

Barboza, told a congressional committee that Frank Sinatra fronted a part ownership in the Fontainebleau Hotel for New England Mafia boss Raymond Patriarca. The charge was denied by owner Ben Novack, who insisted vehemently that nobody “in the world has one dollar in this hotel but me... I built this hotel with my sweat and blood.”¹³ Barboza noted that Frank Sinatra also fronted Patriarca’s ownership in the Sands Hotel in Lake Tahoe, Nevada. Patriarca, the Providence R.I. mob chief, was at that time in Federal prison for conspiracy to commit murder.¹⁴

In 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. Reports compiled since 1962 and 1963 by attorney Dougald McMillan outlined business and personal relationships between Mr. Sinatra and various leaders of the crime world. One in particular, dated August 3, 1962, held information of Sinatra’s investment in a Lake Tahoe lodge and the implications that arose when “Mr. Giancana, who had been barred by the Nevada Gaming Commission from gambling establishments in the state, was found staying there.” The same report showed Joseph Fischetti on the payroll of the Fontainebleau Hotel “at the instance of Mr. Sinatra,” and that as of April 1962 Mr. Fischetti had received 71 checks totaling \$38,340. The report added that Mr. Fischetti’s income tax returns for 1959 and 1960 listed fees of \$12,000 from the Fontainebleau as a ‘talent agent.’” The charges were never pursued. According to some Justice officials, “there was a reluctance to pursue an extensive investigation because of Mr. Sinatra’s close ties to the Kennedy family.”¹⁵

In addition to implied Mafia connections, the Fontainebleau played a cameo role in high-level political scandal. The Florida State Attorney in Miami investigated “the possibility that unidentified persons tapped telephones and bugged hotel rooms there during the Democratic National Convention in July, 1972, in Miami Beach.” James W. McCord, found guilty in the Watergate bugging of June, 1972, apparently told investigators last summer that he had been shown a floor plan of the Fontainebleau Hotel in Miami Beach with identifying marks on certain rooms. McCord reportedly said that G. Gordon Liddy, also convicted in the Watergate case, had shown him the plans.”¹⁶

Economic Decline (1976 – 1977)

As the largest, most desirable, and most expensive resort destination in Miami Beach, the Fontainebleau Hotel was at the leading edge of the evolving culture of tourism, as well as of economic trends. Its role as an economic engine for the city of Miami Beach led it to take an active role in promoting economic development and steering governmental tourism development efforts. Ben Novack became a consistent critic of the city and county, publicly excoriating their focus and use of funds. The Fontainebleau Hotel acted as an industry or city unto itself. Novack noted that the hotel spent \$800,000 a year on advertising, more than the Miami Beach Tourist Development Authority and not much less than the entire state.¹ Nevertheless, by the early 1970's, the Fontainebleau (as well as the city of Miami Beach) was in a steep economic decline. Ben Novack played an increasingly frontal role in urging the city to 'adapt' and exploit new trends in tourism.

As early as in 1961, Novack told a meeting of the Miami Beach Civic League gathered at the Fontainebleau that the city had paid \$250 million in property taxes to Dade County and had gotten little in return. He preferred that Miami Beach secede from Dade County, tear down the hotels on lower Collins Avenue and build at least 4 or 5 golf courses there with the money saved. "We have too much cement and not enough grass," Novack declared. "Those hotels built from 15th to 23rd Streets were like a woman with a gown and no wig. They had no setting. The property was sold by the inch and we wound up with a solid mass of concrete." He claimed this crowding was a result of "greedy leadership." At the meeting, Novack was seconded by Beach Councilman Bernie Frank, who declared that the State legislature would eventually recognize an independent Miami Beach county, especially if the city were to forgo representation in the legislature and "not seek a cut of the horse track taxes."²

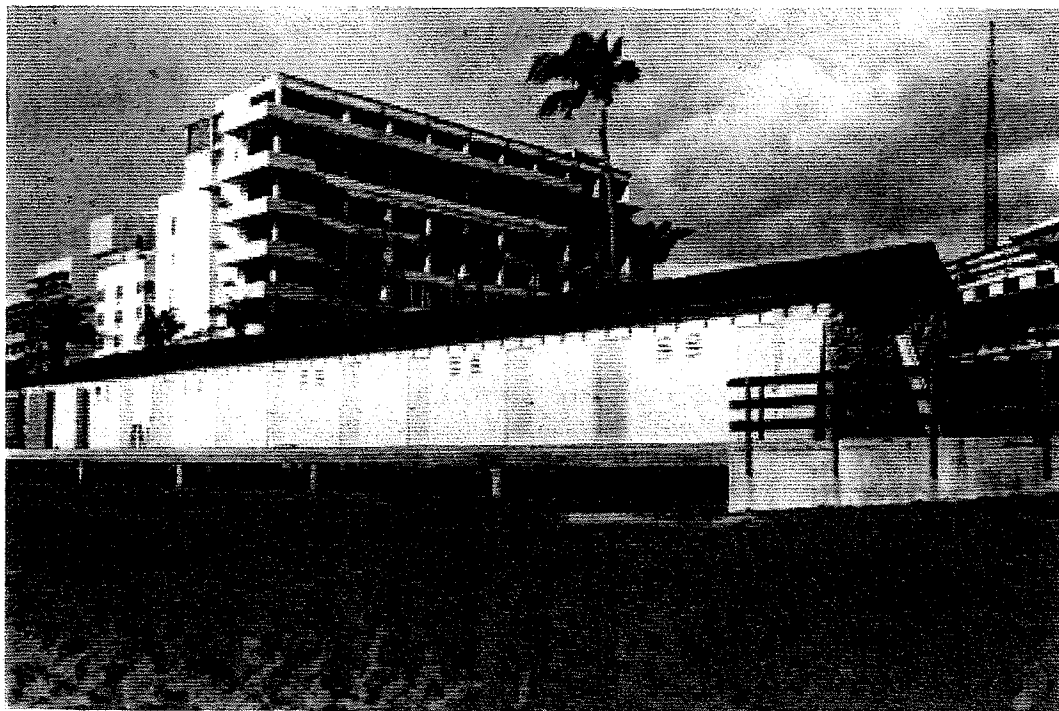
Despite the Fontainebleau's staggering \$5.8 million gross income in 1964, the profits, it claimed, were less than one per cent of that. The hotel took these figures before the Miami Beach City Council to request a lower tax assessment than the initial \$13.4 million, but the request was denied.³ *The Miami News* noted that "between 1963 and 1968 hotel attorneys contest the property assessments (\$16,975,200 in 1965) every year. In 1965, the suit said there has been no change in the condition of the property since the 1963 court decision."⁴

The Fontainebleau's weakening financial condition was exacerbated by Novack's ambitious plans for expansion. Novack's 1970 purchase of the neighboring Sorrento Hotel, rebuilt with a spa as the 'Fontainebleau South' added another 265 rooms. However, the hotelier's dream idea of creating Miami Beach's dominant convention headquarters hotel in anticipation of a rise in this market turned out to be a bad risk. In 1975, Novack complained: "This was once the greatest resort area in the world and I've got \$50 million tied up in it."⁵ He attributed the hotels financial problems to the \$6 million debt he incurred in this southward expansion in anticipation of a business growth that never materialized.⁶

- 1 "Hotel Asks To Restrain The Herald," *The Miami Herald*, August 17, 1967.
- 2 "Fontainebleau Ties? No Answer," *The Miami Herald*, June 16, 1967.
- 3 "Novack's 'Goodwill Cruise' Covered in Trial Testimony," *The Miami Herald*, June 22, 1967.
- 4 Ibid.
- 5 "Novack still seeks Casino, Probers Told," *The Miami Herald*, September 1, 1967.
- 6 Ibid.
- 7 "Hotel Asks To Restrain The Herald," *The Miami Herald*, August 17, 1967.
- 8 "Court Denies Hotel Plea in Libel Suit," *The Miami Herald*, August 18, 1967.
- 9 "Depositions Asked of Five Witnesses," *The Miami Herald*, September 9, 1967.
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Henry Cavendish and William Tucker, "Fontainebleau Mum: Beach Hotel Income Tax Under Probe," *The Miami News*, May 6, 1963.
- 12 Noted Tony Acardi, John Formosa, Sam Mooney Giancana, Maxie Eder, Murray 'the camel' Humphries were reported to make the Fontainebleau their headquarters. "Depositions of 25 Taken In Fontainebleau Hotel Suite," *The Miami Herald* March 10, 1968.
- 13 Clark Hoyt, "Mob Role Claimed in Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, May 25, 1972.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Gage, Nicholas, "Ex-Aides Say Justice Dept. Rejected a Sinatra Inquiry," *New York Times*, April 14, 1976.
- 16 "Florida Aide Suspects Bugging at Hotel While Democrats Met," *New York Times*, October 5, 1973.



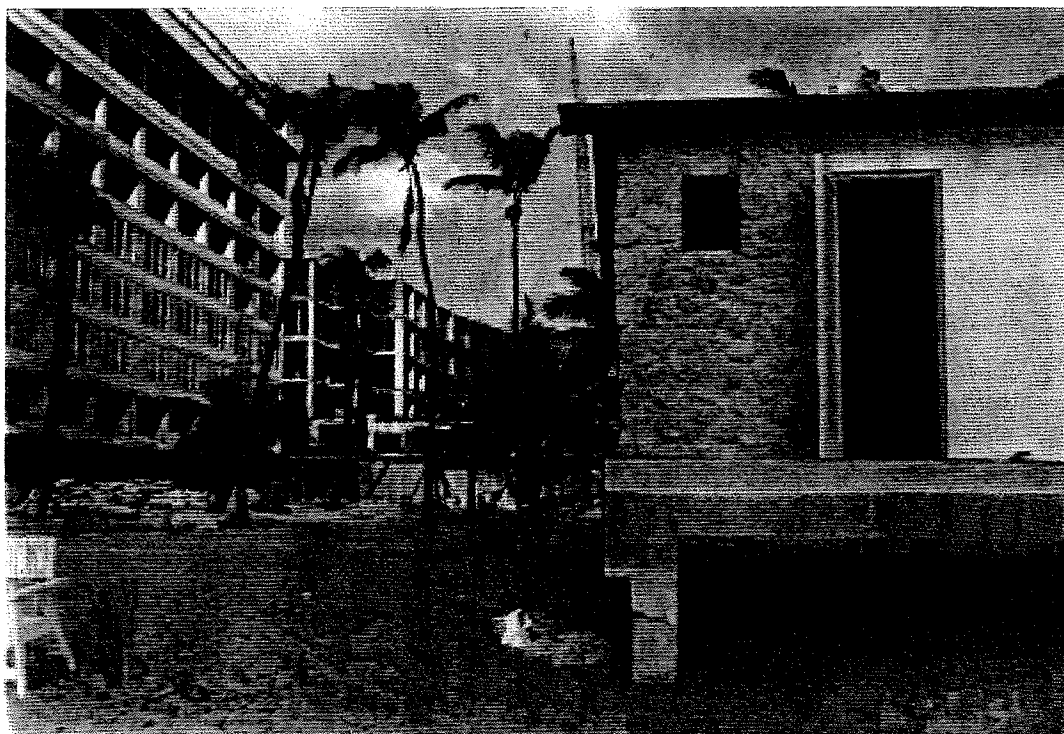
Beachside Cabanas (undated, ca. 1969, during Sorrento addition)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



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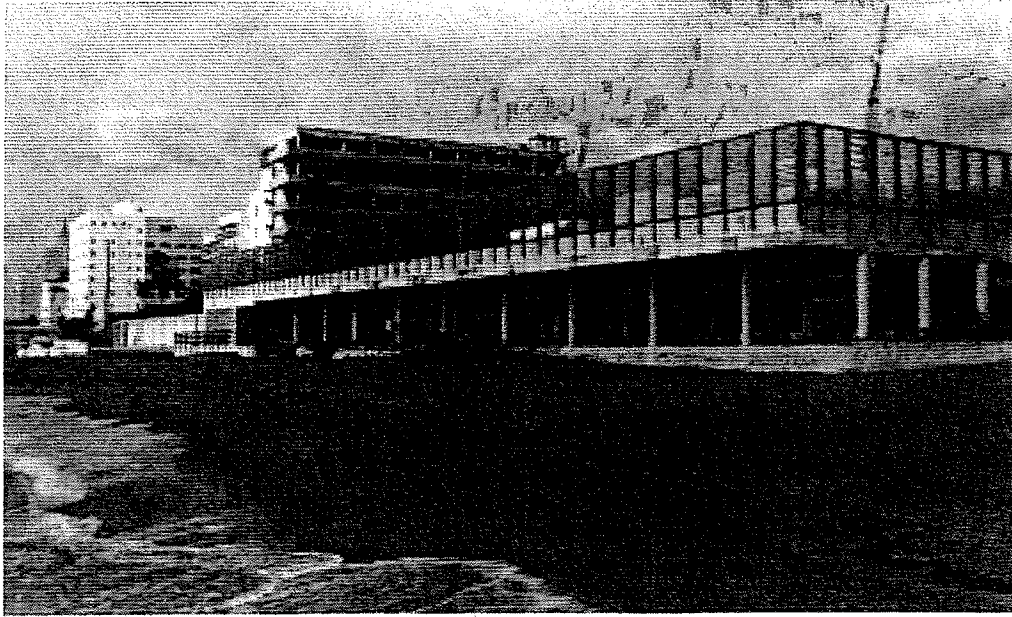
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Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



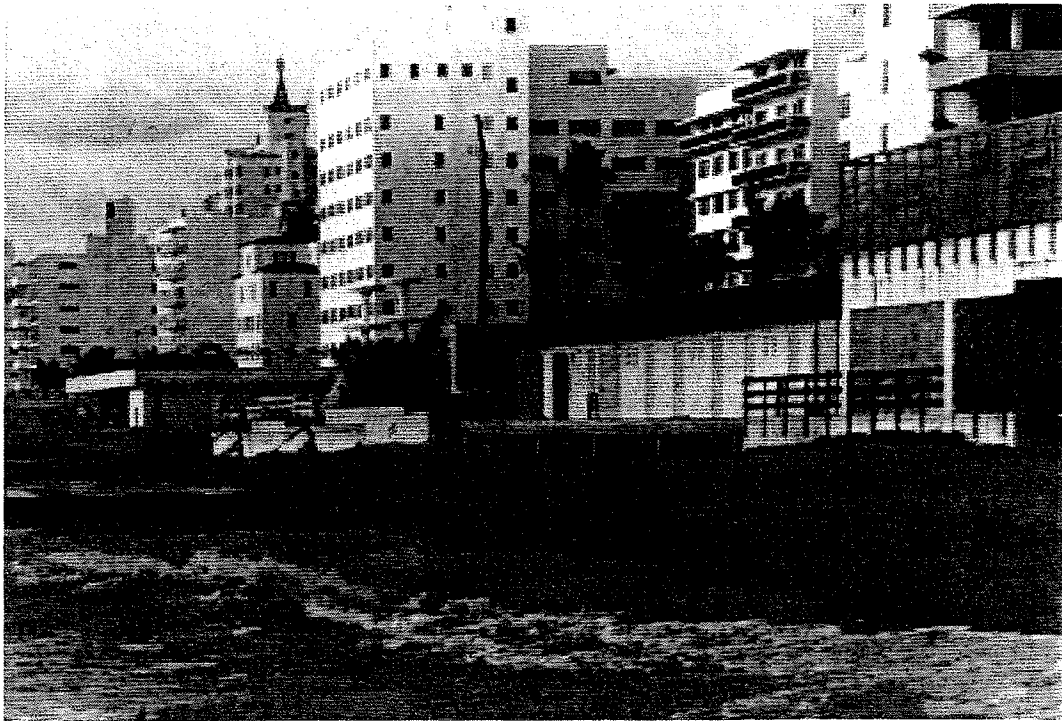
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Novack's resources and dreams of growth were similarly squandered on land holdings in other parts of Dade County as well. Novack planned to build a 600-room country club at 'Fontainebleau Park', or 'Fontainebleau Estates,' a large parcel of land he purchased west of Miami International Airport. If the project had been fully built, it would have been not only a diversification of the hotels services but also the first branding of Fontainebleau name. However, financial difficulties hobbled the project. ⁷

Perennial reports of the hotel's imminent sale were always making news. In 1971, it was reported that Novack was in negotiations for sale of the Fontainebleau to San Francisco hotel magnate Ben Swig, owner of the Fairmont Hotel. Although Swig confirmed the talks, Novack ascribed the 'rumors' to his longtime competitor, Morris Lansburgh, whose Associated Hotels, Inc. chain managed both the Eden Roc and Deauville hotels.⁸ London-based J. Arthur Rank Associates were rumored to have offered \$50 million for the hotel.⁹ However, a key player in plans to purchase or transform the Fontainebleau was Roland International. Roland International was controlled by Miami Beach investors Joel Friedland and Gerald Robins."¹⁰ Novack's 440 acres of industrial property, the Fontainebleau Estates had in fact secured a \$3.45 million loan to the hotel by Roland, a loan that secured that company's 1974 option to purchase the Fontainebleau hotel.

Roland soon announced its intention to start a vacation-lease-a-room plan at the Fontainebleau, as had been successfully in operation in the Florida Keys, the Caribbean and Hawaii.¹¹ In February 1975, Novack acknowledged that Roland held an option but denied reports of an impending closing for \$30 million. If it had materialized, the price would have been a severe discount from the \$50 million that Rank purported offer.¹² In any case, Roland began selling 26 year leases on 800 of its 1,250 rooms. An early version of a time share, which the Fontainebleau called 'Time Travel,' the leases would entitle their owners to occupy the same room in the season of their choice. Prospective buyers were lured to the hotel where they were given breakfasts, lunches or cocktails.¹³ Roland estimated that Time Travel would "fill the vacancy gap between the hotels convention business and the social business." \$1,790 bought a 26 year lease on a bayview Statesman suite in May, June, September or October.¹⁴ Time Travel did not, however, offer ownership of actual property. It was a club membership, the right to spend a week in the type of suite the buyer selected, one of dozens of identical rooms." Time-travel soon became a prominent issue in the press, since it faced allegations of discrimination. Many nationalities (purportedly those that did not allow citizens to take ample money out of their countries), were excluded from being able to purchase.¹⁵ The first hint of serious economic difficulties surfaced in 1976, when Roland International filed a suit against Novack and the Hotel, claiming they were delinquent in repaying loans: According to *The Miami Herald*, Roland "obtained a lien against the hotel when its investment in Novack's west Dade County land deal went bad. However; in any case, the Roland suit was immediately explained by Novack as an embarrassing mistake. The Roland suit was soon withdrawn and later negotiated.

