



Rob O'Neal Photography.

The Historic Hemingway House on Key West: A Cool Step Back in Time

Visitors to the Ernest Hemingway Home and Museum in Key West, Florida, enjoy stepping back in time to see how the prolific author lived during his 10 years in residence there in the 1930s. The two-story home was built in 1851 in the Spanish Colonial style, constructed of native limestone hewn from the grounds.

The home was in poor shape when Hemingway and his wife, Pauline, purchased it, but the couple could see beyond the rubble and ruin, and appreciated the grand architecture and stateliness of the home. The massive

restoration and remodeling they undertook in the early 1930s turned the home into the National Historical Landmark that thousands of tourists visit every year.

Curators have taken care over the years to preserve and maintain the original architecture and the Hemingway family's furnishings. But one issue constantly plagued the home: the intense heat and humidity of the Florida Keys. The climate, especially in the summer, made it unbearably hot in the house. The discomfort was so pronounced from July through September that at least two visitors would faint during tours every week,

The Unico System®

says Dave Gonzales, longtime curator at the museum.

Installing central air conditioning seemed out of the question, as it would require adding drop ceilings and soffits, which would disrupt the architectural integrity of the home. Window units would be equally destructive to the building's character. Besides, the Key West historic architectural review committee would hardly be willing to approve such a project because of its negative impact on the building's aesthetics, Dave said.

Strategy:

Dave turned to colleagues at the nearby Harry S. Truman Little White House, another historic property-turned museum on Key West. He knew they had successfully installed central air conditioning without ripping out walls or lowering ceilings, and it was done with the blessing of the local architectural committee as well as the National Park Service.

Dave learned that the museum had installed the small-duct, high-velocity Unico System, known for its remarkable ability to remain mostly hidden from view. Unico's tubular, flexible ducting can snake through crawl spaces and wall and ceiling cavities where traditional metal ducting could never fit. Hidden above ceilings or between floor joists, the Unico System sounded like the right solution for the Hemingway Home.

Working with Unico engineers and a Miami HVAC contractor, Dave oversaw the installation process. He selected round room outlets made of red oak, in a stain that matched the home's floors. Dave also came up with creative solutions such as hiding a return air box in a wooden cabinet that he retrofitted with louvered



Round room outlet stained to match the home's floors.



This retrofitted cabinet hides the return air box.

doors for air flow. The installer carved through the floor inside the cabinet for the intake air ducting.

Dave used the master bedroom closet on the second floor to house a small vertical air handler. The intake air box was installed in the bathroom closet. Normally it goes against building codes to pull intake air through a bathroom, but this bathroom had no running water so inspectors approved it.

"It took some explanations and convincing with inspectors, but we finally got the approval," Dave said.

Results:

The Unico System has been an ideal solution for the Hemingway Home and Museum, Dave says.

"The system performs great, and our utility bill hasn't gone up as much as we thought it would by adding central air conditioning," he said.

The Unico System helps lower air conditioning bills by removing 30 percent more humidity from the air than a conventional central air system does. This allows homeowners to set the thermostat a few degrees higher

while still providing a comfortable temperature. Reduced humidity also aids in the preservation of the books, artifacts and memorabilia displayed in the museum.

Dave added that the Unico System operates quietly, which is important because the museum conducts guided tours every 20 minutes. As many as 25 people participate in a tour. "The air conditioning doesn't interfere at all – we can hardly hear it."

The best part, though, is that no one is fainting during tours any more. Plus, the dozens of cats – descendants of Hemingway's famed felines – roaming the house and grounds have a nice, comfortable place to relax.

And if the temperature dips into the 40's or 50's on winter nights, the Unico System includes a heat pump to keep visitors – and cats – warm and cozy.

Key West Facts:

- Key West is one of the top ten cities for historical homes per square mile.
- The humidity in Key West is not related to rainfall, but rather to its location on a coral reef. The water is shallow for a long way out, resulting in more evaporation. "It's almost a mist; a dim fog at times," says Curator Dave Gonzales.
- Heat and humidity are so high in summer months that vacationers and residents often wait until evening to go out.

Location: Key West, Florida

Unico Contractor:

Re-Fri Air • www.refricenter.net



Humidity control from the Unico System helps preserve the books, artifacts and memorabilia displayed in the museum.



Small, discreet Unico outlets can be placed on floors, high walls or ceilings to deliver even temperatures.

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Unico, Inc. manufacturing plant and sub-assembly plant

Unico, Inc. is the leader in small duct heating and cooling systems and other high-end HVAC systems. The company manufactures all of its products in St. Louis, Missouri, with over 125,000 square feet of modern manufacturing space. The company is well known for extensive use in older, architecturally unique homes and buildings as well as elite, high-end custom homes. The company is family owned and operated and their products are available throughout the United States and Canada, and in over 28 countries around the world.



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