

# Gulfshore Life<sup>®</sup>

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Does your home have  
good feng shui?

Nostalgic Presences:  
a new look at old Florida

Rookery Bay's  
little-known treasures

Fort Myers' most  
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# Nostalgic Presences

*Maria von Matthiessen's  
visions of Southwest Florida*

The fact that photographer Maria von Matthiessen came to live in Naples is, quite literally, accidental. A little more than a year ago, she was visiting here from the east coast, when she was in a car crash. "My left hand was nearly torn off," she says quietly. "It was physically devastating." But she decided that Naples would be a good place to regain her strength, so she rented a house and has been living here ever since. Although the effects of the accident still shadow her, she's back to work. Recent projects include exhibits at the Marianne Friedland Gallery in Naples and the Ringling Museum in Sarasota as well as several book and magazine projects.

In the past, von Matthiessen's photographs have appeared in *Life*, *Harper's Bazaar*, *Town & Country* and *Southern Accents*. She also photographed and wrote a book, *Songs from the Hills: An Intimate Look at Country Music*; far from a straightforward series of portraits of musicians, it's an extraordinary collection

of work, rich with symbolism and subtlety, that visually mythologizes her subjects. Like a forest spirit, Lionel Cartwright sleeps in a hollow tree, Linda Davis becomes a flower-garlanded wood nymph, John Hartford grows angel's wings and Boxcar Willie rises from a sea of kudzu.

Von Matthiessen's hauntingly lyrical photography has, in the past, centered around people. Since she's been in Southwest Florida, however, she's extracted the same mytho-poetic flavor from this place.

Of her work, she says this: "I endeavor to speak with images, but sometimes, things, people, places hand me words. They say, 'Tell this about me, with these words.' And so, sometimes, there are impressions too, with words, that come to me."

On these pages, we present Maria von Matthiessen's pictures and her words about Southwest Florida's lingering nostalgic presences.

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*The Planetary Court at the Koreshan State Historic Site, Estero*

Few places can say they echo the tranquility of Heaven to come. The graciously dark cedar wall paneling of the meeting room in the women's quarters of the Koreshan commune embraces long windows, where light falls through lace curtains onto a simple kerosene lamp and a creamy couch shell, set on separate, soothingly dark wood tables. Simple portraits of Martha and George Washington, in simple, dark wood frames look down on it all, approvingly.

Out through the fields to the right is buried Hedwig Michel, the last member of the commune. She lived to be almost 100. A quote is inscribed on her tomb: "Be ashamed to die until you have won some victory for humanity."