Gene Beach, Florida’s West Coast Renaissance Man

Tom Adamich

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In descriptions of the concept of “art,” the terms “movement” and “motion” often feature prominently. Movement and motion are synonymous with Gene Beach. Beach was an auto-racing pioneer, a self-taught architect, and the quintessential visual artist. This essay details Beach’s accomplishments. Also included in Beach’s colorful story is information about the people associated with both Beach and the significant cultural and social movements that took place on Florida’s West Coast during the 1960s and 1970s. The abstract impressionist artists Jasper Johns and William Pachner, the theater pioneer Francis Wilson, and the noted educational psychologist and women’s rights activist Dore Beach (who was also Beach’s second wife) all play a part.

Early Years

Born in Battle Creek, Michigan, on November 17, 1919, Eugene Hamilton Beach learned at an early age how to creatively engage his curious mind to entertain himself.1 Beach was the only child of traveling chefs (Alexander Hamilton Beach and Gladys Beatrice Cook Beach) who traversed the East Coast working at such prominent resorts as New York’s Blue Lake Mountain Resort.2 Their winter employment brought them to Florida’s West Coast in the 1920s, which was rapidly becoming a popular area for wealthy winter residents. Many of the resorts catering to this group were located in St. Petersburg.3 Two examples are the Jungle Country Club Hotel, developed and built by Walter Fuller in 1925 and now the Admiral

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1 Eugene H. Beach, funeral card (source: Dore Beach).
2 Dore Beach, interview by the author, April 13, 2010.
3 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, April 23, 2010.

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Gene Beach poses with his parents by their car in this 1927 photograph. The Beach Family led a very nomadic lifestyle during Gene's early years.

Farragut Academy; and the Roylat Hotel, developed and built by “Handsome” Jack Taylor and now home to the Stetson University College of Law. The following description of the Roylat project from the *St. Petersburg Evening Independent* suggests why the Beaches may have considered Florida’s West Coast a prime area to work: “The Roylat will not be the usual type of hotel. . . . It will be a rambling group of buildings around a large court, or as the Spanish call it, ‘Plaza Mayor,’ resembling a medieval Spanish town of the fourteenth and fifteenth century with towers, turrets, balconies of wood and masonry.”

Since children of nomadic parents often move to the next location before they can develop real friendships, Beach spent hours alone drawing and designing. According to his wife, Dore, art and design came naturally to Beach. In Clearwater, where the Beach family eventually settled, Beach won an art contest at North Ward Elementary, where he depicted a detailed scene from the famous story “Hans Brinker.” Dore also notes that Beach spent an entire winter alone at the New York Museum of Natural History exploring and examining the exhibits while his parents worked in a posh New York hotel.

In Clearwater, the family built a modest Sears Catalog–type factory home

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6 Dore Beach, interview by the author, April 13, 2010.
at 2011 S. Osceola Ave.\footnote{Ibid.. The home still exists; however, the model type and catalog number for the home have not been identified.} Alexander and Gladys Beach had been working at the Washburn Inn, which, according to Clearwater historian Mike Sanders, was renamed the Grey Moss Inn in 1933. Owned by the John Welsh family until the early 1980s, the Washburn/Grey Moss Inn was Clearwater's main hotel for prominent guests until the larger, nearly twelve-story Ft. Harrison Hotel was built across the street in 1926.\footnote{Mike Sanders, interview by the author, April 23, 2010.} The Grey Moss was later razed to make room for what is now the Church of Scientology’s Super Power Building (a construction project started in 1998 and halted in 2003).\footnote{“Super Power Building,” Wikipedia.} In many respects, Beach's strong desire to become a self-taught architect may have originated from the nomadic lifestyle of his early years—from what Dore refers to as “not having a home.”\footnote{Dore Beach, interview by the author, April 13, 2010.} Of course, Beach would not begin to create homes for himself and others until after he married for the first time, attended the University of Florida, and served in World War II.\footnote{Beach married Lillian Speights in 1942; they divorced in 1955.}

\section*{Gainesville and the War Years}

In 1938, Beach began to study industrial engineering at the University of Florida and participated in ROTC. According to Hugh I. Kleinpeter in “Of Begra’s, Beach’s, and Grady Sports Racer,” Beach, like many college students during wartime, was called to active duty shortly before graduation. His initial assignment as a first lieutenant in an artillery unit led to a transfer to tank destroyer development duty in Texas and, subsequently, to Army Air Corps flight school, for which he was stationed at Andrews Air Force Base outside of Washington, D.C.\footnote{Hugh I. Kleinpeter, “Of Begra's Beach's and Grady Sports Racer: Sports Racing Cars Designed and Built In the 1960s by Gene Beach and Henry Grady,” Victory Lane 10, no. 6 (September 1995): 44-47, reprinted at Vintage Sports Car Racing, \url{http://www.virhistory.com/beach/beach/mag/vl95.htm}.}

