

HAWAIIAN DAYS

Royal Awakening

A tour of Honolulu's Iolani Palace opens a local's eyes to key parts of Hawaii's past BY TIM RYAN

HA VE A CONFESSION TO MAKE: I HAVE LIVED IN HAWAII for 20 years without ever visiting Iolani Palace in Honolulu, the Hawaiian version of Buckingham Palace. And for nearly as long, a part-Hawaiian friend of mine has admonished me for my lapse, suggesting that more knowledge might help me better understand the perspective of the always simmering Hawaiian-sovereignty movement.

She's right. I really should know more than just a few of the big things: that King Kalakaua, "The Merrie Monarch," who revived the hula more than 50 years after the missionaries banned it, lived at Iolani from 1882 until his death nine years later. And that in 1893, American forces placed Kalakaua's sister and successor, Queen Lili'uokalani, under house arrest at Iolani for eight months. And that the set for the offices of television's *Hawaii Five-0* squad were supposed to have been located in the same second-floor corner room where Lili'uokalani was detained.

Over the years I'd convinced myself that the building was uninteresting, that its stonework made it too gray and intimidating, that its several Hawaiian flags made it too political, and that its history wasn't mine. The truth is, I have always felt guilty by association about the United States's overthrow of the Kingdom of Hawaii in 1893. So my lapse might just be denial.

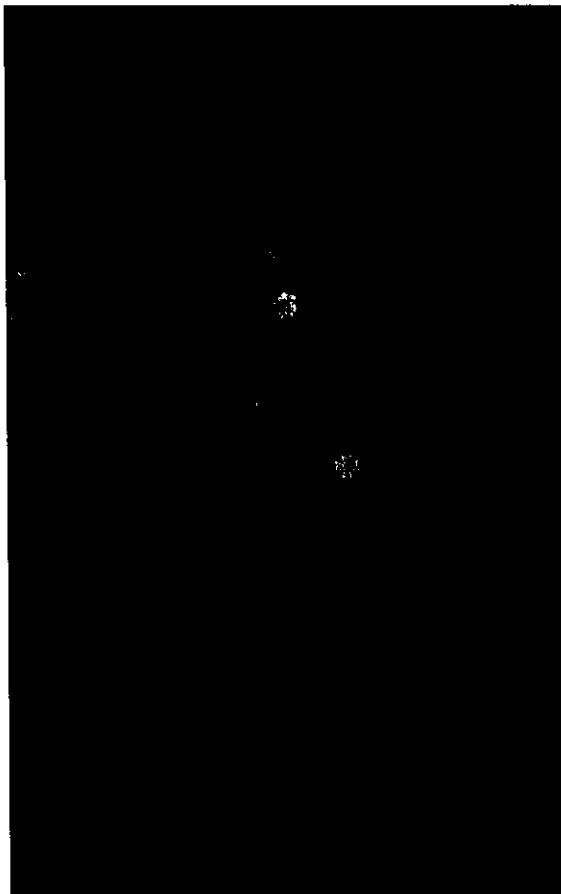
Recently, however, I was passing the palace on my way to a meeting downtown with my much-admonish-

ing friend, when a shaft of sunlight suddenly peeked through winter clouds, reflected off a palace window, and caught my attention. Then, on the lawn in a corner of the grounds, I saw a Hawaiian woman singing "Aloha Oe" (written by Queen Lili'uokalani, it is probably the

most popular Hawaiian song ever published) while her male companion played ukulele. The woman's tender voice gave me chicken skin, the Hawaiian term for goose bumps. On the spur of the moment, I entered the grounds and paid to join the next tour. (I figured my friend would understand.)

Soon I knew much more about the place. The 14,000-square-foot palace was completed in 1882 at a cost of \$360,000. The main floor was used for formal functions, royal-family living quarters were on the second floor, and the basement housed kitchens, storerooms, and offices for household staff. From 1893 until 1968 the palace served as the capitol — first of the republic, then the territory, and finally the state of Hawaii. When the palace was vacated in 1969, its restoration began; it continues under the auspices of The Friends of Iolani Palace.

