

## YOUNG LOVE AND MAGNIFICENT SCULPTURE



Hilda Otten Prescott (above), who along with her husband, Sam, created the ornate plaster carvings that were hallmarks of the early hotel. Hilda's lions flanked the Don's original two-story entrance window. Today, that arch and the lions greet guests as they enter at the top of the added driveway ramp.



Hilda DeFrain had only recently moved to St. Petersburg in 1927 when she met Sam Prescott, who had been hired to do ornamental plaster work at the Don CeSar Hotel under construction. Having found a passion for art in her Indiana hometown as a student at the Fort Wayne Institute of Art, the young sculptor must not have known what a significant role she would play in the identity of the Pink Lady, including the creation of the lions that still guard the entrance today.

Working together, the Prescotts shaped the vases, balusters, and stairways throughout the building, as well as the unique columns that sat atop a ring of carved goats' feet. Hilda conceived much of the intricate design and carved the clay molds, while Sam did the casting.

Over the years, the pair applied their craft to architectural ornamentation at the downtown St. Petersburg's YMCA building, City Hall, and numerous churches, among them the Christ United Methodist sanctuary. There, they developed a series of plaques that brought the stories of the Bible to life for parishioners.

The Prescotts also contributed much of the interior detailing at the Ringling Museum of Art in Sarasota, and even repaired statuary and created plaster frames for works of art being shown there — Raphael's *Diane at the Pool* required a frame of 33 feet by 17 feet in size.

Hilda also was an accomplished musician and educator, working with generations of children as a teacher of art, dance and music, as a choir director and as a Girl Scout leader. She passed away in 1989, at the age of 90, but her work continues to capture the wonder of locals and visitors alike throughout the St. Petersburg area.

(clockwise) The Prescotts casted their ornamentations from beach sand on the ground floor of the Don CeSar during construction.

Hilda was on hand for the Grand Re-opening gala in 1973, shown here with her lions.

An early sketch study for architectural castings, some of which can still be seen at the Don today.

Rose Marie Judd, granddaughter of Hilda Otten Prescott, visits the restored fountain in the lobby of the Don CeSar in the 1970s.