While Beach was on a June 2, 1944, flight training mission, the engine in his P-47 fighter jet quit at an altitude of 1,500 feet. Beach was forced to eject at less than 500 feet from the ground (due to the rapid descent of the aircraft) and broke his back upon impact.\footnote{Ibid., 44.} According to Dore, Beach spent nearly two years encased in a full-body cast at Washington, D.C.’s Walter Reed Hospital recovering from his injuries. The experience proved to be a motivational period of reflection and mental development for Beach:

There is no doubt in my mind (as a psychologist) that Gene’s WWII injury gave him the motivation to prove (to himself) that he could have a “normal” life. He was married [Beach’s first marriage] and had one child before the injury. During his stay at Walter Reed Hospital, he saw many amputees and men with very serious burns that were
worse off than he was. He was determined not to spend his life in a wheelchair. During his rehabilitation, he had occupational therapy and he learned how to work with metal (silver) and leather. When he returned to Clearwater he opened a small leather goods shop with his father. In his later years he made me beautiful gold jewelry. 14

Thus, Beach’s metal/leather crafts appear to have provided him the opportunity to develop mechanical skills that would, combined with his penchant for design and art, prepare him to become both a renowned architect and automobile racing engineer.

Following his release from rehabilitation, Beach returned to the University of Florida and obtained a bachelor of industrial engineering degree in July 1946. 15 After graduation, Beach returned to the Washington, D.C., area and service in the Army Air Corps as a part of his treatment (and to fulfill an ROTC reserve requirement). After receiving a comprehensive medical evaluation and completing his reserve duties, Beach left the military in 1947, receiving the rank of captain. He was formally discharged on May 23, 1953. 16

Beach returned to Clearwater to work with his father in a small leather goods shop. Beach’s demonstrated talent for designing and creating visual images (coupled with the mental toughness and determination he developed while in traction) would prove to be the catalyst for what would become his most noteworthy and celebrated contributions—as an architect and race-car designer.

14 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, April 27, 2010.
15 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, April 29, 2010.
16 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, April 30, 2010.
In Clearwater, Beach sought to assimilate back into mainstream life. His first architectural job was as a draftsman expeditor for a Clearwater-based building contract firm, where he reviewed and edited basic structural plans and drawings. This experience led Beach to accept a more profitable job with Juice Industries in Dunedin, a building-construction firm that specialized in erecting structures for Florida's iconic citrus industry. His task there was to design processing plants and storage warehouses for frozen orange juice, which was then a recent innovation.17 While the original process of creating frozen orange juice concentrate was developed by Dr. J. E. Crump of the United States Department of Agriculture in Winter Haven during the 1920s, in 1944, three men—Dr. L. G. MacDowell, Dr. Edwin L. Moore, and C. D. Atkins—developed an improved process, which was patented in 1948.18

Although Beach's talent for visual design proved useful during his Juice Industries years, designing processing plants and storage warehouses offered him limited opportunity to express his multifaceted artistic ability. However, Beach took what he learned at Juice Industries and applied that to his next goal, one that would require the mental toughness and determination he had developed during his recovery—to become an architect.

Midcentury Modern

Dore Beach recalls the self-imposed “architecture curriculum” Beach pursued: “While working at Juice Industries, Gene knew he really wanted to pursue architecture. He remembered from his University of Florida days that a bookstore in Gainesville had an extensive collection of architecture books. He traveled back there several times, bought a number of books, and began to teach himself the fundamental concepts of architectural design.”19 As Beach progressed in his architectural education, he became knowledgeable about a number of important architectural styles and their significant creators. One style influenced Beach to the point that it became his signature style—the rapidly developing “midcentury modern.”

Defined as the influence of modern design on architecture and urban development from 1933 to 1965 (and identified by a phrase coined by Cara Greenberg in 1983 in her book Mid-Century Modern: Furniture of the 1950s), the midcentury modern style has been aligned closely with Frank Lloyd Wright's principles of organic architecture—which include a strong awareness of the land and natural surroundings as influences on design decisions—as well as with elements of the International and Bauhaus styles.20 Structurally, midcentury modern architecture features the use of post-and-beam design, which eliminates support walls in favor of incorporating open spaces, and the use of walls that appear to be made of glass.21

18 Vitamix Corporation, 2010, “History Notes from Frozen Orange Juice Concentrate,” www.practicallyedible.com/edible.nsf/pages/frozenorangejuiceconcentrate#ixzz0w0z1HLuC.
19 Dore Beach, interview by the author, April 13, 2010.
20 “Mid-Century Modern,” Wikipedia.
21 Ibid.
Midcentury modern architecture has also been referred to as the “California style.” As Beach began his architectural studies, one of his great influences, according to Dore, was Gordon Drake, a California-based architect and leading proponent of the California style whose promising career ended when he was killed in a skiing accident in 1952. Drake designed such notable homes as Edward Kennedy’s northern California home and his signature “unit house,” which became one of the foundations for the development of both the California style and, later, Sarasota modern (or the Sarasota school of architecture).22

