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ONE DOLLAR



The controversial Dragon's Head, now owned by Calvin Klein, could be torn down and replaced with a smaller home.

DANA SHAW PHOTOS

The Dragon Could Soon Fall

'Castle' is slated for demolition

By Brendan O'Reilly

Fashion designer Calvin Klein is seeking permission to demolish his oceanfront home in Southampton Village, one with a controversial history, with plans to replace it with a house half the size.

The application before the village's Board of Historic Preservation and Architectural Review calls for tearing down the Meadow Lane house, which resembles a castle more than a single-family home, in favor of a much more modest and modern retreat for Mr. Klein.

The historical integrity of the house has been compromised over the years as ownership changed and altera-



A view of the ocean side of the building.

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tions were made to both the exterior and interior. The home has been known by several names. Some names were bestowed on it by its owners, others were eponymous with those owners.

Former Worldcom director Francesco Galesi, the owner before Mr. Klein, dubbed it Elysium. Henry Francis du Pont originally built the house in the mid-1920s and called it Chestertown. A year after his death in 1969, the estate was sold to "Baby" Jane Holzer, a Warhol Superstar. When Holzer and her husband, Leonard, defaulted on their mortgage a few years later, the house was auctioned to coal industrialist John Samuels III. In 1979, financier Barry Trupin purchased the estate, eventually renaming it Dragon's Head—a name which overshadowed the others, in part because of the controversy that surrounded its reconstruction by Mr. Trupin.

Mr. Trupin put a huge shark tank into the house, which the Trupins said they would swim in among the sharks amid boulders and banyan trees.

The biggest alterations, which resulted in \$1 million worth of legal costs and years of litigation for Southampton Village, happened in violation of zoning code during the 1980s. Mr. Trupin added 20,000 square feet to the house before the village stopped him in 1984 for working without a building permit. The remodeled house, which resembled a Norman castle and violated zoning ordinances, was referred to as "the height of hideosity" and "Disneyland on LSD."

In 1992, Mr. Trupin, who was convicted in 1999 on tax evasion charges, sold the house to Mr. Galesi for \$3.3 million.

Mr. Galesi, who had scaled back some of the house's most extreme features, put the estate on the market in 2000 with an asking price of \$45 million. He eventually sold the property to Mr. Klein in 2003 for \$28.9 million.

According to town records, the 6.6-acre property, which is classified as an "exceptional home," is assessed at \$32 million and comes with a tax bill of more than \$104,000.

The plan filed with the village Building Department promises to reduce building mass on the property by 50 percent and meet Federal Emergency Management Agency standards. The new house would be 17,250 square feet, with a 1,500-square-foot attached garage.

Mr. Klein's architect, Michael Haverland of East Hampton, declined to comment on the application.

Many neighbors have written letters in support of the demolition and replacement. Hotel magnate Ian Schrager, who owns a nearby property, wrote the existing house is "over scaled and garish," and the planned house is "beautifully designed."

"I strongly believe that his proposed demolition of his over-scaled home, replaced with a more scaled and refined property, will help our neighborhood improve aesthetically," Manhattan real estate mogul and Meadow Lane resident Aby Rosen wrote.

Southampton Village Mayor Mark Epley said Friday he is also in support of



Mayor William Hatrick stands before the Dragon's Head property in 1989.

PRESS FILE PHOTO

the plan, noting the property's marred history with the village. The house is historical in the sense that it divided the village dramatically, he said.

Mayor Epley added that the cost of demolishing such a large house raises eyebrows and he is curious to see the entire project completed.

Board of Historic Preservation & Architectural Review Chairman Curtis Highsmith advised on Tuesday that community opinion is not directly involved in board decisions. He said that while the board takes public comments and written submissions into consideration, final decisions are made according to village code.

Before the review board can make any decisions regarding the new design, it needs to approve a certificate of appropriateness to allow the demolition of the existing house, since it is in a historic district, Mr. Highsmith noted. Historic counsel Zachary Studenroth is investigating the historic nature of the house and will likely present his findings to the board at its January 12 meeting, the chairman said.

Mr. Highsmith, while not specifically commenting on the Meadow Lane application, also said smaller does not necessarily mean better, and that a smaller replacement house is not a guarantee a design will automatically be approved. The board still needs to consider if the design is in keeping with the community, he said.

Unlike some other areas of Southampton Village, Meadow Lane's houses are not uniform in architectural design. Mr. Highsmith said the designs range from very modern to eclectic: "All anyone has to do is drive down Meadow Lane to see the different styles."

If the ARB approves the demolition and the new design, the application still needs Zoning Board of Appeals approval before construction can go forward.