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SARASOTA MAGAZINE®

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They Wouldn't Live Anywhere Else

For a certain kind of person—brainy, creative and a little adventurous—home just has to be along the historic, tree-shaded streets near the [Ringling Museum](#).

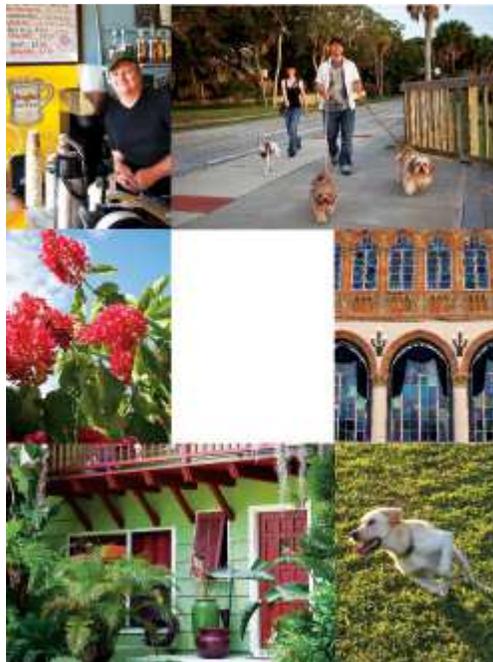
Author: Robert Plunket

Photographer: Jenny Acheson

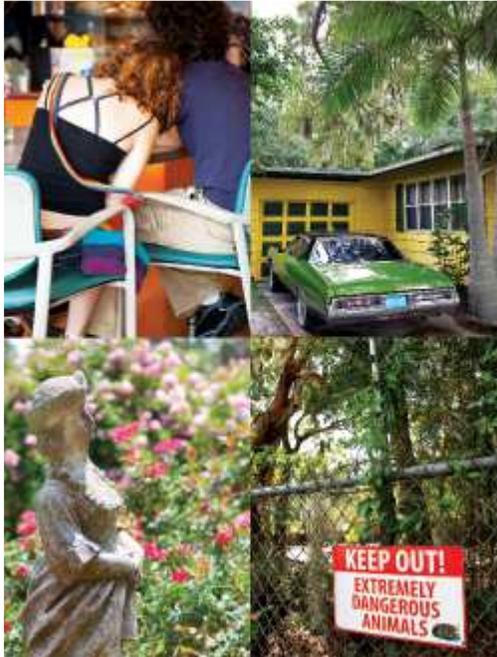
Prestigious neighborhoods in Sarasota usually follow a pattern: gated, manicured, new. They tend to be a little removed from the action, and they can be spookily quiet, with hermetically sealed houses and nary a human being in sight. The real world doesn't intrude much, and that's the way the residents want it.

And then there's the museum area. It breaks all the rules. Here, people are actually outdoors, walking their dogs, bicycling. A certain raffish character is part of the appeal. For people who crave diversity and a sense of history, whether from aesthetic or moral concerns, this is the place. When I try to explain it to people from out of town, I compare it to Manhattan's Upper West Side.

Like its New York counterpart, the Ringling Museum area is a little shabby around the edges. There are some spectacular places on the water—sort of like



Riverside Drive in New York—but the bulk of the housing is rather modest. The economy revolves around [higher education](#) (think Columbia University), and the inhabitants run a highly developed neighborhood association that can make or break a local politician.



The museum area certainly has the best location in town. In fact, you could argue it's the best location in the entire area, so nice that people have been living here for 5,000 years. Its bayfront setting, backed by enormous century-old oaks, is matched by the great fishing—and not all that long ago, great hunting, too.

Exactly what fits into the “museum area” is subject to interpretation, and realtors often stretch the truth and include most of northern Sarasota. But it is traditionally regarded as a combination of Indian Beach and Sapphire Shores.

Indian Beach begins at Whitaker Bayou. It is most famous for its trees. When I asked residents what they liked about it, they all—and I mean every single one—began with “the trees!” They are giant oaks, five and six stories high, dripping with Spanish moss. They cover the neighborhood like a canopy and produce a dappled lighting effect that reminds you of old-time American life. The housing stock is perfect for such an atmosphere. It's classic “old Florida”—cottages, bungalows and occasional two-story Colonial with a smattering of 1950s' ranches.

As you head north you come to Sapphire Shores, which abuts the museum on the south. Here there's brighter sunlight and bigger, more suburban homes, including a collection of 20 or so Spanish homes, some mansions, actually, that date back to the 1920s. They were all part of the building boom that occurred when Cà d Zan and the [Ringling Museum](#) were built, and many were designed by the same architects and used spare parts left over from the Ringling mansion.

Once you get to the museum itself, the neighborhood ends. To the north is a confusing part of town that contains New College of Florida, then the Crosley Estate and the University of South Florida's Sarasota-Manatee campus, and across U.S. 41, the airport. I always find it amazing that from the northern edge of the museum area you can actually walk to the airport. You could pull your roller a mile or so, right up to the ticket counter.

Unfortunately, just to the east lies the North Trail, which clings to the museum area like a dysfunctional white trash relative. Sometimes it seems like the hookers have been walking up and down those sidewalks for 5,000 years. There's always some community drive to clean things up and it never happens, although [Ringling College of Art and Design](#), which keeps expanding its campus along the trail, has certainly made a difference for the better.

But the Trail, with its seedy motels and "for lease" buildings and shirtless rednecks grilling hot dogs



in front of \$29-a-night motel rooms, seems to be the deal breaker. Many people take one look and say, "absolutely not." A true Upper West Sider/museum area person, on the other hand, takes one look and says, "Turn here, I'm a block down on the left."

The museum area's history is long and colorful. The Native Americans left behind many traces, mostly in the form of "middens"—small rises in the land composed of shells and other refuse. There are so many that much of the land has a 10- or 11-foot elevation, and if you dig into it, you will find layer after layer of

prehistoric garbage, thankfully transformed over the years into picturesque archaeology.

7 comments

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Decent description of my hood.

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Sue Strong · Owner/President at Strong Consulting

I just love this neighborhood and am so happy to own a home here. It captures all of the diversity and funkiness I could ever want.

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Roger Barkin

Mr. Plunket nailed it. From the history to the current persona. We knew this area was for us the minute we turned onto Turks Cap Place.

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Joanne Gonet · Sarasota, Florida

This is a great article written in the Sarasota magazine about my neighborhood.

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Viola Dunnington Posthuma

This is my new home town = love it so much!

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