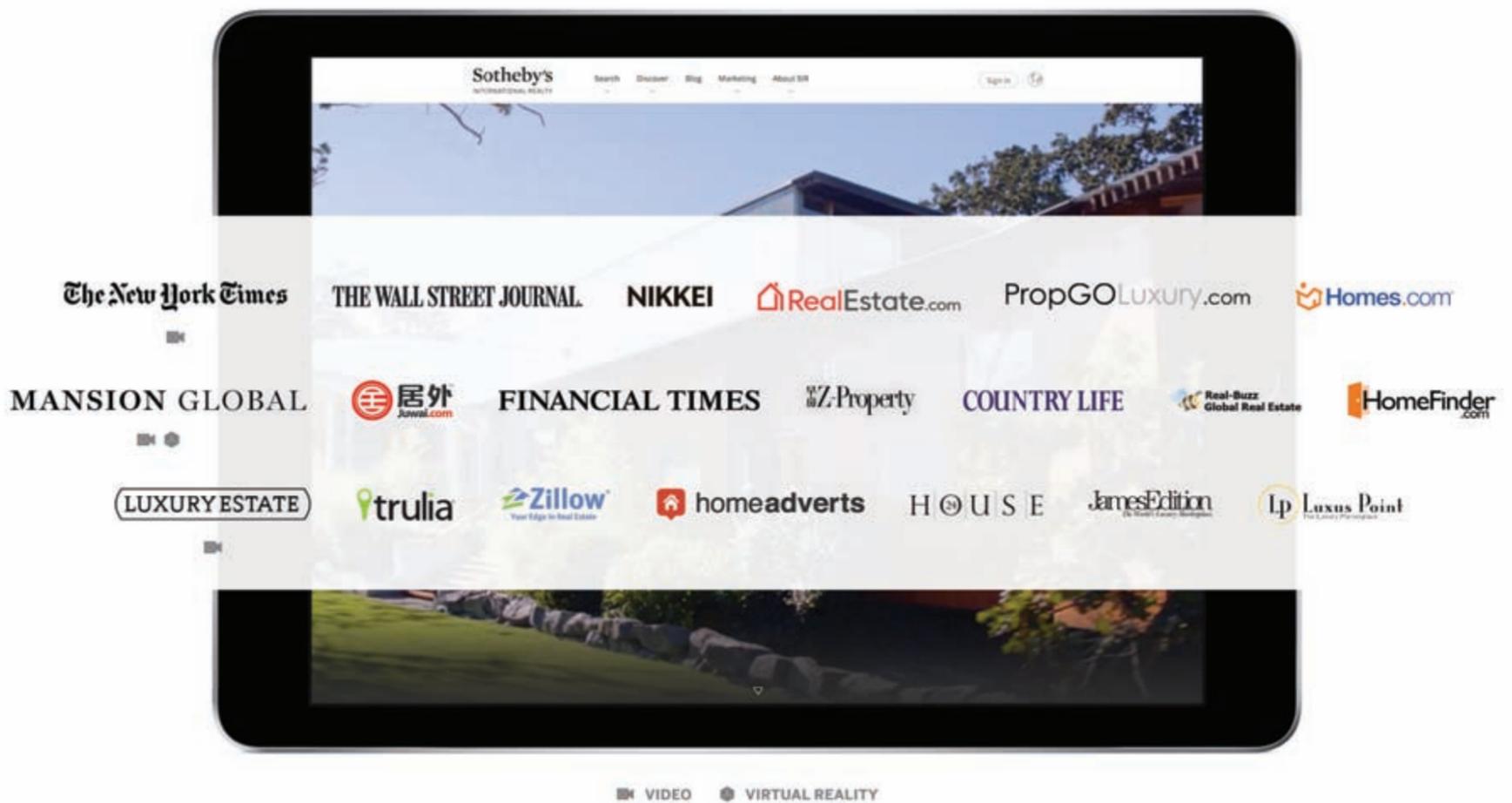
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