



Conception: The Beginning

In 1923, it all started with a party, a bet, and a game of golf at the St. Petersburg Beach Drive home of Aymer Vinoy Laughner, a wealthy Pennsylvania businessman. Famed golfer Walter Hagen drove several golf balls off the face of his host's prized pocket watch. The wager: whether the watch's crystal would survive Hagen's powerful drive. It did, and the golf balls landed across Beach Drive on a residential waterfront property.

After party guests suggested he purchase the property and build a grand resort under his name, Laughner acquired the land for \$170,000. Led by architect Henry L. Taylor and contractor George A. Miller, construction for The Vinoy Park Hotel began on February 5, 1925. The contractor set a construction record for completing the 375-room hotel in just under 10 months, in time for a grand opening on New Year's Eve 1925.

1920s & 1930s: The Golden Years

On New Year's Eve 1925, The Vinoy's first guests paused outside the hotel's imposing portals, admiring its facade of intricately carved stone columns and elaborate frescos. With a buzz of excitement, they stepped into the enormous lobby that revealed a vaulted ceiling that soared 25 feet, huge hand-stenciled pecky cypress ceiling beams, and massive chandeliers suspended by hand-tooled leather straps. Even the glazed tile floor gleamed with hand-painted accents.

The ballroom where they rang in the New Year was just as impressive: two stories high, 50 feet wide, and 125 feet long. It was a masterpiece of Georgian-style symmetry, described as one of the largest and most beautiful ballrooms in Florida. At \$20 per room, the hotel's nightly rate on opening day was one of the most expensive in the state.

The Vinoy opened just as the "Boom Era" in Florida was ending. However, it attracted well-to-do Northerners who were looking for a warm recreational destination in the winter. It quickly became one of the country's most prestigious and coveted getaways for the world's rich and famous families, along with Hollywood stars, celebrities, presidents and authors.



Despite the Great Depression gripping the country, the 1930s still attracted wealthy Northerners to The Vinoy, who arrived by train or car to experience the resort's carefree ambiance, lavish pleasures, and refined hospitality. Celebrities, presidents, and the local elite continued to flock to the hotel and solidified its position as the "grand dame" of St. Petersburg, whose residents called upon the hotel to host their most important social occasions. In 1932, candy entrepreneur David L. Clark purchased the Coffee Pot Golf Course on Snell Island for \$156,000. This would later become the golf course for The Vinoy.

1940s: The War Era

As the country eased out of the Great Depression and into the cold reality of the Second World War, The Vinoy Park Hotel shifted to a more patriotic purpose. On July 3, 1942, The Vinoy ceased operation as a hotel and was leased to the U.S. Army Air Force and subsequently the United States Maritime Service as a training center and housing for military cooks and bakers. By the time the training center was closed, more than 100,000 trainees had passed through the city of St. Petersburg.

After substantial repairs to the property were made in December 1944, The Vinoy reopened to the general public for the season. A year later, the hotel opened for its 29th season under new ownership when Chicago businessman Charles H. Alberding purchased the hotel for \$700,000. Weekly rates ranged from \$112 to \$224, including meals.

1950s & 1960s: The Decline

Post-war America coincided with the country's great highway expansion and the glory days of the automobile. Once again, Florida was the go-to destination for winter sun-seekers and The Vinoy welcomed them in much the same way as it had for the past three decades - as an elegant oasis overlooking Tampa Bay where guests could enjoy superb cuisine, incomparable service and a genteel ambience. However, the advent of air conditioning and The Vinoy's resistance to it prompted guests to seek cooler environs elsewhere and The Vinoy soon fell out of favor. By the late 1960s, the lack of regular maintenance took its toll on The Vinoy and it stood as a sad relic of St. Petersburg's golden past.