Gordon Drake and the California Style of Architecture

Gordon Drake, according to a biographical article published in 1952, was a prolific architect who designed nearly sixty homes and six commercial buildings during his short career.23 According to fellow landscape architect Douglas Baylis, an associate: “He [Drake] would work fifteen or sixteen hours a day. . . . We were all starry-eyed, but Gordon was the most starry-eyed of us all.”24

Drake’s aforementioned “unit house” demonstrates what are considered the four key principles of what became known as the California style:

- outdoor living
- modular structure
- the architectural use of light
- precise elegance25

Drake’s interpretation of outdoor living included the use of multiple terraces that could be adapted as the family changed (for example, as children were added, which would have been of special interest during the post–World War II baby boom).26 His use of modular design promoted the benefits of including prefabrication and building integration into modern construction. In order to achieve this, strict use of discipline and order was incorporated—a departure from “rambling, close-to-nature” houses of earlier time periods. For example, the “unit house” design used a 3-foot dimensional standard (the width of a standard door plus frame) to enable a modular’s size to range from a one-room apartment to a two-bedroom house.27

Drake made architectural use of natural light by including such light-gathering structural elements as clerestories, glass gable ends, translucent screens, and large walls made solely of plate glass.28 These were supplemented by artificial light elements which were incorporated into the structural frame as means to accentuate a space’s direction or illuminate important structural patterns.29 Beach’s designs and his

22 “Gordon Drake,” Archiplanet.
24 Ibid., 95.
25 Ibid., 96.
26 Ibid.
27 Ibid., 98
28 Ibid., 100.
29 Ibid.
impressionistic use of light, as influenced by Drake, include unique interpretations of Drake’s light-enhancing vision (particularly those that maximize Florida’s abundant sunshine).

As Beach developed his own architectural style, both his ability to analyze his surroundings and his own keen awareness of the visual once again became a dominant elements in his work. Beach brought the same skills and quality of attention to bear in learning about architecture that he had applied in his childhood study of the exhibits of the New York Museum of Science and Natural History. In so doing, he developed an apparent affinity for particular design elements as well as admiration for the leading architects who created and developed those genres.

The Sarasota School of Architecture/Sarasota Modern

While there is strong evidence that Gordon Drake’s interpretation of the California style of architecture and thoughtful awareness of midcentury modern design elements and principles influenced Gene Beach’s Florida West Coast architectural style, there is also important evidence that Beach contributed indirectly to the activities associated with the Sarasota school of architecture. Also referred to as “Sarasota modern,” the Sarasota school of architecture is an interpretation of midcentury modern design that originated on Florida’s West Coast and was centered in Sarasota. Generally active from 1941 to 1966, the Sarasota school architects followed both midcentury modern and the California style in its promotion of architecture responsive to climate and terrain.\(^{30}\) Featuring the use of oversized sliding glass doors, large awnings/sunshades, walls of jalousie windows (movable parallel glass panels set in a frame that provided both ventilation and unobstructed views), and floating staircases (in multilevel examples), the Sarasota school of architecture consisted of several key figures, including Victor Lundy, Philip Hiss, Paul Rudolph, and Gene Leedy.\(^{31}\)

Paul Rudolph was a protégé of Ralph Twitchell, who participated in the 1938 Works Progress Administration (WPA) Lido Casino project on nearby Siesta Key and was considered a follower of Frank Lloyd Wright.\(^{32}\) It was Rudolph (in partnership with Twitchell) who brought the residential designs of the Sarasota school to life in significant volume, designing and building experimental and speculative homes for family and friends. In 1952, Rudolph split from Twitchell and started his own firm. Later, Leedy joined Rudolph as one of his first employees; the pair took on larger projects, in addition to homes, including Sarasota High School and Sarasota City Hall.\(^{33}\)

One of the most notable residential examples of the Sarasota school was the Umbrella House. Designed by Hiss and Rudolph, the Umbrella House is

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30 “Sarasota School of Architecture,” Wikipedia.
31 Ibid.
33 Ibid., 15.
an interpretation of midcentury modern design elements and principles within a subtropical climate context. According to the online “History of the Umbrella House,” the entire north and south exposures of the house were constructed of jalousie windows (to promote natural cooling from both the Gulf of Mexico and Sarasota Bay breezes), and the home was covered with a wooden trellis structure, which shaded both the home and the pool area—hence the use of the term “umbrella” to describe the dwelling.

