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# VeroBeach

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*Vero Beach prepares for the holidays with*

## Tantalizing Treats







# Storied Walls

THE HOUSE CALLED IMMOKOLEE CHRONICLES  
THE EVENTFUL LIFE OF DOROTHY BINNEY PALMER

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Sally Chapman still lives in Immokolee, the house her grandmother Dorothy built on 40 acres of wooded hammock 7 miles outside Fort Pierce.



**D**orothy Binney Upton, heiress to the Crayola crayon fortune, newly divorced from publishing giant George Putnam, built a home in 1930 in the farthest outreaches of Fort Pierce and called it “Immokolee.” The name is derived from a Seminole word for “the home place.” Her Mediterranean Revival retreat, today listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was built 4 miles from her parents’ home in Indrio, once a Scandinavian settlement called Viking organized in 1895 by Minnesotan John Helseth, who helped incorporate the Farmers Bank of Vero.

Immokolee was situated not on the water as were the homes of most affluent winter residents, but 7 miles from downtown Fort Pierce in the remote recesses of the wild, heavily wooded hammocks of St. Lucie County only miles from a bulldozed Seminole encampment once led by its matriarch, Sallie Tommie.

When Dorothy, accustomed to at least three servants, including a chauffeur, first saw the parcel of 40 acres for which she had paid \$2,775, she pulled on high boots, tied a scarf over her forehead and chopped her own path through the dense tropical tangle. Then she hired six men with grub hoes to do the same and purchased a Chevrolet truck and a Caterpillar tractor. She selected a Ford roadster for her new husband, Frank, whom Edwin Binney, Dorothy’s father, had just made vice president of the St. Lucie County Bank.

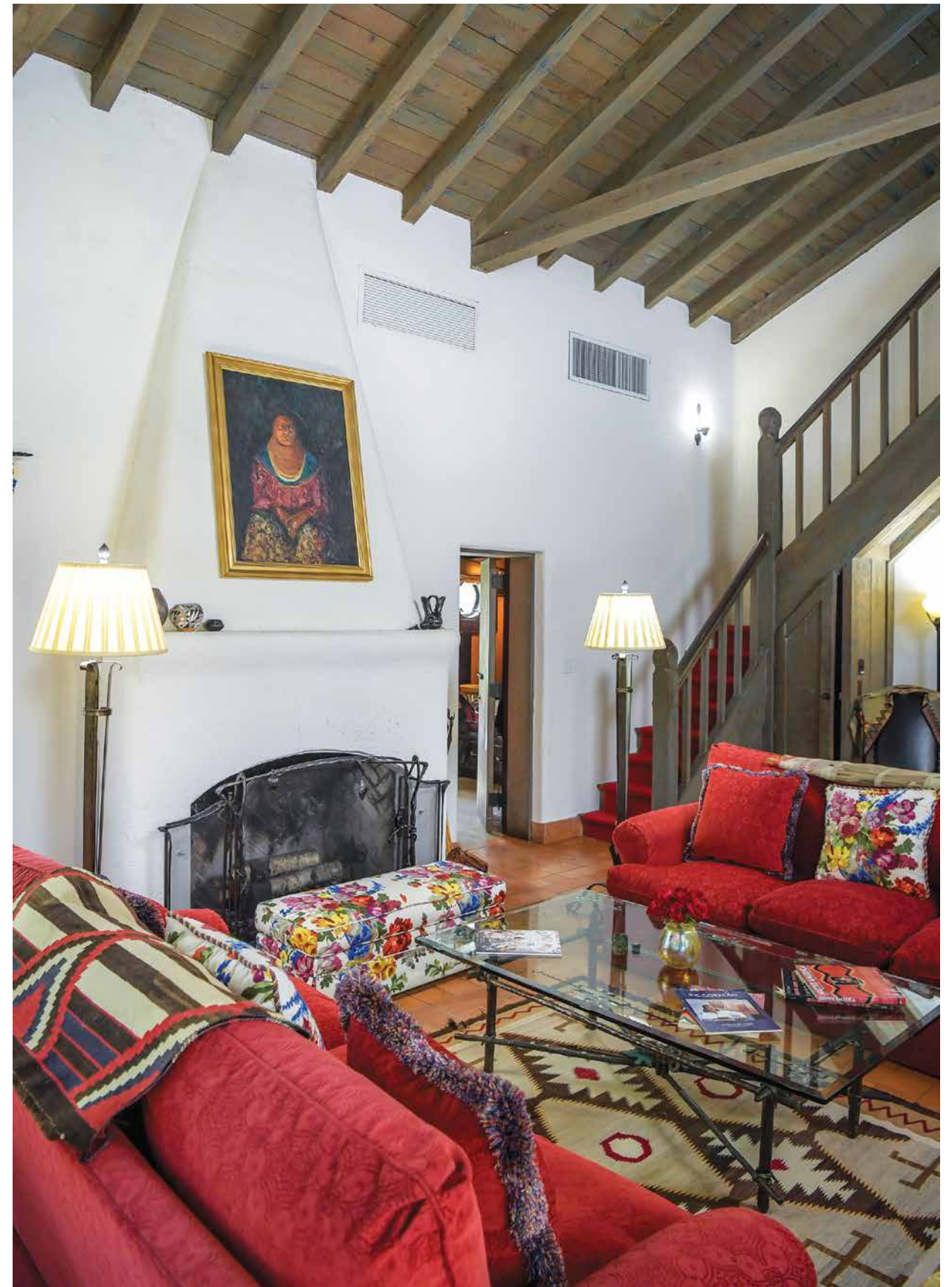
In the days that followed, the 5-foot, 10-inch mother of two sons, who once climbed

