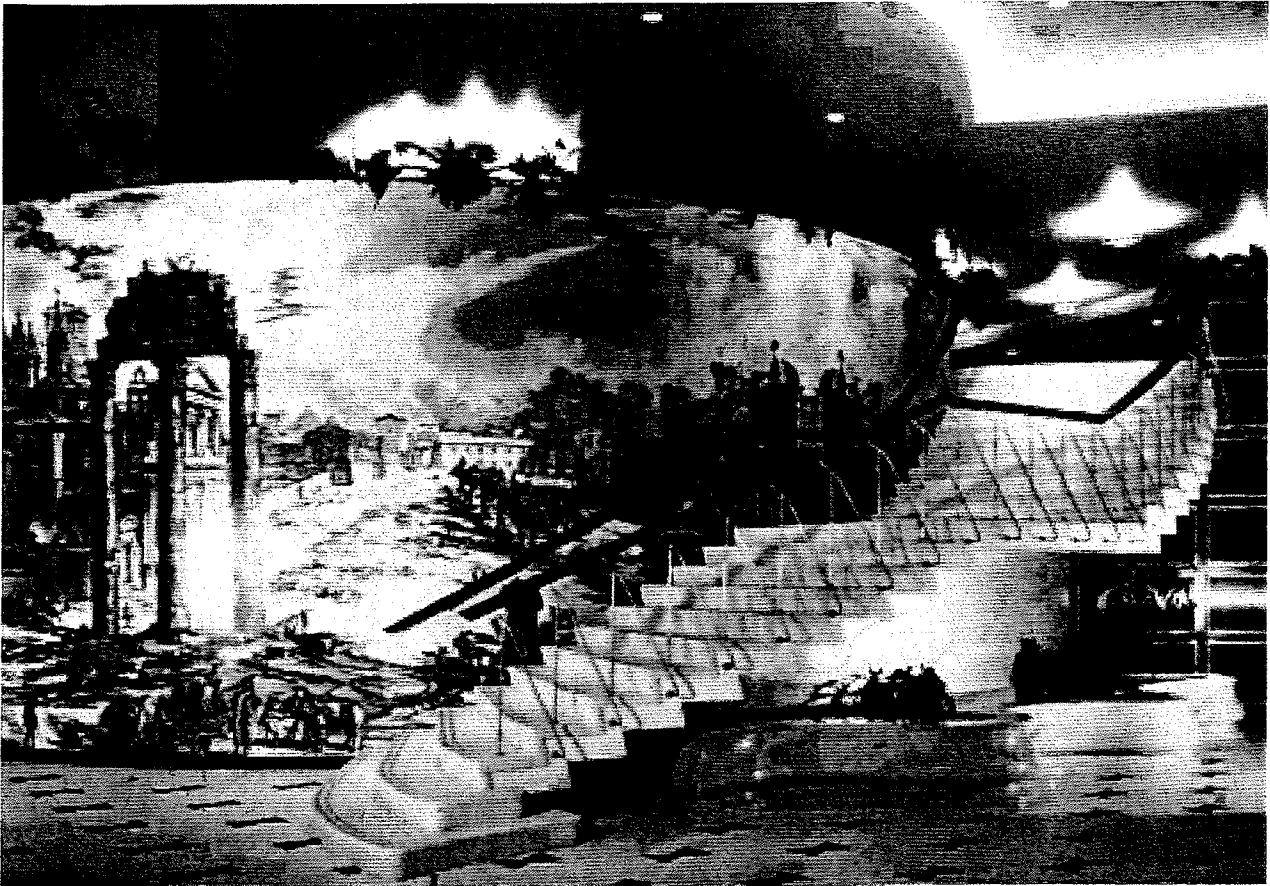


Fontainebleau Hotel

Miami Beach



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JANUARY 28, 2008

The Fontainebleau Hotel



pic from

26 of 36

From the Wikipedia entry (any small, bold text):

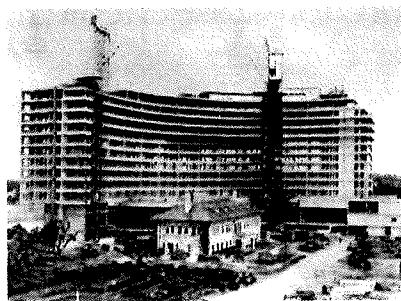
The Fontainebleau Hotel is one of the most historically and architecturally significant hotels on Miami Beach. Built in 1954 and designed by Morris Lapidus, it was considered the most luxurious hotel on Miami Beach at the time of its opening and for a long time after that, and is also thought to be the most significant building in Lapidus's career.

According to this Lapidus biography:

"By the early 50s he had developed a bunch of principles that he called theories:

- * Get rid of corners
- * Use sweeping lines
- * Use light to create unusual effects
- * Use plenty of color
- * Try to get drama
- * Keep changing the floor levels
- * People are attracted to light (The Moth Complex)"

In his 1996 autobiography *Too Much Is Never Enough*, Lapidus wrote that if: "American taste was being influenced by the greatest mass media of entertainment of that time, the movies.... So I designed a movie set!" Lapidus conceived of the ideas for the hotel each morning as he took a subway from Flatbush to his office in Manhattan.



1954 construction

BOREDOM-MOTIVATED



Radiator Springs
Radiator Springs is a "rural desert town located in Carbuoret County on U.S. Route 66, not far from Interstate 40 , in the state of Arizon...



Whatever happened to John Megna? Who the heck was John Megna , you ask? Maybe this will help: Megna portrayed Dill (Charles Baker Harris) in the 1962 film masterpiece, ...



"Fast Times"
Talk about too little, too late! Did you realize there was a television "spin-off" to Fast Times at Ridgemont High ? Neither did I, and

I wa...



Diana Dors
At the Cannes Film Palace in 1956 where she attended the presentation of *Yield to the Night* Diana Dors was born on October 23, 1931, in ...



The Island of Misfit Toys
The "The Island of Misfit Toys" segment from the 1964 Rankin-Bass special, *Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer* , is like some sort of

strange,...



The Clash at Shea Stadium
Prior to Shea Stadium show, October 1982 (pic by Bob Gruen) In 1982, the Clash were on tour in America, promoting their *Combat Rock* albu...

Lost in Translation locations

The inspiration to do this post (as well as many [but not all] links, data and descriptions) came from this guide to travel in Japan . Lo...



Chasing ghosts, fictional and otherwise
Rereading *To Kill a Mockingbird* and have just completed the Monroe County Heritage Museum 's book, *Monroeville: The Search for Harper Lee's...*



"Crazy Little Thing Called Love"
Here is Queen performing "Crazy Little Thing Called Love" on Saturday Night Live back in 1982. "Crazy Little Thing Called

Love" was wr...



Index: Volume I

I. Introduction

- Preliminary Remarks
- Chronologies: Permits and Building History
- Ownership listing from City Directory of Miami Beach
- Map of Original and Added Structures
- Site "Nolli" Plan at Lobby Level

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Index: Volume II

IV. Research Materials

- Newspaper and Journal Articles
- Abbreviated Building Card
- Abbreviated Microfilm
- Blueprints of Added Structures

Preliminary Remarks

The present report and attached documents comprise a survey of the Fontainebleau Hotel and surrounding grounds. It has been prepared in anticipation of the site's designation as part of an historic district.

The attached study provides an overview of the existing structures based on available documentation. It includes an historical narrative, vintage maps, photographs, and original blueprints, as well as the City of Miami Beach Building Card documenting the permits of structures on the property.

The Fontainebleau Hotel and property comprises several added structures in addition to the original main hotel buildings of 1954. Added structures and spaces include the ballrooms and Versailles building, lower lobby and level IV conference rooms, pool, landscaping, and ocean-front cafe and the Fontainebleau II tower completed in 2005. In the map which accompanies this report, the main hotel building and added structures are identified chronologically.

*Fontainebleau Hotel Historic Resources Report
July 25, 2005 Draft: Not for citation, reproduction or circulation without written consent of authors.*

Editing: Allan Shulman

Writing: Allan Shulman & Kara Wood

Layout & Design: Lauren Lue

Research Assistance: Carolyn Klepser & Maria Casuscelli

Chronology

1914	15-bedroom mansion built by James H. Snowden, a Standard Oil Co. executive
1923	Estate purchased for \$250, 000 by Harvey Firestone, auto tire magnate
February 7, 1938	Harvey Firestone Dies in his sleep
July 1952	Firestone Estate sold to Ben Novack for \$2,300,000
December 29, 1953	Permit issued for 150' CBS building with concrete piling foundation, flat roof, 624 water closets, 858 lavatories, 538 bath tubs, 261 showers. Architect Morris Lapidus
1954	Former Firestone Estate mansion being used by Novack and Taylor Construction as construction offices
February 10, 1954	Two 275-foot long groynes, and addition of 48 ft on two existing groynes
June 24, 1954	Swimming pool, 120' x 50', and approximately 250 cabanas
October 27, 1954	Firestone mansion demolished
November 5, 1954	33 one-story cabanas and 225 feet of steel groyne
November 18, 1954	Parking district #1, facility of 381 cars
December 4, 1954	"Pussy Cat" pool, approximately 40' x 70' (irregular shape)
February 18, 1955	16 timber pier docks
December 20, 1955	Parking Control Station
December 22, 1955	Tennis House, 12' x 20' x 10'
August 10, 1956	New terrace and private dining room, addition to pool deck, addition to "Boom-Boom Room"
November 1957	Novack briefly deposed from the management of the hotel
July 2, 1958	Demolition of approximately 16 cabanas on north side of property

Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach

- July 31, 1958 73,500 square-foot building (210' front, 416' depth, 47' height), 1 and 2 stories: 2 parking levels for 273 cars, one floor and mezzanine floor of public space
- October 7, 1958 Permission granted for parking level in setback area to a height of 5'0" above grade as permitted in parking district number 3." Architect A. Herbert Mathes
- October 16, 1958 Variance granted for addition to La Ronde Supper Club to extend within 51 ft. of property line on Collins Avenue (area District No. 69 requires 65-foot setback from Collins). Architect A. Herbert Mathes
- July 31, 1958 New 14 story CBS building: 339 hotel rooms and 18 apartments (13 2-bedroom, 4 1-bedroom, 1 4-bedroom). Front: east 50'6", depth: 410'11", height: 159'2." Architect A. Herbert Mathes YES SILVER TOWERS
- May 1959 In Florida State Supreme Court; Fontainebleau won right to build 14-story building next to Eden Roc hotel; Novack adds 335-room Fontainebleau Towers creating "world's biggest spite fence"
- July 23, 1959 ZBA granted variance to extend 3 building wall projections 6 ft. into north 20 ft. side yard setback along north wall: on east end, projection to extend 74'6" on floors 12-14; on west end, projection to extend 53'9" on floors 13-14; in center, projection to extend 14'0". Architect: A. Herbert Mathes
- May 9, 1960 ZBA granted variance for 3-level parking garage on southwest portion of property to extend within 5 ft. of both Collins Avenue and 44th Street. Elevation at top deck approximately 13' above grade with grille extending additional 10' surrounding top deck. Architect A. Herbert Mathes
- January 1961 Novack argues for Miami Beach secession from Dade County over value received from paid taxes
- May 19, 1961 Enclose Patio & enlarge present rosewood room
- October 3, 1961 Addition of roofing over existing "kitty cat" pool; addition of bowling alley on first floor level of existing cabanas
- October 27, 1961 ZBA granted variance for construction of roof above existing cabanas, 28' above mean low water mark. Architect A. Herbert Mathes

Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach

- March 16, 1962 Roof deck over cabana area from existing 2 story cabanas to extension of roof at “kitty cat” pool. Ice skating rink, 75’ x 56’, north of swimming pool (accessory use of hotel – not to be open to the public)
- May 1963 *The Miami Herald* reported that IRS was investigating tax returns filed by Fontainebleau that included questionable and untraceable deductions for ‘rebate credit slips’ given to ‘unidentified persons’
- 1965 Novack offers \$100,000 to House of Assembly member to lobby for Bahamian gambling license application
- July 1965 Fontainebleau requests lower tax assessment due to low profits
- November 4, 1966 Variance granted for construction of four finger docks to extend 40’ into Indian Creek on condition that all docking of boats is to be from bulk-head out. Contractor Atlantic Foundation Company
- January 6, 1967 Variance granted for construction of two finger piers 6’ wide, to extend 40’ into Indian Creek, and extension of 15’ to an existing 15’ dock
- May 1967 *The Miami Herald* begins investigations into Fontainebleau connections to Mafia
- June 1967 Ben Novak’s marital difficulties resolved with uncontested divorce on charges by Bernice Novack of ‘mental cruelty’
- Mid-June 1967 North wing of hotel suffered fire in upper level storage room
- August 17, 1967 Fontainebleau asked Circuit Court to stop ‘harassment tactics’ by *The Miami Herald* in defense of \$10 million libel suit brought against them by the hotel. Lawyers for *The Herald* successfully argued that newspaper’s inquiry was “in good faith”
- August 27, 1968 South part of cabanas to be demolished
- May 12, 1969 Variance granted for addition to northeast portion of Sorrento Hotel, extending to southeast portion of Fontainebleau property (now all under one ownership) to setback of 90’ from harbor line, with condition that construction commence within 6 months and applicant provide 208 parking spaces for the 138 units
- 1970 Novack added another 265 rooms in buying the neighboring Sorrento Hotel, rebuilt with spa as Fontainebleau South

Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach

- May 11, 1970 Request variance to construct a canopy for restaurant to be known as the "Gaslight Club"
- May 1972 Convicted mob triggerman Joseph (the Baron) Barboza, told a congressional committee that Frank Sinatra fronted part ownership in Fontainebleau for New England Mafia boss Raymond Patriarca
- July 1972 Fontainebleau is HQ for Democratic National Committee during convention
- August 1972 Protesters attempt to block entry for attendees to Republican Convention at Fontainebleau
- October 1973 Florida State Attorney investigating bugged hotel rooms and tapped phones during 1972 Democratic National Convention at Fontainebleau
- September 1974 Roland International purchased an option to buy Fontainebleau
- November 1, 1974 New corporation took control with Novack as minority partner
- November 17, 1974 *The Herald* reported that foreclosure suit on first mortgage on Fontainebleau, held by Connecticut General Life Insurance Co., was dismissed when Novack paid \$250,000 in back payments
- February 1975 Novack acknowledged option to buy but denied reports of pending closing for \$30 million
- April 1976 Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy rejected repeated recommendations from his department's Organized Crime Section for tax investigation of Frank Sinatra and his ties with 15 Mafia leaders
- June 2, 1976 Miami Beach Council disclosed the hotel was behind near \$1.3 million in property taxes
- December 10, 1976 Repair swimming pool
- January 1977 Roland International Corp. filed suit to retrieve \$4.3 million in unpaid loans made to develop Fontainebleau Park west of airport
- 1977 Director of Black Tuna drug smuggling gang attempted to rescue financially-floundering Fontainebleau in exchange of Novack appearing in court as character witness for two gang directors

March 14, 1977	Novack removed from control of the hotel
April 14, 1977	Novack filed to place the Fontainebleau in bankruptcy
May 3, 1977	Novack filed for personal bankruptcy
June 28, 1977	Novack surrendered control of the Fontainebleau
September 19, 1977	Four Miami Beach hotels damaged by succession of bombs
November 1977	Two bids offered for purchase of Fontainebleau
December 2, 1977	Stephen Muss and Roland International Corp. won court approval to buy bankrupt Fontainebleau Hotel
End of 1977	Fontainebleau property crippled by beach erosion
March 14, 1978	Stephen Muss/Hotelerama purchased Fontainebleau Hotel
April 1978	Hotelerama invested \$45 million in improvements
June 1978	Hotelerama signed 20-year management agreement with Hilton
June 29, 1978	“Deconstruction Party” kicked off wrecking of 3-story cabana building and pool deck that had been blocking view of ocean
October 9, 1978	Commercial swimming pool, 334,500 gallons, \$186,000. Contractor Edwin M. Green
January 26, 1979	Apply VIP roof system over walkway
January 29, 1979	Alteration to longhouse and snack bar
March 9, 1979	Mountain waterfall framing
April 15, 1980	Build 3-level parking garage using setback*
September 7, 1982	Convert offices in lobby to jewelry store
September 17, 1982	Refurbished La Ronde Room and re-created “the nightclub ambiance of 1943 – when everybody who was anybody wintered thereabouts”

- February 20, 1984 Fontainebleau celebrated 30th birthday with intimate party that headlined new mayor of Fontainebleau,, France, Paul Seramy. *The Herald* noted that Lapidus and Novack were still “acidly feuding over who designed the hotel in 1952.”
- July 6, 1984 For addition of night club/restaurant at northeast corner, ZBA granted requests to waive 1) 165’ of required 300 ft. separation between night club and place of worship (actual separation is 135 ft.), 2) all of required 50 ft. rear yard setback at pedestal, 3) waive 79’ 3” of 99’3” north side yard setback at ground and pedestal levels, and 4) all of required 50 ft. rear setback at ground level for pool enclosure around existing pool at southeast corner. A request to waive 125 additional off-street parking spaces for additional 19 units and operation of 424-seat night club/restau- rant was not granted. Architect: Arc-Tech Associates.
- April 5, 1985 Ben Novack died of heart and lung failure at Mount Sinai Medical Center
- May 19, 1987 Certificate of Occupancy for meeting rooms, ballroom #2, promenade, north tower area 4th floor center, east section of building, kosher kitchen, ballroom level east section, upper parking level
- November 8, 1988 Approved for new meeting rooms and ballroom expansion with “contrac- tual agreement ... with the city calling for the lot to be maintained as a parking lot for the Fontainebleau.” Architect: Arc-Tech Associates.
- January 5, 1988 Re-construction of restaurant
- November 17, 1997 Application for 41-story, 250 unit apt w/garage*
- May 5, 2000 Build a 36-story, 230 units/231 apts. & parking*
- September 19, 2000 Cabana Demolition
- January 2001 Death of Lapidus prompted Herbert Muschamp to re-analyze role of architect of “swank”
- January 31, 2001 Roof-top addition*
- February 15, 2001 Interior demo & lobby*
- May 10, 2001 Chickee Hut*

July 22, 2003 Variance for 15' pedestal side setback. Architect: Nichols Brosch
Sandoval & Associates.

September 16, 2003 Revisions to architectural & landscaping plans*

November 18, 2003 To erect 200' 18-story building at southeast corner of property

April 19, 1005 Request extension for commencement of construction.

*Taken from the City of Miami Beach Planning and Zoning Master Index of Land Use Files.
All others taken from Building Card and original application files.

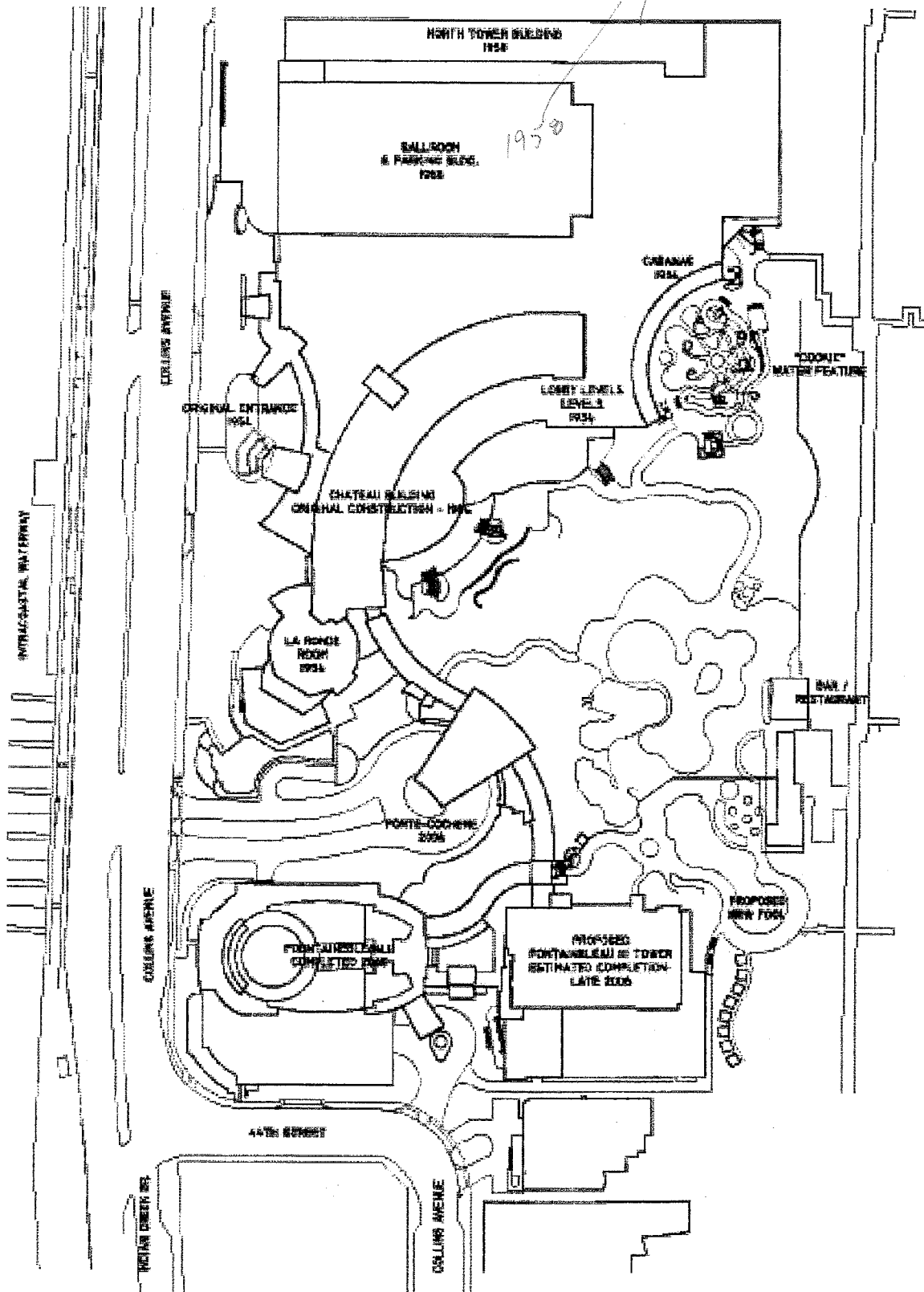
City Directory Listings for Fontainebleau Property

1915 No Listing
1916 No Listing
1917 No Listing
1918 No Listing
1919 No Listing
1920 No Listing
1921 No Listing
1922 No Listing
1923 No Listing
1924 Harvey Firestone
1925 Harvey Firestone
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1955 Fontainebleau Hotel

