



RESTORE, REPURPOSE OR START ANEW?

What owners are doing with
old homes on large parcels of
land

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A distinct memory of my childhood is an image of 106 Hope Road: ornate wrought iron gates leading to sprawling open land and, set back from the road, a mock Tudor-style two-storey house with its distinctive gabled roof, elaborate portico and decorative half-timbering of a black wood frame set on white plaster. To me, this was a dream house out of a storybook from a faraway land. Except, here we were, at this house named "Liguanea" with its mango trees and large tropical verandah, in the middle of turbulent 1970s Jamaica.

While it is not clear who originally built the house, it is known that "Liguanea" was bought by Arthur Sigismund Hendriks from Pedro Machado around 1918 when it became fashionable for prominent families to move out of the city to country areas "above the Half-Way-Tree clock" such as Mona, Barbican and Constant Spring. Arthur Hendriks was the founder of a successful furniture company and also the great grandfather of well-known comedian Tony "Paleface" Hendriks, who shared with me some of the stories about this house that his family occupied for over 50 years. Among the most interesting

anecdotes was that these iconic gates were actually commissioned from a forge in France and imported by Tony's grandfather, Arthur Ritchie Hendriks (also the owner of Jamaica's first Rolls Royce). Sometime after the property was sold to the Urban Development Corporation in the late '70s, the gates were then installed at "Vale Royal", official home of the Prime Minister, where they still stand today.

Of course time moves on and places change. "Liguanea"—both the house/site and the neighborhood—is a perfect example of this. After all, who today could even imagine the existence of such a house which, in its heyday, was surrounded by rolling pastures and woodland?

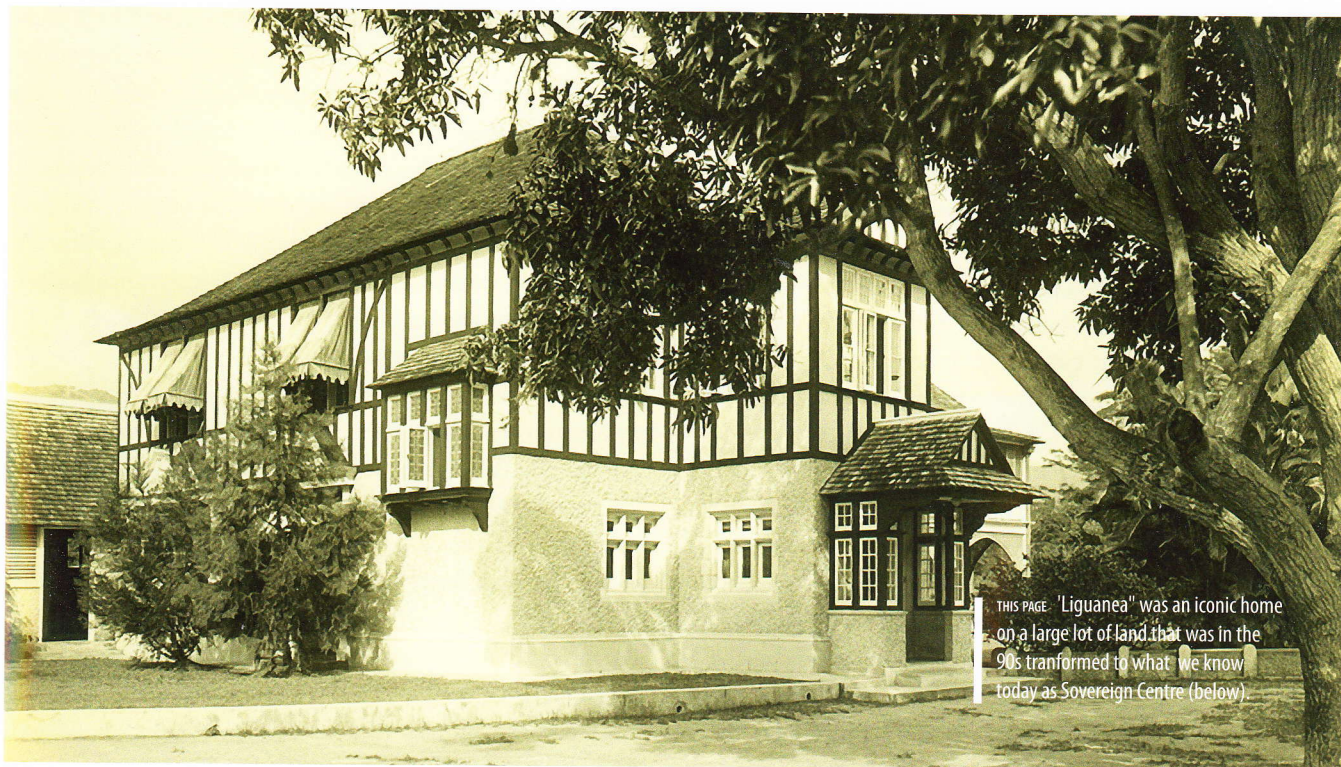
As the location of perhaps Kingston's busiest shopping mall, Sovereign Center, "Liguanea" is now the focal point of an area crammed with shops, apartments, schools, offices and yes, traffic congestion. However, most people would argue that despite the challenges—mainly caused by the lack of any meaningful urban planning—the expansion of this Kingston neighborhood has been for the better, what with so many more persons being able to benefit from the various housing developments in the area over the years.

