

BAY HARBOR ISLANDS MiMO

Architecture of a Mid-Century Town





LEFT Bay Harbor Islands (East Island is on left) seen from the air in 1959. Bay Harbor Islands' palm-lined commercial area, Kane Concourse. **COVER 01** The Haven condominium, 1962, designed by T. Hunter Henderson. **BACK COVER 36** The Elegant Eight condo, 1959, by Robert Swartburg

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00 NUMBERS ON PHOTOS ARE REFERENCED ON CENTERFOLD MAP

The East Island of Bay Harbor Islands, Florida, contains the largest, most intense collection of Miami Mid-Century Modern ("MiMo") buildings in the world. I learned this in 2002 when I moved there, attracted by the town's comfortable, pedestrian-oriented style. As interior designer and resident Teri D'Amico gave me a tour of my new neighborhood, she pointed out the special features of those wonderful structures and mentioned a few architects familiar to me from the Art Deco Historic District of South Beach, just seven miles away. Some of those architects had transitioned from the Art Deco genre of the 1930s to MiMo at mid-century.

The rest of the world began to appreciate Bay Harbor Islands' remarkable treasure trove of architecture in 2006 when the town, complying with state requirements, commissioned an inventory of its buildings. The astounding results revealed that 300-plus structures were 50 years old or older; approximately 80 were so impressive they merited placement in a local register of historic architecture; and 5 were so significant they likely were eligible for inclusion in the National Register of Historic Places.

In 2007, Teri D'Amico and journalist Nina Korman delved beyond the inventory of 2006 and completed a comprehensive architectural survey of the East Island, discovering that the dazzling buildings had been created by illustrious architects, among them Morris Lapidus and Igor Polevitzky. Now, three years after the initial inventory, many more BHI structures have turned 50 years old, the minimum age the U.S. Department of Interior requires for historic designation.

With good news comes bad. Bay Harbor Islands' fabulous MiMo buildings remain unprotected, vulnerable to the vagaries of the business cycle and the proclivities of the local politicians. While this booklet was in production, several MiMo structures on the East Island were destroyed; only the recent economic downturn has stalled further demolition. This underscores the urgency to designate this extraordinary neighborhood a historic district. Please help maintain the special character and quality of life of Bay Harbor Islands by saving its gorgeous Broad Causeway, elegant Kane Concourse, and inimitable, irreplaceable MiMo buildings.

KENT HARRISON ROBBINS
MIAMI-DADE HISTORIC NEIGHBORHOOD PRESERVATION COALITION, INC.

bay harbor islands' mimo

Mostly modest in scale and scope but no less compelling and fun to look at, these buildings were created during some of the happiest times in America's history, a prosperous postwar moment when anything seemed possible and the resulting architecture embodied that enthusiasm and joy. Large or small, understated or embellished, these structures are considerate of the environment, the view, and each other. More than just tangible, whimsical expressions of a bygone era, they are persuasive reminders that a sun-soaked life in Florida, surrounded by soothing water and manicured landscapes, should be celebrated on a daily basis.

LEFT Marine imagery is a common applied decorative element on MiMo structures. **RIGHT** This compressed arch artfully harnesses light and shadow.





bay harbor islands' history

A tangle of mangroves in Biscayne Bay and the singular vision of one man, Shepard Broad, yielded the Town of Bay Harbor Islands in 1947. A Russian émigré who rose to prominence locally as an attorney and banker, Broad traded a financial interest in a downtown Miami office building for some patches of mangroves. He had them transformed into two discrete land masses. And in an insightful feat of city planning, Broad declared the West Island would contain only single-family homes and the East Island would encompass multi-family dwellings, a public school, government offices, and a small commercial area. Connecting Bay Harbor Islands to the mainland by facilitating the construction of a causeway, eventually named in his honor, Broad served as mayor of the town he created for an amazing 26 years until 1973. He resided on the West Island until his death at age 95 in 2001.