But a curious thing happened on the way to restoring this important piece of Hawaii's past: Furnishings, paintings, and other items of great historic value disappeared. Every room our tour group entered was sparsely furnished, in contrast to the Victorian clutter shown in photographs on the walls. Where had it all gone?



William Cogswell's palace portrait of Queen Lili'uokalani depicts Hawaii's last monarch as she appeared in 1891.

crossroads

bies was feeding on a tightly clustered mass of minnows. The birds flew circles, first high and then low over the water, and then suddenly, when they were again high in the air, they would all simultaneously brake, crook their wings, squawk excitedly, and rain down close to the cliffs like a shower of arrows.

I donned snorkeling gear and finned into the commotion. Boobies and pelicans were striking the water like salvos from a fleet. As soon as a booby hit the water, its wings would fold up and disappear and its feet would come out like a pair of enormous diving fins, propelling it underwater as if it were a beaked bullet, faster than my eye could follow, so fast that the fish never knew what hit them.

BACK AT THE LIGHTHOUSE, I ASKED what would happen on the island if a hurricane struck. Automatically the crew turned to Niles, who had been on the rock in 1960, when Hurri-

cane Donna hit the Leeward Islands without warning, packing winds of up to 150 MPH. The foreman, an old Anguillan seaman, didn't need a weather satellite to interpret the long swell and leaden calm that preceded heavy storm clouds on the horizon. Two of the men holed up in an old masonry tower while the rest of the crew barricaded themselves in the new main building.

The wind rose and the seas with it, until they broke on top of the rock and sent water washing completely over the island. The two men climbed into the window apertures of the four-foot-thick stone walls. Then they heard the roar of a monstrous sea that broke onto the roof. When another enormous comber obliterated the roof and plucked them out into the chaotic night, the two men gave themselves up for dead.

But then, in an incredible dovetailing of coincidence and luck, a wave dropped one of them through the open

roof of the main building, leaving him half drowned but unharmed in a pool on the floor. His mates dragged him to safety. The other fellow was swept past the building by one wave, then sucked back by the ebb. He managed to climb through a broken shutter into the pantry. When the storm abated and the cook opened the door, out he tumbled.

After that, a new light tower was built, incorporating four immense pillars of reinforced concrete that now rise from the island's rock and meet in a pillbox that sits high above sea level – the refuge of last resort for Sombrero's light keepers.

What the boobies do in such weather I don't know. But what I do know is this: If I come back for another round after I die, I don't want to spend my days as a pope, a prince, or a poet. I want to be a brown booby on Sombrero, flying high over spectacular islands and plunging through the light-filled Caribbean sea. ♦

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"About 80 percent of the furnishings were auctioned or returned to descendants of Queen Kapi'olani," my guide told us. "We have thousands of original pieces, but a tremendous amount remains in private collections."

Palace items have been found in five countries and nearly every state in the U.S., we learned. An Oklahoma woman who took the tour in 1980 noticed that a small table in a picture of Kalakaua's bedroom looked exactly like one she had at home. As it turned out, the Royal Symbol had been burned into the wood of the woman's table, marking it as authentic. She donated it to the palace, and it's now back in Kalakaua's bedroom, where each morning his retainer would gently awaken the king with a chant about how handsome he was.

In 1985 the design director from Tiffany & Co. was at Iolani for a photo shoot when he noticed a pair of copies of portraits of King Kamehameha II

and his wife, Queen Kamamalu, in the Grand Hall. A year later on a scouting trip in Ireland, the stylist discovered the originals in the living room at the farm of an art dealer. The king's portrait was propped under a lamp; Queen Kamamalu's was sitting in a pile of magazines behind a sofa. The collector sold the works for \$1,400, the cost of a load of bricks he wanted, and the stylist returned them to Iolani. Their combined value was estimated at \$25,000.

Once such items come back, they usually need to be refurbished before they can be put on display. That takes money, and the palace restorers operate on a shoestring. The state government provides funds for building upkeep but not for staff or conservation work.

"We have dozens of wonderful objects in storage – jewels, signed secession letters," said palace executive director Deborah Dunn, who had joined our group, "but there's no money to repair them, so they can't be displayed."

