

PRESENTED BY REV. ALSO EBANKS, CHAIRMAN, NATIONAL TRUST FOR THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

There are few things that speak so eloquently of our history as our old buildings. Together, these splendid old structures recount a fascinating story of a place that *was* Cayman, a spirit that *is* Cayman, and a way of life that shall never again *be* Cayman. These are precious cultural artefacts, and much like our Blue Iguana, is an endangered species.

There are those who would argue that traditional Caymanian architecture is simple and humble, and by virtue of these characteristics, dispensable. But the spirit of our architecture is not reflected merely in its design. Rather it is linked to a time, a place, a people, and a remarkable history that have in fact *resulted* in its design.

Yes, our earlier dwellings were functional rather than idealistic; they were intimate rather than grand; and they were plain rather than dazzling. Even our grandest estate home, Pedro St. James, is modest in the context of estate architecture throughout the Caribbean region. But perhaps this ‘modestly’ is the architectural substance that is inherently Caymanian. Is this then dispensable? Are the charming old cottages and cabins that occupy Boggy Sand Road in West Bay unimportant because they are not imposing? Are the hipped and gable-roofed rectangular cottages of Bodden Town insignificant because they’re unassuming? Is the ‘polite’ residential architecture of Merrendale and Pantonville, in central George Town, inconsequential because it is a scaled-down version of similar architecture elsewhere? Absolutely not! Our architectural style is a distinctive expression of a culture and history unlike anywhere else in the Caribbean, or in the world for that matter – something we should be proud of. It is this simplicity that produces the sense of place that is very much Caymanian. Because our architecture was strongly textured and shaped by local conditions and creativity, the resulting manmade landscape is indeed substantial and indeed memorable.

The continued survival of these structures is dependent, of course, upon the thoughtful and diligent stewardship of people who take as much pride in the structures as did our ancestors who built them. But as anyone who has undertaken the endeavour will assure you, restoring an old house is no simple task. The work of striking a balance between past and present, old and new, is most challenging.

We are here tonight to honour achievement for historic preservation. In a time when all too many of our cherished buildings and landscapes have or are about to become paved over for roads or intrusive architecture, it is important to distinguish those members of our community who have opted to preserve Cayman’s sense of place and authenticity.

Historic preservation, however, is not limited to the preservation of our older buildings. The Cayman Islands have a distinct identity that is worthy of being understood and appreciated – and more importantly, perpetuated. While our historic structures do indeed provide Cayman with a unique character and a connection with our past, so too do new structures that utilise historic

principles of design. It is through both the protection of our historic structures and the building of new structures that embody our built heritage, that our identity can be preserved.

Therefore, tonight we also honour those special *new* structures that help to bring out the soul of our community. It is true that individual works of architecture seldom have any guarantee of immortality, but we do not seek immortality – we seek *continuity*. And new structures built with principles of historic design, embody such continuity. As do, of course, old structures that have been preserved and adapted for modern use.

But our historical landscape is fragile and finite, and it is slowly disappearing as it is replaced by modern structures that bear no Caymanian integrity whatsoever. The dilemma of these islands is that they are preferred vacation destinations, and therefore expected to maintain their unique qualities, while it is natural for Caymanians to desire progress. There is no reason, however, why both cannot co-exist. And so we hope that the imagination, enthusiasm, and persistence of tonight's award winners, is contagious, because our built heritage is an integral part of our cultural identity and worthy of preservation.

The National Trust will continue in its mission to preserve that part of Cayman's heritage that is manifested through the built environment. We will continue to encourage the restoration of old and often dilapidated buildings rather than having them replaced with new and presumptuous structures; we will continue to preach the virtues of recycling old buildings for modern use as opposed to demolishing them; we will continue to encourage sympathetic rather than incompatible new architecture; and to those who feel that we ignore the highest and *best* use of land for the profit that it promises, we will continue to argue that reusing old buildings in a new way is a case of good economics!

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