Time Travel was one just example of trying to improve the waning profitability of the mammoth Fontainebleau resort complex. Legalizing gambling and Las Vegas-style entertainment were a critical objective. Already the 1970's, the La Ronde Club was converted into a 'superstar theater' where paying patrons can skip the drinks."¹⁶ However, Novack believed that the hotel's fundamental economies could no longer support the glamorous entertainment its patrons expected. In 1975 he noted, "We have no profits to subsidize the big names like Vegas does." "Every competing resort offers sun and beaches and palm trees – what tourists are looking for is activity, and the strongest activity is gambling."¹⁷ Angling for casinos, Novack estimated the hotel was worth \$90 million, "or \$200 million in an area with casinos."¹⁸

Another indicator of the hotel's decline were rising tax troubles. On June 2, 1976, the Miami Beach Council disclosed the hotel was behind nearly \$1.3 million in property taxes. As the Fontainebleau was the largest tax source to the City of Miami Beach, the tax problem caused a major municipal funding shortfall that caused 82 employees to be laid off. Having just completed their new city hall, the city announced plans to planned to sell the old city hall to meet its budget.¹⁹ In 1976, the New York Times reported that "Despite last year's brisk tourist season ... the Fontainebleau Hotel ... may have to be sold at a public auction"²⁰if the bills weren't paid by November 1. Metropolitan Dade County initially tried to sell a tax certificate for the Fontainebleau tax bills dating back to 1974, but there was no interest.²¹ However, about a week after the tax disclosure, it was reported that a \$1.27 million tax certificate owed by the hotel had

been purchased on behalf of "unidentified investors."²² Attorney William Soman of the law firm of Bruckner, Green and Mannas announced that he had purchased the certificate as a trustee on behalf of several corporations and individual investors as both an investment and a community service. Flagship National Bank of Miami, it was reported, was the largest single investor.²³ The Fontainebleau was now obligated to these banks for the loan, plus interest of 18 per cent a year. If not paid, the hotel could be sold at public auction.²⁴

During the next two years, Novack was repeatedly engaged in efforts to raise money for the floundering Fontainebleau. In September 1976, Novack announced a \$29.3 million loan that would be used to financially reorganize, renovate and expand the hotel. The 15-year loan commitment was by the Euro-Afro-Asiatic Trust, a Lichtenstein investment group tied to the Martini Foundation. The Martini Foundation was an offshoot of Martini and Rossi, the wine house. The president of Euro Trust was Prince Constantin of Liechtenstein, brother of the ruling lead of the principality. According to *The Miami Herald*, Novack would retain operational control, and would use the money to pay off \$18 million in existing mortgage debt, the \$1.3 million tax burden, refurbish the hotel, add tennis courts and acquire 324 acres in Fontainebleau Park, on Flagler Street in West Dade (for the purpose of offering golf to its guests).²⁵ It became clear in November that the loan would come attached to a transfer of ownership from Novack and his purported partners to Fontainebleau Hotels International Ltd, a company controlled by the Lichtenstein investors and whose majority stockholder was Andrew L. D'Amato, a mortgage banker from Woodbridge, Connecticut. D'Amato and partner Vincent DiPentima were represented in the negotiations by Carl R. Ajello Jr., the Attorney General of Connecticut, whose private law firm handled the transaction.²⁶ *The Herald* reported that the new corporation took control on November 1, with Novack as a minority partner. All employees were required to fill out new employment applications and were told that their union no longer had a contract with the hotel, although, this was refuted by Herbert (Pinky) Schiffman, president of the Hotel Employees Union, who announced he had reached an agreement with the new owners.²⁷

On November 14th 1976, *The Herald* reported that the deal with Euro-Afro-Asian was probably in trouble, as Novack had returned to Miami Beach without completing the loan. *The Herald* began to investigate the deal, revealing the fact that D'Amato was under Federal investigation and that his home had been recently foreclosed. Euro-Afro-Asian Trust, it turned out, was also in negotiations on a loan to construct a new Hyatt Regency Hotel in Fort Lauderdale.²⁸ Meanwhile, in mid-November, a foreclosure suit on the first mortgage of the Fontainebleau, held by Connecticut General Life Insurance Co., was filed and then quickly dismissed when Novack paid \$250,000 in back payments. However, the suit revealed that in addition to the hotel's local tax problem, the Fontainebleau owed more than \$1 million in federal income taxes. According to *The Miami Herald*, insiders speculated that the foreclosure suit was settled so quickly with cash so as not to encumber the planned purchase of the hotel by Euro-Afro-Asian Trust.²⁹

Meanwhile, *The Herald* reported that Florida banks were being approached to provide 'wrap-around' financing for the Euro-Afro-Asian Trust purchase.³⁰ Yet, in January 1977, Roland International Corp. again filed suit to retrieve its \$4.3 million in unpaid loans made to develop Fontainebleau Park, west of the airport. According to attorney Aaron Podhurst, who represented Roland, interest was accumulating at a rate of \$1,500 a day. In the Roland suit, it was further revealed that the hotel owed additional back property taxes, an issue that became political in the wake of painful belt-tightening and layoffs at the city. According to *The Miami Herald*, the possibility of a loan from Euro-Afro-Asian Trust was increasingly remote.³¹

The Roland suit was purportedly resolved when Novack agreed to allow Podhurst to monitor the hotel's books. But the Fontainebleau was informally placed in court-ordered receivership in January 1977, a move formalized by court order on March 14th. Novack was accordingly removed from control of the hotel. His problems worsened in late March when Connecticut General Life Insurance Co. again filed suit for payment of the hotel's \$12.2 million first mortgage. The suit revealed that the hotel had been operated since January by attorney Howard R. Scharlin (for Roland) and Richard Marx (for Novack). The co-receivership had been kept secret for publicity purposes.³² The federal receivers had laid off 77 employees and tightened business practices at the Fontainebleau, and the hotel reportedly made a profit of \$212,900 in a two-week period."

On Thursday, April 14, 1977 Novack filed to place the Fontainebleau in bankruptcy. This allowed him to reclaim management of the hotel.³³ In an attempt to rescue his 20-year old project from financial ruin, Novack was forced to consider desperate measures, including the bringing on of new partners. According to *The Miami Herald*, outside investors, including South African hotel owners, were reported to be on the "verge of a financial rescue mission at several points during Novack's recent problems."³⁴ As many as 18 different investors were prepared to form a limited partnership to pay off various mortgages and creditors. The plan for this transaction included Ben Novack as the only limited partner with 34 per cent ownership, and an unidentified general partner. The mystery partner according to the *Daily Sun Reporter*, was South African hotelman Sol Kirschner.³⁵

In another last ditch effort, Novack was reported to have turned to organized crime figures. *The Miami Herald* reported that "a director of the business-like Black Tuna drug smuggling gang attempted to rescue the financially-floundering Fontainebleau Hotel for owner Ben Novack in 1977. Novack in turn appeared as a character witness for two of the gang directors in a North Carolina Court after they were convicted on drug charges."³⁶ The deal, however, was apparently unsuccessful. Novack filed for personal bankruptcy Tuesday, May 3, 1977 as part of what *The Miami Herald* called his "strategy to buy time in his race against his creditors."³⁷ On Tuesday, June 28, 1977 Novack finally surrendered control of the Fontainebleau.

¹ Don Bedwell, "Novack: I Wish Hotel Were 'Somewhere Else'" *The Miami Herald*, June 13, 1975.

² "Let's Secede and Putt - - Novack," *The Miami Herald* (?), January 26, 1961.

- 3 Stuart Auerbach, "\$5.8 Million Income, But ... Fontainebleau Nets \$51,900," *The Miami Herald*, July 15, 1965.
- 4 Morton Lucoff, "Court Backs Metro Vs. Hotel," *The Miami News*, July 31, 1968.
- 5 Ibid, Bedwell.
- 6 Roberto Fabricio, "Fontainebleau Tax Bill Bought," *The Miami Herald*, June 12, 1976.
- 7 Ibid, Bedwell.
- 8 Susan M. Burnside, "Fontainebleau Sale Rumor is Denied," *The Miami Herald*, June 17, 1971.
- 9 "Hotel is Not Sold, Owner Novack Says," source unknown – from clipping files at Historical Museum of South Florida, February 4, 1975.
- 10 Markowitz, Arnold, "New Fontainebleau Owners Begin the 'Renaissance'," *The Miami Herald*, March 15, 1978.
- 11 Darrell Eiland, "Lease Plan Eyed for Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, September 10, 1974.
- 12 Ibid, "Hotel is Not Sold, Owner Novack Says."
- 13 Cathy Lynn Grossman, "Fontainebleau Offers Space Oddity," *The Miami Herald*, July 21, 1975.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 Ibid.
- 16 Ibid, Bedwell.
- 17 Ibid.
- 18 Ibid.
- 19 Sam Jacobs, "Fontainebleau Owes 2 Years Tax," *The Miami Herald*, June 6, 1976.
- 20 "Fontainebleau Hotel Owes \$1.3 Million Tax," *New York Times*, June 7, 1976.
- 21 Ibid, Jacobs.
- 22 Ibid, Fabricio.
- 23 Ibid.
- 24 Jacobs, Sam, "Plan Proposes Bankers Pay Taxes: Fontainebleau May Get Aid," *The Miami Herald*, June 10, 1976.
- 25 Jane Scholz, "Fontainebleau Gets \$29-Million Loan," *The Miami Herald*, September 17, 1976.
- 26 James Savage and Sandy Flickner, "Decision is Expected This Week on Fontainebleau Ownership," *The Miami Herald*, November 9, 1976.
- 27 Louise Montgomery "Novack Apparently Yields Control of Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, November 8, 1976.
- 28 James Savage, "Funding Eludes Fontainebleau: Novack Talks to Investors," *The Miami Herald*, November 14, 1976.
- 29 James Savage, "Fontainebleau Foreclosure Dismissed: More Than \$1 Million Still Owed in U.S. Taxes," *The Miami Herald*, November 17, 1976.
- 30 James Savage, "Novack Gets Foreclosure Suit Notice," *The Miami Herald*, January 8, 1977.
- 31 James Savage and Roberto Fabricio, "Fontainebleau Owes \$250,000 in Back Taxes," *The Miami Herald*, January 29, 1977.
- 32 James Savage, "Firm Sues For \$12 Million; Lawyers Run Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, March 31, 1977.
- 33 Savage, James, "Novack: Hotel's Bankrupt," *The Miami Herald*, April 18, 1977.
- 34 Riordan, Patrick, "Fontainebleau Shows Profit, Receiver Says," *The Miami Herald*, April 30, 1977.
- 35 "Fontainebleau will be sold under terms of plan to court by Novack," *Daily Sun Reporter*, June 29, 1977.
- 36 Crankshaw, Joe and Al Messerschmidt, "Drug Gang Tried to Aid Troubled Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, May 3, 1979.
- 37 Patrick Riordan, "Fontainebleau's Novack Files for Bankruptcy," *The Miami Herald*, May 4, 1977.

Competing to Purchase the Fontainebleau Hotel (1977 – 1978)

In late 1977, several groups competed to buy the bankrupt Fontainebleau. By November 1977, two bids had been offered. The first was by Hotelarama Inc., a group that included Roland International Corp. and Stephen Muss, a Miami Beach apartment house developer. They offered \$4 million above mortgage debt, about \$21.3 million. The second bid was by Oppenheimer Properties Inc., which bid around \$4.25 million over mortgage, or \$21.5 million. The Oppenheimer bid had a later closing date that would have left the hotel in bankruptcy for a longer period.¹

A bidding war ensued, and the purchase price quickly escalated. Abraham-Claxton, a group of 13 Amway cleaning products distributors, joined the competition and offered \$28.78 million, \$11.5 million over mortgage costs. Oppenheimer's offer bumped up to \$26.29 million. Hotelarama, now with Stephen Muss at 75 per cent ownership (after buying out Helmsley), offered two increased bids, at \$25.8 and \$26.8 million, each with different terms. The possible deal clincher was the third mortgage held by Roland International, which still held a 25 per cent with Hotelarama. Because they were a creditor with a claim to the hotel, they had the power to drag the claim through tiresome litigation if the hotel were sold to another bidder.² On December 2, 1977, Stephen Muss and Roland International Corp. won court approval to buy the bankrupt Fontainebleau Hotel for \$26 to \$28 million. The exact figure was to be determined by future court rulings.³

On January 6, 1978, *The New York Times* reported that: "The bankruptcy sale of the Fontainebleau Hotel will become final Monday unless Ben Novack, the owner, finds a new delaying tactic. "Mr. Novack missed another deadline yesterday in his quest to stall the bankruptcy court order to sell the hotel. He had until then to post \$10 million cash bond with the court to stop the sale pending his appeal."⁴ The sale to Hotelarama became final.

For many business leaders in Miami Beach the demise of the Fontainebleau was more than an individual business failure. It was the emblem of a resort in decline. Hotels like the Fontainebleau were crippled by beach erosion, exceptionally cold weather, and an economic slump felt throughout Miami Beach. In a desperate search for a safety net, many businessmen and hotel operators looked toward legalized gambling as the solution for local troubles in tourism. "Casino gambling is seen as the key to economic prosperity for Miami Beach, but there is concern in Miami and the rest of Dade County that gambling would hurt the local economy by drawing off money from working people already struggling to meet the high cost of living."⁵ Yet, legalized gambling was defeated in the polls in November 1977. *The New York Times* noted that despite the defeat of legalized gambling at the polls in November, "casinos are still a lively subject of debate among the diehards who have long considered them a panacea for all the ills associated with Miami Beach, including its growing reputation as being more of an old folks' home than a swinging resort."⁶ Ralph Blumenthal, analyzing the Fontainebleau's failure, found fundamental reasons for the decline, but also the signs of a nascent new market: "Cheaper air fares and a shift in vacation-taking patterns that favored Western ski resorts and

the more exotic destinations of the Caribbean; severe competition from Disney World in Orlando, 200 miles north; the skyrocketing costs of keeping up large hotels and entertainment. When the recession and Arab oil embargo hit in late 1974, Miami Beach suffered its worst season in decades. It never quite recovered, although foreigners have been arriving in increasing numbers.”⁷ New air routes between Miami and London, Amsterdam and Frankfurt, as well as the strength of their currency against the declining dollar were helping to develop this new market.⁸

The Federal Government soon committed \$60 million to a dredging operation to restore 10 miles of oceanfront.” In pursuit of a renaissance of resort culture in Miami Beach, local business leaders hoped for further federal support. According to the *New York Times*, they claimed that \$100 million in loan guarantees from Federal agencies would help refurbish the resort hotels, benefiting the entire area.”⁹

¹ Patrick Riordan, “Court Will Hear Proposals For Fontainebleau Purchase,” *The Miami Herald*, November 22, 1977. (This article also reported that the partnership included New York real estate investor Herry Helmsley with 50 per cent interest. Apparently this venture was originally discussed but never formalized.)

² Patrick Riordan, “\$28.78 Million Tops Bids For Fontainebleau Hotel,” *The Miami Herald*, November 30, 1977.

³ Patrick Riordan, “Fontainebleau Sold to Developer, Creditor,” *The Miami Herald*, December 3, 1977.

⁴ “Bankruptcy Sale Near For the Fontainebleau,” *New York Times*, January 6, 1978.

⁵ Jon Nordheimer, “Miami Beach, Seeking Comeback, Weighs Casino Gambling,” *New York Times*, December 1, 1977.

⁶ Marilyn Alva, “What’s Doing in Greater Miami,” *New York Times*, January 28, 1979.

⁷ Ralph Blumenthal, “Miami Beach Fights to Regain Its Superstar Billing,” *New York Times*, June 17, 1979.

⁸ Ibid Alva.

⁹ Ibid Nordheimer.

Purchase and Resurrection

The once proud and glamorous Fontainebleau Hotel, a carved and terraced monument to the American dream vacation, had to fight to regain its prestige after its bankruptcy and sale to new owners in early 1978. After navigating the labyrinthine matrix of negotiations, Stephen Muss and his Hotelorama Corporation finalized the purchase of the Fontainebleau in 1978, signed a 20-year management agreement with Hilton and put \$45 million in improvements into the hotel. He replaced the Louis XIV look with tropically inspired contemporary furnishings, including an \$8.5 million pool that had eight palm trees and an artificial mountain in the center. Harold Gardner, the hotel's public relations representative, declared "the renaissance of the Fontainebleau" in hopes of reversing its declining reputation with tourists and the travel industry¹ as occupancy slumped to 30% in 1978.²

In his plan for the rebirth of the Fontainebleau, Muss took a firm stance against long-discussed proposals to legalize gambling, even though the hotel would have profited considerably. "I would not like to see my kids grow up in a city based on gambling," he said, insistent that there were other ways to revive the sag in tourism. He was also firmly opposed to the tactic of attempting to keep guests within the hotel for all their dining and entertainment needs (the so-called 'American Plan') for fear of losing those additional tourist dollars to other businesses. Muss noted that one of Novack's critical mistakes was "his insistence on running the Fontainebleau as a self-supporting empire apart from the rest of Miami Beach. Novack 'thought that the world began and ended within the four walls of the Fontainebleau,' Muss said, adding that the new Fontainebleau will have bilingual employees handing out cards steering tourists to other good restaurants throughout Dade County."³ Already in action on this plan, Muss was in communication with airlines, local restaurants and regional attractions to partner up in serving future guests. Unlike Novack's practice of trying to personally run hotel operations, Muss intended to "use modern management techniques implemented by nationally known hotel management teams."⁴ The new owner's other roles in the community, as a prominent real estate owner in Miami Beach, as leader of the city's redevelopment agency, and as a major contributor to local political campaigns made Muss a well grounded and thus promising new head of the legendary Fontainebleau.

A "Destruction Party," heralding a new age for the iconic hotel, kicked off with the wrecking of the 3-story cabana building that *The Miami Herald* declared, had been blocking the view of the ocean from the hotel.⁵ In place of the old pool and cabanas was built an impressive 334,500-gallon, half-acre "swimming lagoon," with waterfalls, a grotto bar, a man-made rock mountain with water slide, and more than a dozen live parrots and cockatoos.⁶ To support this new guest play area, alterations were made to an oceanfront longhouse and snack bar in the following season (permitted January 29, 1979). An application was filed for zoning variances to build a 3-level parking garage (at the time prohibited under zoning) with current setbacks. *The Miami Herald* joked that when Stephen Mess combined "Lapidus schlock with modern hotel interiors and ripped out the original cabanas, people declared 'the end of an era.' ...Of course, back in '54, mourning the demise of the Firestone mansion, people said that, too."⁷

A 1980 retrospective of the Fontainebleau Hotel published in *The Miami Herald* upon completion of its Muss- inspired facelift was one of the first to frame the hotel in a historical context. “It is tempting to describe it in metaphor, to say it is like a painted harlot, gaudy in youth, repulsive with age, less horrid after some of the paint has been removed. It is tempting but wrong, for this place functions as metaphor. It is the symbol. Its history is our history, both local and larger than that. It is the history of our expectation? How they have failed, how they have changed.”⁸ The re-examination of the Fontainebleau not only as a hotel, but as an American Icon had begun.

In 1982 some repackaging of the public spaces was undertaken. The area that had been offices near the front entrance of the hotel was converted to a jewelry store, and the famous La Ronde Room was refurbished in an attempt to reinvigorate the performers and clientele drawn to the legendary hotspot of entertainment. The hotel even attempted to re-create “the nightclub ambiance of 1943 – when everybody who was anybody wintered thereabouts – in its La Ronde Room.” In 1982, after being redesigned by former resident showgirl Lynn Wilson, the theater staged “Stompin’ at the La Ronde,” a three-hour nightly entertainment that resurrected themes of the “old Florida nightclubs right down to conga lines, big band radio shows, dime-a-dance girls and drinks – Singapore slings, Cuba libres and zombies. Snacks will be available too, but they will be more along the lines of current favorites such as quiche, since researchers determined that wartime food was ‘boring and bland.’”⁹ The club re-opened with the slogan: “The Stars Are Shining at La Ronde”.