The design elements of Beach’s numerous residential and commercial projects show the influence of the Sarasota school/Sarasota modern design elements, while remaining distinctively “Beach” in their function and theme. In addition, his sensitivity to both the desires of the client and to professionalism in client interaction enabled Beach to develop an impressive and unusual skill: according to Dore, “he could print and draw plans in reverse so clients sitting across the table from him could read them.”

**Early Tampa Bay Designs**

One of Beach’s early designs, a single-family residence, was located in Belleair, at 240 Garden Circle, and was known as “Seven Pines.” Recently listed for sale by a real-estate agent specializing in Sarasota school homes, “Seven Pines” is attributed to Beach in 1957. The multilevel home remains true to the Sarasota school’s use of post-and-beam construction and includes terrazzo flooring, clerestory windows, and Ocala block walls (tan-colored concrete blocks that were often glazed and, in this instance, produced in Ocala—part of a network of Florida-based producers of concrete blocks whose unique colors, shapes, and designs were identifiable to the customer by the towns and cities where they were produced). Also in accordance with the design precepts of Sarasota modern (and with Beach’s sensitivity to his surroundings) is the home’s use of large expanses of glass, which maximize the flow of light into the home and provide impressive views of the tropical landscape and gardens that surround the home.

Another early Beach building design was the North Greenwood Branch of the Clearwater Public Library. Opened in September 1962, the library, located on Palmetto Street (next door to what was the Pinellas High School), originally held fifteen thousand volumes and today includes the holdings of the Edward Allen Henry, Jr. Special Collection on Negro Culture and History.

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34 The Umbrella House, http://www.umbrellahouse.com/history.html
35 Ibid.
36 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, May 29, 2010.
Sarasota’s Umbrella House featured several innovative design elements, including floor to ceiling jalousie windows and a wooden trellis that covered the whole structure like an umbrella.
Gene Beach

Beach would design numerous other Sarasota school/midcentury modern structures, including his own home, located in Lutz, Florida. According to Dore, construction began on the post-and-beam structure in 1978. Beach favored both the post-and-beam construction technique and Sarasota school/midcentury modern design even though both had fallen out of favor by the early 1970s. Beach and Dore moved into the home on March 18, 1980. The home is situated on a lake and is a multilevel, open-concept design. According to Dore: “People who visit the house describe it as magical [emphasis added] because it looks out on a beautiful lake. . . . The roof is blue glazed ceramic tile. There are several buildings in Sarasota with the same tile.”

Gulf Coast Plantation Style

Later Beach designs would reflect both changing tastes and modified Florida building requirements. The Mellish/Bostow House, located in Tampa, was completed in 1986. Featured in the March 1990 issue of Florida Home & Garden, this Beach creation is an interpretation of the Gulf Coast plantation style.

Because the home is located in a flood zone (approximately one block from Hillsborough Bay), local building codes required the living area to be 16 feet above ground level. Both Hartley Mellish and his wife, Diane Bostow, were University of South Florida professors (and were also, at the time, colleagues of Dore Beach), and they had definite ideas as to the type of home they wanted: “There’s a house on Cabbage Key that has many of the design features we were looking for—the large overhanging roof, lots of painted wood, porches, and the fairly simple straight vertical lines.” Built in phases over a five-year period, the home Mellish and Bostow built had a small guest house, adjacent to the main house, where the couple lived during the main construction phase. That strategy also enabled Bostow to act as general contractor.

While the Mellish/Bostow House is most closely related to the Gulf Coast plantation style, both Beach and Dore confirm that the house design is definitely a “Gene Beach original”: “It has a formal appearance, with the precisely spaced exterior columns, traditional doors and windows, and the very steep and sheltering roof. Other elements—the furnishings, the molding and trim, for instance, give it an English elegance.” Dore states: “The owners of the ‘Florida House & Garden’ house [were] colleague[s] of mine. The couple became aware of the work [Beach] was doing in Temple Terrace[,] which is near USF. Gene’s interpretive style was ‘Gulf Coast

40 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, May 24, 2010.
41 Ibid.
43 Ibid.
44 Ibid.
45 Ibid., 52.
Plantation Style.’ . . . The owners had very definite ideas about what they wanted the house to look like from the outside. It was built on 3 lots and the pitched roof is copper. It is reminiscent of the plantation homes built around the entire Gulf Coast in the early 1800–1900s. Gene, at the time, said that it was not easy to label its style. Throughout the entire design process Gene ‘educated’ the clients on what they could and couldn’t do. He spent many months on the design process.”46

Beach continued: “I like to have some historical reference in the homes I design. . . . This [home] shows the islands’ influence, where many of the houses have elements of the original settlers’ homelands—the Dutch, French, Spanish, or English, for instance.47