1970s & 1980s: The Bottom

By the early 1970s, The Vinoy had declined into a low-rent boarding house, commanding \$7 per night, far less than the extravagant nightly rate of \$20 in 1925. Finally, in 1974, the hotel closed its doors for good. Much of the hotel's effects - china, silver and crystal among others - were sold at public auction. In 1978, despite its dilapidated condition, the St. Petersburg community petitioned to secure the landmark hotel's place on the National Register of Historic Places. Yet, throughout the 1980s, the hotel remained empty and served as a haven to homeless wanderers and SWAT teams who used it for training.

In 1984, a voter referendum by the loyal citizens of St. Petersburg saved The Vinoy from the wrecking ball. In December 1989, the St. Petersburg-based Federal Construction Company was awarded a \$33.6 million contract to renovate and expand The Vinoy

1990s: Rebirth

In May 1990, after sitting unoccupied for 18 years, the restoration and reconstruction of The Vinoy began. For two years, architects, interior designers and local historians took careful consideration to preserve or recreate the historic landmark's original Mediterranean Revival design. The original pecky cypress beams, which were originally installed because they were impervious to pests, were removed, numbered, cleaned and replaced. The Pompeian frescos that so lavishly adorned the main dining room underwent meticulous restoration. The glazed quarry tile floor and the ballroom's ornate plaster castings were all restored to its original grandeur, as well.

Ironically, as the painstaking restoration of this local treasure unfolded, the hotel revealed a treasure of its own. Workers removing an oddly placed wall between the ballroom and lobby discovered a hidden vault containing 1,400 silver pieces, wrapped in newspapers dated 1934, and most stamped "The Vinoy."



During the two-year, \$93 million reconstruction of The Vinoy, the hotel was also expanded and enhanced to appeal to the contemporary traveler. In addition to the original pink palace, visitors would now enjoy a new guest tower, state-of-the-art tennis complex, 18-hole golf course designed by Ron Garl, two heated outdoor swimming pools and three spas, a fully-equipped fitness center, and 74-slip marina. And of course, The Vinoy was now fully air-conditioned.

In 1992, The Vinoy reopened as a Stouffer Hotel and restored its place as the epicenter of St. Petersburg's waterfront downtown. It was named by the National Trust for Historic Preservation as one of the Historic Hotels of America. In 1993, Stouffer Hotels was acquired by the Renaissance Hotel Group and the hotel was renamed The Vinoy® Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club.

The New Millennium

As the new millennium began, The Vinoy® Renaissance St. Petersburg Resort & Golf Club continued to incorporate additional innovations and improvements. A \$3.5 million renovation in 2008 included the complete makeover of the two signature Presidential Suites, the Plaza Ballroom, and meeting rooms. The Vinoy's Lobby Promenade Lounge was reconfigured with a new bar and expanded cocktail seating. The entrance to Marchands Bar & Grill, The Vinoy's signature restaurant, was redesigned to showcase the popular Vinoy Bar with the addition of private dining options.

The Vinoy continues to expand upon its legacy of comfort and elegance. Just as in years past, guests can enjoy luxurious amenities designed to pamper and restore within stunning surroundings and a chance to experience unique moments for a lifetime of memories.



Welcoming the Rich & Famous

From the moment it opened in 1925, The Vinoy attracted the rich and powerful. The grandest of all the 1920s Boom Era hotels, The Vinoy became one of the country's most prestigious destinations, a coveted getaway for notable families, such as the Pillsburys and Fleischmanns, along with Hollywood stars, celebrities, presidents, and authors. Jimmy Stewart, Babe Ruth, Admiral Richard Byrd, Calvin Coolidge, and Herbert Hoover were all known to grace The Vinoy Veranda at one time or another.

In the 1950s and 1960s, Marilyn Monroe and Joe DiMaggio visited the hotel. More recently, celebrities who have enjoyed the resort's hospitality include the late Paul Newman and Eartha Kitt, Raquel Welch, Julia Roberts, Brad Pitt, Jay Leno, George Clooney, Bo Derek, Carol Burnett, Vicki Lawrence, Tom Petty, Wolfgang Puck, Joe Namath, Melissa Etheridge, Tiger Woods, B.B. King, Dionne Warwick, Mikhail Baryshnikov, Olivia Newton John, and Harrison Ford.