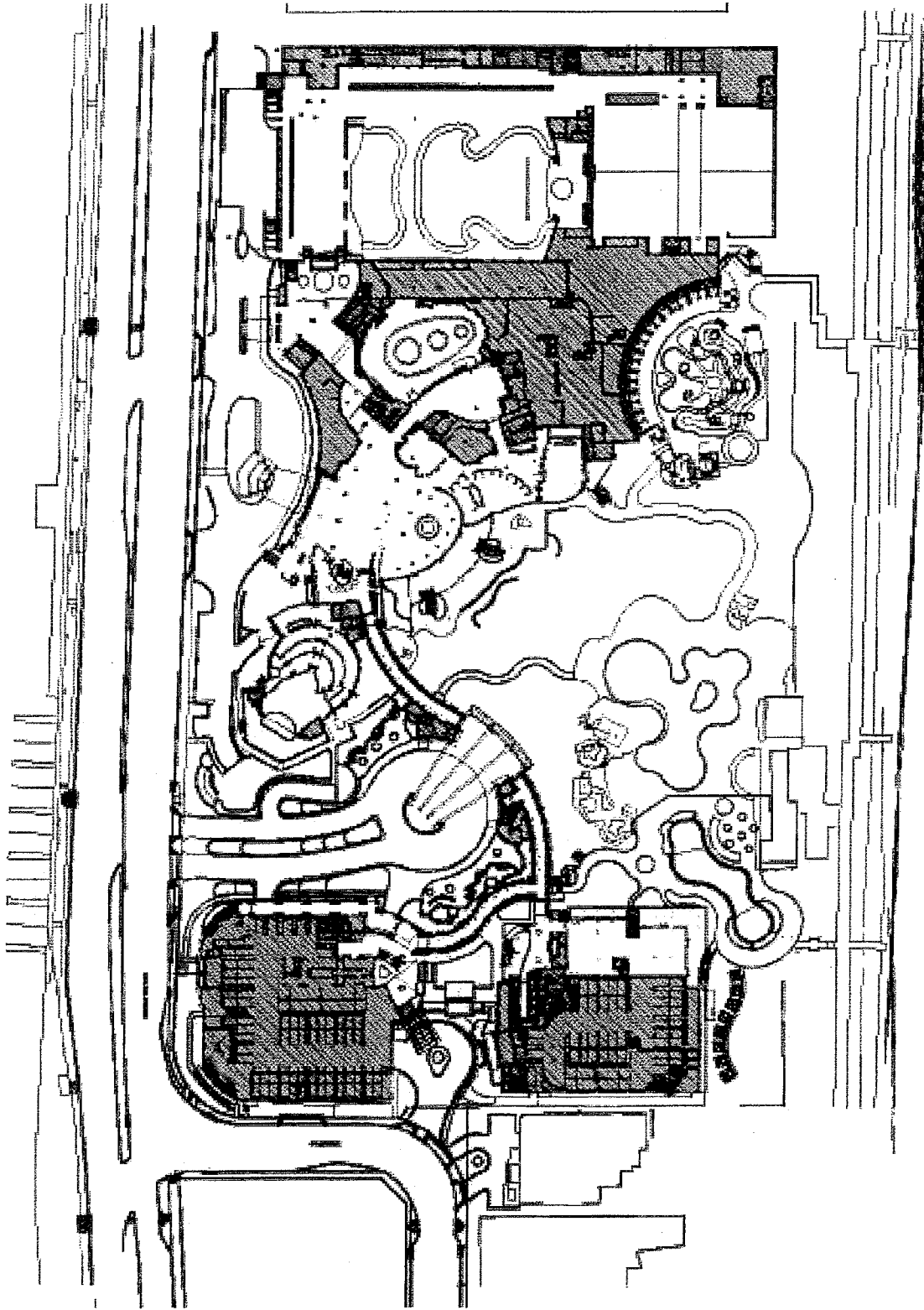
Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach

1956 Fontainebleau Hotel
1957 Fontainebleau Hotel
1958 Fontainebleau Hotel
1959 Fontainebleau Hotel
1960 Fontainebleau Hotel Stewart Duke Exec. Manager
1961 Fontainebleau Hotel Stewart Duke Exec. Manager
1962 Fontainebleau Hotel Stewart Duke Exec. Manager
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1971 Fontainebleau Hotel
1972 Fontainebleau Hotel
1973 Fontainebleau Hotel
1974 Fontainebleau Hotel
1975 Fontainebleau Hotel
1976 Fontainebleau Hotel

Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach



Existing Roof Plan, including Proposed Fontainebleau III



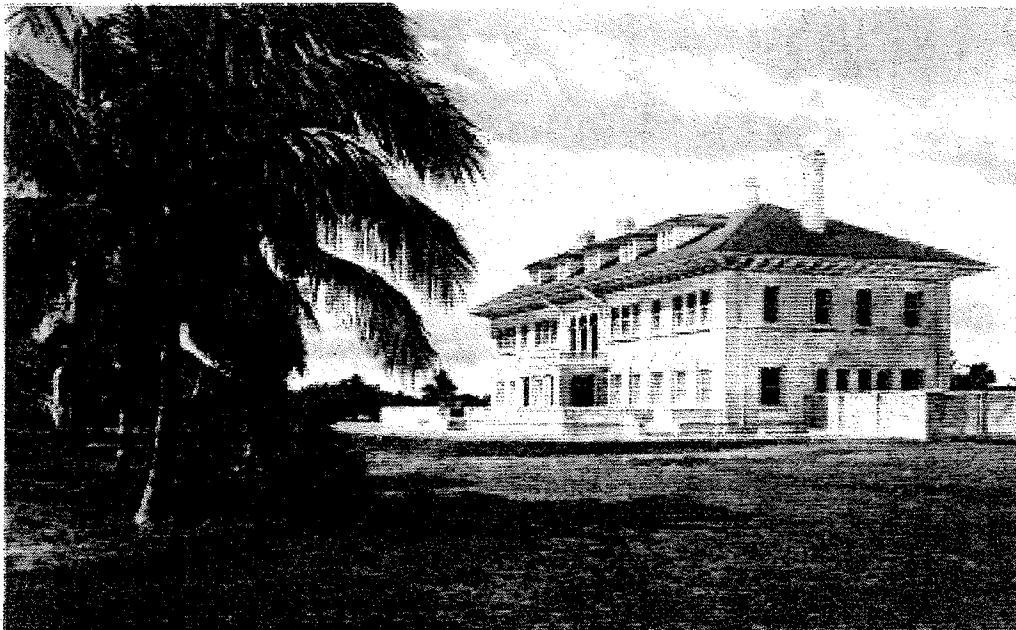
"Nolli" Plan including Proposed Fontainebleau III

Historical Analysis

The Snowden/Firestone Estate (1915-1952)

The site of the Fontainebleau Hotel, bordered by 44th Street to the south and Collins Avenue to the west, has been a pivotal location, literally, since the incorporation of Miami Beach in 1915: it marks the juncture of the Miami Beach Improvement Company's Oceanfront Subdivision on the south (terminating at 44th Street) and Carl Fisher's Indian Beach Subdivision on the north. While in the former, as Carolyn Klepser notes, "Collins Avenue runs equitably through the middle, affording building lots of both the Ocean and Indian Creek, suitable for middle-class homes,"¹ in the latter Collins Avenue runs along Indian Creek, creating large and secluded oceanfront lots for the private estates of 'Millionaires' Row.'

It was at this strategic site that James Snowden, (a Standard Oil Co. executive and friend of Carl Fisher), built a 15-bedroom mansion in 1919. In addition to the main house were three other structures: a guest house, garages with servants' quarters above, and a colorful doll house.² The estate was purchased in 1923 by Harvey Firestone, the auto tire magnate, for \$250,000. Firestone used the estate to entertain world-renowned figures in science, industry and government, making it the most famous site on Miami Beach. President Warren G. Harding, Henry Ford, naturalist John Burroughs and Thomas A. Edison were all guests there.



JAMES H. SNOWDEN ESTATE, ALTONIA BEACH, MIAMI, FLA.

*James H. Snowden Estate postcard
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida postcard collection*

Firestone died in his sleep on February 7, 1938 at age 69³ at the home, which had been renamed Harbel Villa.⁴ The property was held by his widow, Mrs. Idabelle Smith Firestone, until its sale to the Fontainebleau Hotel Corporation, headed by Ben Novack, operator of the Sans Souci Hotel, in July 1952 for a reported \$2,300,000.⁵ The city of Miami Beach had reportedly tried several times to buy the Firestone estate for the creation of a park, but presumably lacked sufficient resources to meet the asking price. City representatives were even so bold as to suggest that the estate of Harvey Firestone donate the land as a park, a proposal that was only met with scoffs.⁶

¹ Carolyn Klepser, "Neighborhood Designation Report," Collins Waterfront Historic District, Miami Beach, November 2000.

² Harold Gardner, publicity office for Fontainebleau, copy of undated press release draft, circa December 1954.

³ "Harvey Firestone is Dead in Florida," *New York Times*, February 8, 1938.

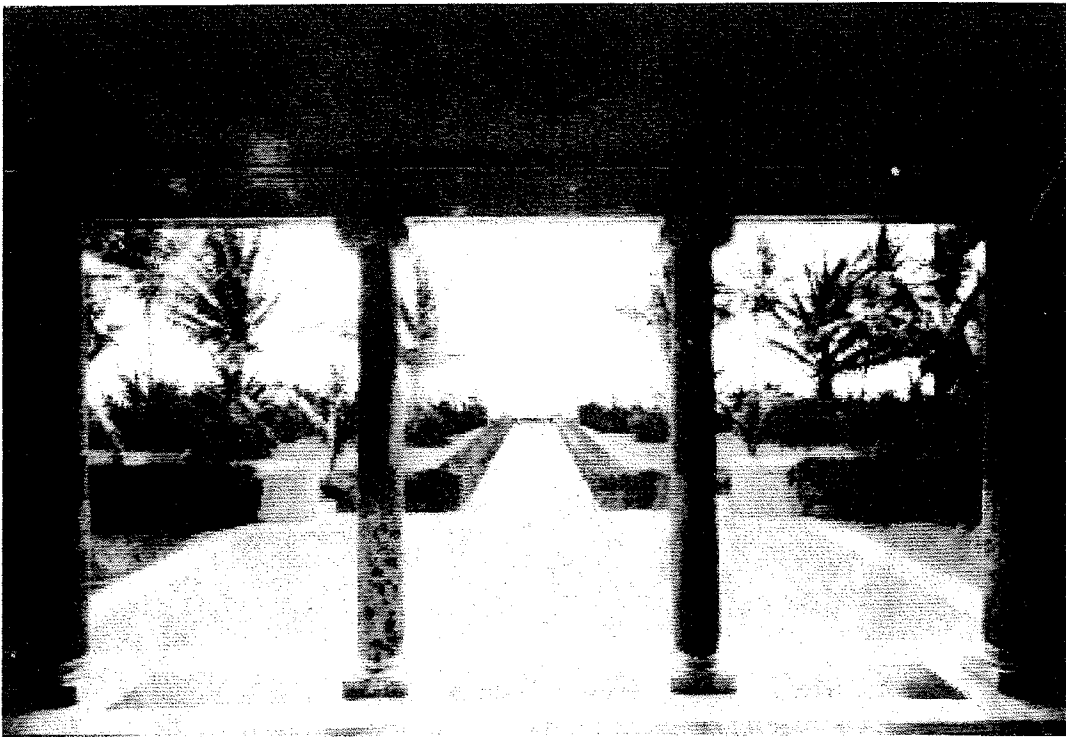
⁴ The name "Harbel," given to their Miami Beach home, merged "Harvey" and "Idabelle." The title was also given to their rubber plantation in Liberia, so vast at one million acres, that it is also the name of the nearby town. (New Internationalist magazine on-line, www.newint.org/issue131/rubber.htm, June 20, 2005.)

⁵ "Firestone Estate Sold," *New York Times*, July 23, 1952.

⁶ "Firestone Gift? Beach Gets Laugh," *The Miami Herald*, February 21, 1952.



*Firestone Estate, 4441 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Matlack Collection*

