

## Something Very New at Old Vizcaya

Written by Terence Cantarella, BT Contributor  
August 2015

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### A contemporary art project aims to bring the estate's "lost spaces" back to life



James Deering, a slight, silver-haired man in a white linen suit and little round glasses, sits in the bright loggia of his Venetian-style mansion in Coconut Grove and watches a crowd of tourists wandering through his home. Servants move among the visitors, preparing for a dinner party later in the evening. They set the walnut table in the Renaissance dining room, bring the shine to a collection of gold-rimmed china, and set up the bowling alley, billiard, and smoking rooms.

But the modern-day tourists can't hear the clinking of dinnerware. They can't see the dapper gentleman or his servants. Deering and his staff at Villa Vizcaya have all departed this world. Today they're just specters of a long-gone era, a lingering presence in the Gilded Age home that is now a popular museum.

Gone, too, is the furniture from that sunny loggia where Deering liked to sit. The bowling alley where he cavorted with friends is now the museum café's kitchen. And the billiard room no longer has a billiard table. It's been turned into a gift shop. The spirit of those spaces, and several others at Vizcaya, has been lost.

Gina Wouters, Vizcaya's curator, believes contemporary art can bring them back to life. "Historic houses have a negative stigma," she says. "People think they're static, that they're monuments to people who are dead from times long gone, that they're nondimensional. But that's not always the case. So I want to look at the original design intent of these spaces and have

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contemporary artists respond to them.”



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