Interestingly, there seems to be a new wave of development coming to Liguanea and its environs in terms of both restoration projects

and repurposed spaces. One such project is the beautiful 7 Seymour Avenue which has recently been restored by Issa Construction. Instead of tearing down the main house or cutting down the many trees on this large lot, the developers decided to enhance the property's existing design characteristics while creating ideal rental space in the main building and two other side buildings and even, more importantly in Kingston right now, providing some 80 parking spaces. And so, for example, the old art deco Gore cement tiles as well as wooden floors and staircase were sanded and polished rather than be covered with carpet or new ceramic tiles. In areas that needed substantial work, care was also taken in the selection of materials to maintain the integrity of the house. Project Manager at Issa Construction, Peter Issa, admits that this was not always the easiest, nor the cheapest approach, but one that the company is committed to and believes is certainly worth the effort—effort, it is hoped, that will also be appreciated by prospective tenants.

But this is not the first restoration project for Issa Construction. In recent years, the company has been working on some 10 projects downtown, including old office buildings that have been shuttered for decades. Currently they are working on the restoration of 169 Harbour Street which has involved placing a new steel frame inside the old building's exterior walls—in this way, the historic facade remains while structural integrity is assured. Again, not the easiest





THIS PAGE: 'Liguanea' was an iconic home on a large lot of land that was in the 90s transformed to what we know today as Sovereign Centre (below).

choice for a developer, but one that certainly honors the architectural heritage of the area.

Another opportunity to tap into some more recent history would be investing in the purchase of the former French Embassy building on Hillcrest Avenue in the Liguanea area which, at the time of publication, was still up for sale along with two other lots of adjoining land. Designed by renowned architect, Marvin Goodman and built in 1988, the magnificent building sought to compliment the then home of the ambassador on the property which was in the style of a French manor house. A classic French design that also celebrates Jamaican craftsmanship, this embassy building features a grand entrance with regal brass pulls fabricated in Jamaica, a sweeping Jamaican marble staircase, French doors built in Jamaica, as well as high ceilings and gorgeous brass chandeliers. The 14,000 square foot building certainly seems ripe to be repurposed as a set of luxury apartments or elegant offices with the option of adding other buildings on the surrounding lands.

However, as with any property, a developer's plans may call for something completely different (and perhaps more efficient) at Hillcrest as it did with "Liguanea". This appears to be the case with 5 Seaview Avenue, formerly owned from the 1990s by businessman and avid art collector Wallace Campbell who housed over 2000



pieces of Jamaican and Caribbean art there in a private gallery. The 1940s house, built in a Spanish-style and also once the home of legendary antique furniture collector, Burnett Webster, has recently been purchased by First Rock Capital Holdings and will reportedly be developed into residences in the near future. One hopes that at least some architectural nod to this historic home on Seaview will be incorporated into the development's design.

As the number of classic older homes around Kingston come up for sale, the question arises: should one restore, repurpose or tear them down and start anew? Obviously, housing and commercial space demands and the need for ROI will be the main drivers behind these decisions. Hopefully, however, a middle ground can be achieved so that future generations will have exposure to all the various styles of architecture that have played their parts in Jamaica's history. Δ



First Rock Capital Holdings has major development plans in place for the home at 5 Seaview Avenue.



An old business on Harbour Street is currently being restored by ISSA Construction