A more ambitious project to add a larger night club and restaurant on the northeast corner of the property was also initiated. On July 6, 1984, Arc-Tech Associates, the Fontainebleau’s architectural firm since its change of ownership (succeeding Morris Lapidus and A. Herbert Mathes respectively), submitted a request to waive setbacks all around the site to accommodate this new structure, as well as the added parking spaces require to operate a 424-seat establishment. The attempt was blocked by the parking issue, on which the City of Miami Beach refused to grant leeway. No records exist to indicate that the project was further pursued.

Conflict arose in the summer of 1983 when the Fontainebleau was given permission to rent 375 public parking spaces at the City’s park and parking lot North of the Eden Roc, 93% of the only lot within many blocks, for its guests over the 4th of July weekend. City managers and commissioners defended the arrangement, offering that it only helped to boost tourism and the local economy. However, the Mayor’s office and the press were reported to be astounded and enraged. *The Miami Herald* called it a prime example of big business versus community.¹⁰

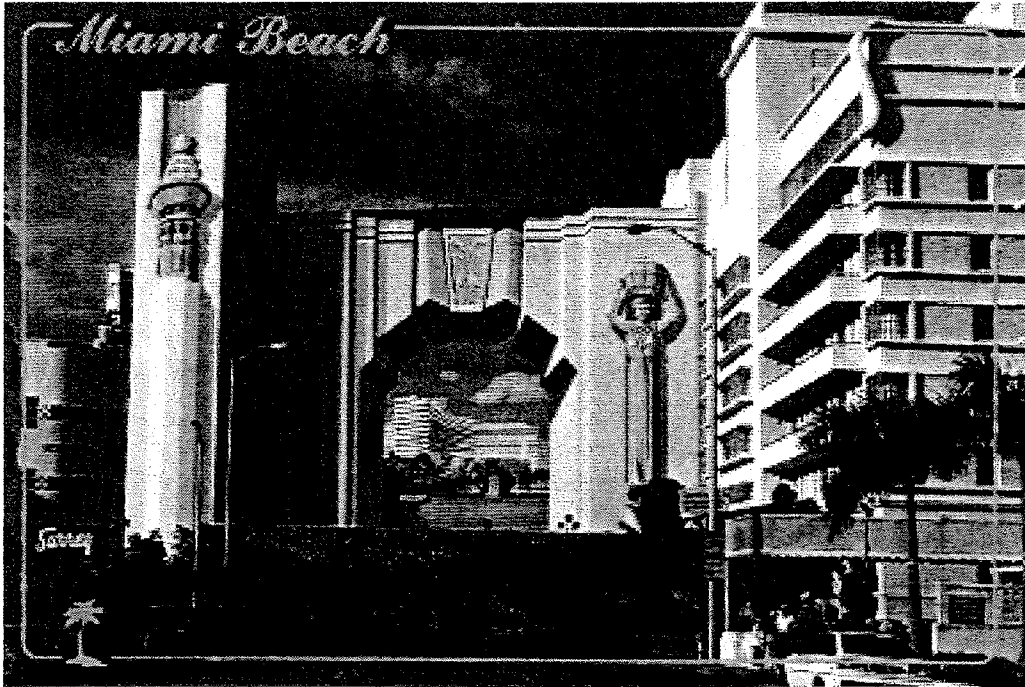
In 1984, the Fontainebleau celebrated its 30th birthday with an intimate party that, as in 1954, headlined the mayor of Fontainebleau (France). The new mayor, Paul Seramy, was to bring a new brass plaque to mount next to the one his processor had laid in 1954. The hotel gave quiet honor to a French pastry chef, coffee shop waitress, hostess, waiter, bell captain, secretary and

clerk had been with the hotel for 30 years. Mike Capuzzo, writing for *The Herald*, attributed transcendent nobility to the hotel. “Miami Beach’s crown has tumbled, but the Fontainebleau remains its jewel, a successful Hilton, home to celebrities, marble museum of the grand past.”¹¹ Also in 1984 the hotel got city approval from the Zoning Board of Adjustment for an expanded convention facility and 20 new meeting rooms. The ambitious \$15 million project was undertaken to compete with hotels in other major cities that were attracting bigger conventions than the Fontainebleau could accommodate. Since its construction, the Fontainebleau had functioned as a secondary convention facility to the main facility provided by the city of Miami Beach. The plans, which were unanimously approved, required variances because the proposed ballroom was not within the city-mandated oceanfront setbacks. It was a risky bet, and an investment that displayed confidence in Miami Beach’s ability to pull itself back up from its tourism slump.¹²

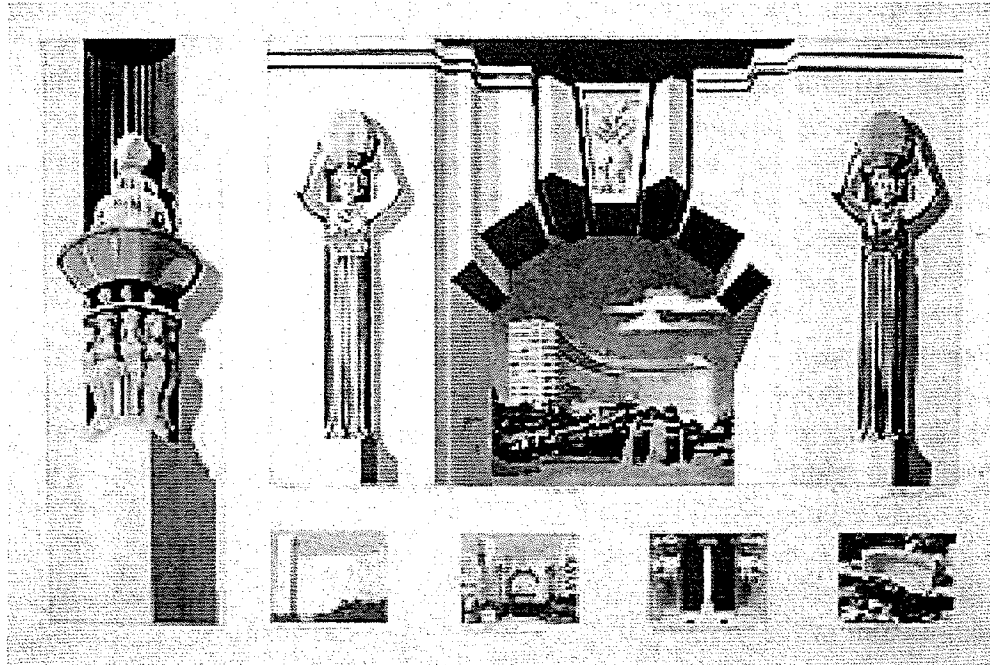
In 1985, the blank south wall of the Fontainebleau Hilton Beach Club along Collins Avenue was transformed by artist Richard Haas into another stage set befitting the drama of the hotel itself. Steve Muss first discussed the mural project with Haas around 1982. The artist commented, “When I saw the site, I thought I could play off the building and still be deferential to it.” The painting created the illusion of looking through an Art Deco triumphal archway with the pool grotto and sweep of the Chateau building beyond, “its crisp white set off against a turquoise pool and powder blue sky. And it is deferential, in that the hotel, as depicted, looks very glamorous. But it is also a bit satirical, an ironic treatment of a very big, very blank wall that oncoming drivers have to look at for blocks.”¹³ The mural “splendidly solved a curious problem of urban design. The Fontainebleau, for years dismissed as vulgar, was nevertheless one of Miami Beach’s cherished architectural icons. Yet it was invisible from the south, blocked by the blank side wall of a building awkwardly placed at just the point at which Collins Avenue, Miami Beach’s spinal main street, bends. Mr. Haas, who gives us his permission to call him both “environmental artist” and “decorator,” framed an artificial vista that led right to the heart of the Fontainebleau. As *New York Times* architectural critic Paul Goldberger noted, “the admired building is celebrated and the offending one put in its place, both in a single, artful gesture.”¹⁴

In an interview with *Architectural Digest*, Haas stated his hope “that this section of Collins Avenue becomes something of a typical, Deco Champs-Elysees in scale and feeling. ... Some have called what I do urban surgery – radical urban surgery. But it’s more like mending.” *Digest* commented that “his reinventions come out of an analysis of the city structure and what is missing from it – namely, city as fantasy or, as he puts it, ‘city as plausible fantasy.’”¹⁵

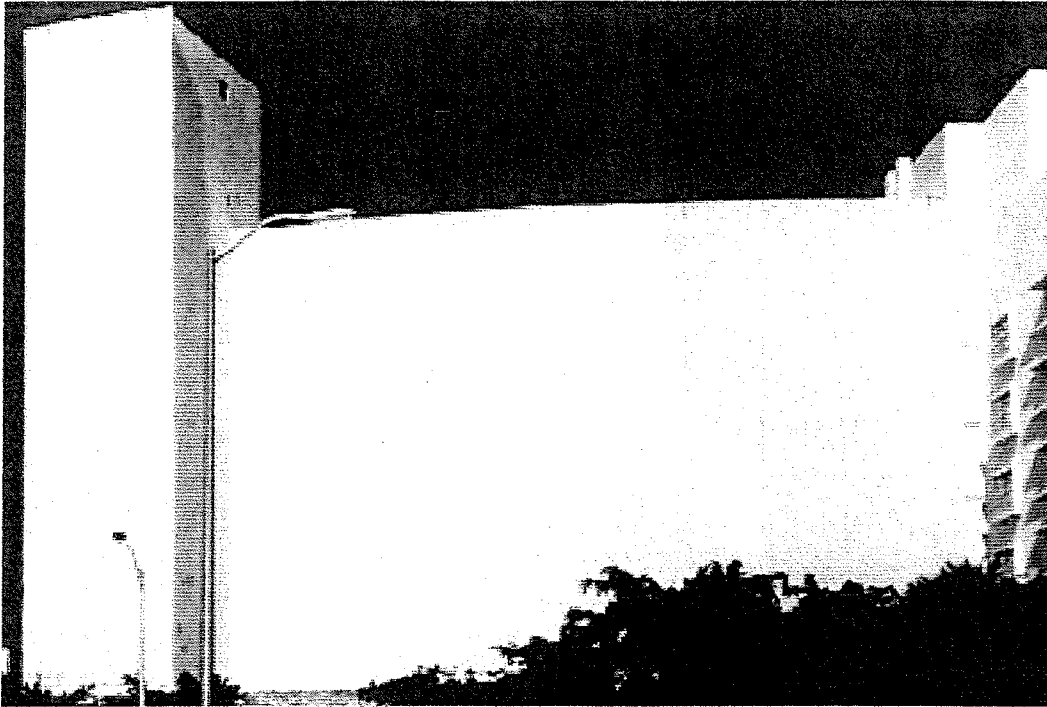
In the late 1980s, few renovations were initiated, and the ones that were mainly small and located on the north section of the property. On May 19, 1987 a Certificate of Occupancy was issued for an upper parking level, as well as for a kosher kitchen, meeting rooms, ballrooms, and promenade on the 4th floor of the north tower. The following year brought new meeting rooms and a ballroom expansion, designed by Arc-Tech Associates.



*Postcard: Mural on South wall of the Fontainebleau Hotel (1985)
Published by Scenic Florida Dist.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida*

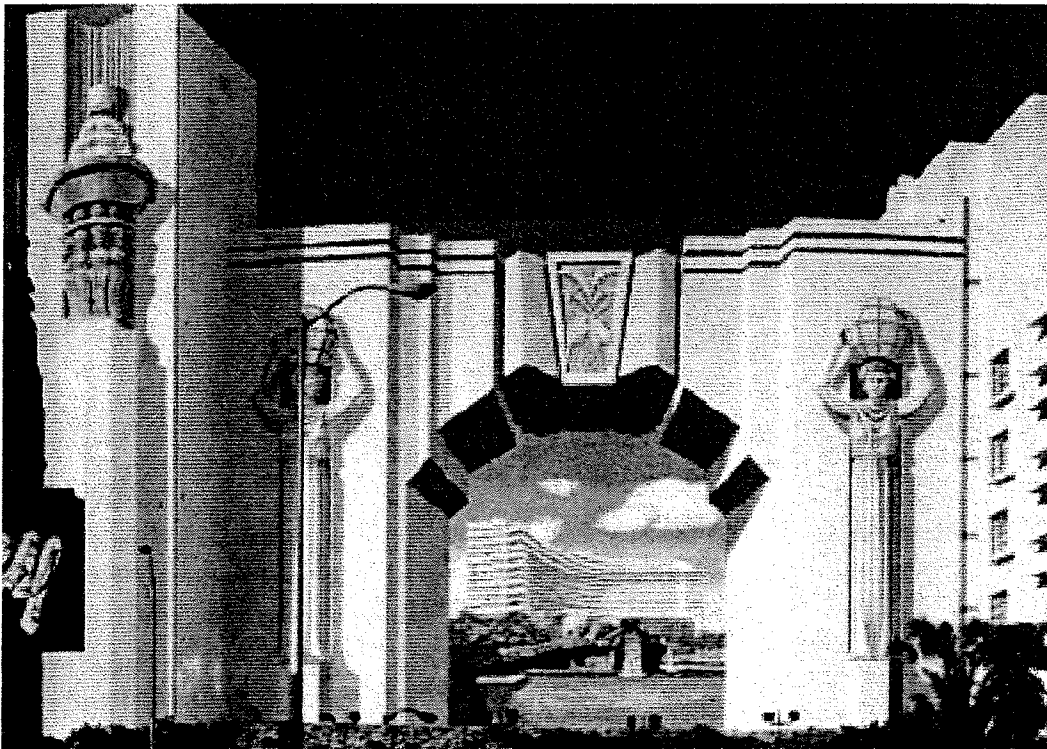


*Fontainebleau Hotel Mural Screenprint
Fontainebleau Hotel, Miami Beach FL (Architectural Facades Portfolio), 1989
Screenprint 29.5" x 42", Edition of 100, Publisher: Brooke Alexander*



Fontainebleau wall Before Mural

Photograph courtesy of the Richard Hass Collection, Publisher: Brooke Alexander



Fontainebleau wall After Mural

Photograph courtesy of the Richard Hass Collection, Publisher: Brooke Alexander



*Postcard: Looking North on Florida's Gold coast at the Fontainebleau
Published by Gulfstream Card Co., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida*



*Fontainebleau Pool with Waterfall
Published by Gulfstream Card Co., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida*



*New pool & island
Image Courtesy of Corbis*



*Sailboats on Miami Beach (1987)
Photographer: Carl Purcell
Image Courtesy of Corbis*

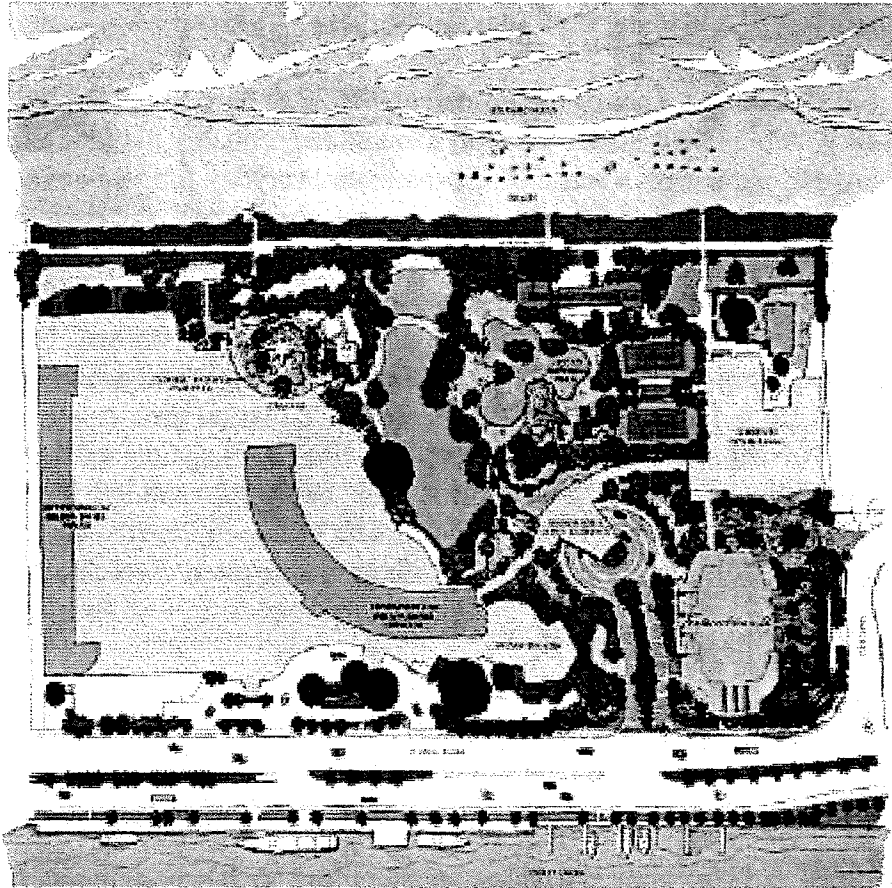
Expansion and Redevelopment (1997-2005)

In 1997, Hotelarama announced the most ambitious Fontainebleau expansion since the Towers addition of 1958. A new 40-story tower, designed by Nichols Brosch Sandoval & Associates, was proposed for the south side of the property. The initial application for the project in November of that year called for a 41-story, 250-unit apartment building over a garage. The final product, called Fontainebleau II, whose application was filed in May, 2000, called for a 36 story tower with 230 units and a multistory parking pedestal occupying the corner of Collins Avenue and 44th Street. As part of an overall master plan for the property, the proposal included a new entrance drive from Collins Avenue, just south of the original hotel entrance, added underground parking, and a segmented glass spine connecting all the major structures on the property. *The Miami Herald* architectural critic, Peter Whoriskey, noted that as aggressive a gesture as this was, “the proposed project respects the original hotel far more than other refurbishments did.”¹⁶ After final approvals were granted, Hotelereama teamed with Turnberry Associates for the project’s development.

A cherished victim of this expansion was the once-controversial but later-celebrated Haas mural on the wall that greeted the curves of Collins Avenue, destroyed in the demolition of the wall facing 44th Street as the road was shifted 135 feet to the south. The proposal from the Fontainebleau initially called for preserving the wall as an established character in Miami Beach street scenography. As a result of the design review process and the suggestion of preservationists like Randall Robinson, the final decision was to take down the wall to reestablish the Collins Avenue view corridor.

In January, 2004, Muss and Turnberry announced the development of Fontainebleau III, a 200,’ 18-story building slated to replace the Sorrento at the southeast corner of the property. Like Fontainebleau II, the project was designed by Nichols Brosch Sandoval & Associates. A variance for a 15’ side setback for the parking pedestal was requested in July 2003, and the building application itself was submitted four months later. Groundbreaking is planned for late 2005, and the building is scheduled to be open by 2007.

The creation of this report was spurred on May 10, 2005 by the first hearing to begin the historic designation process for the district including the Fontainebleau. In a coincidental chronology, the next day Fontainebleau Hotel was sold to Jeffrey Soffer’s Turnberry Associates in a newly-formed partnership called Fontainebleau Resorts.