Another important element of Beach’s contribution to the Mellish/Bostow House was his attempt to remain true to his midcentury modern/Sarasota school of architecture roots by using post-and-beam construction, which yielded the following results, as detailed by Beach: “That’s one of the cupola’s two functions . . . as a ventilator. The fan draws air up through the house, cooling it as Caribbean houses are often cooled. And it answers the need for fantasy. When you go up onto the deck area, you feel as if you’re in the crow’s nest of a ship. The stairs are a ship’s ladder, which adds a bit of romance.”48

Another unique aspect of Beach’s design of the Mellish/Bostow House was the design process he used, which involved both the use of detailed drawings and educating his clients. According to both Mellish and Bostow, the results of Beach’s efforts were extremely beneficial, aesthetically and financially:

Mellish: A good architect is also an artist with a sense of proportion that builders don’t necessarily have.

Bostow: Gene added the style and grace. . . . For instance, the fanlight over the doors, the curved staircase. I could walk around this house and show you exactly what saved us money and time. We had just one change-order from the original plans [which ran approximately 75 pages]. . . . When I figured out my accounts at the end, I was within one-half of one percent of our original budget.49

Beach’s ability to celebrate important architectural design movements using his own interpretations of each genre—be it the California school of architecture, the Sarasota school of architecture, or the Gulf Coast plantation style—illustrates his awareness of both his clients’ design preferences, as well as what he felt was important to the overall structural integrity, the surrounding natural landscape, and unique artistic details of the design. It was his attentiveness to others’ expectations and his own keen sense of individuality that would lead him to his next major artistic endeavor—as race-car designer and builder.

46 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, May 24, 2010.
47 Hunter, 53.
48 Ibid.
49 Ibid., 102.
Race-Car Design

Not only did Beach incorporate his unique interpretation of midcentury modern design elements and principles to produce homes and public buildings that could easily be branded as uniquely “Beach,” he created a whole line of race cars that, to this day, are known worldwide in the vintage racing community. These cars, part of the Formula Vee class of sanctioned, Sports Car Club (SCCA) vehicles, are known as “Beach cars.” According to Alice Bixler in her 1966 *Road & Track* article entitled “America’s Race Car Builders: Beach Cars”:

> It is to Gene’s everlasting credit that he has avoided naming his cars anything but Beach (and perhaps an occasional number if he remembers). With manufacturers tacking such designations as “Malibu,” “Catalina,” and “Riviera” on their models and with such an adaptable last name as his, it must have been a terrible temptation to tag the cars with such titles as the “Daytona Beach”, the “Miami Beach”, ad infinitum (the world is full of “beaches”). . . . Occasionally, a few soundly-trounced soreheads refer to the hard-to-catch Beach buggies as “Sons of Beaches” — or something like that!  

Wally Korb, in his article entitled “Formula Vee,” felt it was imperative to “recognize the beastie before it rears back to snap at us.” Thus, he describes the Formula Vee (also known as the Super Vee) in the following terms: “Essentially, the machine is based on a sturdy tubular space frame, modified [but basically derived] VW [Volkswagen] running gear, and very stringently controlled VW powerplant and transaxle.” The concept behind the development of the Formula Vee appears to have been to build a race car using relatively simple structural and mechanical design components that would be easily accessible to those of modest means who wanted to race cars, but who could not afford the high cost and maintenance of custom design. Korb adds: “You can tune it for racing, but don’t change the basic intent of the design . . . Generally, they [the Formula Vee specifications] are aimed at making the car as interesting and competitive as possible while being restrictive in certain key areas . . . to insure some degree of success in this type of Formula.”

Earlier attempts at creating an affordable Formula racing class (identified by Korb as “Formula Junior”) had proven to be less than successful due to the high cost of maintaining an individual, custom design. Since the Formula Vee design promotes interoperability with respect to the use of existing parts and design, the use of inexpensive Volkswagen components seemed logical.

Beach became one of the leading designers of this new “affordable Formula

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50 Alice Bixler, “America’s Race Car Builders: Beach Cars,” *Road & Track* 20, no. 10 (October 1966): 83-86.
52 Ibid., 53.
53 Ibid., 55.
The Beach Type II was one of Beach’s open wheel designs. His designs were immediately popular in the U.S. and eventually caught on in Europe as well.

racing class.” His Beach Formula Vee Type 5C, as profiled in a 1964 brochure, could be purchased unassembled for $1,250; completely assembled (but without an engine—identified as a Stage One car) for $2,150; completely assembled (including a Volkswagen engine—designated as a Stage Two car) for $2,450; and completely assembled (with the addition of a dyno-tuned Volkswagen engine/exhaust system—branded as a Stage Three car) for $2,750. A top-of-the-line Stage Three Beach Formula Vee race car would also include track testing (this feature could also be purchased at the Stage Two level). To complete the package (and maintain affordability), a Beach race-car trailer was available for purchase, priced at a mere $325.54