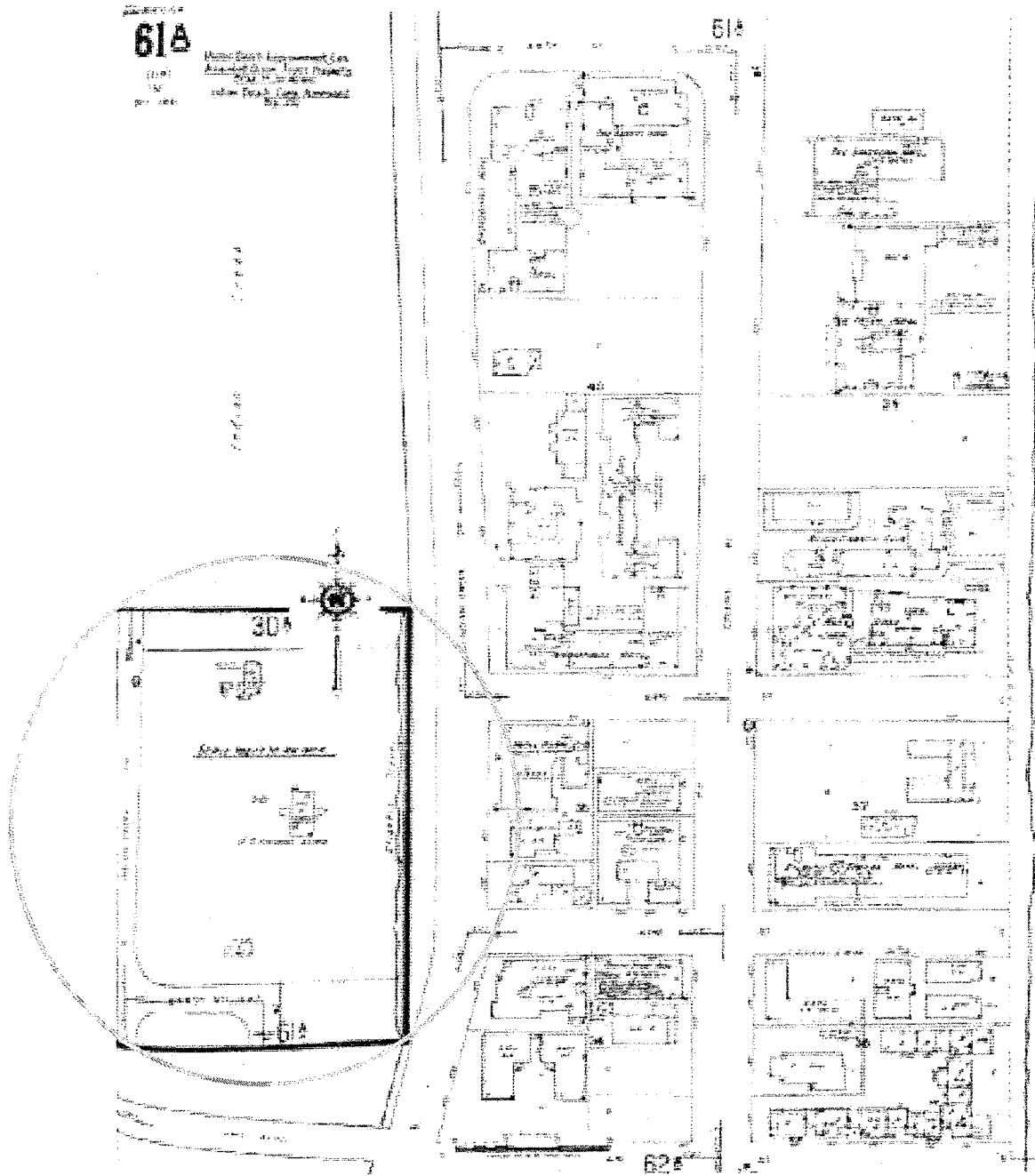


*Firestone Estate, View from loggia
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Matlack Collection*



Sanborn fire insurance map of Miami Beach, 1921
Courtesy of Digital Sanborn Maps: 1867-1970 (<http://sanborn.umi.com>)

Historic Report, August 31, 2005
Allan T. Shulman Architect, P.A.



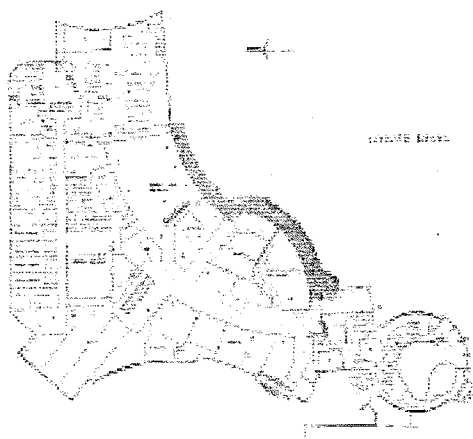
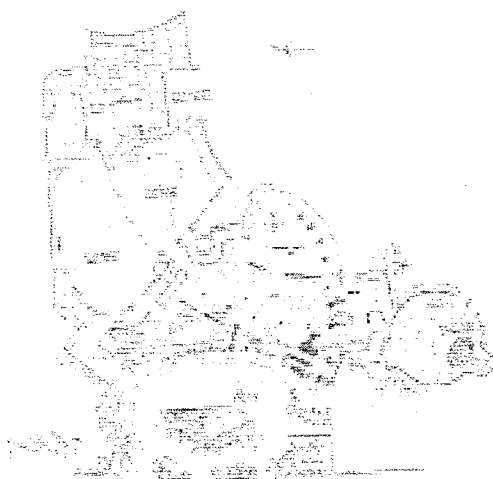
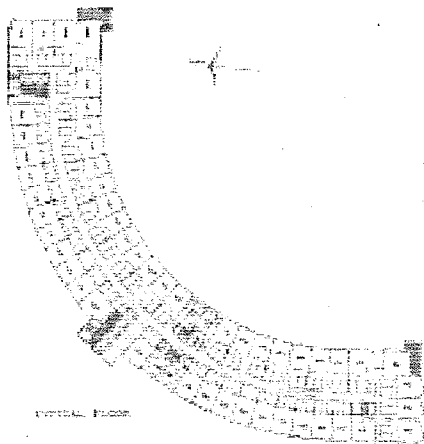
Sanborn fire insurance map of Miami Beach, December 1941
Courtesy of Digital Sanborn Maps: 1867-1970 (<http://sanborn.umi.com>)

The Fontainebleau: Design and Construction (1952-1954)

A crucial component of any proposed hotel development at the Firestone Estate was the rezoning of the property from Estate Residential to hotel use. The zoning change elicited a powerful controversy that split residents, property owners, commercial interests and hotel interests. Hotel interests were concerned that the change would flood, and therefore bankrupt their market. Some owners of nearby residential-zoned lots claimed that the rezoning would devalue their property; some were already being forced out of their own homes in the area by the dramatic rise in taxes that they could no longer afford. Others, including city officials, argued that Miami Beach's stunning population growth between 1930, when the land was zoned (7,000), and 1953 (46,000 year-round residents plus 125,000 winter tourists), warranted the development of additional hotel accommodations. They also claimed that the widening of Collins Avenue north of 44th Street had created a "main arterial highway" on that section of the city, and that, in the process, privacy to homeowners had already been sacrificed. In January 1953, the *New York Times* reported that the Circuit Court had ruled to uphold the change in Miami Beach rezoning on the oceanfront lots north of 44th Street from estates to hotels. Judge Gordon, who was responsible for the court's decision, said that "this strip of eighty-six lots has been in a state of arrested development," and that by rezoning the property, land values would increase by 400%.¹ The zoning change cleared the way for the Fontainebleau and later Eden Roc hotels, and eventually the redevelopment of Millionaire's Row, into one of the world's greatest aggregations of postwar resort architecture.

When the permit for the Fontainebleau Hotel was issued on December 29, 1953, it was the largest permit ever granted by the City of Miami Beach. The site comprised 700 feet along the ocean and 500 feet in depth. The permit was granted for a 150-foot tall CBS building with a concrete piling foundation and flat roof, including 624 water closets, 858 lavatories, 538 bath tubs and 261 showers. The 6,000 square foot swimming pool and approximately 250 cabanas were permitted on June 24, 1954, and 33 additional cabanas and a 381-car parking facility were permitted later that year in November. Weeks before the hotel opened, the "Pussy Cat" children's pool, approximately 40 feet by 70 feet, was approved. The Fontainebleau's original size and amenities constituted, by almost any standard, a breakthrough in resort hotel design.

The eleven month construction employed 1,200 workers. The sizeable investment of \$14,000,000, including \$2,400,000 paid for the land and \$2,000,000 for equipment and furnishings² was financed by 32 original partners.³ In addition to Ben Novack, the *Daily News* reported that other members of the hotels board of directors included Herbert Glassman, Jules M. Gorlitz, Ben Jaffe, Sam Lane, Joe Novack, Abe M. Parker and Abe Rosenberg.⁴ The existing Harbel Villa became the construction headquarters for the new hotel and its builder, Taylor Construction, with the breakfast room as the private office of Ben Novack. In the solarium, a model of the architect's vision was on public display. Morris Lapidus, who had previously designed the interiors of the Sans Souci for Ben Novack and was associated with several other hotel projects, was architect, his first major solo commission.



Top: Typical floor
Middle: Main Lobby
Bottom: Lower Lobby
Original Floorplans published in
Interiors, May 1955, v. 114

The hotel was to be the largest in Miami Beach with its main structure occupying nearly five of the fourteen acres of its site, with 554 rooms in an eleven-story gently curving 440-foot-long slab built over three-floor pedestal. The pedestal included a main lobby of about 17,000 square feet, a Grand Ballroom or convention room seating 1,000 dining-room style next to a main dining room with a capacity of 550 (which could be combined to accommodate 3,000), small private dining rooms seating 125 and a breakfast room seating 200. The La Ronde Supper Club, with seating for 500, had a stage that could be raised and lowered hydraulically. A ground floor retail concourse had shops, a post office, health clinic and stock brokerage offices, coffee shop, club-rooms and a cocktail lounge; there were solaria, Russian and Turkish baths and a gymnasium on the roof. The complex was served by approximately 900 employees, a 1,300-ton air conditioning plant, an auxiliary power plant, laundry, kitchens, bakeshop, and an employee cafeteria.

Above the pedestal, the tower was also spacious and luxurious. The guest rooms, approximately 14' x 18', were considered large, but the dressing rooms at 5 ft' x 11' and equipped with refrigerators and built-in ironing boards and furniture, were particularly generous; by contrast, the bathrooms remained relatively modest. Only the top three floors had balconies, at 7' wide; the penthouse floor had three-room presidential suites at 14' x 28' with similarly sized balconies.⁵ Two-room Governors' Suites were on the top-floor corners. Although Lapidus largely abandoned private balconies and bris-soleil of a tropicalist approach in favor of sealed ribbon windows for the other air conditioned guest rooms, an environmental genesis cannot be ruled out: the sweeping curve of the tower could alternately be viewed as a pragmatic device, since it opened south-east toward the trade winds. As the *Miami Daily News* noted, "nearly every modern device made of steel, masonry, glass, plastic, aluminum, marble and textiles has been introduced so guests may take better advantage of South Florida's warm sun and soft breezes."⁶

Beyond the main structure of the hotel a playground of amenities extended across the grounds when the Firestone mansion was finally demolished in October 1954. Six acres of French parterre gardens that emulated the pleasure palaces of the French kings at Fontainebleau and Versailles, playgrounds, tennis courts, a putting green as well as the pool and cabana complex ran from the hotel to the ocean. Built in a serpentine shape around the pool, and extending almost the entire length of the site, were 250 cabana units in a three story structure; each 9' x 15' room could be rented by guests during the day as a private dressing room, massage room and bar. From the Garden Lobby of the hotel, guests could survey, the enormous 6,500 SF pool with its "bevy of bathing beauties" skiing across it.⁷ The southeast orientation of the main tower was designed to admit sunshine to the gardens and cabana area all day.⁸ Below the ground level, an L-shaped double-decked parking facility offered storage for 500 cars; across the street on Indian Creek, the hotel's private docks could accommodate 50 large crafts.

According to the Miami Herald, "Everything about the place is in the super-colossal category."⁹ The hotel deployed 25 acres of carpeting, 85,000 SF of glass and 2,000 mirrors. Imported statuary, marble fireplaces and 18th century pianos and glimmering crystal chandeliers graced the lobby areas and dining rooms.¹⁰ A famed Normandy statue from the sunken cruise ship guarded the La Ronde foyer. The hotel's PBX switchboard had 45 operators, more than enough to handle 2,000 telephones, enough for a small-sized city. Its 847 staff members included a permanent security force of 14 men. Eight kitchens, including a full butcher shop with 10 freezer-lockers, were staffed by over 160 chefs and kitchen staff.

The Fontainebleau took tourists by storm, lured great performers either as guests or headliners at the supper club, flabbergasted architects and outraged critics. Once derisively termed "the nation's grossest national product," it was instantly the most colossal, the most opulent, the most gaudy, the most outrageous and the most controversial of a generation of colossal, opulent, gaudy, outrageous and controversial Miami Beach resort hotels. Some joked the hotel was designed "to convince a sucker spending \$50 that he's actually spending \$100." "A beautiful place," cracked Jack Benny, "but they overdid things when they put a 10-piece orchestra in the men's room."¹¹ Novack wanted over-the-top glamour and fame to be flowing through his hotel, yet he originally proposed that a vacation at the Fontainebleau would cost no more than the rates at neighboring oceanfront hotels,¹² seemingly incongruous goals. When the Fontainebleau opened, the price range of rooms was \$37 to \$200.