Dunn told me that in 2002 a Honolulu resident donated a magnificent three-legged Victorian table that had once been in Queen Kapi'olani's bedroom and was also placed at the foot of Kalakaua's casket when he was lying in state. A docent donated \$4,000 to cover the cost of restoration.

"Want to see it?" Dunn asked, leading me away from the group to an elevator. Joined there by collections manager Janet Ness, we rode to an upper-level room, where items waiting to be catalogued were laid out on tables. I walked carefully, worried about knocking something over.

Ness opened a double-locked door, and I saw the shape of the small table under a protective sheet of plastic. I was excited at seeing a piece of monarchic history that had never been on display, but my excitement turned to shock when Ness slid the plastic off. The table was gaudy and covered with what looked like cheap gold paint that

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was tarnished and chipped.

"Queen Kapi'olani had *that* in her bedroom?" I asked. "It's awful."

Dunn and Ness laughed.

"It's Victorian," they said in unison.

"The *alii* [royalty] were fond of European designs," Dunn added. "Iolani Palace is a bicultural museum. We look at items through historical eyes."

A moment later we were joined by conservator Thor Minnick, who would repair the piece. A specialist in wood-object conservation, he explained what he thought happened to the table.

"I believe that someone regularly polished it, dislodging the gold leafing," he said. "Bare spots were painted gold, but that created too much contrast, so they painted the entire table."

Oxidation had turned some painted sections an awful brown. Minnick planned to test various gel solvents designed to remove only the outer layer. The renovation would take many hours.

"It can't be hurried," said Minnick, who joked that he had good reason to consider carefully the best way to proceed: "I've been promised a lifetime supply of macadamia-nut cookies if I

can meet the budget."

Next, Dunn led me to a dimly lit basement gallery to see a 300-year-old red-and-yellow feather cloak that belonged to Chief Kawal'oo, who later gave it to his cousin, Kamehameha I. The cloak hung inside a Plexiglas case; its layered feathers were tiny and stunningly brilliant.

"How many birds died for that cape?" I asked.

"None," Dunn says. "They were trapped and then usually released."

Looking carefully, I could see a few tiny bare spots on the cloak; they reflected the fact that funds for its conservation had run out after three weeks of work by ethnographic conservator Diana Dicus, who had traveled from her home in Idaho to work on the cloak, which belongs to the Bishop Museum. Talking about the piece when I contacted her by telephone later, she said, "It was moving to work on the cloak because of its historical significance to Hawaiians and the stories I know it could tell. It was very difficult to leave it unfinished."

Near the cape stood a centuries-old *pahu*, or drum, carved from the trunk

Monumental Oahu

Iolani Palace is just one must-see landmark in the Honolulu area. Here are a few others.

- The bronze statue of Kamehameha the Great (right) on King Street is a symbol of welcome and pride, even though it bears little resemblance to the king himself. John Timoteo Baker, regarded as the most handsome man in court circles, modeled for the statue in 1878.
- If you walk between Iolani Palace and the State Capitol, look for a statue of Queen Lili'uokalani, whose outstretched hand is usually filled with fresh flowers and leis left by locals and tourists.
- At Honolulu Harbor, ride up to the observation deck of Aloha Tower. Built in 1926, the ten-story tower, which still serves as a signal to boats at sea, is also a prime spot for sunset viewing.
- Positive vibrations are associated with the Wizard Stones of Kapaemahu, located at Kuhio Beach, at the east end of Waikiki Beach. The four imposing boulders are said to possess the healing powers of four 15th-century wizards.
- Join those at Waikiki Beach who drape leis of respect on the statue of Duke Kahanamoku, who popularized surfing for the world.



Melissa Wilbanks

of a coconut tree and inlaid with human teeth. It also belonged to Kamehameha I. A thin, tattered thread of coconut sennit extending from the top of the drum to its base had been tied into a tiny knot where it broke.

"Why not just replace it?" I asked Minnick.

"In the current conservation aesthetic, the goal is not to restore something to new condition," he said. "Today's style is minimal....The blemishes and scars are part of its history."

