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*On its own 10-acre island The Castaways 1957 additions are now the site of the Oceana condominiums in Sunny Isles Beach.*

## Missing Miami: The Castaways

**Text** Nina Korman

Say "the Castaways" and longtime Miamians might raise their eyebrows, widen their eyes, smile or even smirk. Built by Joe Hart, founder of the Pickin' Chicken restaurant chain, the Castaways was a two-part resort complex in man-made Sunny Isles. A three-story, ocean-side motel designed in a vaguely pan-Polynesian style by architect M. Tony Sherman came first, in the early 1950s at Collins Avenue and 163rd Street. By 1957, Charles F. McKirahan upped the Asian ante when he designed a 132-room addition directly across the street on Fairyland Island.

With peaked roofs and fretwork balcony railings and balustrades, the buildings have been described as Oriental Modern, Neo-Chinese Polynesian Pastiche, and Far Eastern Kitsch with Polynesian Trimmings. One Miami Herald writer recalled the Castaways squatting on its site "like a fat Chinese toad."

To get on the island, boaters tied up to a private dock, or guests in cars drove under an enormous Asian-style arch. By car, a gurgling waterfall first caught the eye. But the real attention-getter was the teahouse. Its floor-to-ceiling windows were topped by a double hyper-parabolic roof that was just two-and-one-quarter inches thick and covered with a gold foil and laminate. "A pagoda on steroids," said one writer. The structure housed a lobby and the Shinto Temple Room, where elegantly dressed couples could dine and dance beneath cherry blossoms and hanging lanterns.

Eventually, the Castaways grew to 540 rooms on 10 acres. It billed itself as "America's Most FUNderful Resort Motel." And with five swimming pools, a putting green, 1,000 feet of sandy beach, tennis courts, and a fishing pier, how could anyone not enjoy himself? But the real FUN began elsewhere at the resort.

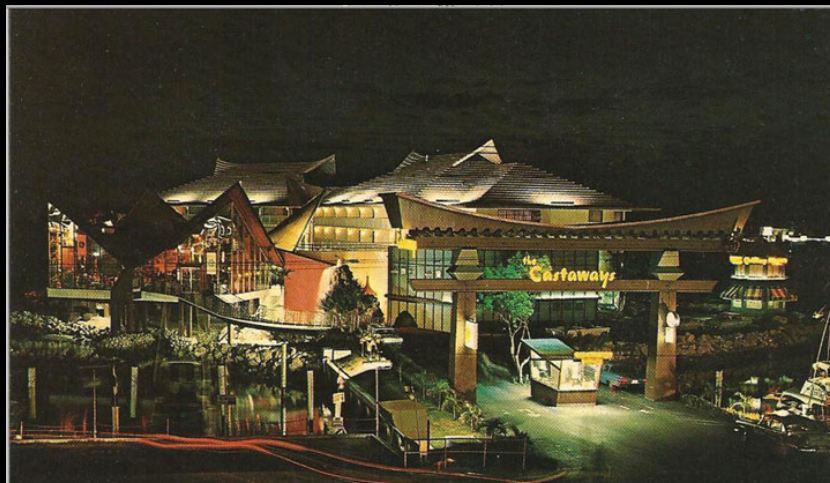
Guests could raise a glass at seven bars. The most famous was the subterranean Wreck Bar, decorated in a sunken galleon theme. Cypress planks covered the walls. Ropes, nets, and chains hung from the ceiling. Seven porthole windows behind the bar allowed an underwater view into one of the swimming pools.

Open from 11 a.m. to 5 a.m. daily, the Wreck earned an international reputation as a decadent hot spot where bikini-clad go-go dancers (dubbed the Wreckettes) would gyrate on tabletops under kaleidoscopic lights while live rock and roll music blared from the 5,000-watt sound system. Patrons were given maracas, tiny tambourines, and mallets to make noise.

The Wreck always attracted visiting celebrities. The Beatles hung out there in 1964. During the spring of 1968, Jimi Hendrix showed up and reputedly jammed with Frank Zappa and Arthur Brown. In 1971, pundit Bill O'Reilly taught high school English in Miami by day and worked as a bouncer in the Wreck at night.

By the mid 1970's the Castaways began marketing itself as a "Singles Apartment Complex," offering seasonal and yearly rentals, touting its many amenities and free admission to the Inner Circle and Wreck bars. In August 1978, Las Vegas casino magnate Steve Wynn bought an option to purchase the Castaways when legalized casino gambling seemed on the horizon for South Florida.

Soon a less savory crowd appeared at the Castaways and the popularity of Sunny Isles waned. Joe Hart unloaded the property for \$14 million in 1979 to four West German real estate developers. The ocean-side motel continued operations. The buildings across the street began closing in 1982. A 20-story, \$40 million luxury high-rise was planned. But the Castaways would not go quietly. Attempts at demolition with a battering ram attached to a bulldozer failed in the summer of 1984. Ultimately, a 3,500-pound wrecking ball razed the complex after several weeks. Fairyland Island, once dominated by the Castaways is now Oceania Island, home to the Oceania IV and V condo towers. But stand nearby and listen carefully: The echo of maracas still fills the air.



*Architect Charles McKirahan loved the drama of the bridge entrance over water, using it to great effect at the entry to both Lauderdale's Mai Kai and The Castaways on Miami Beach.*