According to Kleinpeter, Beach’s 1964 designs and race-car production company, Competition Components, Inc. (located at 2032 Gentry Street in Clearwater), began life as a hobby for Beach in the late 1950s. It was then that he met Henry Grady, who owned Vitesse Sports Cars, located at 1401 S. Fort Harrison Ave. in Clearwater.55 Grady and Beach partnered to create an early version of the Formula Vee using components from a Fiat 600. Once again, Beach utilized his well-

54 Eugene H. Beach, Beach Formula Vee Type 5C (brochure), (Clearwater, FL: Competition Components, Inc., [ca. 1964]), 2.
Gene Beach developed architectural and artistic abilities to create in yet another medium—vehicle body design. According to Kleinpeter: “The chassis of this car was a space frame of welded up square milled steel tubing. The suspension pivot points were identical to the Fiat 600. The attractive and aerodynamic body of this car was aluminum, and was personally created by Beach, who had no experience at all at this craft, by hammering it out over the famous ‘stump.’”

The Beach/Grady design (collectively called the “Begra”) ran its first SCCA race at Cocoa, Florida, in 1959. It was on the Cocoa course that, with Beach at the wheel, the Begra design won its first SCCA-class victory. The victory began what was to become an uninterrupted string of SCCA victories for the Begra design that spanned nearly five years.

Later Begras continued to use Fiat 600 components (as well as some Saab engines, which included limited engineering support from Saab’s corporate design headquarters). These cars logged impressive wins at Sebring and at the Nassau Bahamas’ Speed Week. These cars also represented Beach’s desire to achieve design perfection; he substituted some Triumph vehicle components in later Begra designs in order to improve on the overall suspension design and handling characters of these cars.

During this period, Beach was still actively working as an architect and participating in Florida’s West Coast architectural scene. However, it was also at this time that Beach began to build the Formula Vee in small numbers, which eventually

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56 Hugh I. Kleinpeter, “Of Begra’s Beach’s and Grady Sports Racer,” 2.
57 Ibid., 3.
led to Grady and Beach abandoning their partnership and Beach’s sole dedication to Formula Vee production.58

Beach gained an international reputation as one of the Formula Vee’s top designers. After achieving a level of success similar to the Begra designs at several SCCA sprint-car venues (including Nassau, Sebring, and Watkins Glen), Beach’s Formula Vee garnered the attention of Porsche executives in Zuffenhausen, Stuttgart, Baden-Württemberg, Germany. They wanted to introduce the Formula Vee to European racing audiences as well as provide average Europeans who wanted to race with a low-cost racing option. To achieve that end, Porsche requested an initial order of 63 Beach Type 5 kits to be delivered to the Porsche Assembly Plant in Zuffenhausen, where Porsche engines would be added and assembly completed. These kits, identified as “open-wheel” designs (that is, sans fenders and bumper assemblies), consisted of a frame, suspension, and body components. This initial order led to a total production of nearly four hundred Beach cars at the Clearwater Competition Components factory.59

While today’s Formula Vee remains true to its initial mission of being affordable for the average person to build, maintain, and race, Beach’s own participation in the design and manufacture of Formula Vee race cars waned in the early 1970s. Changing economics on Florida’s West Coast and personal circumstances encouraged Beach to return to architecture as well to pursue another talent noted earlier in this essay—art. With his painting, Beach would once again make a significant impact on Florida’s West Coast communities through his ability to creatively interpret a genre and actively participate (as well as lead) within emerging cultures and communities.

The Artist and Dore Beach

While Beach’s successes as both a race-car designer/builder and an architect testify to his status as a renaissance man, it is in his ability as a visual artist that he begins to reveal both his vast talent and his human side, from both a professional and a personal point of view. It is also at this point that Beach reveals the role that another individual plays in his success, both as admirer and muse: the multitalented Dore Beach.

The Francis Wilson Playhouse is an example of the impact of the 1920s Florida land boom. Located at 302 Seminole Street in Clearwater and opened in 1930, the playhouse is named in honor of Francis Wilson, a successful Broadway actor and producer in the early twentieth century. Wilson is considered one of the founders of the Actors Equity Association, whose affiliation with the American Federation of Labor (AFL) led to one of the first actors’ strikes to achieve better working conditions for vaudeville and stage actors of the time.60

58 Ibid.
59 Eugene H. Beach, Beach Formula Vee Type 5C, 3.
Wilson retired from acting in 1920, at the age of sixty-six, to write. However, his status and activity in New York’s arts and cultural community allowed him to spend winters in Florida—specifically the Clearwater area. It was there that he became active in developing what is often known as the “Little Theater” in Clearwater. Wilson sought the best of national and local talent for his plays and productions. One of the local participants in early “Little Theater” productions was Dorothy Dean Dimmitt, whose family is best known on Florida’s West Coast for their large Chevrolet and Cadillac auto dealerships. Although Dimmitt was an emerging actress at the time (1933), she was able to meet Wilson’s high standards and appeared in several Wilson-led productions. Dimmitt was fortunate to have worked with Wilson, who died unexpectedly in New York on October 7, 1935, as a result of complications from surgery.