THE PALACE GOT SOME OF ITS "scars" more recently, and as we rejoined the tour in the throne room, I was anxious to see one of them, evidence of a highly publicized incident of a few years ago. Everything in the room was crimson and gold, like a French royal court: the draperies, the sofa, the chairs, the carpet, and the thrones. Standing behind a barrier that prevented visitors from getting too close, I used opera glasses to search for a tiny flaw in the fabric of a cushion on one throne – the rip heard 'round the state.

It happened in 1998, when Abigail Kinoiki Kekaulike Kawananakoa, a descendant of Hawaiian royalty (but never a queen), decided to pose on the damask throne for a *LIFE* magazine photographer. When she did, a tiny tear opened on the delicate fabric.

"There was only a little bit of disturbance," said our guide. "But it was a very sad day, indeed."

Outside the palace after the tour, I was standing under what I recognized earlier as the *Hawaii Five-0* offices, where Lili'uokalani endured her house arrest. I had learned that hundreds of Hawaiians used to line the palace fence at night, hoping for a glimpse of their queen, who was likely quilting or writing, recording important events in her life. Walking across the palace lawn, I realized I knew more about life in the palace but not enough about the eight months the queen spent confined in it.

I wouldn't wait another 20 years to come back and find out more. ♦

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Magic Hour on Horn Island

A painter and a scientist seek the essence of an unspoiled Mississippi isle BY RONALD F. TURNER



Artist Stig Marcussen works a sketch of a time-worn tree on Horn Island.

YOU WALK LIKE MY DOG.” THE VOICE WAS Stig Marcussen’s and it came from behind the dunes. Since I’d been following the distinctive tracks of Stig’s three-footed (but four-legged) canine for more than an hour, I understood the comparison. I rested my game knee while Nemo, Stig, and my own dog, Dillon, rejoined me. An Ocean Springs, Mississippi, artist of some reputation, Stig was observant if not tactful, a combination of traits not unheard of in artists. We were on Horn Island, which lies ten miles off the Mississippi Coast, equidistant between the casinos of Biloxi and the shipyards of Pascagoula, in the Gulf Islands National Seashore. We were headed for a palmetto-clad dune near the eastern end of the island, Stig to capture the early morning light in oil on canvas, I to try to do the same on film.

My wife and I had met Stig when he was doing oil paintings of historic homes and boathouses along the Magnolia River in southwestern Alabama. As a paleontologist, I had shown him the natural wonders of the Alabama coast, often while

bemoaning loss and change in a shrinking ecosystem.

There is a scene in Louis Malle’s movie *Atlantic City* in which the aging Burt Lancaster ends a nostalgic monologue about the way things had been by saying to the young Robert Joy, “The Atlantic Ocean was something then...you should’ve seen the Atlantic Ocean in those days.” After one of my all-too-similar lamentations, Stig said, “I *know* what it was like then because that’s the way it still is out on Horn Island.”

That was one reason I was out there, to see if time travel was possible in the Gulf of Mexico. And it seemed to be. The island was completely deserted, the only sounds those of surf and seagulls. An anchored shrimp boat flying both the Confederate battle flag

and a Jolly Roger reinforced the illusion that we were in another time, as did the molted carapaces of horseshoe crabs, creatures that were ancient before the advent of the dinosaurs.

STIG’S RELATIONSHIP WITH HORN ISLAND echoes that of his mentor, the late Walter Inglis Anderson. He pointed out scenes that Anderson had painted and explained his unique style in the context of artistic theories developed by Adolfo Best-Maugard and Jay Hambidge, and the philosophical theories of Georges Gurdjieff and P. D. Ouspensky. So not only was I carrying heavy camera equipment and bulky art paraphernalia across acres of soft, shifting sand, but I was also being lectured on practical mysticism, the “seven basic motifs,” and the “rectangle of whirling squares.” I believe Stig was paying me back for telling him the scientific name (most of them accurate) of every creature we had seen.

As we made our way east, hundreds of birds flitted around us, a mixture of residents and migrants, but the most notable were the ospreys. Their large