

DORIS *Everlasting*

For decades, Shangri La has served as Doris Duke's treasured Hawai'ian retreat. Now, the beachside estate known as an inspiring center for Islamic arts and cultures, continues to astonish.

by Wendy Sy

It may take a little searching, but in the south shore of Oahu, Hawai'i, along the crashing waves of the Pacific Ocean, is the historic home that belonged to Doris Duke, the late heiress, philanthropist and art collector. Named Shangri La, after a mythical hidden paradise in James Hilton's 1933 novel, *Lost Horizon*, the 4.9-acre property is an idyllic haven that radiates charm and character.

Today, Shangri La is a center for Islamic arts and cultures, welcoming visitors as well as artists and scholars in residence. It is owned and operated by the Doris Duke Foundation for Islamic Art (DDFIA), which is supported by the Doris Duke Charitable Foundation (DDCF), just as she wished for in her will. But the story really began 80 years ago, in April 1936, when a 23-year-old Duke and her first husband, American diplomat James Cromwell, 39, purchased land to build a home in Ka'alāwai, Hawai'i, after the couple had fallen deeply in love with the island during the last stop on their ten-month all-around-the-world honeymoon trip.

As the only child of James Buchanan Duke, a tobacco and hydroelectric power tycoon and benefactor of Duke University, and his second wife, Nanaline Holt Inman, Doris Duke was certainly no stranger to wealth. Born in Manhattan, she grew up in a number of spectacular houses, including a French Neoclassical,

The Jali Pavilion at Shangri La.

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PHOTO BY MARTIN MUNKÁCSI. SHANGRI LA HISTORICAL ARCHIVES, DORIS DUKE FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC ART, HONOLULU, HAWAII. GIFT OF HOPE CROMWELL HOPKINS.

Doris Duke, 1939.



PHOTO BY MARTIN MUNKÁCSI. DORIS DUKE CHARITABLE FOUNDATION HISTORICAL ARCHIVES, DAVID M. RUBENSTEIN RARE BOOK & MANUSCRIPT LIBRARY, DUKE UNIVERSITY, DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA.

three-story, 54-room mansion on the Upper East Side's "Millionaire's Row." Her family owned residences in Somerville, New Jersey, and Newport, Rhode Island. Duke loved to travel even from her early childhood. When her father died, she was left as the main heir of his fortune at the age of 12, rising to media fame as "the world's richest girl."

But Duke didn't want to be defined by her wealth. At six foot, one inch tall, she was a statuesque blond bombshell who was independent and witty, someone who craved adventure. Duke was a writer who contributed to *Town & Country* and *Harper's Bazaar*. She was also an environmentalist, a musician and the first female competitive surfer. Her upbringing provided access to a life of luxury, but it isn't clear where her interest in Islamic art came from—it was, however, apparent that she had a profound passion for it. During a visit to India on her honeymoon trip with Cromwell, Duke was captivated by the Taj Mahal, built under the patronage of the fifth Mughal emperor, Shah Jahan (c. 1631–47). There was something exceptional about the floral designs and precious stones, and it ignited her first commission, the Mughal Suite,



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Above: Doris Duke and James Cromwell in the Jali Pavilion at Shangri La, 1939.

Left: The bathroom of the Mughal Suite.

a marble bedroom and bathroom by C.G. and F.B. Blomfield, a British architectural firm based in New Delhi. Originally, it was planned to be shipped to the newlyweds' wing in El Mirasol, the Palm Beach home of Duke's mother-in-law, society doyenne Eva Stotesbury. But after the couple's visit to Hawai'i, they decided to return to the island four months later to build Shangri La, and they had the Mughal Suite

transferred to their new home.

"She was very hands-on every step of the way: where other people would just hire interior designers and go with it, she signed off on every final decision," Carol Khewhok, program manager at Shangri La, DDFIA, tells me during a tour of the estate. "What you find in the house is very much a reflection of her aesthetic sense and vision." Duke hired architect Marion Sims Wyeth, working closely with him in designing the space from the ground up. The footprints of the entire exterior were built within just two years: from 1936 to 1938.

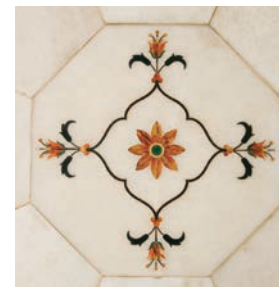
The setting is hidden enough that you'll spot it from afar if you looked very closely, but for the most part, it offers a discreet privacy that Duke was longing for.