LEFT Bay Harbor Islands' first structures were modest one-story housettes, built in the late 1940s. Their generous setbacks, spacious yards, and expansive windows demonstrate attention to quality of life. **LEFT BOTTOM** The house where in 1999 interior designer Teri D'Amico and planner Randall Robinson coined "MiMo," an umbrella term encompassing Miami's varied Modern architecture created from 1945 to 1972. **RIGHT** Unusual roof lines, boxed windows, and second stories appear on later buildings.



the greats

The first building permit in Bay Harbor Islands was issued in 1947, and vintage photographs indicate the islands were almost completely built-out by 1959. It's hard to know who the very first architect was to design a structure, residential or commercial. But extensive research into the town's public records shows that many of the greats who practiced from Miami-Dade up to Palm Beach County, and around the world, were afforded the opportunity to design one or several buildings in BHI during that fruitful 12-year period and even a bit later.

BHI's famed architects include Henry Hohaus, known for works in South Beach's historic Art Deco District; Morris Lapidus and Igor Polevitzky, revered for swanky resort hotels; and John Volk, a favorite of the Palm Beach elite. Most prolific were Gilbert Fein, whose quaint residences are part of a South Beach neighborhood conservation district, and Don Reiff. Apropos to a mid 20-century city, BHI structures were thoroughly modern; however, unlike the austere International Style prevalent at the time, these buildings display a lighthearted tropical twist. Simultaneously quirky, practical, and beautiful, the look would eventually be dubbed MiMo.



FROM LEFT Decorative screen block, bands of awning windows, a floating staircase and rustic stone-clad wall are common elements found in BHI's MiMo buildings.

FROM LEFT Star motifs in metal and concrete exemplify wide-eyed optimism for the future during the Atomic Age.

garden apartments

Unpretentious yet packed with panache, garden apartments, widely spread throughout the East Island, brilliantly welcomed light and air. Whether single buildings or a duo connected by sizeable roofs or unusual decorative elements, they are highly conscious of an invigorating indoor-outdoor life.

Common garden apartment features include a sun-filled courtyard on inward-facing structures; stairways leading to catwalks that double as embellished makeshift balconies; plus ornamental flourishes like floating planters and perfectly proportioned pylons clad in decorative brick or perforated with fanciful cut-outs.



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monumental buildings: mckirahan & mathes

The north and south ends of the East Island highlight structures significantly larger than the many modest garden apartments scattered throughout. The architects Charles McKirahan and A. Herbert Mathes most notably created a handful of dazzling co-ops, which beautifully embrace their waterfront sites.

The buildings' orientation toward the street is undeniably dramatic and ultimately private, the facades never revealing that striking views of Biscayne Bay exist just on the other side. Although the tall structures comprise multiple stories, they gracefully and proportionately inhabit their respective lots.



By inserting colored glass rectangles into white cast-concrete screen block, Charles McKirahan gave his Bay Harbor Continental (1958) a playful appearance and a stylish shield from the sun. Stairwells and elevator shafts are artfully hidden too.



A sweeping boomerang-shaped porte cochere balanced on beanpoles, turquoise and white mosaic tile, and breezeways inventively masked with miles of screen block are a breathtaking combination at the Mediterranean, designed in 1957 by A. Herbert Mathes.

kane concourse

Located on the East Island, the town's hospitable commercial strip, a little less than a quarter of a mile long, is lined with eye-catching offices, restaurants, shops, and even a Cadillac dealership.

Varied yet cohesive, the buildings, designed by several renowned architects, offer an extended course in the finer elements of MiMo with their golden grilles, tiled pylons, and clerestory windows.



LEFT A corner structure designed in 1958 by Igor Polevitzky features a deep overhang floating serenely above the sidewalk. **RIGHT** An embellished pylon on a circa 1970 building makes a striking home for signage.

LEFT Gold metal grilles elevate a simple structure from 1959 to the sublime. **RIGHT** Expanses of marble and green aggregate plus sleek columns add flair to this elegant 1967 building by Morris Lapidus.