The Fontainebleau's dramatically curvaceous and amorphous spatial vocabulary, a byproduct of Lapidus' own experience in retail architecture, was one of the most important features of the hotel. Lapidus always maintained that the Fontainebleau was curved "because of function – to keep the lengthy hallways from seeming so long to the guests. ... The corridors are long, but the guests never realize it. The curves express what goes on inside the building – a Modern

concept.”¹³ The architect had discovered that if he curved the space with serpentine walls, “people would meander to the far side: the waves pulled them like an undertow.”¹⁴ His conviction was forged designing long, narrow stores in New York, where the architect had developed tactics of drawing customers all the way through the store: “I hated boxes, so all of my stores had sweeping curves and lines. I kept moving people – the space seems to go on and on.”¹⁵ As Joseph Giovanni has noted, his “spatial maneuvers became a personal signature as well as an emblem of the times. More important, he emerged as a behaviorist: there was psychology to space.”¹⁶

He brought this mastery of movement to the hotel in its suite of public spaces built over the ground-level shopping concourse that fused hotel design with new retailing trends, providing countless opportunities for Lapidus to express his design mastery of commercial space. He meshed theories of attraction based on poignant juxtapositions with a trademarked degree of excess. As with the size of the hotel itself, Lapidus sought to “overwhelm the visitor with color, texture, and opulence,¹⁷ earning him a reputation as the epitome of excess, or even “the epitome of the apogee.”¹⁸ Polly Redford remarked in *Billion-Dollar Sandbar*, “Never has so much Gross National Product been assembled in one place.”¹⁹

The Fontainebleau’s pedestal was also significant for its idiosyncratic form, open-plan configuration and theatrical handling of the interiors, which blended historical and spatial exoticism. An array of parlors lounges and theaters were legibly expressed on the building’s exterior, not just with plate glass but in dynamically juxtaposed volumes – a visual diagram of leisure culture. The spatial particularity of the major rooms, the amoeboid garden lobby, detached La Ronde supper club, and pie shaped Fleur de Lis dining room, bring to mind the individualized components of casinos found in Havana and some South American cities, perhaps anticipating a nightlife and gaming culture that ultimately eluded Miami. The focal point of the public spaces was the long curved lobby, a space whose size and multiple seating islands conveyed the logic of a public concourse (an effect at one time augmented by escalators that fed guests to the shopping level below). Lapidus’ mastery at juxtaposing form with graphic sleight of hand was nowhere more evident than at one end of the lobby, where a grand stair spiraled around a wall surface emblazoned with an 18 foot high reproduction of Piranesi’s ‘vedute’ of the Roman Forum.

In fact, the lobby was, following traditional practice in Miami, a stage set for touristic spectacle and glamour, rather than a built demonstration of distinctly modernist theories and practices. Lapidus’ experiments in architectural hybridity cultivated public space as a theater for acting out a collective drama in which tourism was invested with spectacle, fashion was displayed and consumed, and new contemporary identities found visual and spatial representation. His hotels, rooted in a middle-class American thirst for the exotic, were “no place like home,”²⁰ but rather conceived as narrative productions that distilled and synthesized populist icons. Wielding symbols of pleasure and exoticism, Lapidus created lavish, eclectic environments that multiplied the

opportunity to see and be seen. Multiple stages, proscenia and vast areas for observers were choreographed features of the spatial flow, making the hotel, as Cook has noted, a “stage...set for the splendid human act.”²¹ The result was a multicultural fantasy animated by intercontinental transience, the mid-20th century mode of *flânerie*.

As the comprehensive designer of the hotel, Lapidus learned to disassociate modern exteriors from thematic, even period interiors. This disassociation allowed him to indulge a ‘decorative principle’ that betrayed his beginnings as a delineator. The Fontainebleau’s most controversial aspect was its outrageously ersatz French Baroque style, which stocked modernist spaces with period furnishings and imported artifacts. Similarly, for the Eden Roc Lapidus devised an ‘Italian Renaissance’ theme. Lapidus attributed such hybrid excesses to his reading of client desire, a tongue-in-cheek explanation that, although caricatured and unsatisfactory, has never been challenged. In fact, the creation of ‘themed’ environments corresponded to Lapidus’ underlying interests, both as an amateur anthropologist and choreographer of popular drama.

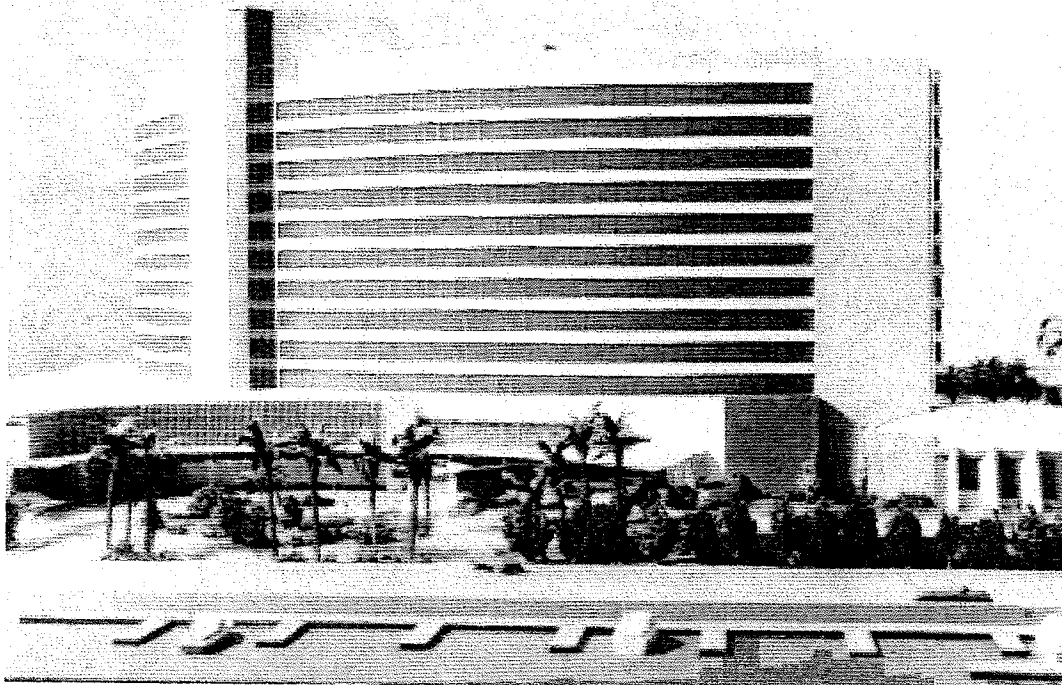
Had Lapidus ever finished his opus magnum, tentatively titled *Man’s Three Million Year Odyssey*, the intentions of his hybridizing style might have been clarified.²² This anthropological epic was to have begun with the geological foundations of the planet, and moved on to cover human evolution and the history of art and culture. Although he never succeeded in constructing this exposition in literary form, Lapidus’ hotels can be assembled and read as just such a narrative. Together, they form an astonishing work of speculative cultural history, using post-war developments in tourism and consumption to advance a plot about hemispheric unity. Manhattan’s design establishment, championing a more restrictive notions of modernism, may have condemned Lapidus’ idiosyncratic Pan-American style to the sidelines of architectural history, but as hybridity transforms American cities in our age of globalization, it should be apparent that the cultural fantasies nurtured by postwar Miami endured and ultimately flourished.

- ¹ Arthur L. Himbert, "Gold Coast Rezoning," *New York Times*, January 11, 1953.
- ² John T. Bills "Fontainebleau: Hotel Masterpiece, It will be Florida's Largest, Most Luxurious Hostelry by Fall. *The Miami Herald*, February 21, 1954.
- ³ Mike Capuzzo, "The Sand Castle: The Famed Fontainebleau, inspired by a French castle and a Miami Beach toilet seat, has seen – and barely survived – more than 10,000 nights," *The Miami Herald*, February 19, 1984.
- ⁴ Frank Fox, "Doors Swing Open at Fontainebleau: Staff of 847 Needed Just to Run Largest Hotel Ever Built At Beach," *Miami Daily News*, December 19, 1954.
- ⁵ John T. Bills "Fontainebleau: Hotel Masterpiece, It will be Florida's Largest, Most Luxurious Hostelry by Fall. *The Miami Herald*, February 21, 1954.
- ⁶ Ibid, Fox.
- ⁷ "Roughing it at Miami Beach," *The Saturday Evening Post*, February 23, 1957, v. 229, pp. 19-21.
- ⁸ Ibid, Bills.
- ⁹ Stephen J. Flynn, "Everything at Fontainebleau Hotel is Super-Colossal," *The Miami Herald*, December 19, 1954.
- ¹⁰ There is some uncertainty over the history of the lobby lighting fixtures and its original furnishings. Photographs taken of the lobby interior three and six months after the hotel's opening (see Library of Congress Gottscho-Schleisner Collection and "Fontainebleau, Miami's Hotel of the Year," *Interiors*, May 1955, v. 114, pp. 88-95.) show more modern furniture and less ornate fixtures. Original watercolor renderings by Morris Lapidus and photographs from Lapidus's autobiography (*Too Much is Never Enough*, Rizzoli, 1996) dated 1954 show the elaborate crystal chandeliers similar to the ones that currently occupy the lighting alcoves. This research implies that a redecoration took place very shortly after the hotel opened in December 1954, but no other confirmation of this process has yet been found.
- ¹¹ Blumenthal, Ralph, "Miami Beach Fights to Regain Its Superstar Billing," *New York Times*, June 17, 1979.
- ¹² Ibid Bills.
- ¹³ "Interview: Lapidus Cuts Loose," *Architecture*, February 1997.
- ¹⁴ Giovannini, Joseph, "Ahead of the Curves," *New York Magazine*," March 26, 2001.
- ¹⁵ Ibid.
- ¹⁶ Ibid.
- ¹⁷ Alice Friedman, "The Luxury of Lapidus: Glamour, Class, and Architecture in Miami Beach, *Harvard Design Magazine*, Summer 2000, p. 40.
- ¹⁸ Gilbert Milstein, "Architect De Luxe of Miami Beach," *The New York Times Magazine*, Jan. 6, 1957, p. 26.
- ¹⁹ Polly Redford, *Billion-Dollar Sandbar: a biography of Miami Beach*, New York: Dutton, 1970, p. 238.
- ²⁰ Morris Lapidus, *An Architecture of Joy*, Miami: E.A. Seeman, 1979.
- ²¹ John W. Cook, *Architecture as Intentional Nonsense*, Departmental Paper, (New Haven: Yale University p. 24.
- ²² Morris Lapidus, *Too Much is Never Enough*, op. cit., p. 291.

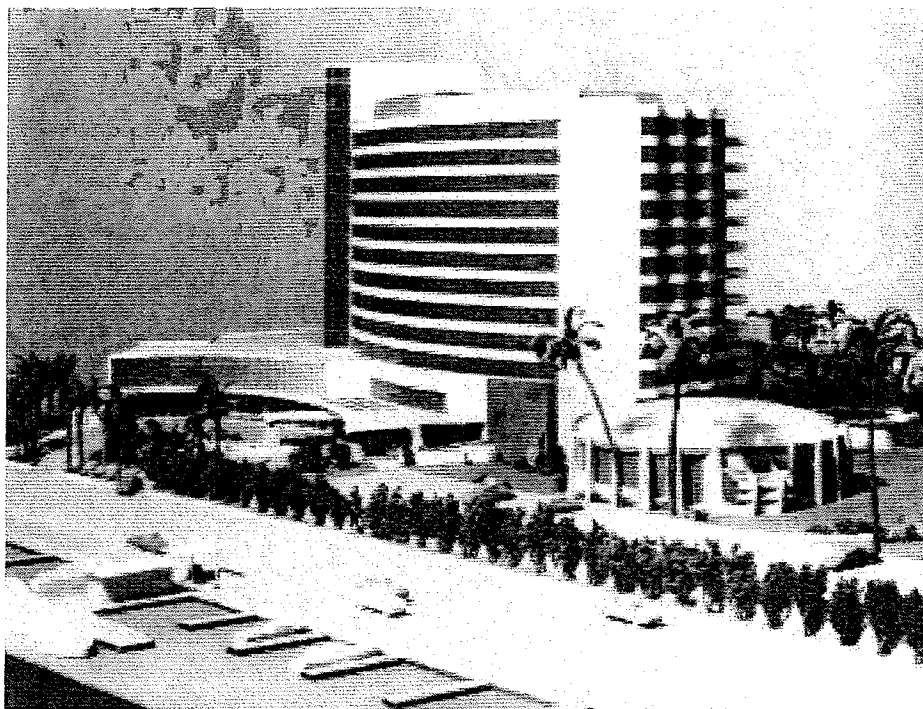
Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach



Model, view from southwest (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Model, view from west (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Model, view from southwest (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Model, view from southwest (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

