



A Must See in Sarasota

The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art is the remarkable legacy of circus entrepreneur, collector of art and financier John Ringling and his wife, Mable. The 66-acre estate includes the Museum of Art; the Venetian-Gothic *Cà d’Zan* mansion, winter-residence of John and Mable Ringling; historic grounds and gardens; the 18th-century Historic Asolo Theater; and the Circus Museums, including the home of the world’s largest miniature circus at the Tibbals Learning Center.

A Legacy

Blessed with entrepreneurial genius, John Ringling (1866-1936) and his brothers produced *The Greatest Show on Earth*. Together with his beloved wife, Mable (1875-1929), The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art, by many to be considered their greatest legacy, was created.



John Ringling left his art collection and estate to the people of the State of Florida at the time of his death in 1936. In 2000, the State of Florida transferred stewardship of the Ringling Museum to Florida State University, establishing the Ringling estate as one of the nations largest museum/university complexes.

A Lasting Love Letter

Their frequent travels to Europe provided John and Mable with a deep appreciation for the culture and treasures of the continent’s architecture. They fell in love with Venice, and determined that their home on Sarasota Bay



would emulate the grandeur of the Doge’s Palace, combined with the gothic grace of the Cà d’Oro. The mansion, completed in 1926, soon became the epicenter of cultural life on Florida’s west coast, attracting such luminaries as New York Mayor Jimmy Walker, entertainer Flo Ziegfeld, comedian Will Rogers, and many others. Lavish parties were held with orchestras serenading guests from the Ringling yacht, moored off the marble terrace. Their dream home, to be known through Venetian dialect as the “House of John,” became what one writer called John’s “love letter to Mable.”



Left: Peter Paul Rubens, *The Triumph of Divine Love*, c. 1625
Right: Nicolas Poussin, *The Ecstasy of Saint Paul*, 1643

A Passion for Art

European travel had kindled the Ringlings’ passion for art, John Ringling purchased masterpieces by Rubens, van Dyck, Titian, Velázquez, El Greco, Gainsborough and Reynolds among others, as well as a collection of Cypriot antiquities purchased from the Metropolitan Museum of Art. He dreamed of building a museum to make Sarasota a cultural destination.

In 1925, Ringling engaged architect John H. Phillips to design a museum that emulated Florence's Uffizi Gallery, echoing its graceful colonnades that open onto an Italianate garden. In October 1931, "The John and Mable Ringling Museum of Art" was dedicated and opened to the public.

Today, the Museum of Art displays European, American and Asian works. The Old Master paintings, among the rarest and most celebrated in the United States, are the most important of the Museum's holdings.

The Museum's collection continues to grow. In 2002, for example, it received the Koger Collection of Chinese ceramics, which features beautifully portioned and elegantly formed utilitarian and decorative pieces. In 2006, Dr. Helga Wall-Apelt, noted art collector and philanthropist pledged funds to support the future Dr. Helga Wall-Apelt Asian Art Gallery featuring her collection of magnificent jades, stone figures and bronzes.

A design approved by John Ringling himself inspired the Ulla R. and Arthur F. Searing Wing for traveling exhibitions to house major traveling exhibitions and display portions of the permanent collection.

A Wonderful Delight

In 1948, the Ringling Museum of the American Circus became the first museum to document the rich history of the circus. With many circus people living nearby, the collection grew quickly. Today, the Ringling Museum includes rare handbills and art prints, circus papers, business records, wardrobe, performing props, and all types of circus equipment, including beautifully carved parade wagons.



The Howard Bros. Circus model is an authentic replica of Ringling Bros. and Barnum & Bailey Circus, when the tented circus was at its largest

(circa 1919-1938). Complete with eight main tents, 152 wagons, 1,300 circus performers and workers, more than 800 animals and a 57-car train, the model is a 3/4-inch-to-the-foot scale replica and occupies 3,800 square feet in the Circus Museum's Tibbals Learning Center. The "largest miniature circus in the world" was created by master model builder and philanthropist Howard Tibbals of Tennessee and Florida.



A Jewel Box of a Theater

The Historic Asolo Theater is thought to be the only 18th-century theater in America. It was built in 1798 by architect Antonio Locatelli who designed the theater in the Castle of Caterina Cornaro, in the Italian town of Asolo, near Venice.

The theater was purchased by the Ringling Museum's first director, A. Everett "Chick" Austin, Jr. and installed on Museum property in the early 1950's. This remarkable resource has provided a venue for theater, opera and music performances and helped distinguish Sarasota as a cultural center. In 2004, it was cleaned and prepped for its new home in the Museum's Visitors Pavilion where today it continues to offer theater, dance, music and film.