BHI EAST ISLAND

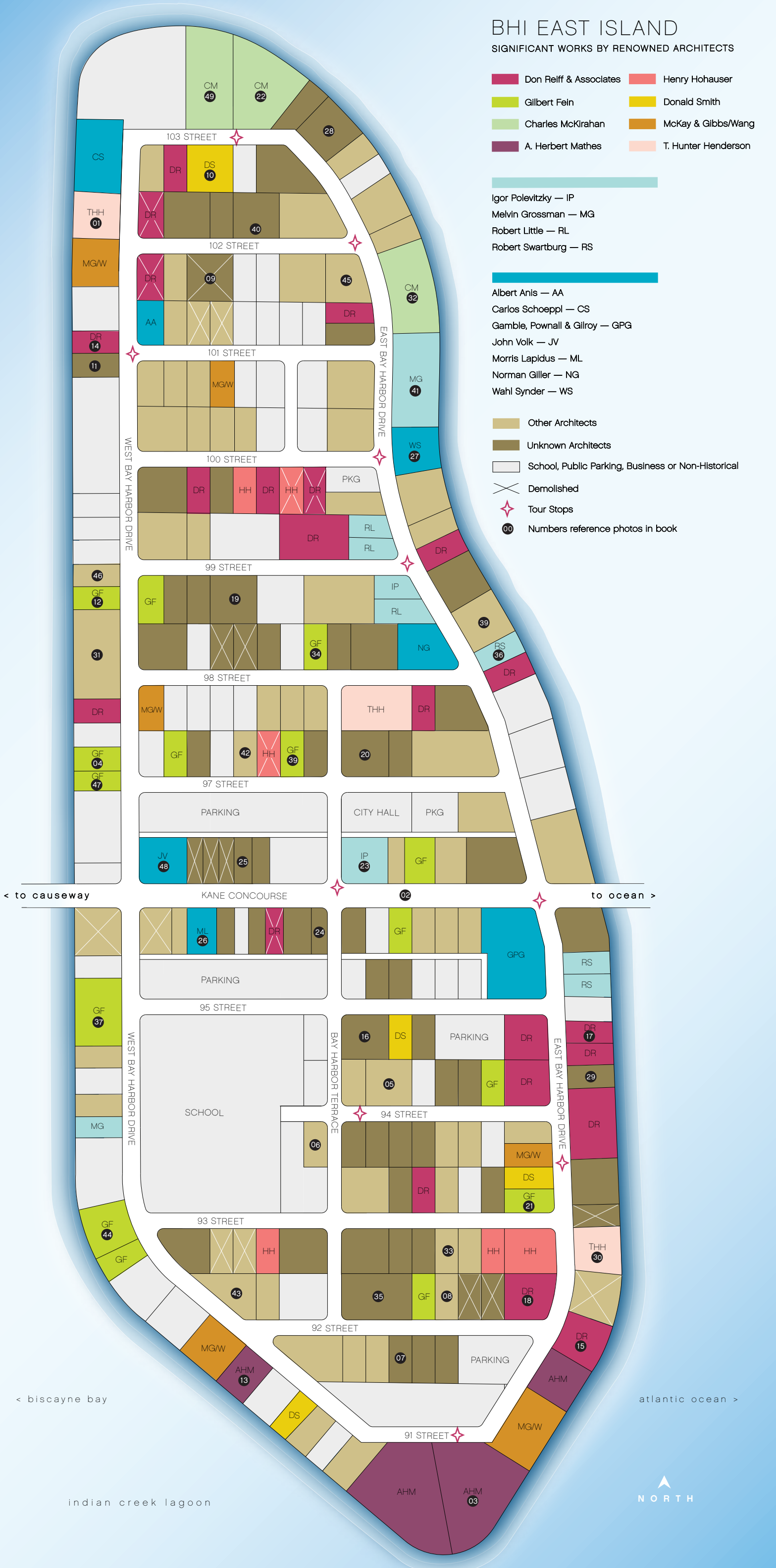
SIGNIFICANT WORKS BY RENOWNED ARCHITECTS