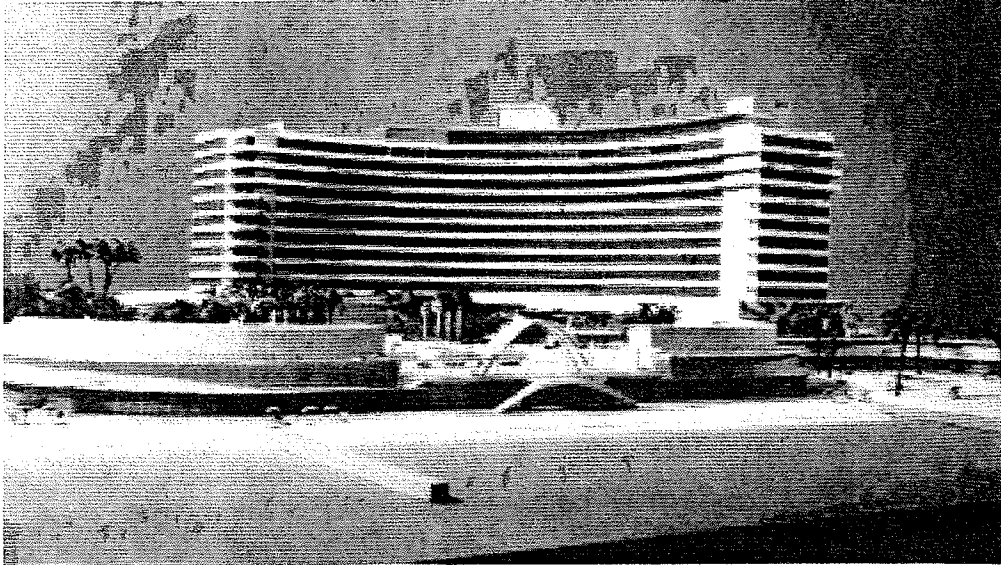


Model, view from south (1954)
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Model, view from southeast (1954)
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

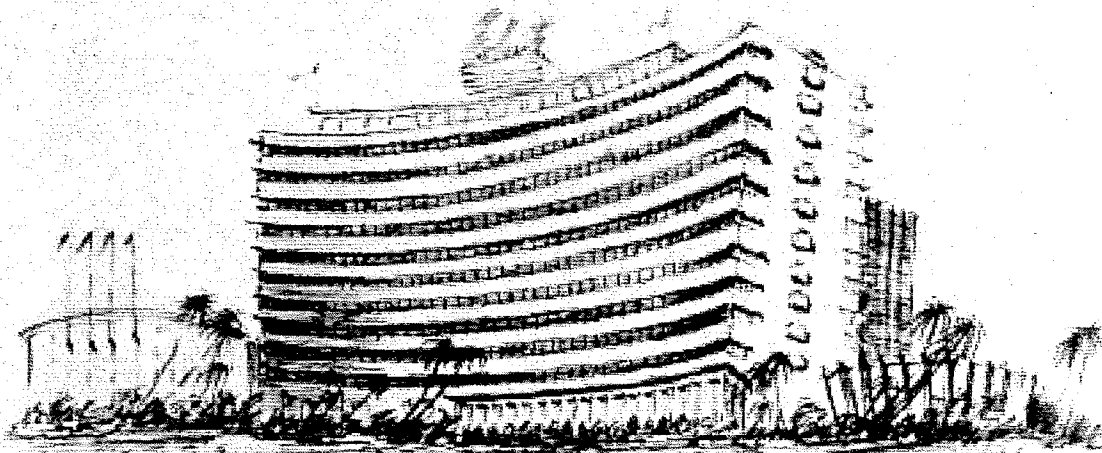
Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach



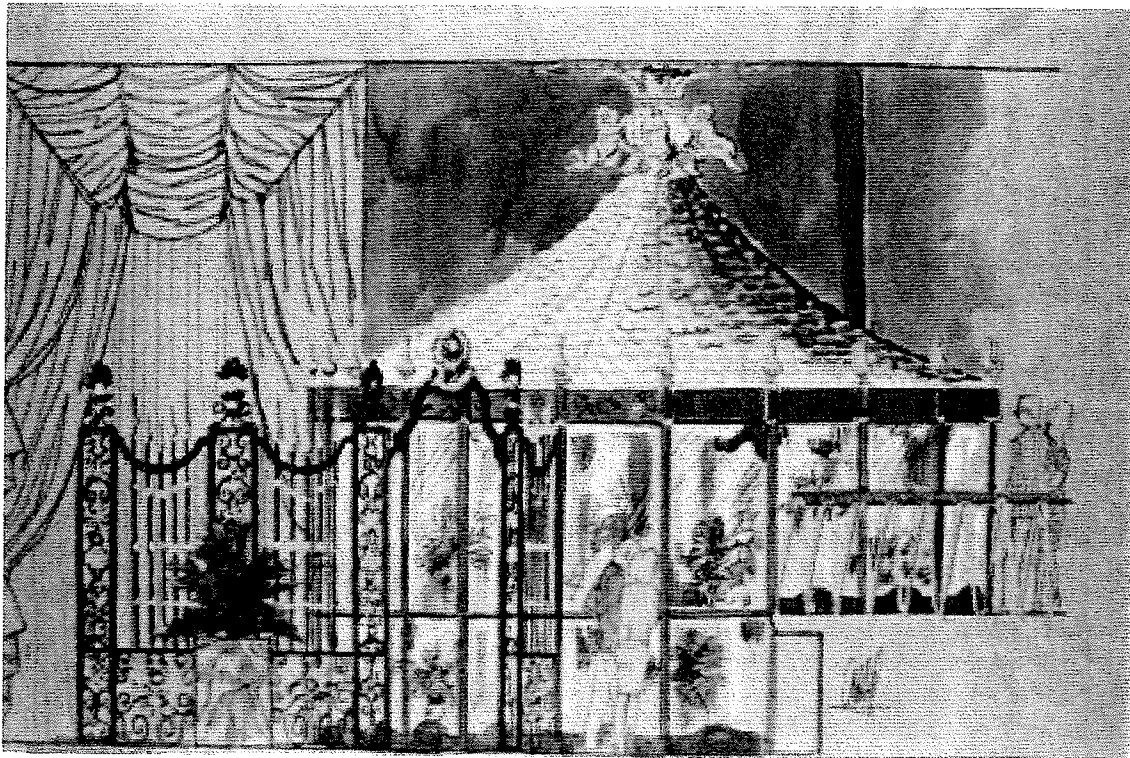
Model, view from northeast (1954)
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



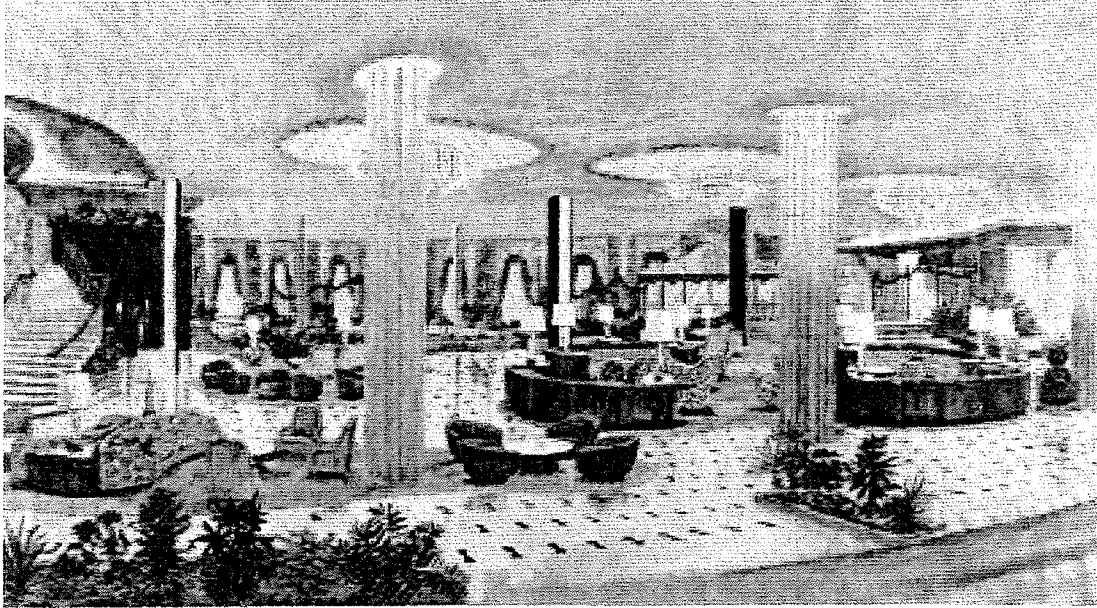
Model, view from southeast (1954)
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



*"One of Lapidus' sketches for the Fontainebleau Hotel, 1952"
as published in Too Much is Never Enough. Lapidus' autobiography, (Rizzoli, 1996)*



*Watercolor renderings of original Fontainebleau gazebo
Courtesy of Bass Museum of Art*



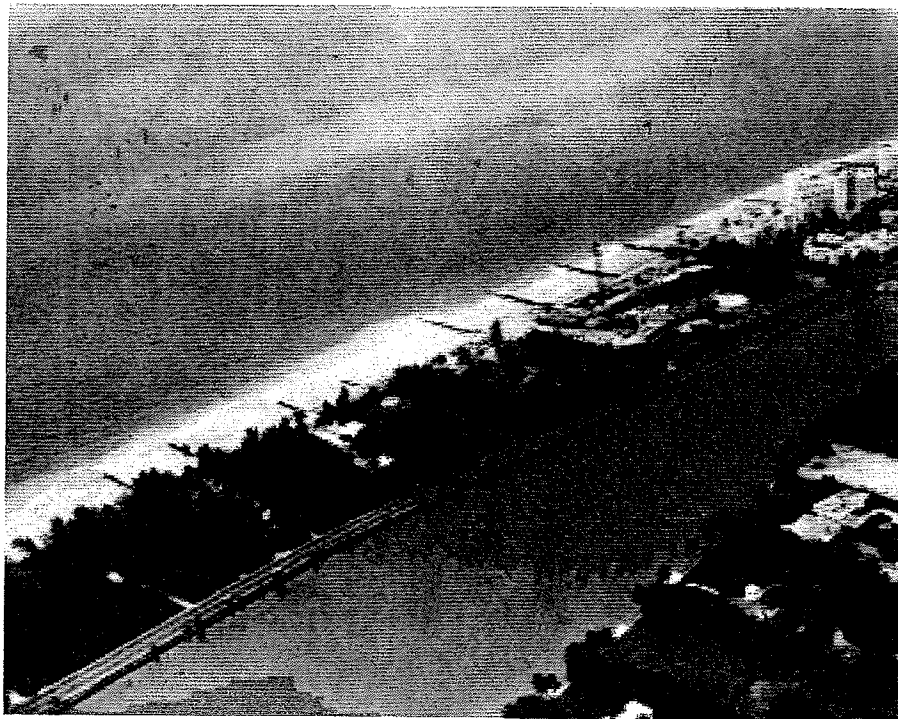
*Watercolor renderings of original Fontainebleau lobby
Courtesy of Bass Museum of Art*



*"Lobby, Fontainebleau Hotel, 1954"
as published in Too Much is Never Enough. Lapidus' autobiography, (Rizzoli, 1996)*