Nearly thirty years later, another actress successfully auditioned at what was renamed (in 1937) the Francis Wilson Playhouse. Dore was a relatively recent transplant to Florida, having arrived in 1957 from Brooklyn, New York. Known in those days as Dorothy Mattson, Dore had been an active spectator in the New York art scene. She and her first husband had moved to Florida and had two children. Although Dore was aware that most of the arts culture in the region was based in Sarasota, she made an effort to seek out the few bright spots in the developing Tampa Bay arts scene, including the Francis Wilson Playhouse.

Dore had acted in several local productions (beginning at the Footlight Theater in Largo in 1963). A reporter for the Clearwater Sun, Eric Adkins, encouraged Dore to join a summer theater group (at the time, he was directing Major Barber, the play by George Bernard Shaw). She decided to try out for a part at the Francis Wilson Playhouse after being approached by one of its directors at the time, Dorothy Ellison. While attending a cast party following one of those productions, Dore met a handsome gentleman who had designed the sets for that particular production. She was struck by his good looks and unassuming nature. That man’s name was Gene Beach.

Beach’s first words to Dore were, “You’re an anomaly!” Thus began what would become a thirty-nine-year arts (and life) partnership, as well as the beginning of their mutual admiration. Beach and Dore would make important contributions to the growth of the Tampa Bay arts community, and Dore worked actively, on the local and national level, to develop equal rights for women.

Beach’s ability to identify how people’s qualities and characteristics might

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61 Ibid., 2.
62 Mike Sanders, e-mail, May 19, 2010.
64 Ibid.
65 Dore Beach, interview by the author, April 13, 2010.
66 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, June 1, 2010.
67 Ibid.
contribute to the success of a particular endeavor, certainly were demonstrated with respect to Dore. A few years after their marriage on October 9, 1967, at the Manatee County Courthouse in Bradenton (and recognizing both Dore’s intelligence and potential), Beach encouraged Dore to return to college to complete her bachelor’s degree (a pursuit she had suspended when she became a mother during her first marriage).68

Choosing to attend the University of South Florida, she received a bachelor’s degree in counseling in 1970. When Dore then applied to the Graduate School at USF, she was told that the school “did not take married women [because] they did not complete graduate degrees.” As a result of that experience in discrimination (and, once again, mostly due to Beach’s encouragement), Dore chose to enter USF’s guidance/counseling program (housed in the College of Education) and completed her master’s degree. She later pursued a Ph.D. in behavioral science at Nova University. Dore was hired by USF in 1972, where she worked as a counseling psychologist and faculty researcher for thirty-one years until her retirement in 2003.69

Dore became a leader in analyzing the role of ethical conduct as it applies to research – understanding what motivates individual scholars to create and identify what belongs to them (that is, their personal intellectual property) as well as recognizing the individual contributions of others (for example, using credible information, properly citing another’s work, avoiding plagiarism). Her book, The Responsible Conduct of Research (1996), examines such issues as intellectual property as well as an array of other ethical research issues in the areas of scientific research, moral reasoning, research grants, and research misconduct.70 Dore also wrote (with Elaine Fantle Shimberg), Two for the Money: A Woman’s Guide to a Double-Career Marriage (1981), in which Dore and Shimberg discuss strategies for working spouses to manage both the demands of a career and a marriage/family life. The book was one of the first to explore the “two-income household” and identify ways to make successful what was at the time a relatively new phenomenon.71

In both instances, Gene Beach acted as Dore’s muse and supported her during the long hours of research and editing associated with both publications. It was also Beach who both encouraged and supported Dore’s efforts to help found Tampa’s Centre for Women and serve as a charter member of the Athena Society. Originally called the Woman’s Survival Center, the Centre for Women was founded in 1977 by a group led by Dore Beach. According to the Centre for Women Web site: “The Centre for Women serves over 3,000 individuals and families in Hillsborough County each year. From substance abuse treatment and employment services for women, to

68 Ibid.
69 Ibid.
70 Dore Beach, The Responsible Conduct of Research (Weinheim, Germany: VCH, 1996).
family counseling, services for seniors, and programs for girls, the Centre ensures help is here for those who need it most.”

Dore adds: “The Centre for Women was originally designed to help the displaced homemaker who is either down on her luck or finds herself having to reenter the job market after being a homemaker for several years.”

