

GLOBAL NEGOTIATIONS GORGEOUS RENOVATIONS

The "Little White House" in Deerwood



By Christi Bowler Elflein | Photography by Michael LeGrand and Bob Self

While driving through the quiet Jacksonville neighborhood of Deerwood, the thought of negotiations of an international nuclear treaty between the United States and Egypt is probably the furthest thing from a driver's mind. Tucked between two fairways lies a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired home that was built in the mid-1970s for automobile magnate Luther Coggin. Soon after it was built, Coggin offered lodging to President Gerald Ford while he met with Egyptian President Anwar Al-Sadat in Florida to discuss Egypt's nuclear energy future.



L

uther Coggin, an Alabama boy raised by a single mother in the 1930s and 40s, began honing his entrepreneurial spirit when he was just a youth. He started his own lawn mowing service at age 6, had a paper route by age 9 and was selling cars by age 17. Coggin quickly made strides in car sales. When he had an opportunity to move to Jacksonville and open a Pontiac dealership in 1968, he took it. He went on to become the founder of the Coggin Automotive Group, a business leader in Florida and a common household name in Jacksonville.

Luther Coggin told Samuel Proctor in a 2002 interview for the University of Florida Oral History Program, "When I first came to Jacksonville, I rode through Deerwood and I told [my wife] Blanche, 'Honey, maybe one day, if the good Lord is willing, and the creek don't rise, we'll be able to afford a home in Deerwood.'" A few years later, in 1975, he hired architect Louis Holloway to design them a Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired mid-century modern house and they became Deerwood residents.

That same year, President Ford was scheduled to meet with Egypt's President, Anwar Al-Sadat in Jacksonville. A White House representative and friend of Luther

The Vasto family combined contemporary pieces with mid-century modern furniture throughout their home to compliment the architecture of the house.



President Gerald Ford in Deerwood during his visit in 1975. Courtesy of Times-Union Media

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Coggin's asked Coggin for his advice on where the President should stay in Jacksonville for the meeting. President Sadat was staying in Epping Forest Yacht Club and President Ford needed to be nearby. Coggin offered up his newly built home, explaining to Proctor that he told his White House friend, "We live in one of the nicest places in Jacksonville, called Deerwood. It is a gated community, guarded and all that, and I would be happy if you want to consider it to have him come stay with us in our home." After the Coggins and all their neighbors were thoroughly vetted, the Coggin's residence was chosen to be Ford's temporary home away from home.

The day was November 2, 1975. "The President and Mrs. Ford arrived at our home, and we greeted them on the front porch. Blanche and all four of our daughters were there," Coggin told Proctor. "They had flags on the limousine, and they had police escorts." The neighborhood was alive with excitement. "We moved out, and they moved in." They brought the White House chefs, held meetings in the house and even went swimming.

That evening, Florida Governor Reubin Askew hosted a dinner in honor of President Ford and President Sadat at the San Jose Country Club. President Ford made a toast in which he said, "I think, as you have traveled, President Sadat, in many parts of our country, New York, Chicago, Houston, and now in this great state of Florida – you have found in the American people a great diversity, but a great strength, and I am convinced that your visit here has been in the best interests of not only the Middle East but the world itself."

From the 1970s through 2015, a number of families moved in and moved out of this storied home. This spring, the Vasto family is starting a new chapter in its history. Like the Coggins, the Vasto family has long wanted to live in the sought-after neighborhood of Deerwood. They became members of the country club 15 years ago and have been considering moving there since.

"Deerwood is awesome. The golf course is amazing. The people are phenomenal," says Cathy Vasto. "It's just a



Custom builder, JL Linder Group, did a magnificent job on both exterior renovations and interior remodel and design. Above are "before" shots of the renovation process, while to the right is an interior shot of the remodeled main living room with its vaulted ceiling that follows the pavilion roof-line, and wall of windows. Bringing the outside inside is a theme of mid-century modern design.



“I was adamant about the integrity of this house. It’s been a big labor of love just trying to get it right.”

— Cathy Vasto



great neighborhood.” One day, her husband Brad came home and said, “I found the house for us.” It was the vacant and well known “Little White House.” They sought out the owner and bought it.

Given that the house was more than 40 years old from its original construction, a makeover was needed. They contracted JL Linder Group to do the complete interior and exterior renovation. Given its presidential history and mid-century modern

architectural bones, a remodel would prove to be both challenging and rewarding.

“I was adamant about the integrity of this house,” Vasto said. “It’s been a big labor of love just trying to get it right.”

The exterior of the house was largely preserved in keeping with the mid-century modern architectural style. The primary change to the exterior is the addition of a carriage garage. The previous garage was incorporated into the house, and the new garage

Left clockwise: The pool is original to the house and the restoration was done by Manos Pool Construction and Pinch A Penny and pool deck and front walkway by Artistic Concrete; Scapes of North Florida did the landscape design, keeping a minimalist-modern aesthetic to compliment the architecture; The floors and tiling were done by Dimensions in Tile; First Coast Supply provided the cabinets, counter tops and appliances.

extends from the side of the house with a matching roofline. Special stained brick was used to match the remainder of the house’s exterior.

The front entry has been spruced up with the addition of a walkway made up of 15-by-2-ft. rectangular slabs set in grass — very typical of a mid-century modern house. The front doors are original and have been stained a rich cocoa brown to match the roof and trim accent color. Upon entering the home, guests are greeted by the crown jewel of the home and favorite feature of Vasto’s, a large coral wall.

The new design of the interior of the house revolved around keeping the original front doors and the entry wall. On the opposite side of the wall is a new modern kitchen and grand family room. The geometrical wall of windows at the far end of the family room affords a panoramic view of the golf course. This wall was designed in coordination with the vaulted ceilings that follow the pavilion roofline. Original beams run the length of the room and extend to outside the house, a feature of mid-century modern houses that brings the outside in and the inside out.

The geometric shapes continue into the back yard. Angled columns, original to the home, line the back covered patio. The stones are stacked wide at the bottom and narrow at the top. Every edge of the house is angled like this.

A key feature of the backyard is the original pool, where President Ford took a dip so many years ago. It has curves that are not in keeping with the mid-century modern style, but the Vastos wanted to maintain the house’s historic integrity and decided to preserve it. To give it more of a mid-century modern look, they removed the pavers around the pool and replaced them with concrete that has angles and points, then had it scored and stained. The renovation results are stunning, a mid-century modern look with a 20th century freshness. 🌊

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