

HOTEL PONCE DE LEON

Flagler College, St. Augustine, Florida, United States of America



The Hotel Ponce de Leon was built between 1885 and 1887 in the Spanish Renaissance Revival style. Standard Oil co-founder Henry Morrison Flagler gave New York architects John Mervyn Carrère and Thomas Hastings their first commission, to create the complex of five buildings and gardens on a seven-acre site. They designed more than 600 buildings in the next 25 years including the House and Senate Office Buildings that flank the United States Capitol.

Architect Bernard Maybeck assisted with the design of the Hotel Ponce de Leon. He became one of California's most important architects. The building is the first major poured-concrete structure in the United States. It includes seventy-nine stained glass windows created by Louis Comfort Tiffany, the world's largest collection of his designs in their original locations. Thomas Edison provided the electricity and lighting systems. George Maynard designed murals in the Rotunda and Dining Hall. The "Exploration" series was reproduced in 1897 in the Library of Congress.

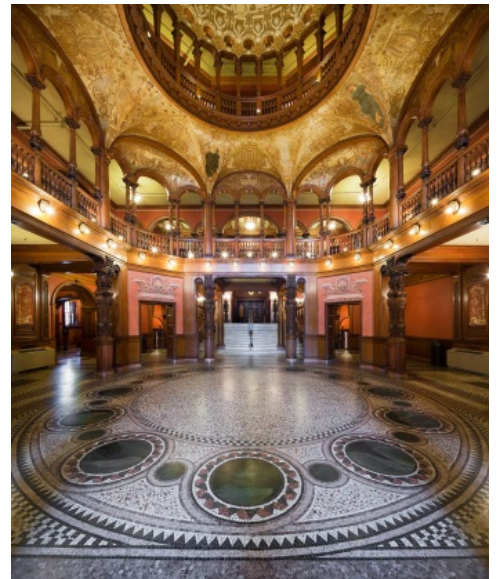
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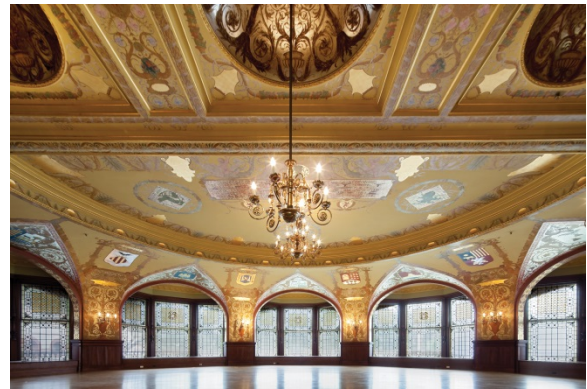
Spanish Heritage: The Hotel Ponce de Leon exhibits details from buildings that represent Spain's "Golden Age." They have been recognized for their universal value as World Heritage Sites. Seville's Alcázar palace is represented through strength and solidity, and the Cathedral's Giralda bell tower, a minaret from a former mosque with a Renaissance spire, added elegance. The Aljaferia Palace in Zaragoza is embodied through the use of brick and stone construction. The elaborate patterns and shell motifs were adopted from the University of Salamanca. The patterned tower roofs are adapted from the churches of San Martin and San Esteban in Segovia. The Alhambra in Granada provided inspiration for the courtyards, fountains and loggias.

The interior of the building pays homage to the New World's Spanish heritage as well. The Rotunda's ceiling arches features names of explorers including Pánfilo de Narváez, Hernando de Soto and Juan Ponce de León. Kingdoms and cities are represented through shields or coats of arms located in the Rotunda and Dining Room. Some of these are Cádiz, València, Vizcaya, Málaga, Castellón and Barcelona.

Spanish proverbs cast in terra cotta highlight the building's courtyard entrances and accompany the murals of galleons at full sail in the Dining Room. The terra cotta is one of the first uses of that material in the U.S., and the building is the first major poured concrete building in the country.

The ceiling in the Grand Parlor honors the date of 1512. King Ferdinand authorized Ponce de León's voyage that November. His efforts resulted in the exploration of "La Florida" where he landed in April of 1513. Circling the ceiling there and in the Rotunda are conquistadors helmets cast in plaster.





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When the building opened in January of 1888, the Hotel Ponce de Leon was considered to be the most luxurious and modern hotel in the world. It featured running water, steam heat, and more than 4,000 electric lights. Over the building's eighty years as a resort, it hosted thousands of distinguished guests from North America and Europe, including eight men who were or would become United States Presidents: Grover Cleveland, William McKinley, Theodore Roosevelt, William Howard Taft, Franklin Roosevelt, Warren G. Harding, John F. Kennedy, and Lyndon B. Johnson.

In March 1963, as part of the 450th anniversary of Juan Ponce de Leon's exploration of Florida and in preparation for St. Augustine's upcoming 400th anniversary, Spanish dignitaries visited. In 1964, Ambassador Antonio Garrigues and Director of Information Carlos Robles Piquer attended a dinner in the Dining room. In 1965 Minister of the Interior, Manuel Fraga Iribarne, Secretary General of the Organization of the American States, Dr. Jose Antonio Mora, Spain's Ambassador to the United States Marquis Alfonso Merry del Val, and Lt. Gen. Camilo Alonso Vega, were present at the ceremonies, including the unveiling of the statue of "Queen Isabella on Horseback" by Anna Hyatt Huntington installed in the Spanish Garden at St. George and Hypolita Streets.



Photograph: Stacey Sather ©

The former Hotel Ponce de Leon is now the centerpiece of the Flagler College campus as Ponce de Leon Hall.



Photograph: Flagler College

The room under the central dome at the top of the building is known as the Solarium. It was restored between 2009 and 2013 and rededicated for the 500th anniversary of Juan Ponce de León's landing to serve as an event venue. The terraces offer spectacular views of the St. Augustine skyline and the Atlantic Ocean.

From the east terrace, the National Historic Landmark colonial city of St. Augustine sits along the waterfront with its town plan and central Plaza de la Constitución. The Cathedral Basilica faces the Plaza as does Government House, which coquina wall remnants from the former 18th century Governor's Palace.

The city's north boundary is guarded by the Castillo de San Marcos, constructed between 1672 and 1695 on a plan derived from 16th century Spanish fortress engineer Bautista Antonelli. Farther north is the Mission Nombre de Dios with its 205 foot cross erected in honor of St. Augustine's 400th anniversary in 1965.

To the south is the Casa Monica Hotel and a view to the St. Augustine Lighthouse. The southern boundary of the city is marked by the historic St. Francis Barracks, built between 1724 and 1755, and now home to the Florida National Guard.

St. Augustine has a lengthy and proud Spanish heritage reflected in its town plan, architecture, religious institutions, and culture. The 450th Commemoration honors this heritage.

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