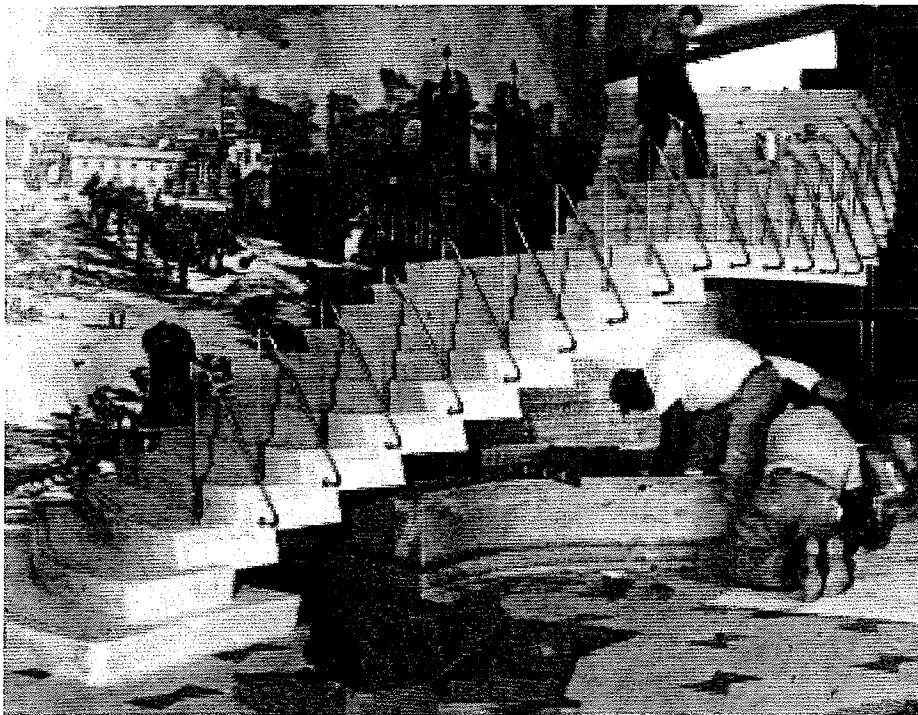
Construction Site (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



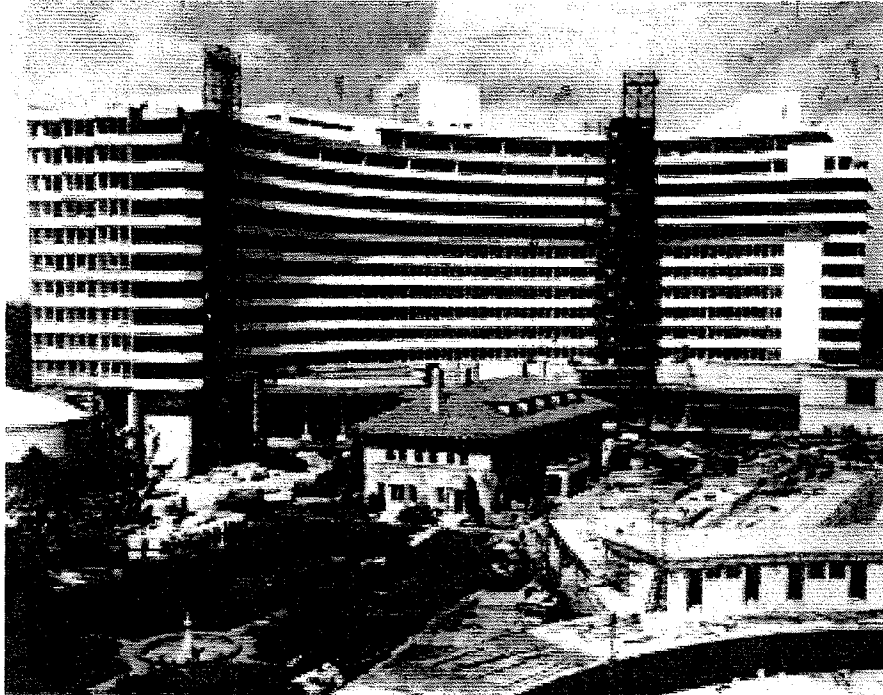
Fontainebleau under Construction
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



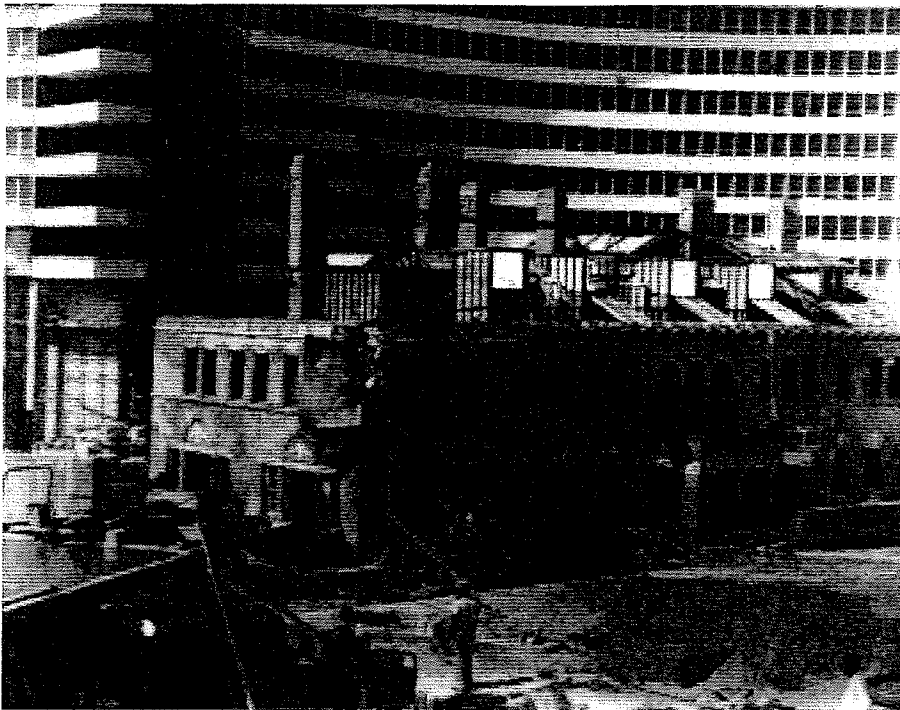
*Trailer hauling what was believed to be the largest girder built in Miami for the Fontainebleau construction
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives*



*Lobby Stair under Construction
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives*



Fontainebleau Construction, showing Firestone Mansion (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



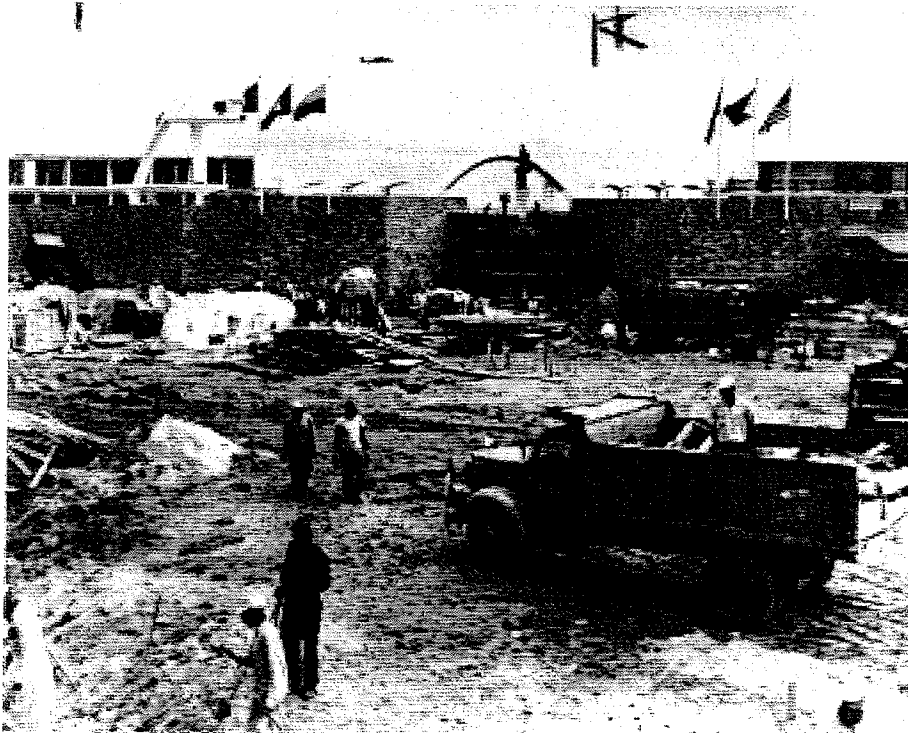
Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



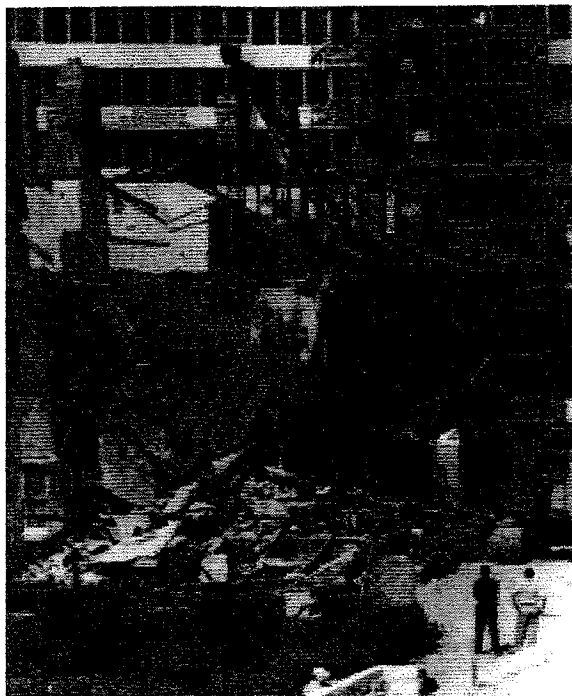
Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



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Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



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Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



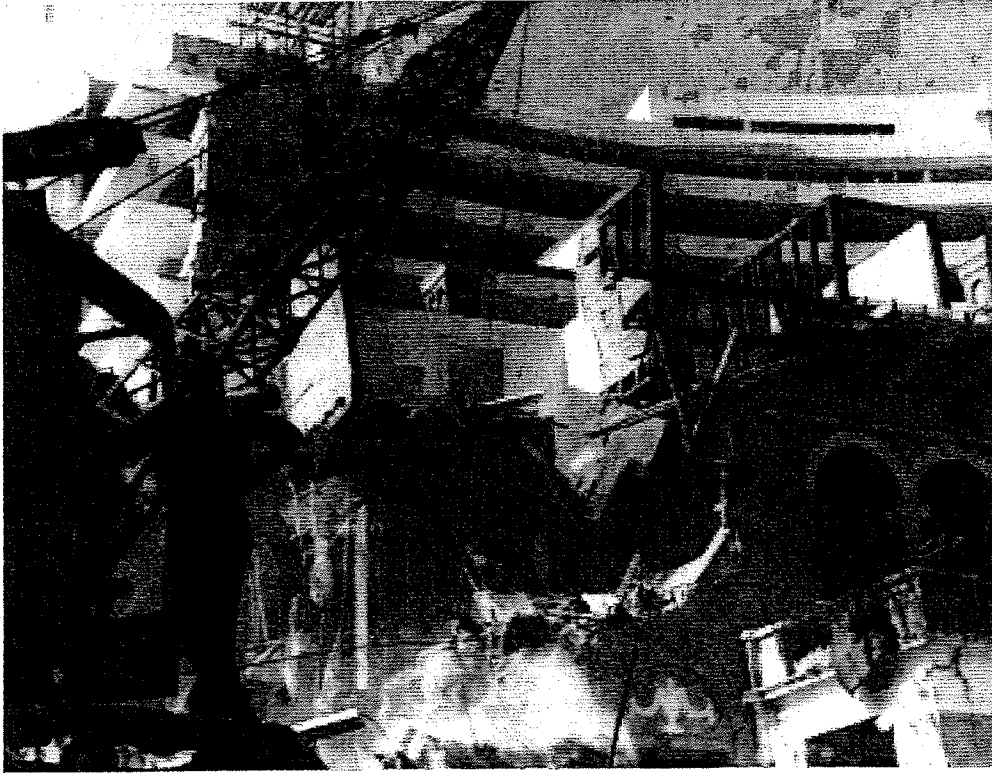
Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



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Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives

The Grand Ball (Opening, December 1954)

The Fontainebleau Hotel opened on December 20, 1954 with a 'Grand Ball,' a \$50 per plate dinner dance to benefit Mount Sinai and St. Francis hospitals. *The Miami Herald* joked that the benefit also accrued to the "local food merchants who will supply the 110 pounds of caviar, 1,000 pounds of potatoes and 300 pounds of fresh string beans to be consumed."¹ 175 waiters and 150 chefs and other kitchen help served 1,600 guests for the dinner.² A group of feature writers and columnists were flown down on a specially chartered plane to view the facilities. "Patti Page sang the Fontainebleau Waltz, Liberace played an 1882 German Steinway Grand and Eastern Airlines planes tipped their wings overhead."³ Groucho Marx famously annointed the hotel the Eighth Wonder of the World. *The Miami Daily News* called the Fontainebleau the "newest jewel in Miami Beach's glittering crown of 380 hotels."⁴

In a ceremony that included Ben Novack, architect Morris Lapidus, Miami Beach Mayor Harold Shapiro, Senator Hubert Pajot (Mayor of Fontainebleau, France), Guy de Schompre (representing the French Government), and, strangely enough, Captain George Israel Salva and Doctor Leontra Jurdosa, both of Nicaragua, the Mayor of Fontainebleau presented a plaque emblazoned with the crests of his city and of the Fontainebleau Hotel. The hotel, of course, was nominally themed after the famous 19th-century chateau of King Francis in eastern France, but the connection was thematic at best. Novack famously derided the name-sake chateau: "It's not fantastic enough!"⁵ The plaque read "The City of Fontainebleau, France, extends every good wish for a pleasant and healthy vacation to all guests of the Fontainebleau, Miami Beach. May the sun warm your days and the moon and stars bring happy evenings and may you return again and again to taste the pleasures and elegant living at this most famous of all resorts." A pine tree from the Forest of Fontainebleau, brought by Senator Pajot, was subsequently planted on the grounds of the hotel.⁶ The subsequent history of this pine tree is not known.

