



The Legacy of John and Mable Ringling

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is the remarkable legacy of the circus entrepreneur, collector of art and financier who endowed the State of Florida with a rich cultural future. As a part of Florida State University, the Museum of Art, Circus Museum, and Cà d'Zan mansion, located on a 66-acre estate overlooking Sarasota Bay, is the state art museum of Florida.

In the spirit of America's wealthiest industrialists of the Gilded Age, John Ringling created an art collection, including paintings by Peter Paul Rubens, Velàzquez, Poussin, van Dyck and other Baroque masters as well as rare antiquities from Cypress. He generously bequeathed his "jewel" to the people of the State of Florida at the time of his death in 1936. Curators of art and generous donors expanded the European collection and added American art, Asian ceramics, drawings, photographs, Chiurazzi sculptures and contemporary art. To honor John Ringling's career as the circus impresario who united the Ringling Brothers and Barnum & Bailey circuses in 1907, the Circus Museum was added in 1948, twelve years after his death. Today, a continual series of temporary art exhibitions from around the world combined with the permanent collection to enhance the cultural experience at the Ringling Museum.

John and his wife Mable Ringling's first venture in Sarasota was the splendid Venetian Gothic mansion *Cà d'Zan*, built between 1924 and 1926 for a then-staggering sum of \$1.5 million. The Venetian styled palazzo reflects their European tastes and

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passion for opulence. Mable had developed affection for Venetian buildings on their travels and personally collected sketches and photos to incorporate into the design of the house. She



supervised the construction of the house with New York architect Dwight James Baum, builder of several New York mansions. Restored to its original splendor in 2002, their winter home and personal possessions reflect the flamboyant lifestyle they enjoyed while entertaining friends.

When the mansion was finished, John Ringling built the Museum of Art in the style of the Uffizi Gallery in Florence to house his growing collection of European paintings and art objects. He had accumulated a treasure house of items, the result of many trips to Europe while searching for new circus acts. For years he acquired columns, architectural details and many fine art objects. The result is a museum with a courtyard filled with bronze replicas of Greek and Roman sculpture, including a bronze cast of Michelangelo's *David*.

What began as John Ringling's personal vision in 1911 evolved into a world-renowned cultural legacy.

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