

Basic fare garnished with elegance.

During a briefing, Zobrist had told me that physicians are especially fond of the Grand because of its hideaway ambience, a mood that inspires wickedly irresponsible thoughts of retirement at 45 and langorous days full of mint juleps, lawn bowling, twilight strolls along the shore, canoeing on the lake that fronts the hotel and golf that doesn't end at the 18th hole on a Wednesday afternoon, that just goes on forever and ever, amen.

"My sister is a nurse in Peoria," he had said, "and she comes down each year for some rest and relaxa-

rented bicycle along the mile-long boardwalk that cuts between the shimmering bay and a string of homes that run the gamut of folkloric Southern lifestyle, from a shack in a deep hollow with a lantern flickering in the window to an antebellum manor exuding imagined voices: "Rhett, Ah simply must have anotha credit cahd. This one won't get me and mah little ol' Mercedes 190 SL all the way up yondah to Atlantah for mah hospital charity wuk, now will it? Ah need a cahd for every kind of juice, including motah oil. You wouldn't want me



There is a distinctive bayou quality about the course, with wooden bridges crossing over lazy little creeks.

on whether the speakers were new arrivals planning their itineraries or soon-to-be departing guests prolonging their last meal, dreading re-emergence into the outside world. One well-tanned gentleman with a shock of white hair, attired in an alpaca-doubleknit ensemble that made him look like he should be stepping onto the first tee in a Florida pro-am, was saying, between gulps of blueberry pancakes, to his wife something like: "My patients are just going to have to wait, Ruth. They'll all still be there, in good health, I might add, when I get back. I called in and notified the office that we're taking two extra days here. That's it."

tion from the hospital grind. You won't believe it, but with all the things there are to do here, you know what she does? Sits under a live oak tree and reads. I couldn't understand it at first, but she said it was so inordinately peaceful here that she wanted to enjoy that aspect to the hilt. Through the years, I've heard similar comments from other visitors."

There is a unique hush at the Grand Hotel that could be legitimately publicized in the brochures as a major attraction, much like golf and tennis. But it is not. Instead, it waits patiently, unassuming in its intangibility, to be discovered.

From breakfast I would ride my

to get stranded on some lonelah road in the middle of the nat, now would you?"

"Frankly, Scarlett, I don't give a damn."

Two doors from the hotel, on this route, stands the Gunnison House, a stark white, wood-frame structure that bears the scar of a shell fired from a Yankee ship on August 5, 1864. The architecture is severely simple and practical. The paint is chipped and flaking. An abandoned, rusty lawn mower leans against the side of the house. In comparison to neighboring residences, its yard is treeless and barren, except for tufts of grass that sway with a steady

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Playing this course alone can be an almost mystical experience.

breeze off the bay, the same breeze that blew over 100 years ago and will blow 100 years from now.

The sense of permanence is pervasive here, and it is nurtured by a tenacious devotion to the past among the natives.

"Some of those homes are well over a century old," Zobrist had informed me. "They're decaying and they're sitting on very valuable property, but the owners refuse to sell because, well, after all, the place belonged to Aunt So-and-So and what would she think and remember the good times we had here when we were children. A great deal of nostalgia is involved."

After giving due scrutiny to Gunnison House, I would continue peddling down the boardwalk, being

careful not to get slapped in the face by low-hanging Spanish moss. A weather-beaten picket fence stretches along most of this path, lethargically protecting the homes from trespassers and providing a perch for vividly colored birds that looked like they flew straight out of a Disney movie. The air was crisp and clean, a product of the scent of salt water and pine. Aside from the gentle lapping of waves and the crackle of my tires crushing dried leaves and needles, quiet was the most audible sound. Alone at last! With me.