California’s Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the continental U.S., continued to slash through the undergrowth with a machete, unfazed by the steaming heat, the snakes or the mosquitoes. She dug up and replanted oak saplings as

a windbreak for a future citrus grove, added bamboo and Australian pines, planted papayas and tuberose, draped vines of white jasmine and yellow begonia on trees already festooned with Spanish moss, turned a natural swale of



Jack and Sally Chapman are avid collectors of Native American art. The longhorn settie was rescued from a museum in Chicago.



Fort Pierce artist A.E. “Beanie” Backus painted the portrait of the Seminole woman that hangs over the fireplace.



water into a lily pond, and planned a home that would nestle as snugly into its surroundings as a cabbage palm in the embrace of a banyan.

When the hammock was cleared, Dorothy chose as her architect Franklind Tyler, who in turn chose Palm Beach's Addison Mizner as his inspiration. The home would include balconies and loggias; a roof of Spanish tiles; a vaulted living room ceiling; six fireplaces; four chimneys; pecky cypress stairs, railings and ceilings; Moorish tiles; arched openings to keep out the rains; and a stucco exterior finished in cream that gleamed like pearl at dusk.

Almost a century later, willowy stands of bamboo still greet you at the gates. Dorothy's granddaughter, Sally Putnam Chapman, who has lived at Immokolee with her husband, Jack, for the last 30 years, preserving the integrity of her grandmother's home while raising chickens in an air-conditioned coop, was waiting for us at the cypress front door. Sally Chapman is beautiful and full of enthusiasm; she and the equally enthusiastic Jack lead us inside to the great room, past a longhorn settee and matching club chairs that Sally rescued from a Chicago museum, over Navajo rugs to the fireplace. Above it hangs the portrait of a Seminole woman painted by the famous Fort Pierce artist A.E. "Beanie" Backus.

Beyond the great room is a bedroom in which beautiful undersea murals painted by Dorothy's third husband, Hawaiian poet and artist Don Blanding, decorate the closet doors. Across the way is a replica of captain's quarters — built for Dorothy's second husband, Frank Upton — fashioned of teak and mahogany,



Don Blanding, Dorothy's third husband, painted the undersea murals on the bedroom doors. Books of his poetry line the shelves.

with authentic ship lamps and a captain's bunk and desk. In another bedroom hangs a set of framed envelopes addressed to Amelia Earhart, whose story is surprisingly intertwined with Dorothy's. They are embellished with images by Olaf Seltzer, a protege of artist Frederic Remington. In a niche in Jack's office at the top of the stairs, a propeller that once turned the engine of the famous aviator's 3-cylinder, 60-horsepower Kinner "Canary," purchased in 1922 for \$2,000, is on display.

Outdoors again, the air is fresh and sweet with the earthy scent of ferns and cinnamon bark. I ask about other Earhart artifacts. Sally tells me that she donated what remained to Purdue University. She leads me to a swimming pool inlaid with glass mosaics of grape-



The propeller on display in Jack Chapman's office came from Amelia Earhart's first plane, a Kinner "Canary."



Blanding's pottery and his book "Floridays," written while living at Immokolee, are on display in the kitchen. Jimmy Buffett quoted Blanding's poem in the liner notes of "Floridays," his first album.

fruit trees and bamboo stands, past a lone hibiscus sitting in a pot — "This part of the yard needed a little color" — to a once-yellow-walled Spanish garden designed by Dorothy's fourth husband, Lew Palmer, manager of a Guatemalan coffee plantation. There stands a fountain that Lew and Dorothy inlaid with tiles they brought back from Africa.

Immokolee spanned the latter half of Dorothy's years. Like every house, it holds secrets, in Dorothy's words, "the turned down pages of everyone's life." The secrets of Immokolee are skillfully revealed by Sally, an adventurer in her own right who climbed the mountains of Tibet and Nepal, as well as Peru and Bolivia, and is a member of the Explorer's Club, as was her father, David, Dorothy's eldest son. It was to Sally that Dorothy entrusted her diaries, which provided the mate-

rial for a book.

