

Secluded island with historic, hand-built home is on the market for \$12 million

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The 5,000-square-foot Bannon Island estate consists of the original 1890 home, shaped like a Celtic cross, and a modern addition with an expansive kitchen, multiple bedrooms and a 2-story library. There's also a duplex on the property, bringing the total number of bedrooms to seven. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

Just before he died, a famous Seminole Indian chief gifted an island to an Irish immigrant whose descendants have made it their home for 150 years.

Now, for the first time, Bannon Island and its exquisite residence are being offered for sale, [priced at \\$12 million](#).

"I have a lot of memories there [and whoever buys it] should work on developing theirs," said Dr. Patrick O'Leary, who owns the 23-acre island in Polk County's Lake Marion. "They can take what we have experienced, but they need to put their signature on it."



The 23-acre private island in Polk County's Lake Marion is accessible only by boat or seaplane. It has been owned by the same family for 150 years. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

O'Leary is now in his 80s and remembers going to the island to visit when he was little. Back then, there was no electricity or running water. Electricity finally came to the island in 1996.

"I went to Winter Haven High School, which is right close by, and we would come out on weekends," he said. "My grand uncle and my grandmother lived there full-time. My grandfather who built the place died in 1948, I believe."

O'Leary's grandfather was Patrick Bannon, a carpenter who immigrated to New York in the 1880s.

"He developed some lung disease, probably tuberculosis, and they said that he would probably benefit from a warmer climate," O'Leary told GrowthSpotter. "He got as far down to Orlando by train and then probably took a wagon on down here into Haines City."

Bannon befriended the Native Americans who were living in the area and on the island, one of whom was [Creek Seminole Chief Chipco](#).

"My grandfather developed a relationship with some Indians and received in this friendship an island, and he decided to build a house on it."

Bannon built the house in 1890 in the shape of a Celtic cross, with four rooms coming from the octagonal living room in the center. A talented woodworker, he used the native cypress for the walls, floors and ceilings.



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O'Leary's grandfather, Patrick Bannon, built the original home - including the octagonal living room with stairs leading to a loft bedroom. He hand-cut all of the wood, including the cypress beadboard cladding the walls. O'Leary added his own touch, a pineapple newel post finial on the staircase. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

"Each piece of wood was hand-cut, and it was beaded boards and tongue and grooved, and then it was mounted on the walls at a 45-degree angle," O'Leary explained. "To try to think of how that was done with no power tools and you had to match up every bead on the wall going up, it was an enormous achievement by an individual."

Now all of the original house has been "restored pristine to its former glory."

"My son is a contractor, and he and a team of people took the original construction, lifted it up, put concrete footers and pillars under it, and then set it back down," he explained, adding it took him and several skilled craftsmen about three years to complete.

Dr. O'Leary is a retired surgeon and academic who practiced and taught around the United States, retiring to Florida to be one of the founding executive deans for Florida International University Herbert Wertheim College of Medicine in Miami.

"That brought me back closer to the island, and so I would come up here on weekends and sort of supervise some of the stuff that was going on."

At some point, an additional structure, a 2,698-square-foot duplex O'Leary calls the "Dog Trot," went up on the property. Each unit has two bedrooms and two bathrooms — bringing the total number of bedrooms on the property to seven.



Vaulted ceilings and a large balcony give the primary suite an airy feeling. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

"My wife decided that she was not going to come up here and live in a fish camp half of the year, so we decided we would build a structure on the same site where the Indians had camped out," he explained. "The one side is where the original people would have used for cooking and the second side would be used for sleeping."

Eventually, he and his wife of 62 years, Mabel “Sam” O’Leary, bought out the other relatives who were partial property owners. In 2003, the couple decided to build an addition to the historic house, bringing the living space to 5,034 square feet.

It’s a combination of old and new with wood dominating the historic part and huge glass windows letting the light into the new. The addition has a chef’s kitchen, an elevator and a three-car garage.

“We have indoor connectors from the historic house into the L’Orangerie, which is the eight-sided center structure in the new house,” he said. “It’s where I’m sitting right now looking out over the lake.”

That octagonal structure has a huge chandelier the O’Learys commissioned from [Zen Glass Studio & Gallery](#) in St. Petersburg, made up of 100 hand-blown glass raindrops so delicate they sway in the breeze when the AC kicks on.



The 2-story L’Orangerie serves as the formal dining room and the connector between the historic home and the additions. The sellers commissioned a 100-piece, hand-blown glass chandelier for the room. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

His other favorite place in the house is the library that appears to float between two stories, has a glass floor, and is suspended using cables, and is “really pretty cool.”

There have always been Valencia orange groves on the land, but as has been the case with other growers, citrus greening has hurt the crop.

“Dr. O’Leary thought because it was an island that somehow he would be protected by being removed from the mainland, but he was not,” explained listing agent Lisa Kleine with [Red Bird Realty](#). “That grove operated for his family for years as a way of making money for the family, but greening has hurt the groves, but they still carry on in just a minimized way because of the greening.”



The addition includes a 2-story library with vaulted ceilings, skylights, and a glass floor that allows natural light to reach the first floor. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

There are also grapefruit, guava, and more.

“The presence of the native sort of old-time Florida has been my biggest satisfaction,” O’Leary said.

Because of the island’s history, it was recently designated as a [Florida Century Pioneer Family Farm](#), a distinction from the Florida Department of Agriculture recognizing properties with at least 100 years of continuous ownership by a single family. There are five others in Polk County, one in Seminole, three in Osceola, and six in Orange.

The island is only accessible via boat or seaplane, and living there is the ultimate in privacy.

“You don’t have to worry about people soliciting at your door,” O’Leary said with a laugh.



The primary kitchen is equipped with commercial-grade appliances around a large center-island. A second 6-burner gas range is located in the butler's pantry, making the estate ideal for entertaining large crowds and extended family. (Photo by BlueBird Property Media)

But grocery shopping is a bit of a challenge, involving a golf cart or ATV from the house to a dock, a boat to the mainland, then a car from there.

“We load up the car, take it seven miles to a Publix, then we shop,” he said. “When we come back, we have to unload the groceries from the car into the boat and then come back over to the ATV and then up to the house.”

Things like that, as well as caring for everything on the island, are getting to be a bit too much for the O’Learys, and their children aren’t interested in island life.

“Sam and I are in our 80s and so we’re having a tough time keeping it up, and it’s expensive,” O’Leary said. “At some point in time, [selling] it just seems like it was a reasonable thing to do.”

But they won't be going far. They're planning to live on the mainland with a view of the island but made a promise to the new buyers.

"I'm not going to micromanage it. It's something that I thoroughly enjoyed, and that time has come for me to go away and do something else."