2003 site plan with Fontainebleau II addition
Image Courtesy of Fontainebleau 2 website (www.fontainebleau2.com)

- 1 Arnold Markowitz, "New Fontainebleau Owners Begin the 'Renaissance'," *The Miami Herald*, March 15, 1978.
- 2 Mike Capuzzo, "The Sand Castle," *The Miami Herald*, February 19, 1984.
- 3 Bill Rose, "It'll Be a 'New' Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, April 21, 1978.
- 4 Ibid, Rose.
- 5 Norton, Mike, "Hotel Shows Off Its 'Ruins'," *The Miami Herald*, June 30, 1978.
- 6 Morin, Richard, "Florida Checks in Fontainebleau," *The Miami Herald*, December 20, 1978.
- 7 "Queen of Goopy Hotels," *The Miami Herald*, December 21, 1979.
- 8 Madeleine Blais, "The Fontainebleau Fairy Tale: Once upon a time comes again," *The Miami Herald*, February 3, 1980.
- 9 Van Gelder, Lawrence, "Hotels Turn Back Clock," *New York Times*, August 22, 1982.
- 10 Dory Owens, "Hotel took 375 public parking spots over holiday," *The Miami Herald*, July 5, 1983.
- 11 Ibid, Capuzzo.
- 12 Shannon, Paul, "Fontainebleau to Expand to Lure Bigger Conventions," *The Miami Herald*, July 7, 1984.
- 13 Dunlop, Beth, "Mister Vista: His Paintbrush Turns Ho-Hum Walls into Landmarks," *The Miami Herald*, March, 1986.
- 14 Golberger, Paul, "The Healing Murals of Richard Haas," *New York Times*, January 10, 1989.
- 15 Gruen, John, "Suggesting a Plausible Fantasy," *Architectural Digest*, July 1987.
- 16 Whoriskey, Peter, "Landmark Hotel Slated to Expand," *The Miami Herald*, August 4, 1997.

Founding Personalities: Ben Novack and Morris Lapidus

Ben Hadwin Novack, founding owner of the Fontainebleau, was born in the Bronx. He worked at his father's country club in New York's Catskill Mountains, probably his first exposure to what it takes to provide people with a sense of escape from everyday life. He arrived in Miami Beach in 1940 and eventually operated the Monroe Towers, the Cornell, the Atlantis and the Sans Souci hotels before opening the Fontainebleau.¹ For decades after the opening of his famous hotel, "Mr. Fontainebleau" as he became known, led a colorful life, as much on the personal front as in business matters. Much of it found its way into the local press. Novack ran the hotel with panache, becoming personally associated with the popular entertainment and criminal figures that frequented it. During the late 1960's Novack's marital problems were also often in the news. In 1967, Novack and his wife, Bernice, both filed suits against each other. She accused him of 'mental cruelty;' he charged Bernice with "being cold and indifferent and unloving, causing him mental anguish." The Novacks, who had been married since February 15, 1952, finally resolved their marital difficulties with an uncontested divorce on June 1967.



The Miami Herald, Sunday, June 18, 1976
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, WTVJ files

Born in Russia, Morris Lapidus was raised in Brooklyn and graduated in architecture from Columbia University in 1927. He found work in the emerging field of store design, where he soon established a solid reputation as a designer, innovator and theoretician – an accomplished technician of the interaction between people and buildings. Lapidus developed his own modernist idiom, which included transparent facades adorned with typography, and a private vocabulary that included architectural elements he named the “woggle,” “beanpole,” and “cheese hole.” His overarching principle, eventually broadcast in manifestos like *An Architecture of Joy* (1979), was that architecture was as an instrument of pleasure. In an architectural practice established during World War II, Lapidus took on apartment blocks, office buildings, public and religious structures, and – most importantly – hotels. Hotels were what drew Lapidus to Miami, providing an ideal pretext for his ‘architecture of joy’ and setting him on a trajectory that would produce his most influential and controversial work.

Fifteen years after a beginning in stage set design and acting and a successful career designing alluring retail spaces, Lapidus received the commission for the Fontainebleau. The hotel was a dream come true. “I just left reality... I designed a Busby Berkley movie set. What I did was glamour, glamour, glamour. If a small crystal chandelier was glamorous, a huge crystal chandelier was glamorous with a capital G.”²



Lapidus Lounging

Image courtesy of GOOD BYE!: The Journal of Contemporary Obituaries
www.goodbyemag.com/jan01/lapidus.html

The Fontainebleau Hotel of was conceived and driven by Lapidus and Novack. Their relationship is part of the legend of the hotel, and both claimed ownership of the greatest aspects of the hotel's design. The architect maintained he designed it while hanging on a strap of the BMT subway but the original owner always insisted that the form of the tower, a bold quarter circle facing the sea, came to him either in the bathtub or on the toilet.

Even the name was a subject of controversy. "Novack once explained that he and his wife were driving through France in 1951 when they passed the famous royal palace of Fontainebleau outside Paris. 'We didn't stop to look at it,' he said. 'But we like the name, kind of catchy.' So when it came time to build – from his bathtub concept – what Mr. Novack himself called 'the world's most pretentious hotel,' ... it became the Fontainebleau."³ However, it is more likely that the name evolved from Lapidus' fertile imagination. Fontainebleau, especially the surrounding forest, had been popularized in 19th century France as a bourgeois destination, a popular locale that cleverly mixed mass-market tourism. According to Ralph Blumenthal, Lapidus and Novack shared a grandiose vision of kitsch and glitz. According to the narrative that Lapidus himself promoted, it was Novack who insisted on French provincial and it was Lapidus who found a way to pare down the baroque qualities of this ornate style to make it "modern" (especially in its exterior features). The interiors were stocked with period antiques purchased from estates and New York dealers, stripped and reupholstered in white and gold.⁴

The genesis of the main iconic features of the hotel were, however, furiously debated for the remainder of Novack's and Lapidus' lives. According to Novack, "It was my idea to have the curved building, it was my idea to decorate it, it was my idea to build it, it was my idea to pay for it. He helped. He was part and parcel of me. We worked together. He did a lot of the décor. He's a very clever man. But Ben Novack designed that building."⁵

In response to Novack's claims as designer, Lapidus said: "This is an illiterate man who thinks he designed the Fontainebleau. He has grand delusions. He had no more to do with it than a man sweeping a street. He's the greatest egotist in the world. I had to sit with him 'till 2 or 3 o'clock in the morning explaining what I was doing and why I was doing it, and he'd say you've captured my ideas, you're pushing the pencil. I've written a book about my experience with Ben Novack. He's a man I once tried to kill and almost succeeded."⁶

Lapidus was referring to an incident on the construction site of the Fontainebleau: The architect recalled trying to kill Novack over an unpaid bill. "I was running after him with a 3 by 6 screaming at the top of my lungs – everything stopped on the job – and saying this man must die. He ran away and I ran after him and it took about three of the partners to restrain me. I blacked out... or I would have flattened him."⁷ Eventually their relationship was severed entirely when Lapidus took his next commission – the design of the Eden Roc hotel next door.

After being thrown out of the Fontainebleau in bankruptcy in 1977, Novack never returned. Quoted later in local newspapers, he seemed to have never lost his bitterness over the loss of his dream resort. Novack, from exile, noted that "The glory I got being Mr. Fontainebleau

will go on forever... But there was no glory in building a failure... There's nothing to celebrate."⁸ He exiled himself to Ocean Ridge, Florida and later opened a Boynton Beach restaurant with a jail-house theme called the Alcatraz.⁹

After the bankruptcy sale of the Fontainebleau, two fires occurred that were never explained. In 1978, the year the hotel was sold, the storeroom over the penthouse suites in the north tower caught on fire. Smoke and flames caused hysteria for pedestrians and motorists on Collins Avenue, but no one was injured and most of the staff and guests inside the hotel were unaware of the blaze. Arson was not ruled out.¹⁰ Two years later, a fire in the Fontainebleau banquet rooms and ballrooms, originating in the basement storage room below, forced 1,000 guests to evacuate. "A dozen guests and six firemen were treated for smoke inhalation. No one was reported hospitalized. Again, the cause of the fire was not immediately determined."¹¹

Ben Novack died of heart and lung failure at age 78 at Mount Sinai Medical Center on Friday, April 5, 1985. He had owned and operated the Fontainebleau from its opening in 1954 until he filed for Federal bankruptcy protection in 1977. At the time of his death, Mr. Novack had been at the center of a mental competency fight over his ability to administer his estate, estimated at \$1 million.¹² Lapidus died in January, 2001.

¹ Don Bedwell, "Novack: I Wish Hotel Were 'Somewhere Else'" *The Miami Herald*, June 13, 1975???

² 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.

³ Ralph Blumenthal, "Miami Beach Fights to Regain Its Superstar Billing," *New York Times*, June 17, 1979.

⁴ "Fontainebleau, Miami's Hotel of the Year," *Interiors*, May 1955, v. 114, pp. 88-95.

⁵ Ibid, Capuzzo.

⁶ Ibid, Capuzzo.

⁷ Ibid, Capuzzo.

⁸ Ibid, Capuzzo.

⁹ Ibid, Capuzzo.

¹⁰ Christopher Cubbison, "Towering Hotel Escapes Inferno," *The Miami Herald*, March 31, 1978.

¹¹ Joan Fleischman, "Fontainebleau Blaze Forces 1,000 to Flee," *The Miami Herald*, May 25, 1980.

¹² "Ben Novack Sr., 78 Is Dead; Founder of Fontainebleau," *New York Times*

Retrospective

In a 1997 interview, Lapidus was asked which, of all the buildings he had designed, was his favorite. “The Fontainebleau. Sweeping, curving. It represents my most original thinking. It was a fantasy work of richness and elegance. It was a world that excited people. They loved it.”¹ Although often bashed for his design indulgence, at the time of his death in 2001 Lapidus had finally gained the respect of his colleagues and critics that had been missing.

Earlier, at age 85 the retired architect reflected on his hotel lobbies: ‘I wanted people to walk in and drop dead.’ ‘Some did,’ replied his wife, Beatrice, who is 79. Even with a portfolio of more than 200 hotels around the world, Lapidus still struggled for respect. “Excoriated by critics ... his ‘modern French chateau’ designs for the Fontainebleau ... flew in the face of mainstream international modernism. They have since become renegade popular landmarks, appreciated anew by a younger generation of architects. In an open letter in the Italian design magazine *Domus*, for example, Alessandro Mendini gushed over Mr. Lapidus’s ‘acrobatic virtuosity.’ He said, ‘We believe the method of which you are a precursor is as necessary as it is dangerous.’”²

Early critics offered scathing reviews. “Fairy wonderlands, extravagant entertainment, strawberry cream cheesecake,” said New York architect Norval White of the work of the Fontainebleau’s architect, Morris Lapidus. ... ‘Uninspired superschlock,’ harrumphed Ada Louise Huxtable – then the *New York Times*’ architectural critic – after a New York gallery’s exhibit of Lapidus’ work. ‘I don’t want to lull anyone’s senses,’ explained Lapidus in return.”³ He “rejoiced that people loved to be seen on his overscaled steps, particularly when dressed to kill. ‘They want to feel like millionaires and so I put them on stage,’ he once said of his stairway for the Fontainebleau Hotel.”⁴

Other opinions on the hotel’s design were more benevolent, but they came from outside the establishment of architecture and architectural criticism. Just before the Fontainebleau opened, a *New York Times* reporter declared that it “has already added favorably to the skyline of Miami Beach. From Collins Avenue, the Fontainebleau’s lines are strong and clean, and have considerable beauty. There can be strong differences of opinion with architect Arthur [sic] Lapidus about the concrete decorations and accretions around the ocean side of the building.”⁵

In retrospect, it seems clear that, in order to have viewed the Fontainebleau favorably, you had to “get” what it was about. Paul Goldberger noted that it is “to architecture what the 1959 Cadillac is to cars – swooping, wildly extravagant, full of self-indulgent glitter and pomp.”⁶ Even the transfer of bellboy shifts, or the “changing of the guards”, was a spectacle that added to the theatricality of the hotel. “The greatest mistake hotel designers make,” says Lapidus, “is thinking a hotel is a home away from home. I’ve given these people something to gape at; you might call it a tasteful three-ring circus.”⁷ Lapidus famously said that a hotel should be “no place like home.”

Lapidus knew the importance of keeping people entertained. He claimed the curve of the building was to diminish the otherwise monotonous experience of long, interior corridors, providing an experience unlike any other. “The plan resembles nothing for the past. There’s hardly a straight line in it – it just moves, with one curve going one way, and another in the opposite direction. There’s no end. ... A perceptual psychologist would say that shifting the point of view prompts people to move: Arthur Murray would say Lapidus twirled guests like a dancer into other dimensions.”⁸

And people clearly took pleasure in the dance and wanted more. As Gilbert Millstein reflected, “With the addition of the Americana, [Lapidus] now enjoys (with the mildly melancholic reservations imposed by the artist on himself), the distinction of being the architect of what are very likely the three best known and the two most expensive resort hotels in the world. He is the architect and designer also of last year’s hotel, the Italianate Eden Roc...”⁹

As the hotel grew and mutated, reactions to the experience at the hotel shifted accordingly. A travel writer in 1998 expressed her disappointment in the current version of the Fontainebleau’s playful interior: “it was dark and had been renovated with a dull institutional hand.”¹⁰ Although overall benevolent in his view of the hotel, journalist and writer T.D. Allman inserted his own brand of ironic amazement in his portrayal of the Fontainebleau in his book, *Miami: City of the Future*: “I took my bath in a whirling Jacuzzi big as that bed at the Fontainebleau, and as I went out, the Haitian maids, in their white uniforms, were singing a song of the Caribbean, and I realized: five years ago that immense machine, that immense Jacuzzi, those Haitian, this hotel – none of them had been here. The whole damn place was made up! The whole damn place was just made up.”¹¹

The death of Lapidus in January 2001 prompted Herbert Muschamp, the *New York Times* architectural critic, to re-analyze the role of the architect of “swank.” “At the Fontainebleau Hotel, scene of the Miami shots in ‘Goldfinger,’ Lapidus made Swiss cheese holes look ... swanky. ... The password was swanky and swanky meant sex. Lapidus, who died last month in Miami Beach at the age of 98, left behind a legacy of imaginative mid-century buildings and the critical controversy they swirled up. He is best known as the leading designer of Florida resort architecture in the 1950’s. The Fontainebleau and Eden Roc are considered his masterpieces. ... The conflict over Lapidus was only partly between high- and low-brow taste. There was also a generational divide. In the 1960’s, everyone I know loved Lapidus, for the same reason we loved ‘Goldfinger.’ Both carried the seal of parental disapproval. Like Miami Beach, Lapidus stood for a certain idea of the exotic. Eroticism was part of it. Jewishness was part of it. Difference in itself is swanky. So is power. Lapidus gave us the power to see beauty where others saw trash, humor where others saw bad taste, feeling where others saw a breach in decorum. The freedom to see what you like can be potent. The young are experts at it. It is often the only power they have. Lapidus was a spring break all year round.” Muschamp goes on to argue that this swank was also a threat to the architectural world – that buildings that “transgress the rules of decorum” call for the civilized critic to protect his sophisticated urbanity by attacking architectural displays of irrationality, primitivism, emotion and sensibility.¹²

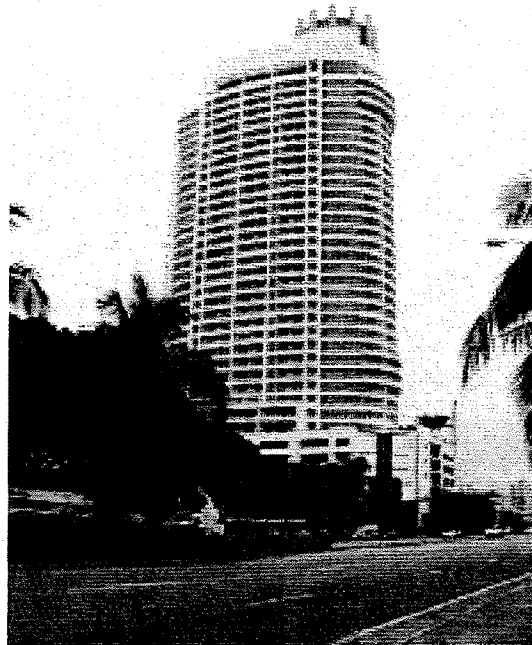
- ¹ "Interview: Lapidus Cuts Loose," *Architecture*, February 1997.
- ² Brown, Patricia Leigh, "Drop Dead' Lapidus Look: Going for the Gorgeous Design," *New York Times*, May 12, 1988.
- ³ Author?, "Queen of Goopy Hotels," *The Miami Herald*, December 21, 1979.
- ⁴ Glueck, Grace, "Design Notebook: Reflections on the passing of grand, sweeping staircases," *New York Times*, July 22, 1982.
- ⁵ P.J.C.F., "Pleasure Palaces: New Luxury Hotels on Miami Beach Are Approaching the Ne Plus Ultra," *New York Times*, December 12, 1954.
- ⁶ Goldberger, Paul, "Comebacks: The Architect of Swanky Populism," *The New Yorker*, December 3, 2000.
- ⁷ "Fontainebleau, Miami's Hotel of the Year," *Interiors*, May 1955, v. 114, pp. 88-95.
- ⁸ Joseph Giovannini, "Ahead of the Curves," *New York Magazine*, March 26, 2001.
- ⁹ Gilbert Millstein, "Architect De Luxe of Miami Beach," *New York Times*, January 6, 1957.
- ¹⁰ Daisann McLane, "Adios South Beach, Hola Budget Miami," *New York Times*, October 11, 1998.
- ¹¹ T.D. Allman, *Miami: City of the Future*, New York: The Atlantic Monthly Press, 1987.
- ¹² Herbert Muschamp, "Defining Beauty in Swanky American Terms," *New York Times*

Contemporary Photo Survey

Taken June 2005



*Fontainebleau site, view from Collins Avenue north
ATS photo 2005*



*Fontainebleau II from Collins Avenue north
ATS photo 2005*



*Original Entrance
ATS photo 2005*



*New Entrance from Collins Avenue
ATS photo 2005*



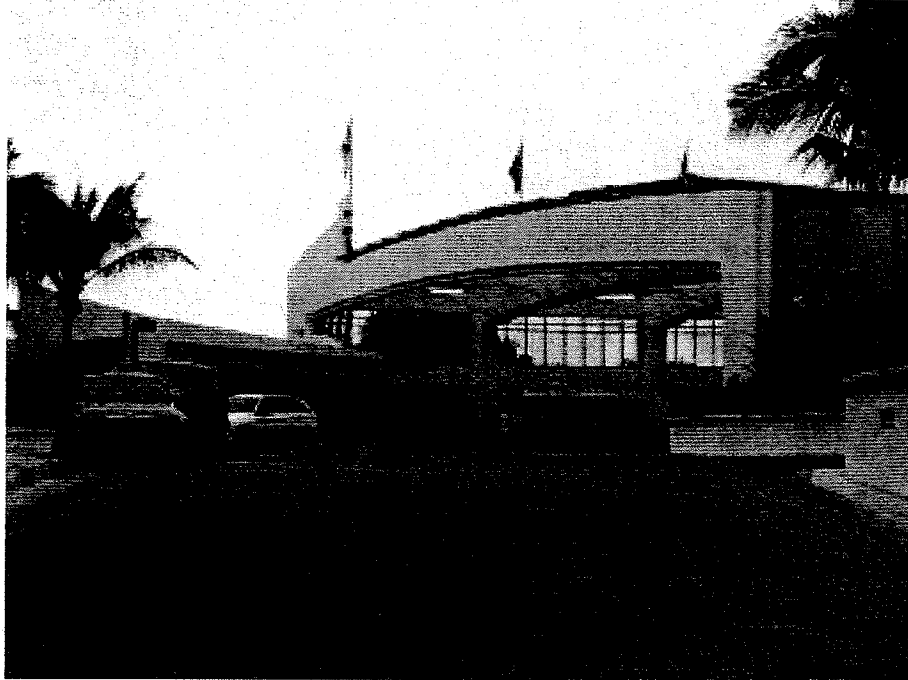
*Southwest corner of Fontainebleau II pedestal
ATS photo 2005*



