

NEW VENTURES

The former Palm Beach Daily News building has 'an ambiance you don't find in new buildings.' — Owner Leslie Robert Evans

Landmark restoration

The historic former *Daily News* building on Brazilian Avenue is receiving a face-lift.

Owner Leslie 'Les' Robert Evans wants to restore the 74-year-old building to its former look.

Evans, a real estate attorney and town resident, bought the landmarked building at 204-214 Brazilian Ave. a year ago for \$2.65 million. He is about one-third of the way through the restoration and has moved his law offices into 5,000 square feet on the second floor.

The first phase of renovations — the second-floor offices — is just about finished. The second phase will mean renovating the second-floor common areas and first-floor lobby. The third phase will mean restoring the outside.

Evans said he hopes to have all renovations complete by year's end. He has spent more than \$400,000 and expects the entire project to cost close to \$750,000.

Evans takes on the demeanor of a proud father as he points out the changes that have taken place — such as adding wainscoting to the walls, installing firewalls, bringing the electrical system up to code, replacing drop ceilings with full ceilings, and updating the antiquated air conditioning.

Evans appears most proud of the restoration of the original Dade County pine floors. He pointed to the shiny dark wood floors during a recent walk-through.

Over the years, the original wood was covered up by "car-



Michele Gelormine

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Clockwise from right: Cast-stone pilasters with a vine motif form the main exterior decoration of the former 'Palm Beach Daily News' building;

owner Leslie Robert Evans on the balcony; the landmark as it appears today at 204-214 Brazilian Ave.; the building as it stood in the 1920s.

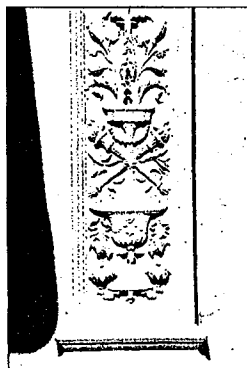


Photo / Historical Society of Palm Beach County



Daily News Photos by Jacek Gancarz

LANDMARK

'This building was left to go to seed. . . . Les is bringing it back as it should be.'

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peating on top of plywood, on top of tile, on top of linoleum and a bunch of coats of paint," he said.

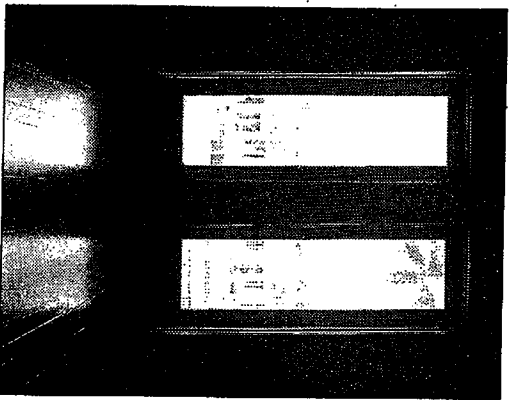
"Back then, they covered the floors up; now we consider them a luxury. You don't see wood like this anymore. They just don't have it."

Evans bought the nearly 18,000-square-foot building from Averell Harriman Fisk. Fisk is the grandson of Averell Harriman, the former governor of New York, wartime ambassador to the Soviet Union, and adviser to presidents from Franklin Roosevelt to John F. Kennedy.

"The building is rich in Palm Beach history.

According to records of the Preservation Foundation of Palm Beach, the building's predecessor was a 100-foot by 57-foot cypress structure. It housed the *Palm Beach Daily News* offices from 1913 to 1925. At the end of the spring 1925 social season, the paper shut down while the building was razed and a new one was constructed. The cost of the new building, which was completed in January 1926, was \$85,000. Money was borrowed at 8 percent interest from Palm Beach Guaranty Co.

The new two-story building fronted 137 feet on Brazilian Avenue and 75 feet on South County Road. It was an irregular rectan-



Daily News Photo by Jack Gancarz
Floors made from Dade County pine have been restored.

gle and constructed with exterior walls of hollow clay tile and textured stucco. The lower floor contained the press room and job printing shop, while the top floor housed the editorial offices of the *Daily News* and related publications. The building also housed offices of the Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce and the Palm Beach Business Association.

The building served as the editorial office and publishing plant for the *Palm Beach Daily News*, *Palm Beach Life*, and associated publications from 1925 until 1974, when the operations moved to their present location at 265 Royal Poinciana Way. Edward Stephen-

son of Warrington, Va., bought the building in 1974 and sold it in 1979 to Fisk.

Evans bought the building in July. He struck a deal without its ever going on the market.

"It's got a certain spirit," Evans said. "It's got an ambience you don't find in new buildings. I love this location. It's something I could not just own, but have pride in and restore. It's something I can give back to the community."

John Archer, owner of J. Pierce-Archer Ltd., has rented space on the ground floor of the building for five years. A curator and framer, Archer said he is happy with Evans' plans.

"This building was left to go to seed," Archer said. "Nothing was done to it. Les is bringing it back as it should be. In a town where they're tearing down bungalows and building big houses, Les isn't tearing this down. He's bringing back a building."

Evans said he is seeking antique furniture and artifacts for the office. He is collecting historic Palm Beach pictures, particularly pictures of the building, to frame and hang on the walls. An array of newly framed Marx Brothers pictures lie on a couch in his office waiting to be hung. A small framed picture of Groucho Marx sits among family pictures on a credenza near his desk.

"Groucho Marx was irreverent," Evans said. "I don't think of myself like most attorneys. People are too serious these days. Practicing law is tough enough, [so] you have to learn to laugh at yourself. Groucho laughed at himself."

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If you have business or real estate news, please contact Michele Gelomine by phone at 820-3863; by mail: 265 Royal Poinciana Way, Palm Beach, FL 33480; or by fax: 655-4594.