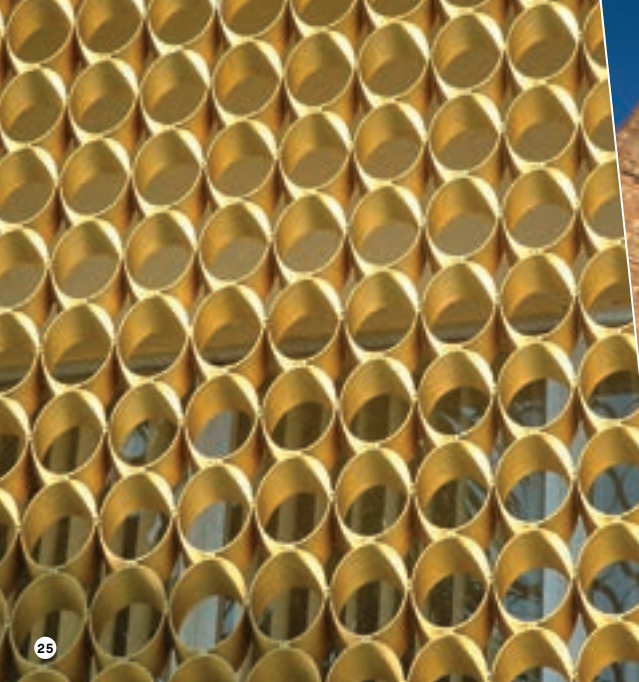
- Don Reiff & Associates
- Henry Hohausser
- Gilbert Fein
- Donald Smith
- Charles McKirahan
- McKay & Gibbs/Wang
- A. Herbert Mathes
- T. Hunter Henderson

- Igor Polevitzky — IP
- Melvin Grossman — MG
- Robert Little — RL
- Robert Swartburg — RS

- Albert Anis — AA
- Carlos Schoeppel — CS
- Gamble, Pownall & Gilroy — GPG
- John Volk — JV
- Morris Lapidus — ML
- Norman Giller — NG
- Wahl Synder — WS

- Other Architects
- Unknown Architects
- School, Public Parking, Business or Non-Historical
- Demolished
- Tour Stops
- Numbers reference photos in book





metal grilles, brise-soleil, and screen block

A chain-like, gold aluminum grille; a stately vertical brise-soleil; and exuberant circular and diamond-shaped cast-concrete screen block keep out the blazing South Florida sun while inviting in the energizing light. Repetitive motifs also add subtle rhythmic components to otherwise sober structures.

eyebrows, cut-outs, and the porte cochere

Cantilevered eyebrows shield windows from the elements while they provide dashes of linear sculpture. Circular and square cut-outs in roof canopies create their own unique art form via the interplay of light and shadow. A delta wing porte cochere heralds an uplifting arrival.





bean poles & balcony railings

Charles McKirahan's Bay Harbor Club co-op (1956) combines simple MIMo features to striking effect. Bean poles line the "jungle gym" spiral staircase (also seen in his Manhattan Tower, Fort Lauderdale, 1953) with its decorative balcony railings and cut-outs. The same motifs are repeated on the building's bayfront side where V-shaped bean poles delicately appear to support the multiple stories.

TRIVIA Yet another South Florida structure to bask in the Hollywood spotlight, this building is a TV star. *Dexter*, the main character of the Showtime series, lives there.





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decorative features

MiMo architecture offers a wealth of visual delights. Sometimes the play of light and shadow with overhangs, eyebrows, and cut-outs was all the decoration a building needed. In other instances, ordinary structures became extraordinary via their applied embellishments. The clever use of inexpensive materials was common on MiMo residences and offices whether large or small. Ceramic and glass tile in various colors and shapes wrapped around columns and stretched across walls. Stately coats of arms and images of sea life such as mermaids, dolphins and seahorses also made amusing adornments. Polished jewel-toned stones or organic pebbles embedded in cement added unusual textures to floors, walls, even fountains. And a galaxy of eight-pointed stars, a recurring motif, made many structures sparkle like never before.

textures & signage

A blank wall presents an ideal opportunity for abstract relief patterns that entertain the eye as they morph the sunlight into mesmerizing shadows. Slumped brick, textured concrete and stucco, and bold paint treatments enhance their respective buildings.

Whether in reference to the seaside environs or in deference to the town, every BHI MiMo building seems to have a name. And a smart modern sign in a sleek sans serif font is the best way to display that identity.



BOTH PAGES, LEFT TO RIGHT Visual variety comes via multiple materials paired with each other and with smooth walls; dark and light colors; and repeated geometric designs such as concentric squares.