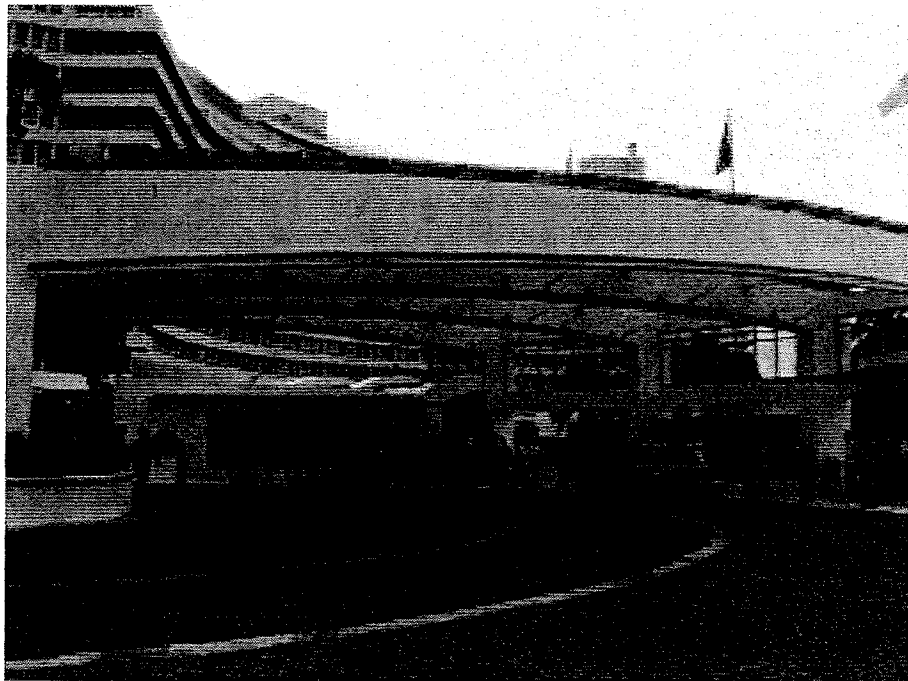
*Fontainebleau II pedestal from Collins
ATS photo 2005*



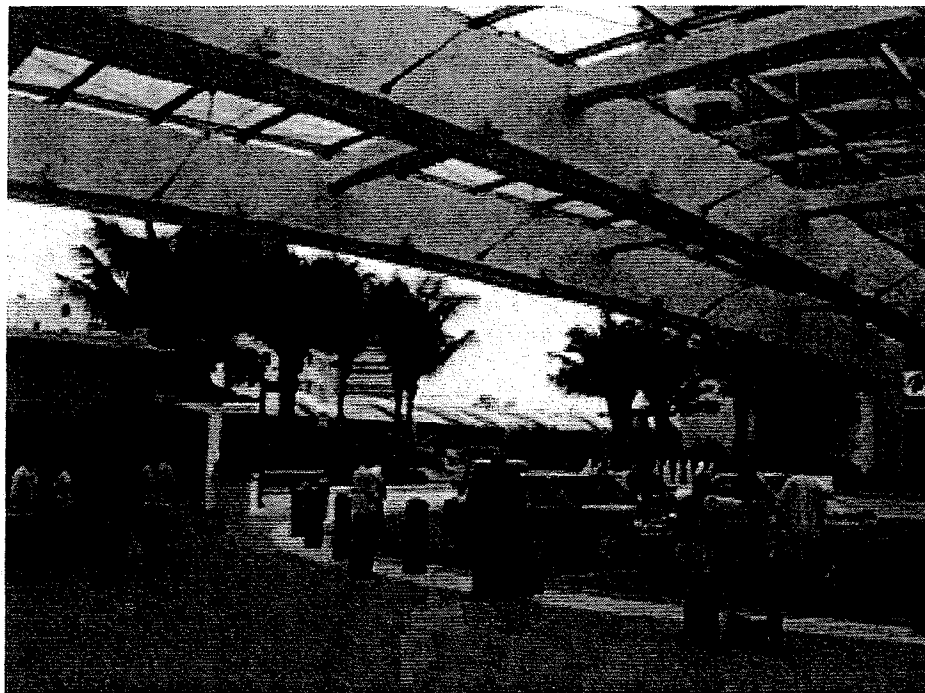
*Fontainebleau II from Collins Avenue at 44th Street
ATS photo 2005*



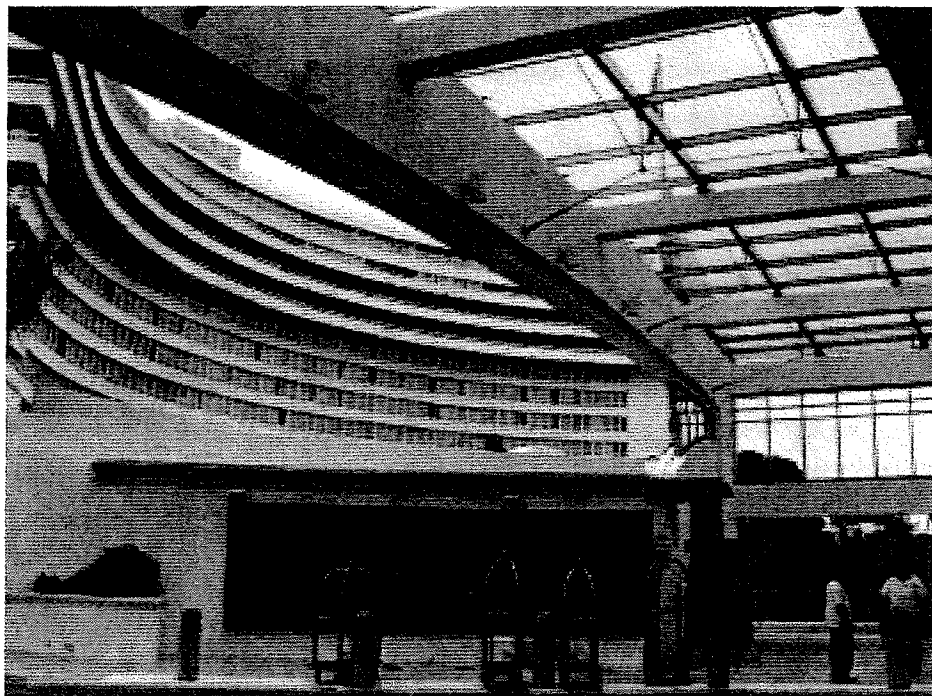
*New Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005*



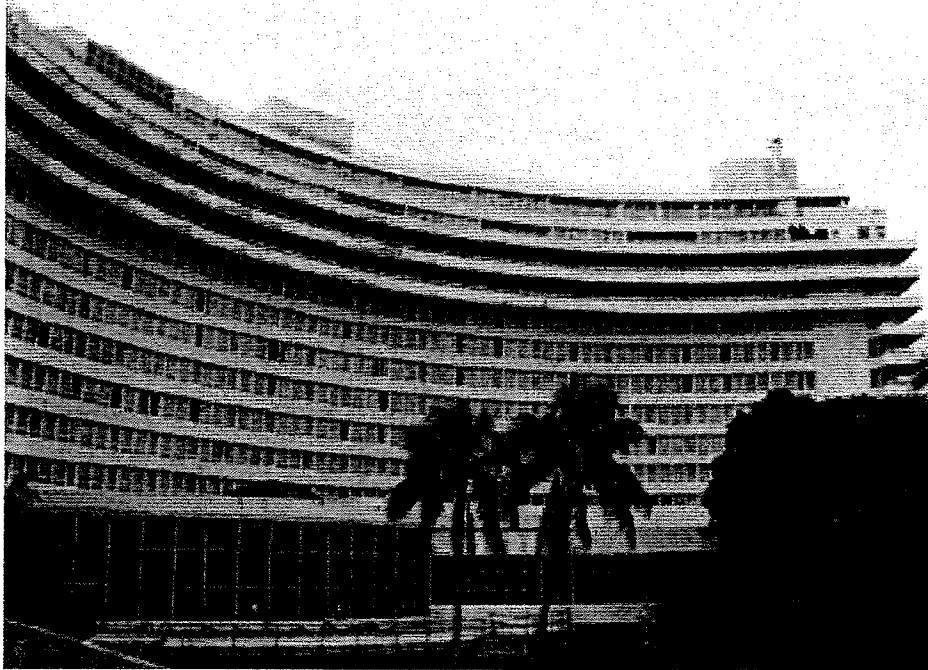
*New Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005*



*View of connector from Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005*



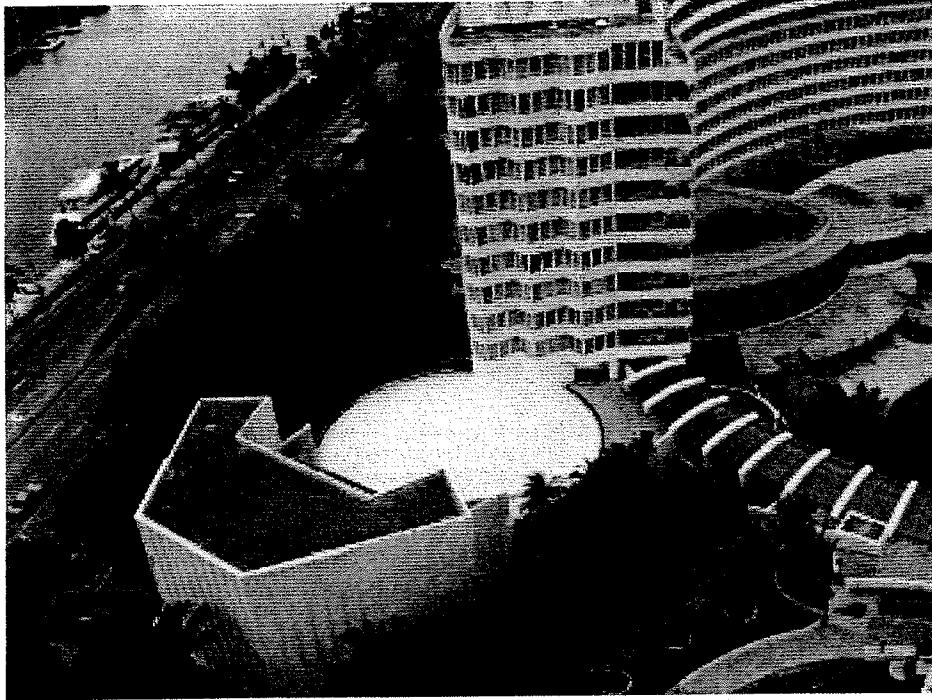
*View of Chateau from Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005*



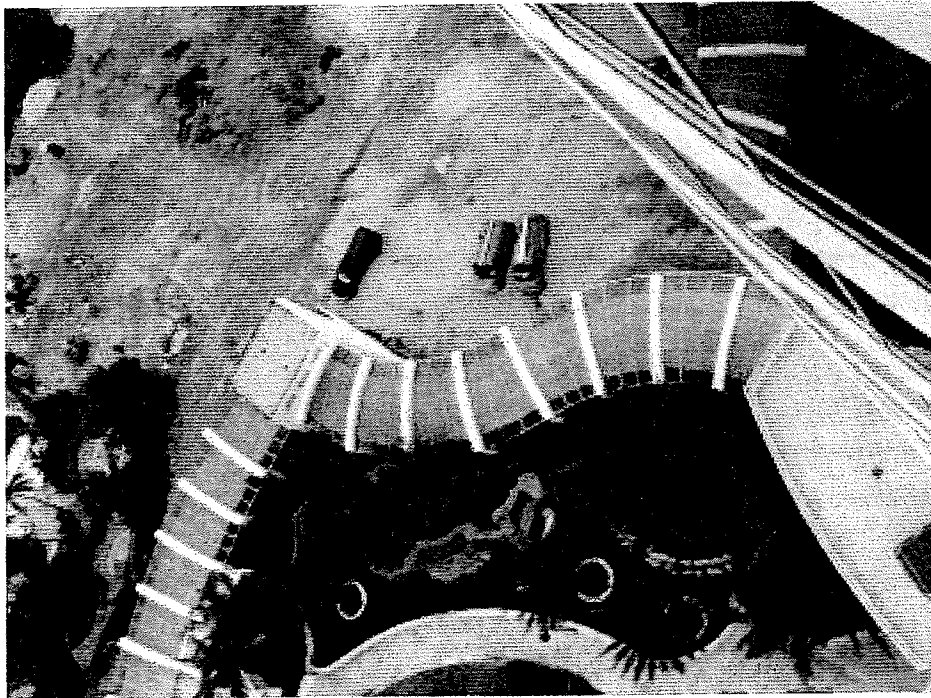
*View of Chateau & Garden Lobby beyond new entrance
ATS photo 2005*



*Porte-cochere canopy and connector spine from above
ATS photo 2005*



*Connector spine to Chateau Building and Tropigala from above
ATS photo 2005*



*Connector spine to Fontainebleau III
ATS photo 2005*



*Exterior of Garden Lobby
ATS photo 2005*



*Exterior Stair from Garden Lobby
ATS photo 2005*



*North wall of Versailles Tower from boardwalk
ATS photo 2005*



*Versailles Tower from boardwalk
ATS photo 2005*



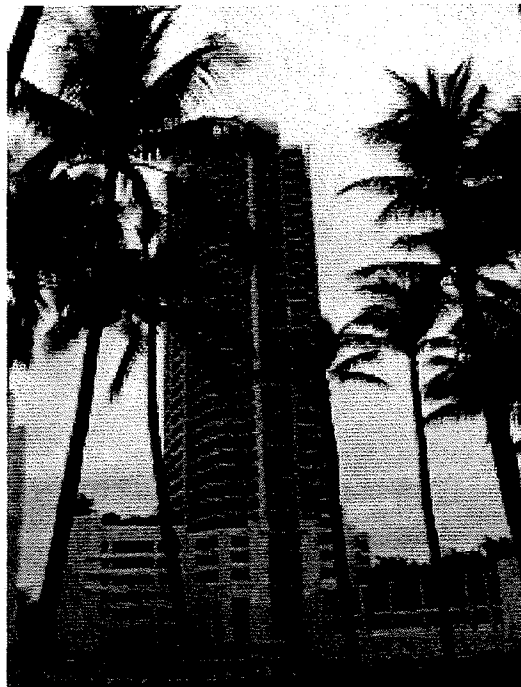
*View of Chateau from boardwalk east
ATS photo 2005*



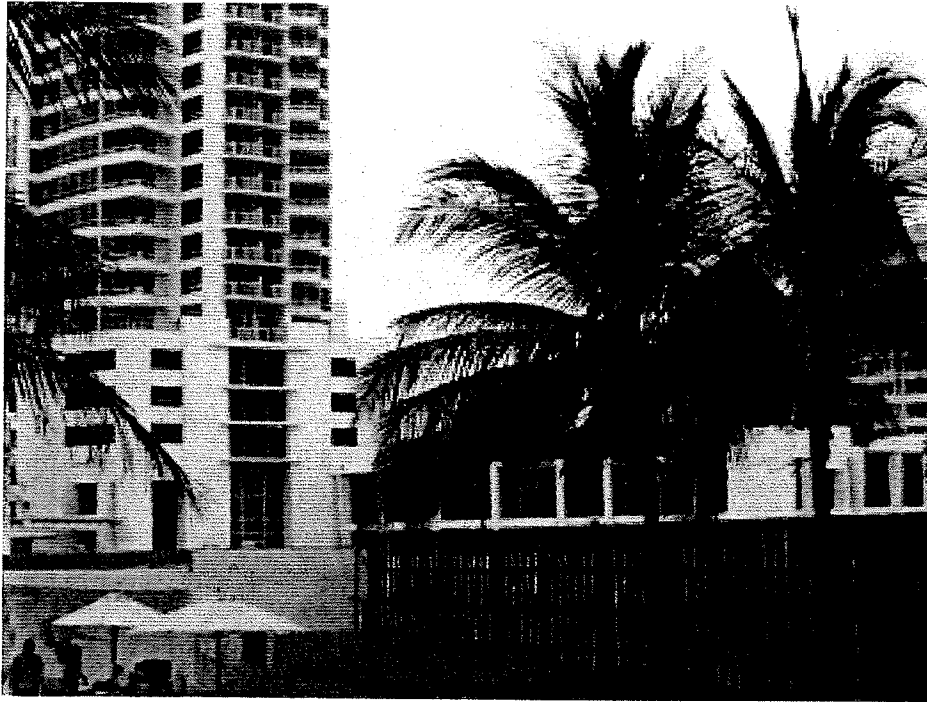
*View of Chateau from boardwalk southeast
ATS photo 2005*



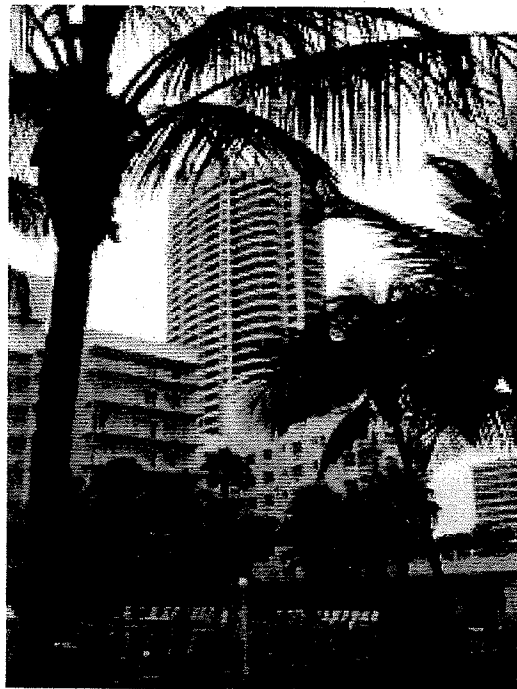
*Porte-Cochere & Fontainebleau II from east
ATS photo 2005*



