

The Vinoy Park Hotel
501 5th Avenue NE
HPC #86-04 - Designated May 1986



The Vinoy Park Hotel, built in 1925 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, was one of the largest of St. Petersburg's "Boom Era" hotels. The owner and promoter of the Vinoy was Aymer Vinoy Laughner, a Pennsylvania millionaire who moved to St. Petersburg in 1920 to carry out his land development plans.

The Vinoy signifies the changing character and scale of hotels in St. Petersburg. At the beginning of the boom era, the city had a large number of boardinghouses but very few hotels of any size; the largest were the Detroit, the Poinsettia, the Floronton, the West Coast Inn, and the Huntington and were usually less than fifty rooms in number and entirely financed by their owner operators. Collectively these hotels provided fewer than five hundred rooms, which even with the help of the boardinghouses, was well below the number needed to accommodate the visiting throngs. The shortage of hotel space contributed to the aforementioned tent city phenomenon of 1920 and 1921 which prompted an outcry from city leaders who worried the city's economic growth was being throttled.

After World War One, hotel construction in St. Petersburg continued apace, although it decreased in size. The first hotels built after the war – the Alexander in 1919 and the Cordova in 1921, exhibited a change to masonry construction and architectural sophistication. The Ponce de Leon built in 1922 would be the first major hotel built along and facing the waterfront and represents this transition from small scale, mainly frame boarding houses and hotels built before World War One to large masonry hotels in the boom years of 1921 to 1926.

The Vinoy was designed by Henry L. Taylor of New York, who designed several other prominent St. Petersburg buildings including St. Mary's Church, the Jungle Hotel (Admiral Farragut), Little St. Mary's Comfort Station, Jungle Prada and the demolished Florida Theater, which was the first air-conditioned theater in St. Petersburg.

The Vinoy's Mediterranean Revival style of architecture featured a central block of seven stories with four canted wings. On the northeast, southwest, and northwest were five story wings containing bed/sitting rooms; the two-story southeast wing houses the dining area. The main entrance was through an arcade in the south facade of the central block. At the west end of the central block was an observation tower, a typical feature of Mediterranean style architecture, rising several stories above the roof parapet. This tower, the main entrance and the major windows of the dining room have baroque detailing in stucco. Around the windows of the top story and on the ballroom facade are scraffito murals. Visible roof surfacing was clay tile. Expense was not spared on the interior spaces of the Vinoy either. The entrance arcade stretching the length of the central block was floored in quarry tile. Parallel but interior to the loggia is a vaulted two-story lobby with balconied mezzanine and exposed pecky cypress timbers.