Looking at it now, it's not difficult to see why the location was such an ideal spot to build a home. The land, purchased for \$100,000, is situated on the east side of Diamond Head, offering breathtaking panoramic views and clear sightings of the island's frequent rainbows. If heaven is a place on earth, this is it. The setting is hidden enough that you'll spot it from afar if you looked very closely, but for the most part, it offers a discreet privacy that Duke was longing for.

"She visited every year and spent several months. What we understand is, Shangri La was her baby and she loved it more than any of her other houses," says Khewhok. "Even though she didn't leave any personal diaries, she left very personal archives. Every bill, every receipt, everything related to the building was filed away very meticulously. We have quite a bit of material on her, and certainly on the refurbishing of the building." Speaking of her personal life, Duke ended her marriage to Cromwell after 13 years. She also briefly wed to Dominican diplomat and international playboy Porfirio Rubirosa in 1947, whom she also divorced less than one year later.



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DDFIA. PHOTO BY DAVID FRANZEN, 2008.



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Above: Entrance to the Mughal Suite.

Above left: Floor tile made in Agra, India, of marble and semiprecious stones.

Above right: Dining Room.

Left: Mughal Suite exterior.



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At the main entrance of Shangri La is a pair of wooden doors from Egypt, circa 1900 from the Mamluk Revival period. Three elements of Islamic art are present within the doors, with Arabic calligraphy mostly drawn from the Qur'an. The top panel conveys, "Enter them in health, secure. God the magnificent has spoken the truth."

To keep the house as close to its original state as possible and to preserve the delicate art inside, no air conditioners are installed. The air feels balmy; fortunately, the heat is not unbearable due to Hawai'i's breezy trade winds passing through the windows and doors. Paper jacquard-printed paddle fans are given to visitors upon entrance, courtesy of the Honolulu Museum of Art, which works in partnership with the DDFIA to provide guided small group tours and educational programs at Shangri La. "Before opening this property as a house museum in 2002, we had to arrange research on all the collections in here," says Khewhok, who explains that Duke's namesake foundation took five years to form after her death in 1993. "We brought in curators and experts to find out what we had, in addition to what the significance and value is. There were a lot of moving parts."

Each and every room is filled with distinct pieces that Duke collected over the course of nearly 60 years, sourced from Spain, Morocco, Egypt, Syria, Iran, Central Asia, India and parts of Southeast Asia, among other places. Duke was open-minded and never one to follow the rules; she mixed and matched works from different styles and eras. Among some of those works include a handcrafted 11-foot wide, 20-foot tall colorful tile mosaic at the center of the Central Courtyard, commissioned from a workshop in Isfahan, Iran, in 1938. The labor that went into the making of the piece is



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SHANGRI LA HISTORICAL ARCHIVES, DORIS DUKE FOUNDATION FOR ISLAMIC ART, HONOLULU, HAWAII.

Above left: Dining Room lanai.
Above right: Syrian Room.
Left: Doris Duke, 1930s.

truly extraordinary—batches of stone paste tiles were glazed in shades of blues, greens, yellows, reds and just about every color imaginable, and fired at different temperatures to enhance luster, then broken up into 17,000 pieces before being bonded back together again to create the final masterpiece.

Duke's living room includes a collection of Spanish luster ceramics and tilework displayed on its walls, nearly all of which were purchased from William Randolph Hearst's private collection in 1941. There are 12-by-20-foot floor-to-ceiling windows that open with a touch of the button—a technological feature that's surprisingly ahead of its time—and offers a direct view of the Playhouse, a poolside pavilion with 14 poppy red columns, inspired by the design of the seventeenth-century palace, Chihil Sutun in Isfahan, Iran. The space was used as a guesthouse and included its own living room, small kitchen and two bedroom suites.

Entering the Syrian Room feels like being transported to a different world. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, Duke organized a major renovation to create this space, which was once a billiard room,



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bathroom and office. Inspired by the late Ottoman period in Syria (which spanned from 1516 to 1918), she sourced historic elements from NYU's Hagop Kevorkian Center for Near Eastern Studies, combined with new pieces made in Hawai'i by local craftsmen. In a smaller room next door, includes a pair of vertical panels with fruit and floral designs, which were once housed in the Damascus Room of the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York.

The very last project that Duke worked on at Shangri La before her death at the age of 80 was replacing a tile on the wall in the hallway connecting the living and dining rooms. When none of the pieces she had in storage seemed like the right fit, her plans were to bring back the perfect one after she returned from her next trip (wherever that might have been), but never did, as she fell ill. To this day, there is visibly a missing tile on the wall, and just like her life—which for the most part was private—a sense of mystery and allure still lives on. ♦

Above: Playhouse, with Diamond Head in the background.

Left: Living Room.

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