*Fontainebleau II from east
ATS photo 2005*



*Fontainebleau II Pedestal
ATS photo 2005*



*Fontainebleau II behind Sorrento addition
ATS photo 2005*

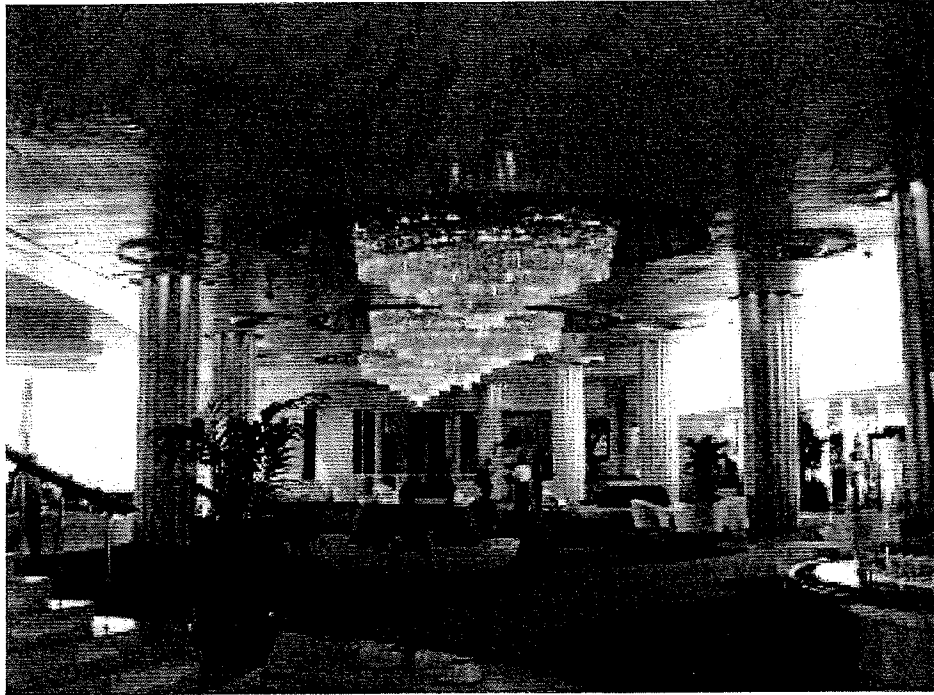
Chateau Lobby & Tower



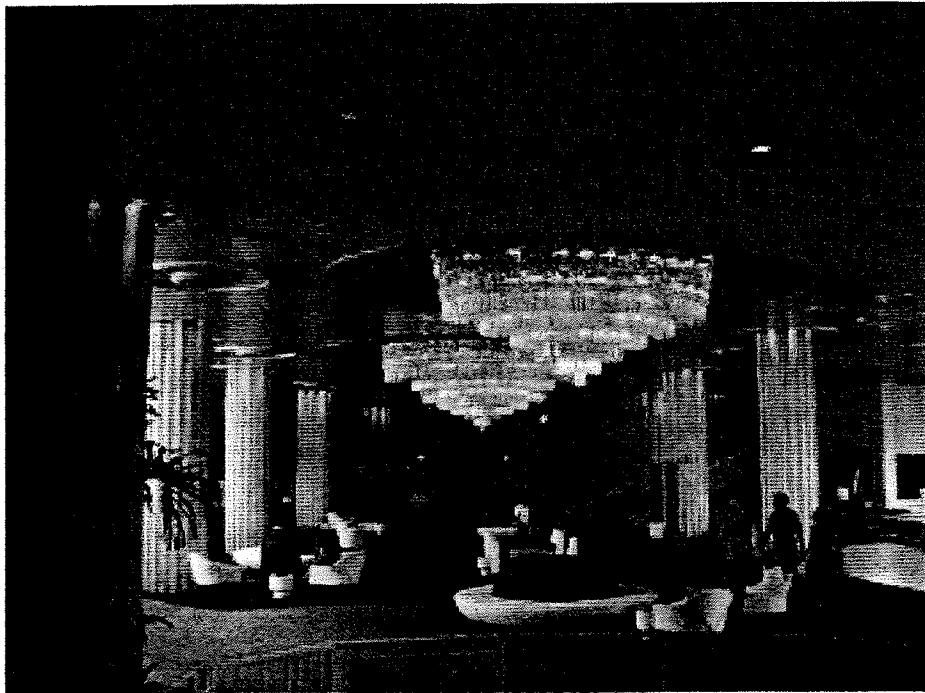
*Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



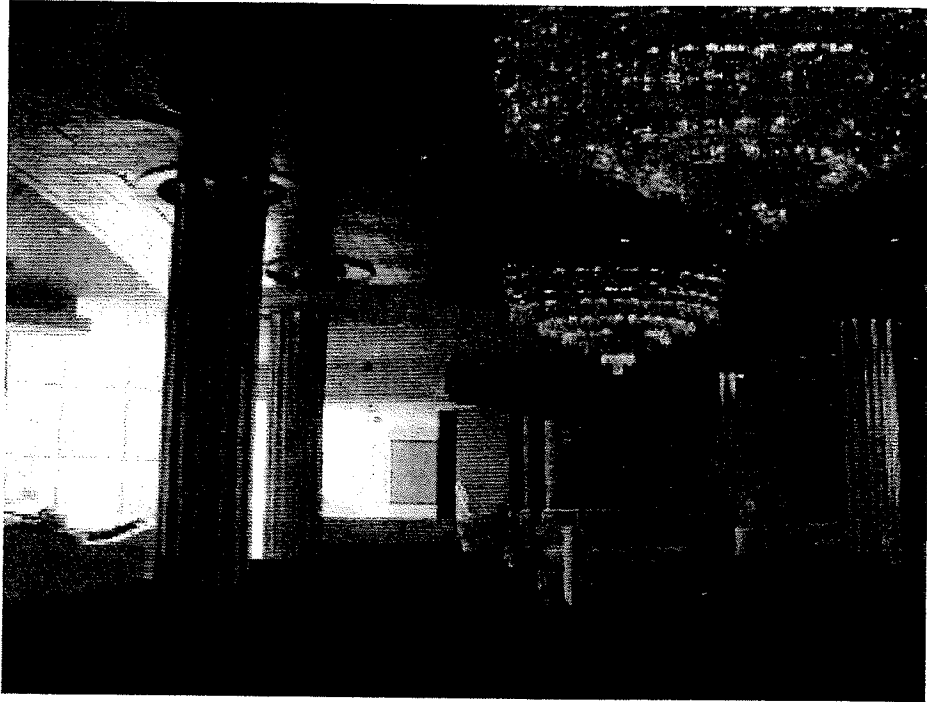
*Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



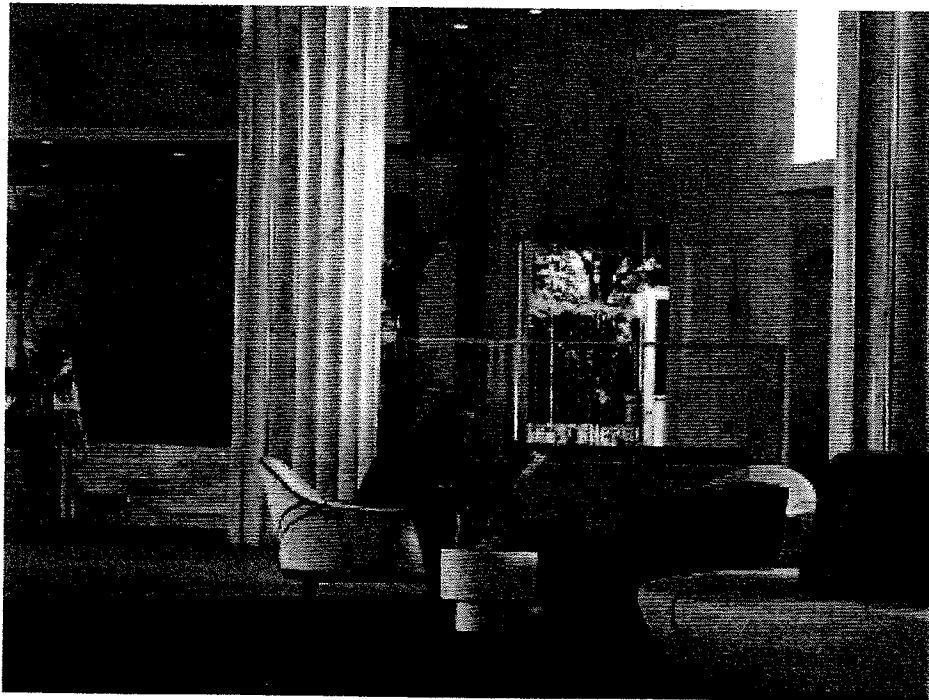
Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005



Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005



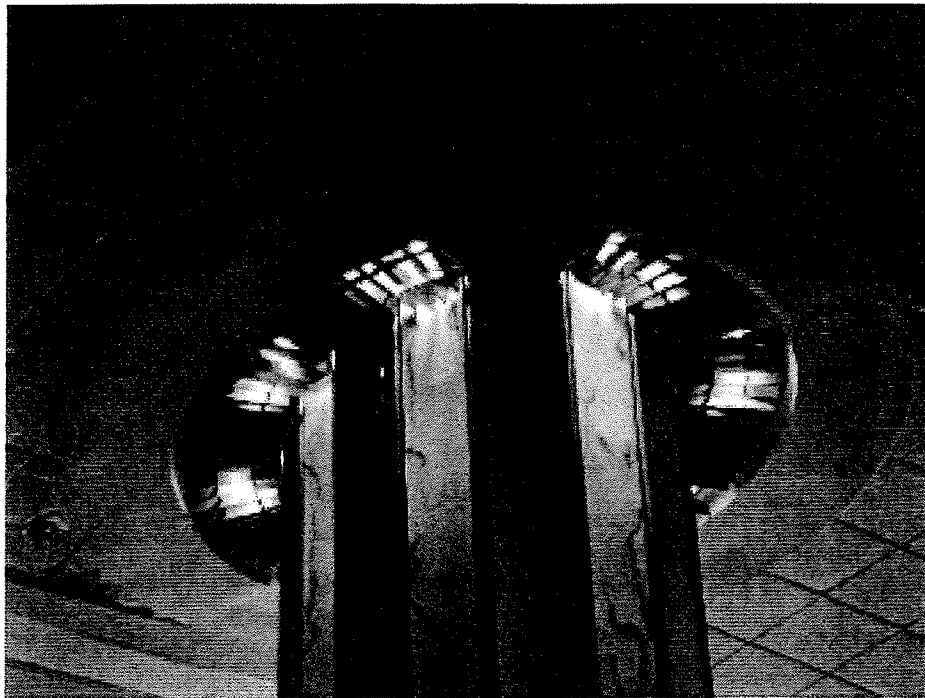
*Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



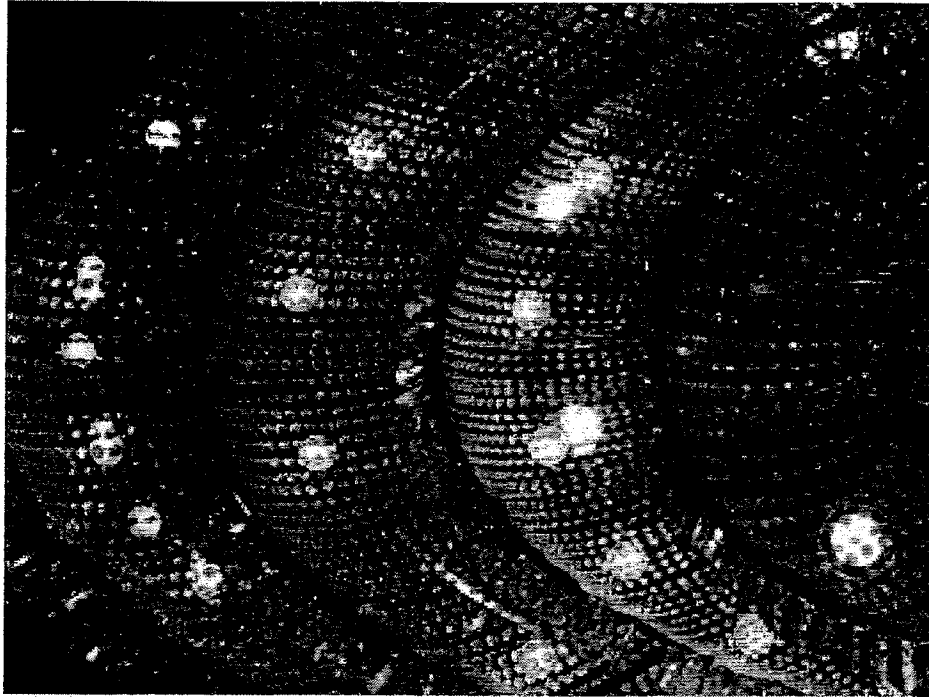
*Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



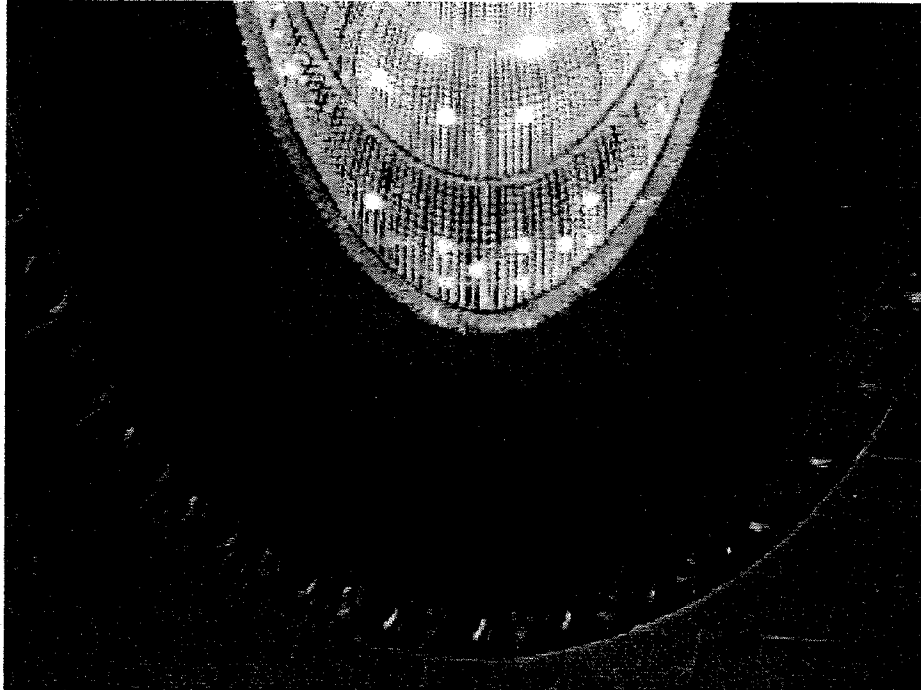
*Lobby from Mezzanine
ATS photo 2005*



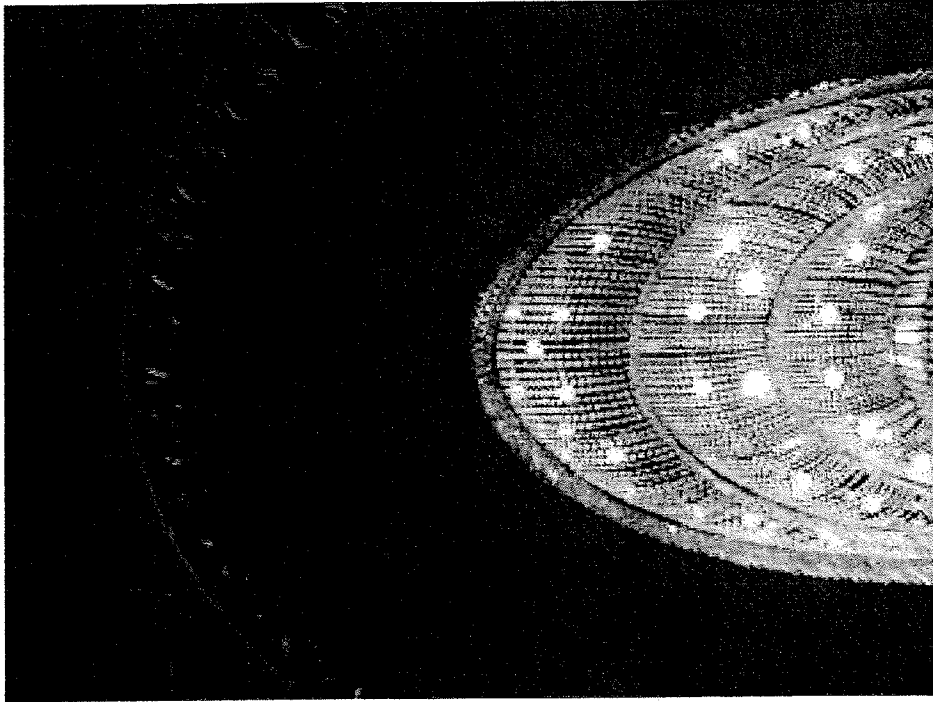
*Lobby Column Detail
CIM photo 2005*



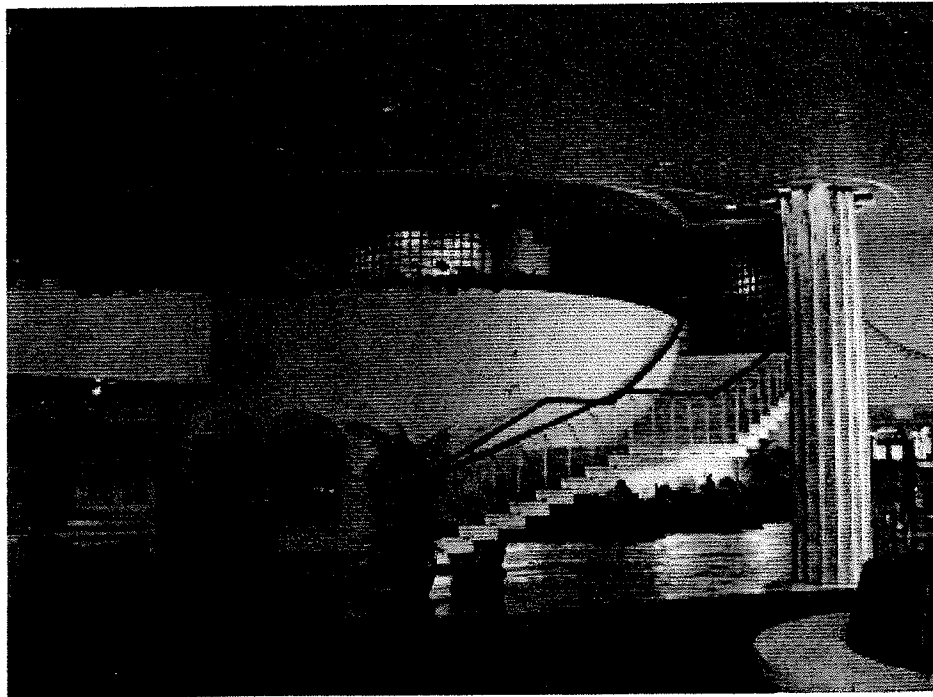
Lobby Chandelier Detail
CIM photo 2005



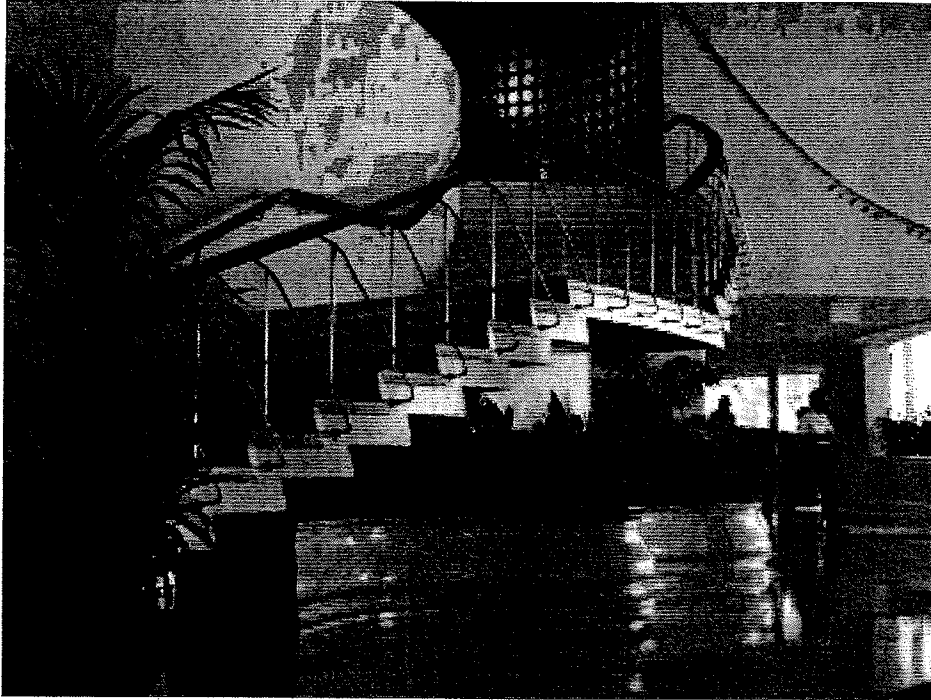
Lobby Chandelier Detail
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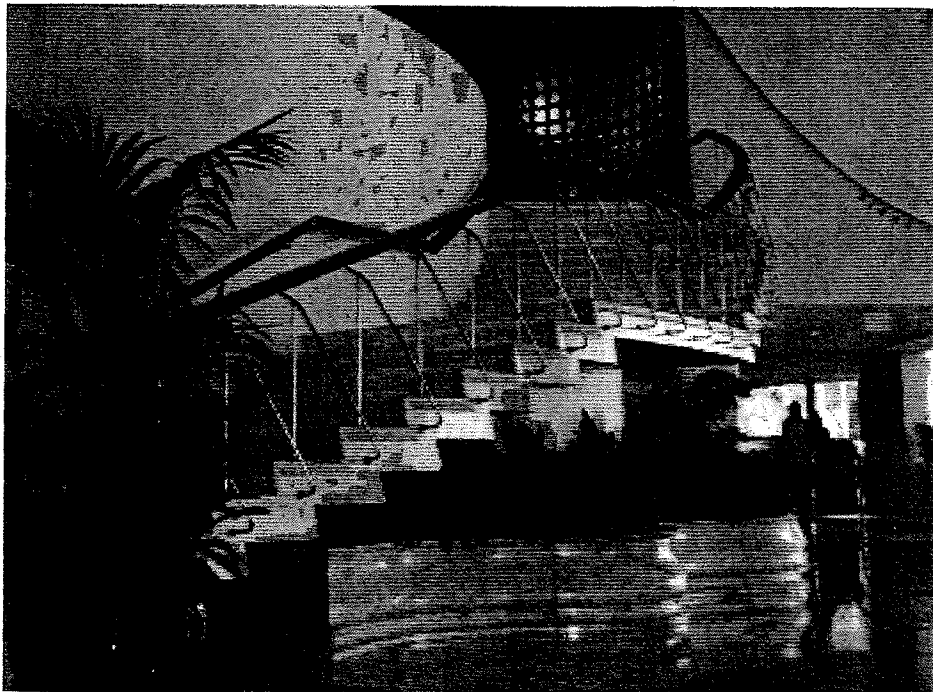
*Lobby Chandelier Detail
CIM photo 2005*



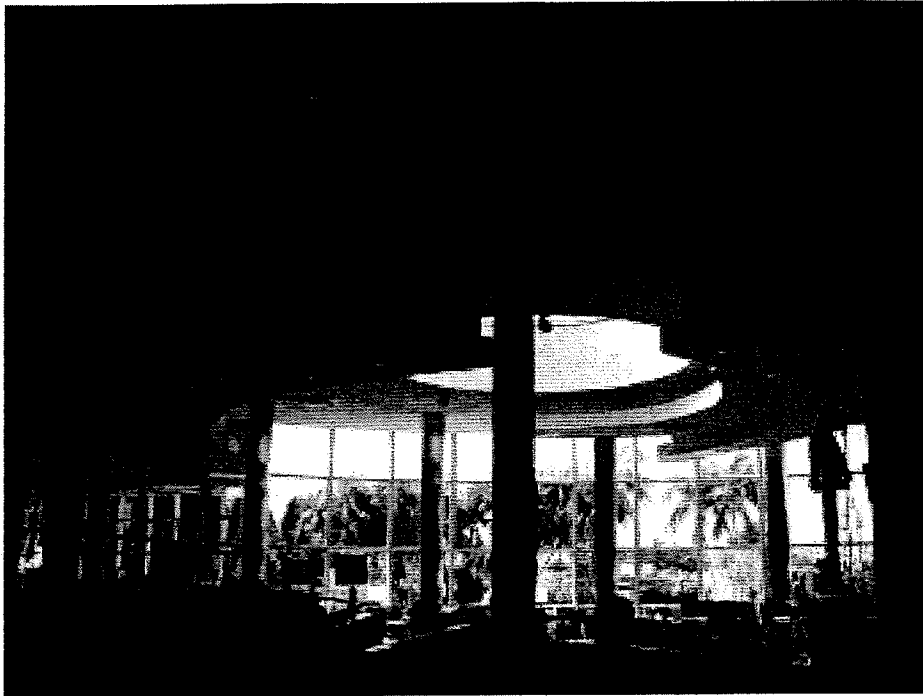
*Lobby, View toward Stairs
CIM photo 2005*



Lobby Stairs
CIM photo 2005



Lobby Stairs
CIM photo 2005



*Garden Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



*Garden Bar
ATS photo 2005*



*View of Lobby stores
CIM photo 2005*



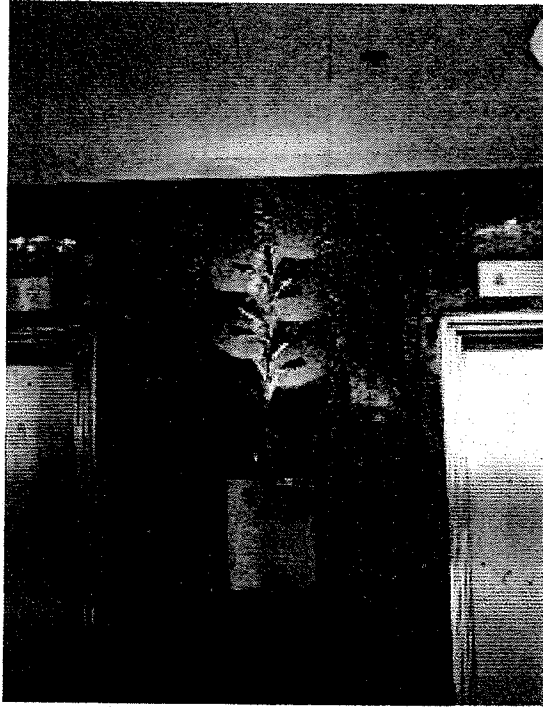
*View towards Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



*Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



*Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



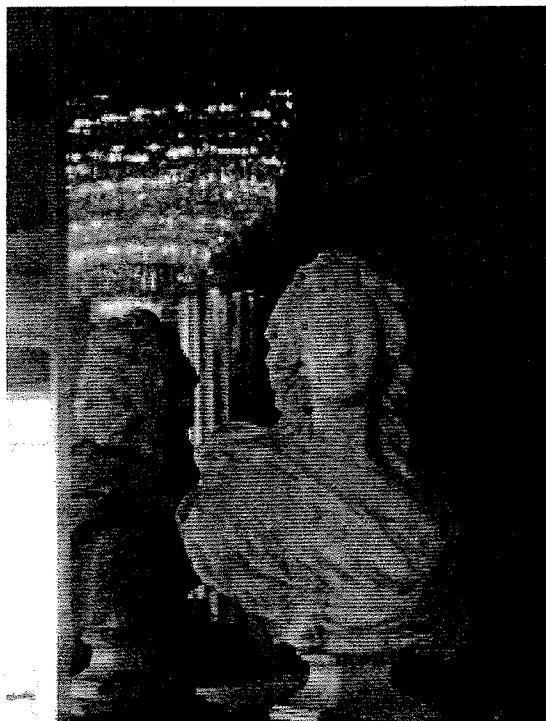
*Wall Sconce in Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



*Wall Sconce in Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



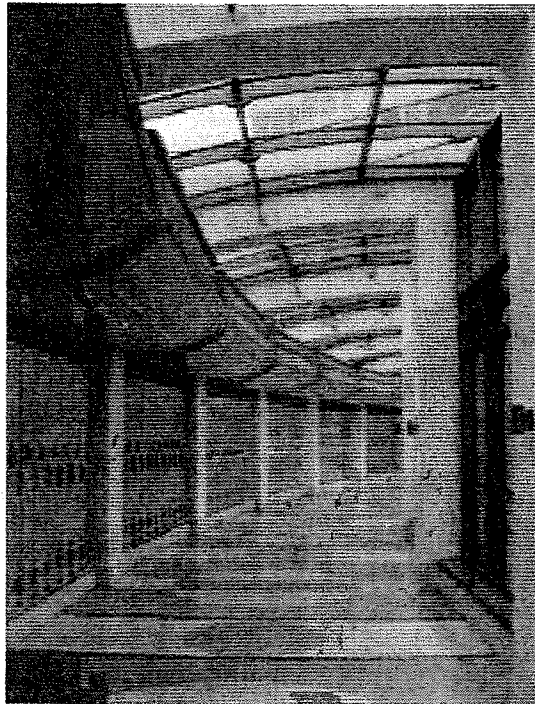
*Statue located in Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005*



*Statue located in Lobby Entrance
CIM photo 2005*



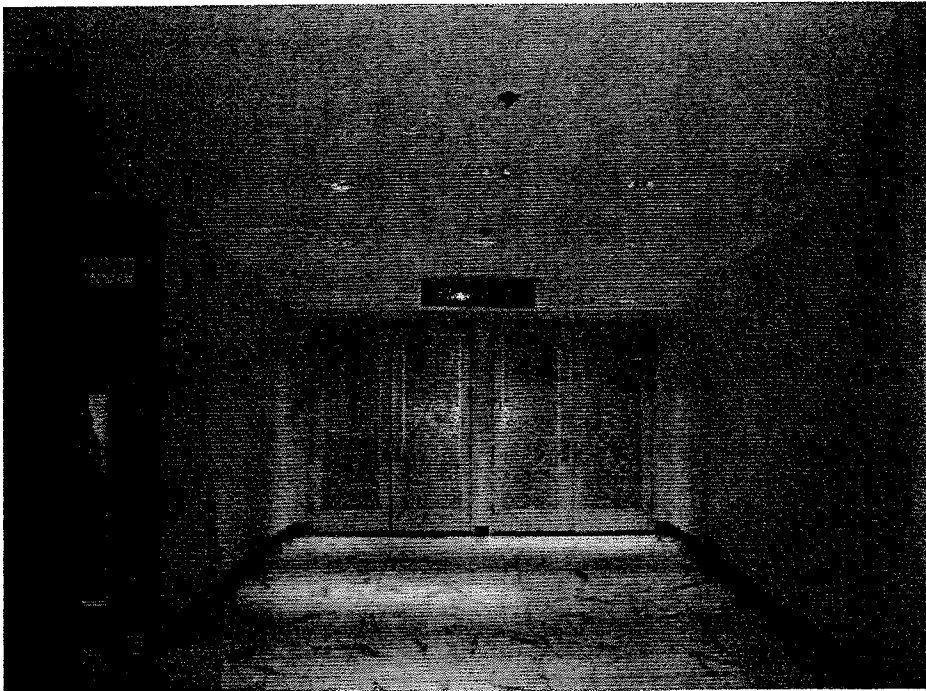
*Stair to Spine Connecting to Fontainebleau II
CIM photo 2005*



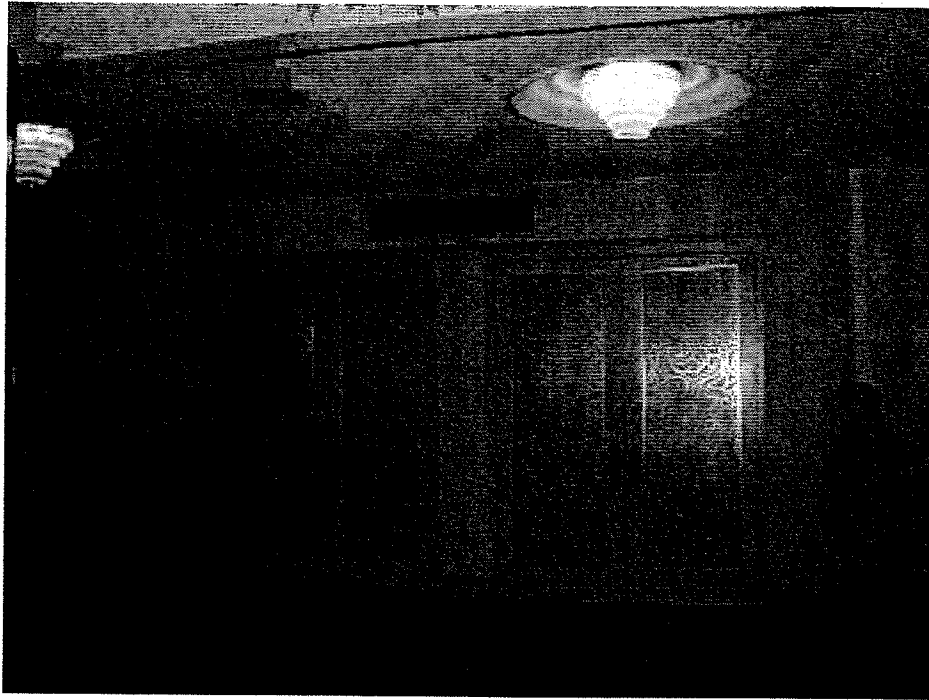
*Connector Spine
ATS photo 2005*



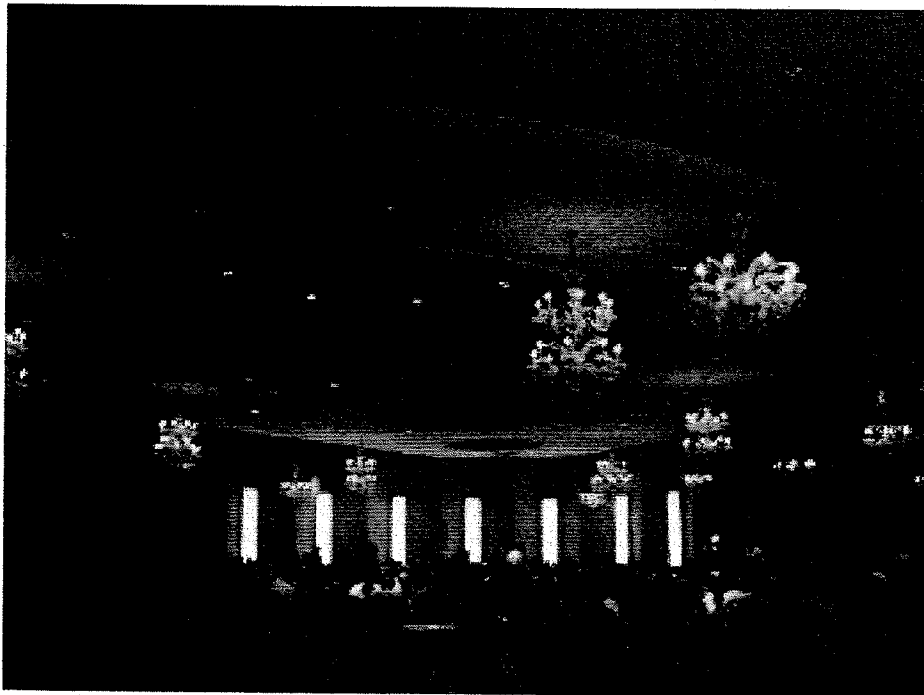
Entry to Fontaine & Fleur de Lis
CIM photo 2005



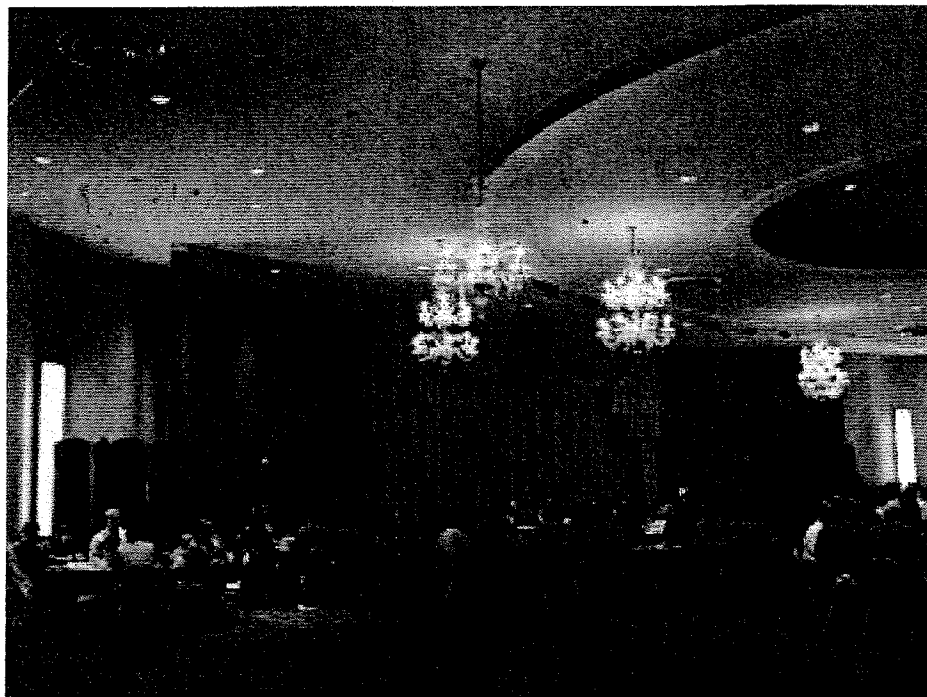
Entry to Fleur de Lis Room
CIM photo 2005



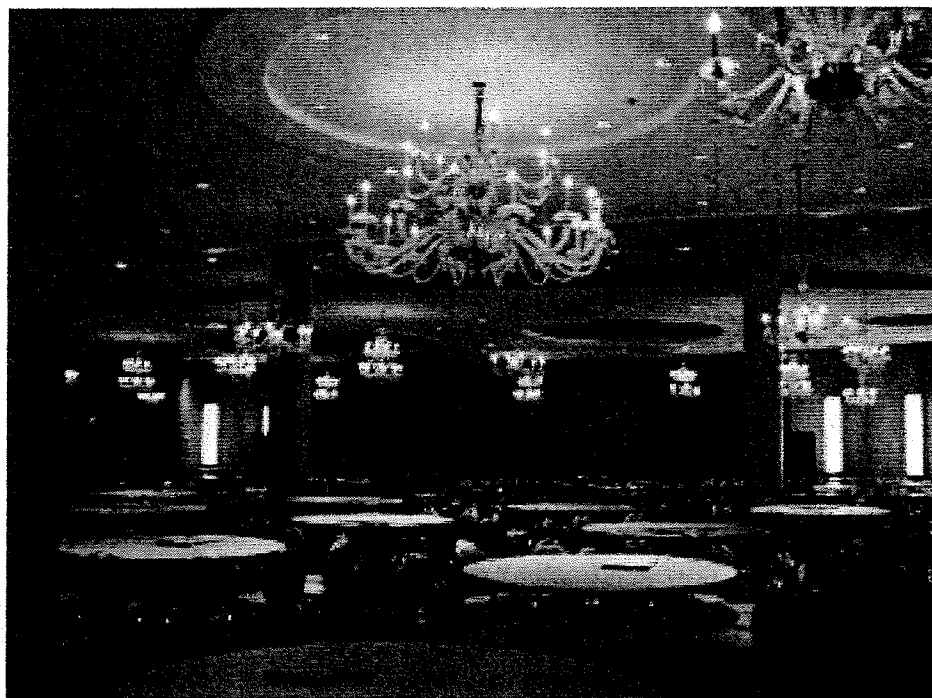
*Entry to Fontaine Room
CIM photo 2005*



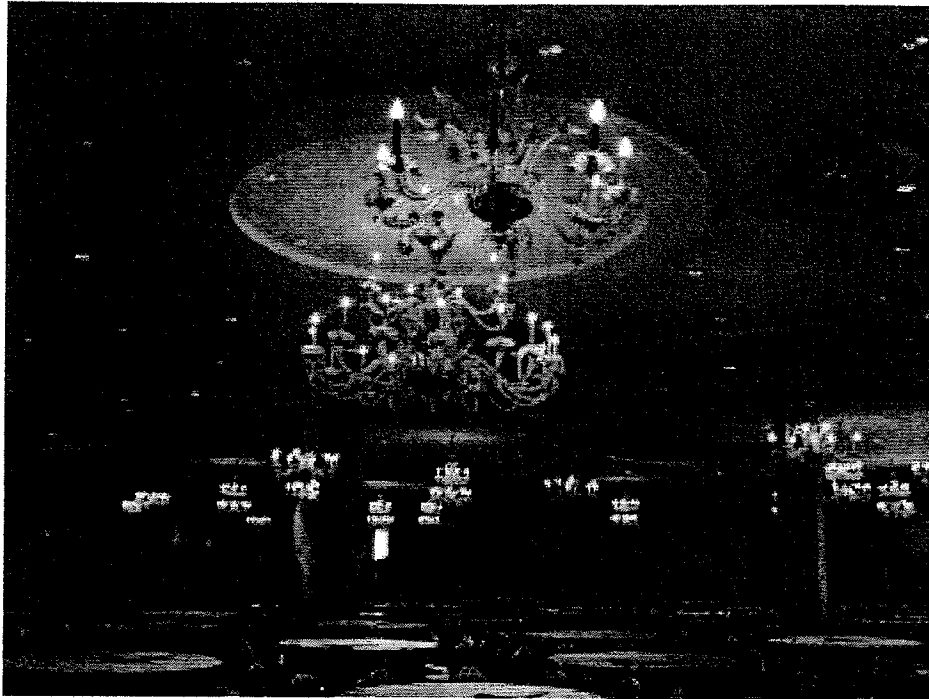
*Fontaine Room
CIM photo 2005*



*Fontaine Room
CIM photo 2005*



*Fontaine & Fleur de Lis Room
CIM photo 2005*



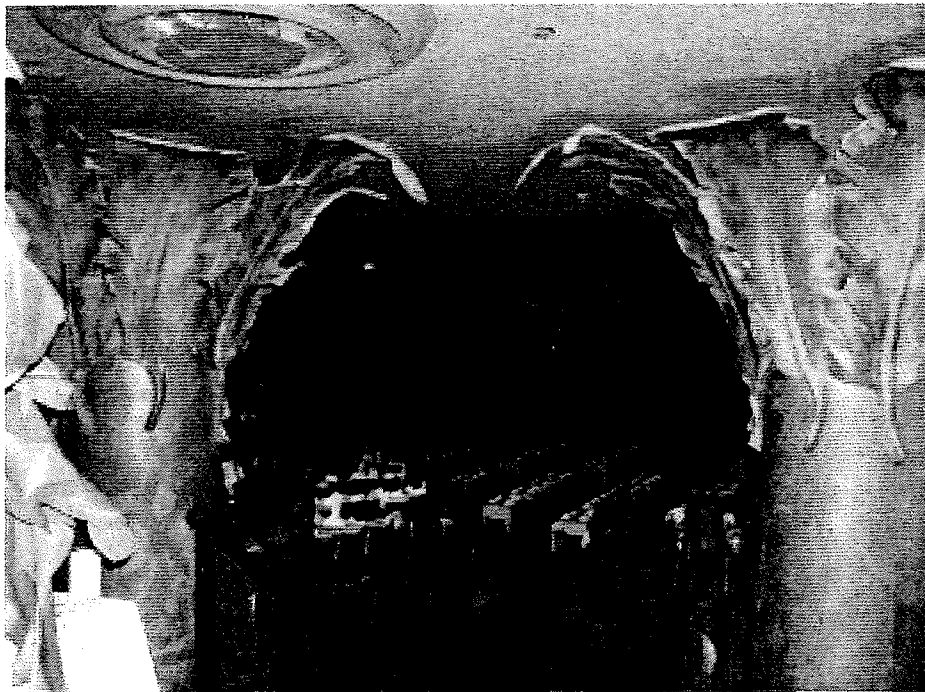
*Fontaine & Fleur de Lis Room
CIM photo 2005*



*Tropigala Entrance
CIM photo 2005*



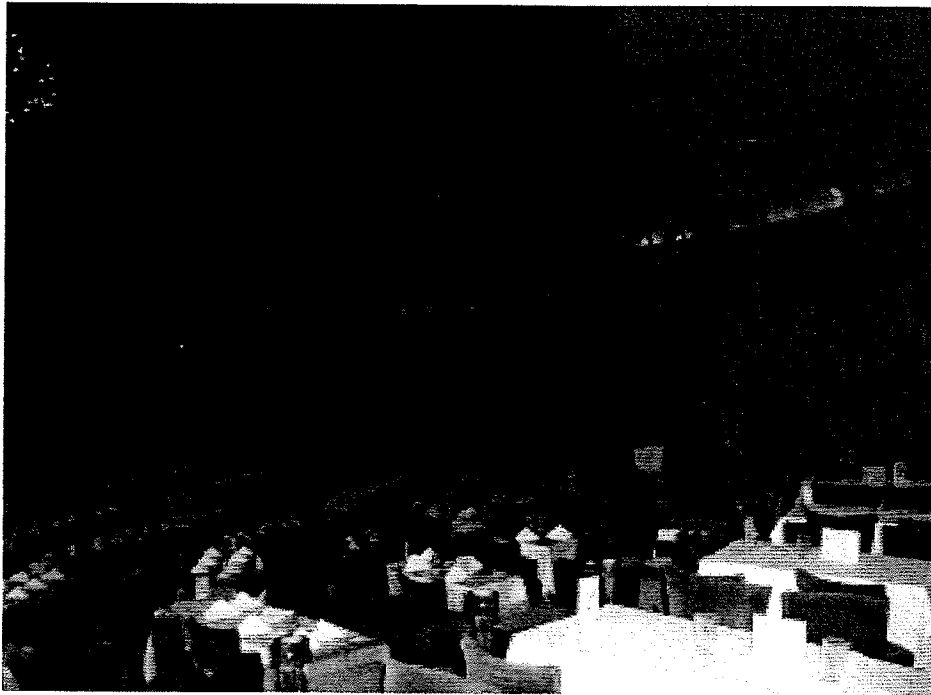
*Tropigala Bar
CIM photo 2005*



*Tropigala
CIM photo 2005*



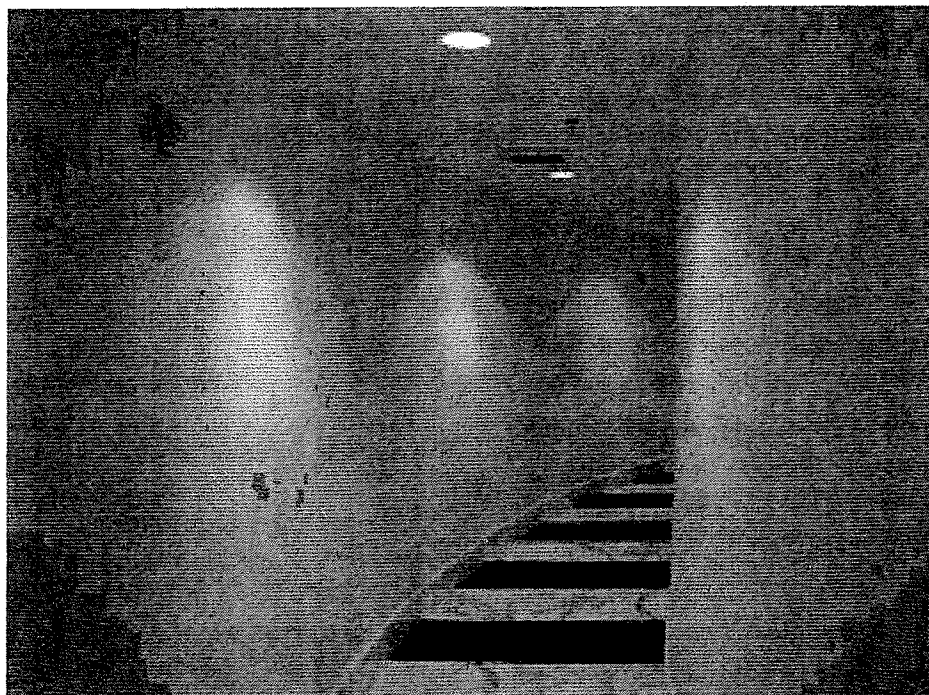
Tropigala
CIM photo 2005



Tropigala
CIM photo 2005



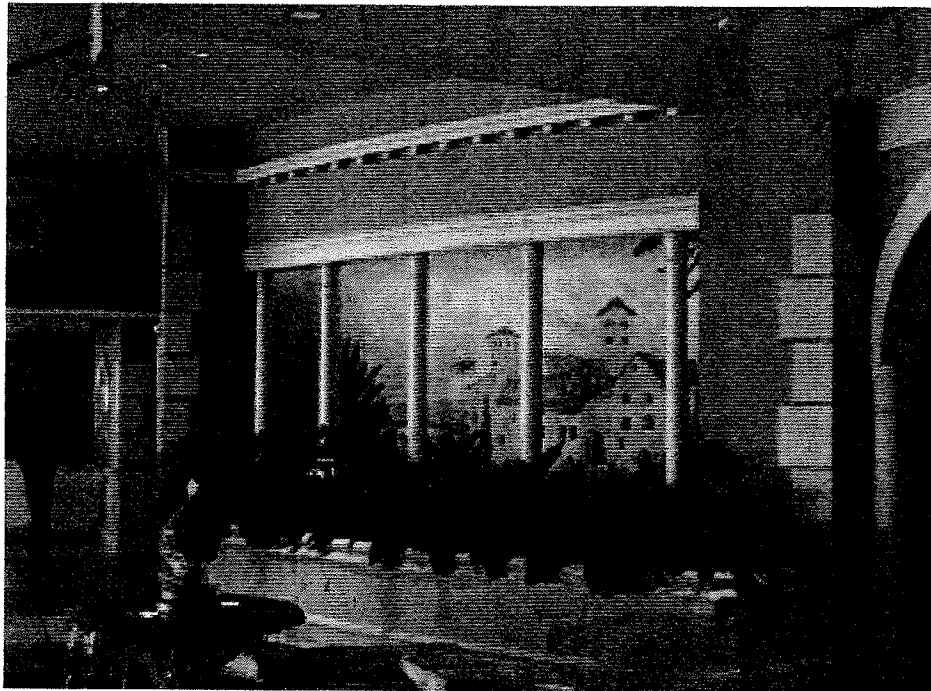
Tropigala
CIM photo 2005



To Restrooms
CIM photo 2005



*Lobby Passageway
CIM photo 2005*



*Lobby Passageway
CIM photo 2005*



*Lobby Passageway
CIM photo 2005*



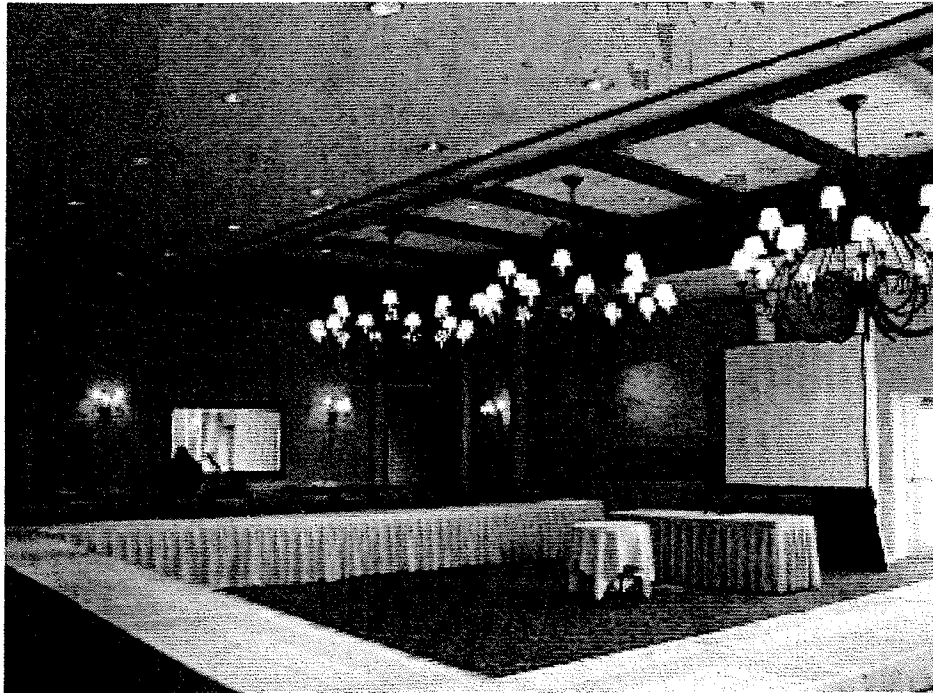
*Breakfast Room
ATS photo 2005*



*Lobby Passageway
CIM photo 2005*



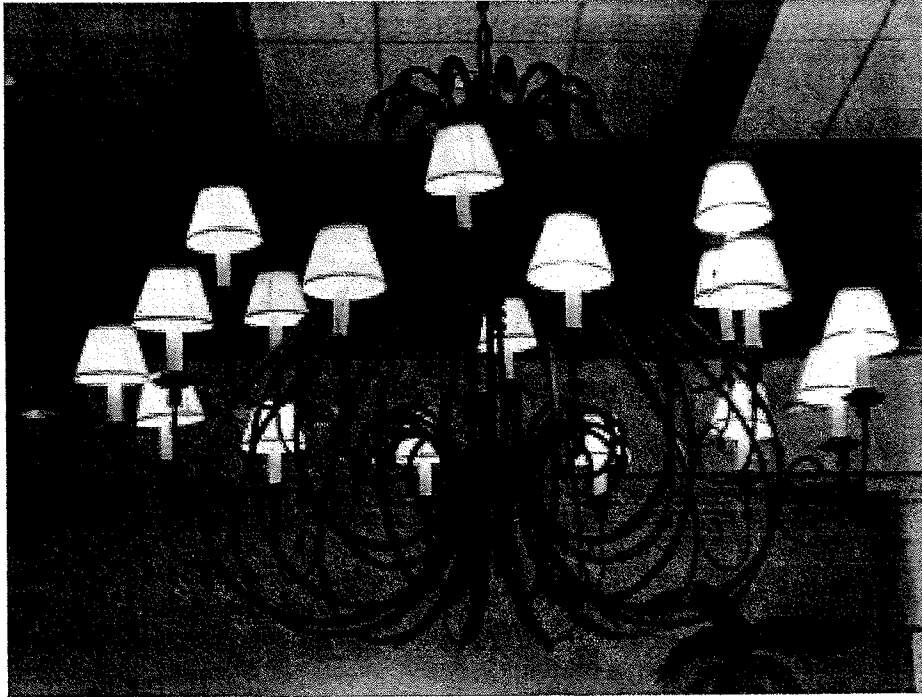
*Lobby Passageway
CIM photo 2005*



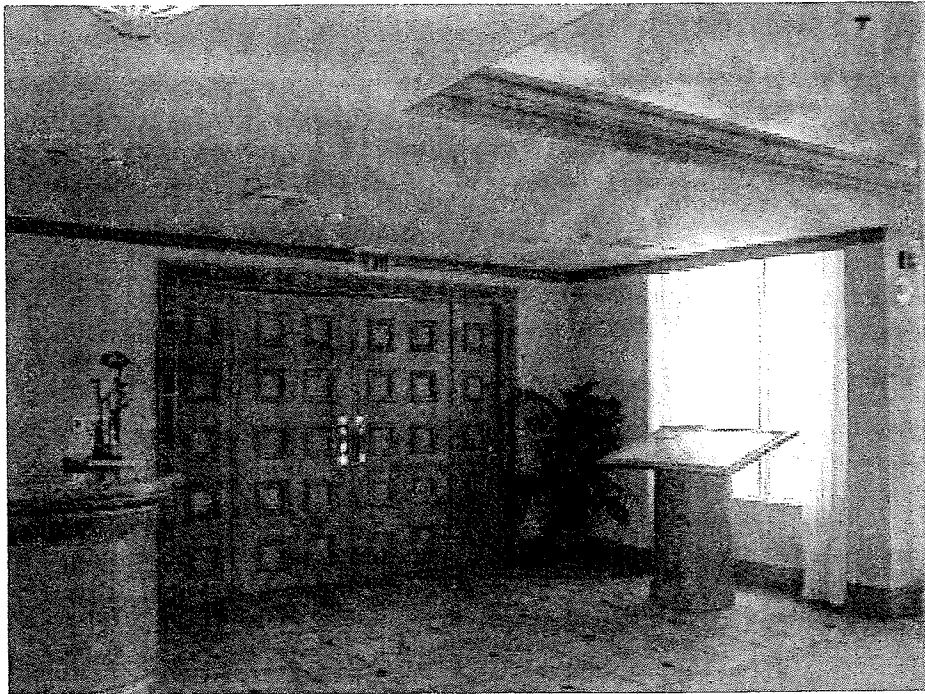
*Lobby Dining Room
CIM photo 2005*



*Lobby Dining Room
CIM photo 2005*



*Lobby Dining Room Chandelier
CIM photo 2005*



*Entrance to Tower Lounge
CIM photo 2005*