The next stop was always the hotel pier, where I would stretch out on a chaise-lounge, gaze at the smooth, serene gulf, doze under a solicitous sun, intermittently glancing at a cou-

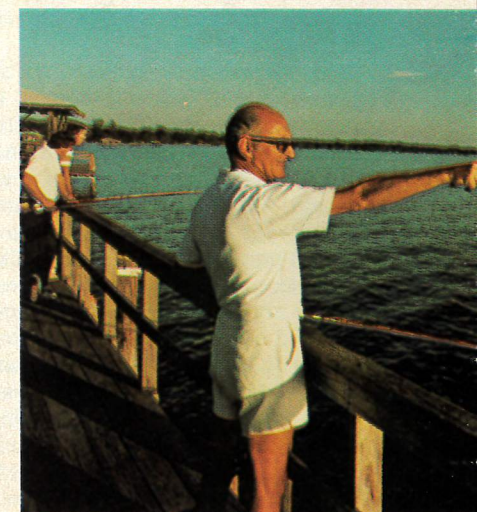
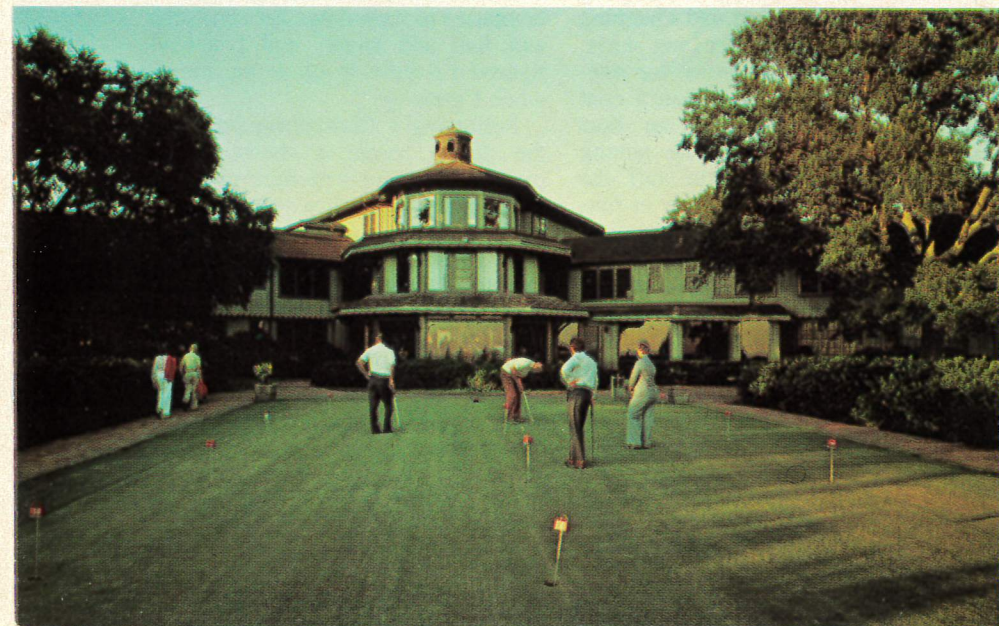
ple of fishermen trying to hook a mullet or croaker. On one such occasion I was distracted by someone whooping, "I got one! I got one!" It was a young woman, dressed in cut-off jeans and a sweatshirt, frantically reeling in some denizen of the sea. In her infectious ecstasy, I jumped to my feet to see what the fuss was about. By the time I got to where she was standing, she was extracting the hook from her wriggling catch.

"He's going to make a fine dinner," said Carol, who, as it turned out, was an Indiana farm girl on her honeymoon and an obvious pro at ensnaring all sorts of critters. "The hotel chef cleans the guests' catches and prepares them any way they want. I think I'll have this one dipped in egg batter, fried in oil and lemon juice and served on a bed of wild rice, with lots of tartar sauce on the side."

That little scene whetted my appetite for a week of gluttony. I proceeded to consume lunches and dinners of fried bay shrimp, seafood gumbo, poached flounder smothered in Bearnaise, red snapper stuffed with crabmeat and Bon Secour oysters.

In the afternoon I would attempt to break bogey at the Grand Hotel's 27-hole Lakewood Golf Club, a rich morsel set on gracefully undulating terrain. Tall, dense, imperial pines wall each fairway, making the holes masterfully cut solitaires seemingly unattached to a composite. Bunkers are made of pure cane sugar, or so it appears—the fine, blindingly white sand, insidiously decorative, was hauled in from the beaches of Pensa-

The hotel's "backyard"—where casual bets are made for drinks before dinner.



Down at the pier, fishermen try to hook a few mullets or croakers.

Photographs by Leonard Kamsler