With respect to the Athena Society, Dore writes:

The Athena Society is an organization of Tampa Bay professionals who have both demonstrated leadership in the community and committed themselves to promoting equality and opportunity for women. Started in 1976 to support passage of the Equal Rights Amendment, it remains true to its purpose today. I was the second president (1978-1979) and one of the original 20 members that helped set up our Mission Statement, By-Laws, and requirements for membership, which is by invitation and limited to 160. From the beginning, Athena members have worked to improve the status of women by producing programs and forums designed to assist women who were in or returning to the work force. The organization has developed position statements concerning such public policy issues as choice [sic], day care, tolerance, nonviolence, pay equity and affirmative action. Today, The Athena Society is a member of The International Alliance for Women, an organization that links business and professional individuals and women's networks around the globe.

In both the Athena Society and the Centre for Women projects, Dore consulted extensively with Beach about details associated with the initiatives as well as the impact that Dore’s involvement in both organizations (considered by some at the time to be somewhat controversial) might have on her career as well as Beach’s (who had returned to architecture full-time in 1969).

Dore had to consider what was, at the time, the couple’s significant role in the developing Tampa Bay arts scene and, in particular, Beach’s growing presence as an artist and the ever-increasing influence of the Gulf Coast Art Center and its programs/artists.

The Gulf Coast Art Center

The year 1957 marked the beginning both of Beach’s development as an abstract expressionist artist and his involvement at the former Gulf Coast Art Center in Belleair (now known as the Gulf Coast Museum of Art and located in Heritage Village in Largo). Founded by Mrs. Georgine Shillard-Smith, a noted patron of the arts in Belleair who had donated seven acres of land to house an arts center in 1944,
the Gulf Coast Art Center was home to several emerging artists and artist colonies, including the abstract expressionist artist William Pachner, whose Studio 1212 was a quaint Spanish building located on Gulf Coast Museum of Art property where local women and men attended the famous artist’s classes. Beach, a student of Pachner, later purchased that building, once located at 1212 S. Myrtle Avenue, to house the offices for Competition Components, Inc. Beach later sold it to create space for a condominium development project.

Pachner also invited the noted New York art critic Clement Greenberg and notable fellow abstract-expressionist artists Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns.

In addition to his abilities as an architect and race car designer, Beach was also an accomplished artist.
to establish a presence at the Gulf Coast Art Center. While the two artists were visiting the Clearwater area during those early days, Beach invited them to stay at his Clearwater home.

While the Gulf Coast Art Center/Gulf Coast Museum of Art and William Pachner served as guiding forces for Beach as he was developing his own painting style (as did Dore’s inspiration and the couple’s friendship with Lorraine and William Pachner, as Dore notes),81 Beach’s interpretation of abstract expressionism led to his broad use of color and dimension in his art. According to Dore, Beach later embraced color field painting, which incorporated the use of a house painter’s brush, ordinary house paint, and a large canvas. Beach, like Pachner, experimented in artistic styles other than abstract expressionism, creating works in the areas of portraiture and realism. Beach also made use of what had become a vast library of art books—which motivated him to study art with the same passion and dedication he had brought to his study of architecture. Dore writes that “as a result [of his experimentation with a variety of painting techniques and styles], it is difficult to label his [Beach’s] style.”82

Other influences on Beach’s art include the changing demographic in the Tampa Bay area. As Dore notes: “My view on the developing arts culture on the west coast, is that when I arrived in Clearwater in 1957, everything that was happening was in Sarasota. The Fine Arts Museum in St. Petersburg did not exist; however[,] Tampa had an ‘Art Center.’ There was, as I have said before[,] a paucity of culture. However, having said that, when I look back it is unbelievable what has happened since then. In 1957 the majority of the population in Clearwater/Belleair were mainly winter residents. When Honeywell located in Clearwater the population changed.”

**Tampa Bay Now and in the Future**

In this essay, I have attempted to offer insight into the talents and contributions of Eugene H. Beach as artist, race-car designer, and architect, and to document Beach’s participation in the cultural, social, and political landscape of Florida’s West Coast during the past century. Beach’s accomplishments, in many cases, represent the transition of Florida’s West Coast from a seasonal resort-style location (where neighborhoods often could be found empty from the months of April through November) to a year-round cosmopolitan community—one that has transformed Florida’s West Coast (and the Tampa Bay area in particular) into a leading cultural and economic center. While such changes don’t occur without compromises and change, including threats to the region’s fragile environment, the cultural, social, and artistic influences of Eugene H. Beach, and those with whom he lived, worked, and played, created a strong, progressive foundation for the Tampa Bay area’s future cultural, social, and artistic growth.

81 Dore Beach, e-mail to the author, May 26, 2010.
82 Ibid.