In Sally Chapman's candid biography of her grandmother, "Whistled Like a Bird," we learn about Dorothy's life, her desires, enthusiasms, indiscretions and frustrations, and the secret shame of the spousal abuse she suffered in a silence that was expected at the time, as if somehow she had brought it on herself.

We learn that she and her first husband, George Putnam, were Earhart's closest friends before their divorce and subsequent remarriages — Dorothy aboard a ship to Frank Upton, who, as she reveals in her diary, later "horsewhipped" her, and George to Earhart, who had become overnight the most famous woman in the world, a marriage that ended with the aviator's last flight and mysterious disappearance in the Pacific.

That the diaries also reveal a

love affair between Dorothy and a man 20 years younger, or that she remarried three times, seems of the same significance as the fact that Immokolee's plates and bowls were fashioned of walnut or that the silverware was hand hammered. What's more important is the text and substance of her story. The diaries reveal an unusual woman for her day: a Wellesley graduate, a strong athlete, an ardent, fearless adventurer who explored the far north and the remote islands of the Pacific and embarked with her young son David on a two-month oceanographic expedition to the Galapagos — as an unpaid assistant — despite having been born in a time when women of the privileged elite were expected not to show their teeth when they smiled, to sit down without looking behind them for their chair, and to be good at lawn tennis and croquet, but not too good.

Reconciliation between the two conditions is still next to impossible. The result was the not-unexpected conflict between Dorothy's need for identity and the demands of society to be, among other things, a gracious hostess when she entertained at her dinner table such personages as Adm. Richard E. Byrd — a conflict disclosed in this poignant entry: "Days pass. I seem idle. Ineffective, almost useless."

Dorothy met Earhart, who appeared to feel none of these things, when Dorothy's husband, publisher George Putnam, with an obvious book in mind, backed Earhart to be the first woman aviator to cross the Atlantic. The two women quickly became close, bond-





Artist Olaf "O.C." Seltzer, a protege of Frederic Remington, was a close friend of Amelia Earhart's. His letters and the envelopes they came in were works of art themselves.

ing even before the flight when they realized they were, in Sally Chapman's words, "kindred spirits." Both were tall, strong athletes, both loved to read and ride horseback, both were daring and adventurous.

After Earhart returned triumphant from her trans-Atlantic solo flight in a plane called "Friendship" to the parades and pageantry of an ecstatic public, Dorothy invited her into her home in Rye, New York, where the aviator would have a comfortable place to write her book, "20 Hours, 40 Minutes," which she dedicated to "Dorothy Binney Putnam, under whose rooftop this book was written."

When Dorothy invited her into her home, she also invited her into her life. For several months the women were inseparable, swimming together every afternoon, shopping for the clothes Earhart would need, Dorothy even running Earhart's errands. Dorothy admired Amelia for her derring-do, while Amelia admired Dorothy for the

illustrious world of celebrities and adventurers in which she moved with ease. The women formed a strong emotional connection. Yet, while Dorothy described Earhart to women's groups as the embodiment of a womanly ideal, she was possibly unaware that Earhart was the one thing she could not be: independent.

When it was clear to everyone that Earhart and George Putnam had become a couple, Dorothy seemed not so much angry as annoyed, probably because she was herself in an impossible union. In one of her more sardonic diary entries, she writes with characteristic spirit, "She took my husband, my house, and my garden. She won't get my furniture."

The Miami Daily News once wrote of Dorothy leading other women in a raid against Florida's unsightly billboards, tearing down over a hundred by herself. Beautifying roadways was the least this adventurous and fear-

less woman could have done. As I walk Immokolee's neatly kept but unmanicured wide, natural pathways, which Dorothy laid out through what she herself admired — "physical feats done with long, strong muscles," I try to reconcile her abilities with diary entries that speak of "the utter boredom of a daily routine," of feeling like a "matronly turnip" and in the most poignant entry of all, of believing that she'd be "happier, poor, in a smaller, simpler menage, even a newborn baby. And work to do."

For all she accomplished, Dorothy was still untapped, like an abandoned maple tree in March. I am reminded that the 19th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution giving women the right to vote was ratified exactly 100 years ago. The right to punch a ballet seems today a sine qua non. The larger issue for women is the right to be. Not only to climb a mountain but to climb any mountain you choose. Whenever you want. For as long as you can. ☼

JAMES NORTEN



The home's original pool has been replaced by this updated one, but the old one still stands on the property, a short distance from the house. When built, it was only the second pool in St. Lucie County. One Vero Beach resident remembers traveling to Immokolee to learn to swim.

Dorothy's fourth husband, Lew Palmer, designed the Spanish garden. The fountain tiles came from a trip the couple made to Africa.