NEXT PAGE, CLOCKWISE Several decorative details of MiMo: A star-shaped escutcheon, an array of balcony railings, mosaic tiles, bean poles, brick planters, and boxed windows.



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the future

There is no other community like Bay Harbor Islands. Its welcoming town plan, its cohesive collection of distinctive buildings on the East Island, created by an array of amazing architects, emerged in a little more than a decade.

During the past few years, a number of BHI structures have been lost to the wrecking ball, victims of redevelopment. Their replacements, if any, have mostly been stylistically inappropriate, not to mention out-of-scale for their lots and the neighborhood itself.

As quality of life and the unique character of the town are increasingly jeopardized, the importance of protecting the remaining BHI East Island structures cannot be underestimated. Historic preservation law — enacting a preservation ordinance, designating a historic district — is the only way to do this.

“Some pasts are the liveliest instigators of the present and the best springboards into the future,” wrote Le Corbusier in his book *When the Cathedrals Were White*. Surely, back in 1937 the great modernist architect, inventor of the brise-soleil, had historic preservation in mind when he penned those words.

Historic preservation is an embrace of planned progress, of adaptive re-use for existing buildings. It’s an affirmation of the past’s essential significance — for today and tomorrow.

LEFT Cut-out circle spandrels remind of effervescent champagne bubbles. **CENTER** Swordfish and seagulls share the sky. **INSET, TOP** Designed by John Volk, the original Storer Building (1953) on Kane Concourse.

Other Notable Structures by BHI Architects

Gilbert Fein

Gilbert Fein Neighborhood
Conservation District, Miami Beach
1200 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach
Deco Palm Apartments, Normandy Isle
Temple Menorah (with Morris Lapidus),
Miami Beach

Norman Giller

Carillon Hotel, Miami Beach
* Diplomat Hotel, Hallandale
North Shore Band Shell, North Beach
Ocean Palm Motel, Sunny Isles
* Singapore Hotel, Bal Harbour
* Suez Motel, Sunny Isles
Thunderbird Motel, Sunny Isles

Melvin Grossman

Dunes Motel, Sunny Isles
Doral Beach Hotel, Miami Beach
International Inn, Normandy Isle
Imperial House, Miami Beach

Henry Hohausser

Cardozo Hotel, Miami Beach
Century Hotel, Miami Beach
* New Yorker Hotel, Miami Beach
Sherry Frontenac Hotel, Miami Beach
Warsaw Ballroom, Miami Beach

Morris Lapidus

* Americana Hotel, Bal Harbour
Eden Roc Hotel, Miami Beach
Fontainebleau Hotel, Miami Beach
Lincoln Road Mall, Miami Beach

Robert Little

Memorial Classroom Building
(with Marion Manley), Univ. of Miami
Pick Music Library,
Univ. of Miami, Coral Gables
West Laboratory School,
Univ. of Miami, Coral Gables

A. Herbert Mathes

Fontainebleau Addition, Miami Beach
Lido Spa (now The Standard),
Miami Beach

Charles McKirahan

Alexander Hotel, Miami Beach
Birch House, Fort Lauderdale
Birch Tower, Fort Lauderdale Beach
* Castaways Hotel, Sunny Isles
Manhattan Tower, Fort Lauderdale
Sea Chateau, Fort Lauderdale

Igor Polevitzky

Albion Hotel, Miami Beach
Havana Riviera, Havana, Cuba
Sea Tower, Fort Lauderdale
Shelborne Hotel, Miami Beach

Don Reiff

Motel Ankara, Miami Beach

Robert Swartburg

Belle Towers, Miami Beach
Delano Hotel, Miami Beach
The Executive House, Miami Beach
Vagabond Motel, Miami

John Volk

Parker Playhouse, Fort Lauderdale
Royal Poinciana Playhouse, Palm Beach

Robert Law Weed

Boulevard Shops, Miami
Burdine's (now Macy's), Miami Beach
Miami Shores Elementary School,
Miami Shores
5600 Biscayne Blvd. (now Andiamo
Pizza/Leo's Car Wash), Miami

* Demolished

We shape
our buildings;
thereafter,
our buildings
shape us.

—Winston Churchill



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