FLORIDA BUILDINGS I LOVE



The Columbia Restaurant, on Seventh Avenue in Ybor City, dates to 1905. HAROLD BUBIL PHOTOS/SARASOTA HERALD-TRIBUNE

No. 67: Columbia Restaurant, 1903-05, Tampa

Harold Bubil Real Estate Editor Emeritus Sarasota Herald-Tribune | USA TODAY NETWORK

The venerable Columbia Restaurant has locations in Sarasota, St. Augustine, Celebration and Clearwater Beach, and two smaller cafes in Tampa, and I've eaten at all but two of them.

But when it comes to enjoying chicken or fish with an enormous mound of yellow rice, black-bean soup, warm Cuban bread with the crumbly crust, and, of course, the olive-laden "1905 Salad," there's nothing like the mothership the 1,700-seat, block-long "Gem of Spanish Restaurants" in Tampa.

Each location has delightful spaces, but none of them do more than echo the Ybor City location's authentic, Spanishinspired architecture. Each dining room is different, and the nightly (except Sunday) Flamenco music performances only add to the atmosphere.

Casimiro Hernandez Sr. started the restaurant on Seventh Avenue in 1905, and the Columbia has been in operation ever since. He expanded the restaurant in 1919.

"The original building was much smaller. We began as a small, 60-seat café in 1905," said Angie Geml, Columbia Restaurant Group's marketing and public relations manager. "But we actually started in our original part of the building in 1903, when (Hernandez) opened the Saloon Columbia on Dec. 17, 1903, the same day that the Wright Brothers took flight. In 1905, the Saloon Columbia became the Columbia Café. So the building was there in 1903."

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The Columbia Restaurant's neon sign in Ybor City.

Energy

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Establish efficient habits

Simple changes like adjusting your thermostat, turning lights off when you leave the room and keeping windows and doors shut when the air conditioning is on can go a long way, Glover says. Installing a smart thermostat, which automatically adjusts the temperature based on time, your habits and the season, can also help, she adds.

Hicks suggests leaving window coverings closed during the day to help keep the sun's heat out of your home and getting a seasonal tuneup to your air-conditioning system to make sure it's working efficiently. Changing your air filter monthly or quarterly also helps it run better, she adds.

Make small upgrades

Small home improvement projects, such as adding or replacing weather stripping that seals leaks around doors and windows, can significantly reduce your energy consumption, Hicks says. "Walk around your house with a lit candle and if the flame flickers, that's where drafts are coming in. That's a good candidate for weather stripping," she says.

Another simple job involves swapping out incandescent bulbs for LED light bulbs, which use at least 75% less energy, according to the Energy Department. "It seems like nothing but has an enormous impact when we do it collectively," Glover says.

Update your appliances

While purchasing new appliances can be expensive, the investment can pay off in energy savings, especially when you select products with the Energy Star certification, a program run by the Environmental Protection Agency. "If you have an old appliance and you can afford to upgrade to something energy-efficient, do that," Glover says, but notes that you should also prioritize other home updates such as better insulation.

Tackle home improvement projects

According to Angi's State of Home Spending in 2022 survey, 29% of homeowners say they plan to add solar panels to their home within the next five years. Updating the heating, ventilating and air conditioning system, or HVAC, was another popular choice (23%). Those kinds of big investments can pay off over the long run, says Hicks, who adds that federal income tax credits are available to help offset some of those costs.

Installing doors as a barrier to different zones in the house can help improve efficiency by letting you control what gets warm and what stays cool, says Jonathan Flynn, a senior building analyst with Home Energy Consultants in Pleasant Valley, New York, and a certified Home Energy Rating System rater. "One of the big flaws in most twostory homes is that there is a stairway that leads up and no door at the top or bottom," he says.

To prevent that energy leakage, Flynn installed a sliding door at the bottom of the stairs in his own home, but he recognizes that doing so might not be practical or desired by all homeowners with open floor plans. Still, he encourages homeowners to at least consider making these kinds of changes, even if they aren't currently popular.

After all, he adds: "Energy efficiency work in your home is one of the few investments you can make that will actually pay you back."

Columbia

Continued from Page 2I

My most recent meal was in the Patio Dining Room, a grand space with a balcony that wraps around a double-height space, putting diners on two levels. That part of the building was constructed in 1937 under the direction of Casimiro Hernandez Jr., who became the owner when his father died in 1930. He worked with architect Ivo de Minicis of Rimini, Italy.

"Resembling a courtyard like the ones found in Andalucia, the south of Spain, it is surrounded by a balcony, with a colorful mosaic-tiled fountain with the 'Love and the Dolphin' statue in the middle," Geml wrote in an email. "The statue is a replica of a sculpture found in the ruins of Pompeii. A glass skylight was installed, giving the room a wonderful bright and sunny look during the day, and an enchanted glow at night."

Ivo de Minicis had a broad knowledge of Italian and Spanish architecture, according to a cookbook published by the Columbia. The younger Hernandez had never been in Spain, but "he soaked up photographs and descriptions of Sevilla and its architecture. Of all Spanish cities, it most resembled Ybor City. Casimiro Jr. wanted to create a dining room that resembled an open Sevillano patio, surrounded by a balcony, with a big fountain in the middle."

Hernandez Jr. added music and Flamenco dancing as he made the restaurant more elegant. He also built the Don Quixote Room, the first air-conditioned dining room in Tampa.

More recently, the Gonzmart family has owned and operated the restaurant. Adela Hernandez, daughter of Carmen and Casimiro Jr. and co-author of the cookbook, married Cesar Gonzmart in 1946, and they took over the restaurant in 1953 from her father, whose health was failing, according to the history on the restaurant's website. Adela, a concert pianist, and Cesar were professional musicians before becoming restaurateurs.



Beautiful tile art adorn the walls of Columbia Restaurant. ROD MILLINGTON/ SARASOTA HERALD-TRIBUNE



The front of the Columbia Restaurant Restaurant faces 7th Avenue in Ybor City. ROD MILLINGTON/SARASOTA HERALD-TRIBUNE

FLORIDA

REALTY



The Patio Dining Room, a grand space with a balcony that wraps around a double-height space, putting diners on two levels at the original Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City. COURTESY OF COLUMBIA RESTAURANT



The Patio Dining Room, with a balcony that wraps around a double-height space, putting diners on two levels at the original Columbia Restaurant in Ybor City. That part of the building was constructed in 1937 under the direction of Casimiro Hernandez Jr., who became the owner when his father died in 1930. He worked with architect Iv de Minicis of Rimini, Italy. COURTESY OF COLUMBIA RESTAURANT GROUP

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