The Fontainebleau was such a success that within months of its opening, talk of adding onto the hotel began. The *New York Times* reported that plans were being drawn to add 250 rooms, at an expected cost of \$3,000,000, without using any more land by building thirteen floors above the dome-shaped night club.⁷ (Unfortunately no drawings have been found for this project.) In fact, only a modest addition to the swank "Boom-Boom Room," additions to the pool deck and new terrace and private dining room were permitted on August 10, 1956.

¹ Stephen J. Flynn, "Everything at Fontainebleau Hotel is Super-Colossal," *The Miami Herald*, December 19, 1954.

² Fox, Frank, "Hotel Opens in Gastronomic Blaze," *Miami Daily News*, December 20, 1954

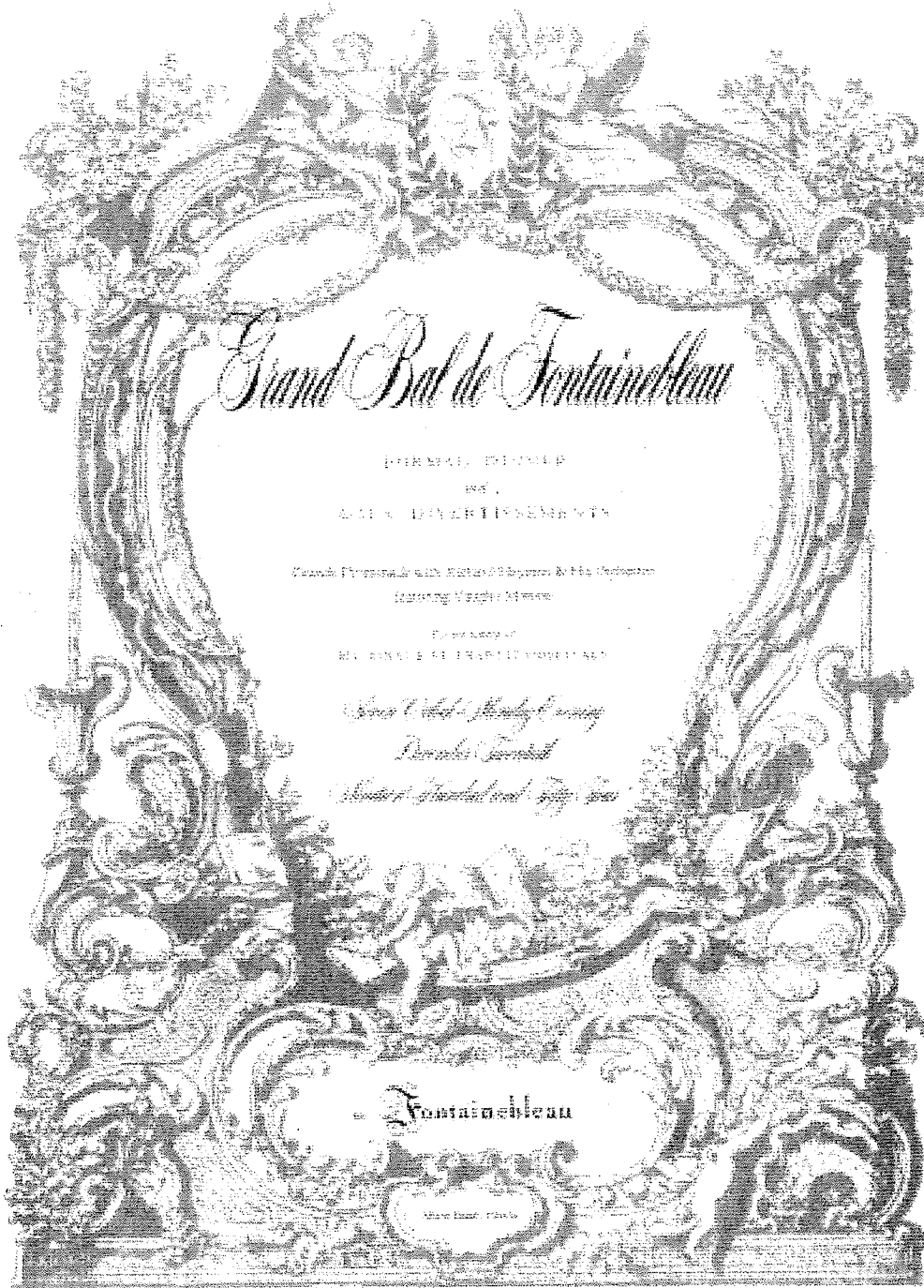
³ Mike Capuzzo, "The Sand Castle: The Famed Fontainebleau, inspired by a French castle and a Miami Beach toilet seat, has seen – and barely survived – more than 10,000 nights," *The Miami Herald*, February 19, 1984.

⁴ Ibid, Fox.

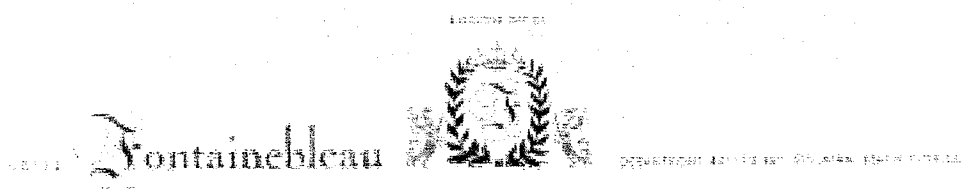
⁵ Ibid, Capuzzo.

⁶ Press release from the tree-planting ceremony at the Fontainebleau Hotel, 11:00 am, December 20, 1954. From WTVJ News File, courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida.

⁷ Himbert, Arthur L., "Expanding Miami: More Room for Visitors is being Made on Florida's Fabulous Gold Coast," *New York Times*, April 10, 1955.



*Invitation to "Grand Bal de Fontainebleau," opening banquet for the Fontainebleau Hotel
to benefit Mt. Sinai and St. Francis Hospitals.
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida*



Officially at the tree-planting ceremony and
presentation of plaque at 11:00 A.M., Monday,
December 20th 1955 - left to right -

L.F.R.

Mayor George Joseph Baker
Senator Leonce Boudreau
Mayor of Fontainebleau
Sen. Robert Fajot, Mayor of Fontainebleau, France
Mayor de Fontainebleau, representing the French Government
Mayor Harold Starnes, Mayor of Miami Beach
Missie Lapina, Secretary and Designer.

The plaque reads:

The City of Fontainebleau, France, extends
warm greetings to all guests of The Fontainebleau,
Miami Beach, and the staff who make it
the most enjoyable place to stay and
hope you return again and again to this
pleasant and elegant living and dining
ground of all seasons.

Mayor H. Fajot
Mayor of Fontainebleau, France

At the left top and center of the plaque is the official
crest of the City of Fontainebleau, France, and at the
right top hand corner is the crest of The Fontainebleau
Hotel, Miami Beach.

The area next has placed has a pine from the Forest
of Fontainebleau, France, and was given to the City of
Miami.

ADDITIONAL INFORMATION AND HISTORY AVAILABLE FROM THE HISTORICAL MUSEUM OF SOUTH FLORIDA

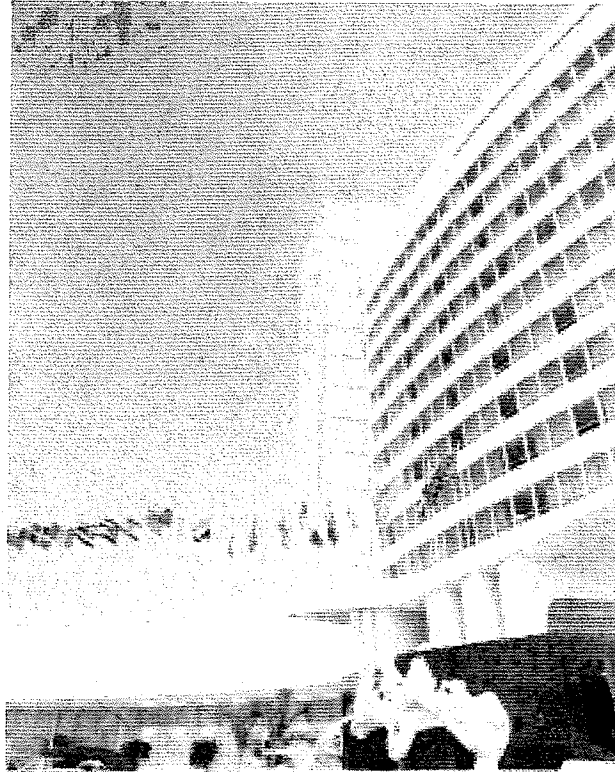
Press release announcing presentation of plaque by Mayor of Fontainebleau, France at
opening of Fontainebleau Hotel, December 1955.
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



*Fontainebleau elevation from across Indian Creek (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection*



*Porte Cochere & Main Entrance (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection*



Fountain at Main Entrance (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Fountain along west side (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



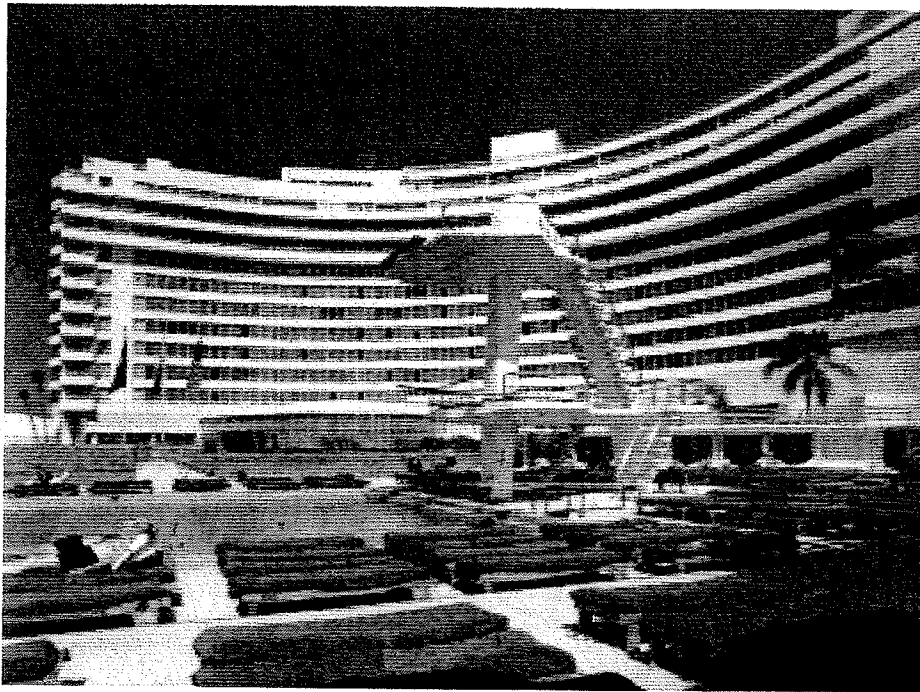
Southern Edge of Chateau Building (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Tennis Courts (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Exterior of Garden Lobby, view from Formal Gardens (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Dive Tower & Pool Deck (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection