

# No Clean, Well-lighted Place

Ernest Hemingway's Cuban house is falling apart. || BY SALVATORE DELUCA

The beloved Cuban residence of Ernest Hemingway—Finca Vigía, or Lookout Farm—sits on a hilltop overlooking the Caribbean Sea, about 12 miles east of Havana. Since Hemingway's death in 1961, the deterioration of the house has been gradual but steady, thanks to the cumulative effects of age, heat, and humidity. Many locals fear the demise of this literary landmark.

Finca Vigía was built in the late 19th century. Hemingway bought the 15-acre property in 1939 for about \$18,500 and spent the final third of his life there. In the room where he wrote *For Whom the Bell Tolls* and *The Old Man and the Sea*, emerald-green mold covers the walls and water drips onto the yellow-tiled floor. Two braces hold the plastered ceiling in place. In addition to its significant literary holdings—including 2,000 of Hemingway's letters and a basement full of discarded drafts and manuscripts—the property contains the author's 9,000-book library, 3,000 photographs, game trophies, rifles, bullfighting posters, artwork, and original furniture.

The problem is, Finca Vigía's caretakers do not have the money needed to preserve the site. In 2002, the Boston-based Hemingway Preservation Foundation came up with a plan to do just that, at a cost of about \$3 million. The first phase of the plan—documenting all the written material Hemingway left in the house—is nearing completion. Part two would have dealt with actual restoration. But last summer, the Office of Foreign Assets Control at the U.S. Treasury Department denied the foundation a license that would have allowed a financial donation to Finca Vigía. That's because of the 40-year-old trade



The U.S. trade embargo against Cuba is preventing the Boston-based Hemingway Preservation Foundation from donating money to Finca Vigía (above).

embargo against the Western Hemisphere's last communist nation.

"The Bush administration needs to come to its senses," said Rep. James P. McGovern (D-Mass.), a longtime advocate of normalizing relations with Cuba and the leader of the foundation's Finca Vigía Preservation Project. "Policy shouldn't get in the way of protecting an important part of our history."

The Treasury Department does not comment on specific license applications, but spokeswoman Molly Millerwise said that the department, in general, wants "to ensure that licensing does not permit activities that put dollars into the hands of the Castro regime." Treasury distinguishes between saving Hemingway's documents, a scholarly pursuit, and his house, an income-generating tourist attraction.

"I've made the argument," McGov-

ern said, "that in addition to being Hemingway's house, the place is also a document. He wrote on the walls."

The Hemingway Preservation Foundation now plans to reapply for a permit and hopes the administration will be more receptive this time around. "Once word gets out that the building is in jeopardy," said Thomas D. Herman, the foundation's attorney, "and that the Office of Foreign Assets Control is the principal impediment, people will rally to support our cause."

"Hemingway is a part of our country, our culture, and our people," said Gladys Rodriguez, a caretaker of the house and an adviser at Cuba's National Council of Cultural Heritage. "We've cared for Finca Vigía for more than 40 years, and we are going to continue working. If the president of the U.S. can help us, we welcome it."