

CRYSTAL APARTMENTS / WHITE ROSE MARKET
230 FIRST STREET / 87 WASHINGTON AVENUE, MIAMI BEACH

Ocean Beach, the neighborhood south of Fifth Street, is the oldest subdivision of Miami Beach, platted in 1912 before the town was even incorporated. In 1923, a one-story store was built at the corner of Washington Avenue and First Street by William R. Hodges, “capitalist,”¹ who had a house at 900 Ocean Drive. The store occupied the western half of Lots 20 and 21 in Block 10 of Ocean Beach. It was designed and constructed by the Hunt Brothers,² but no architectural plans or photographs of this building have been found.

The 1924-5 City Directory shows a delicatessen and fruit stand at 220 First Street that was probably this building. In 1925, a bakery was added and was enlarged a few months later.³ This became the Thaler Brothers Bakery at 236 First Street, run by Jack and George Thaler, with Louis, Norman, Paula and Ronna Thaler helping out.⁴ The rest of the building was a grocery store, at 87 Washington Avenue. Perry Stone was the grocer in 1931. In 1935 and for several years thereafter, the store is listed as the White Rose Market, with Harry Malter dealing in poultry and meat. At that time there was a strong Jewish presence south of Fifth Street, and the Building Permit Card notes “Kosher Chicken Killing” as a non-conforming use.

In 1938 the grocers and property owners were David and Katie Gottlieb, a Jewish couple who had come here from New York in 1932.⁵ That summer they remodeled the store for restaurant use, and constructed a two-story apartment house on the eastern half of the property, at 230 First Street. The Gottliebs

¹ Miami Beach Directory, 1924-5; Florida East Coast Directory Co.

² Building Permit Card #1128, Miami Beach Building Dept.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Polk’s City Directory, 1935.

⁵ Katie Gottlieb obituary, *Miami Herald*, Feb. 8, 1969.

themselves moved in here. It was called the Crystal Apartments, and was designed by prominent Miami Beach architect Henry Hohausser. (See Biography following.) It had 12 units and cost \$22,000.⁶ The original plans are found on Microfilm #11269 in the Miami Beach Building Department, which are in fair condition except that the front elevation is entirely obliterated. An excellent photograph, however, is in the Gleason Romer archive⁷ and shows the north-facing building front in 1940. The rear wall of the bakery next door is also seen, with a “Thaler Brothers” sign on the parapet.

This sunny photo shows the Crystal Apartments as a little two-story confection of ridged, striped, circled and chevroned stucco. Most striking is a vertical row of five portholes rising above the entrance. Above them is a multi-layered chevron that forms a pinnacle at the parapet. A small eyebrow topped with a channel-letter sign is over the front door. Two more rows of circles decorate the stucco flanking the door. Original windows were casements, and came all the way to the corners. There are two built-in planter bins in front, and a little hedged yard on the east side.

David Gottlieb disappears from City Directories in 1958, but the store continued to operate as the White Rose Market through 1962. It was demolished in 1966, as this neighborhood fell into hard times for the next two decades. But in 1993 the Crystal Apartments underwent a major renovation for the Pommier modeling agency that made an important contribution to the revitalization of the area.

The plans for this project, designed by Martin J. Hyman, were found in Building Department file #B9300240. Although this area was not yet a historic district at that time, the project preserved and respected the original apartment

⁶ Building Permit Card #1129, Miami Beach Building Dept.

⁷ Miami Public Library, Florida Room; Romer # A440p.

building to a great extent, only removing the center section of the structure for a new rotunda entry on the west side and an additional entrance on the east. The west end of the lots, where the market had stood, was left open for a landscaped parking area decorated with a glass-block arch. Except for the introduction of sash-type windows, the original front facade and interior stairway of the Crystal were left intact. The apartments were changed to office space that was occupied by the XS Fitness Center in the 1990s. The new structure is three stories high, and the penthouse addition that rises above the vintage structure is respectful of its symmetry and even echoes its chevron design.

When this area was designated by the City as the Ocean Beach Historic District in 1995, the Pommier Building was given Contributing status and described in the Planning Department database as an “exceptionally fine original Art Deco front (1st St.) facade...(and a) successful contemporary addition to west elevation.” In fact, the new addition, with its distinctive glass-block rotunda, has become such a local landmark that the original Crystal Apartments often goes unrecognized.

--- Carolyn Klepser, researcher
June 29, 2007

ARCHITECT BIOGRAPHY

Henry Hohauser (1889-1963)

Born in New York City and educated at Pratt Institute in Brooklyn, N.Y., Hohauser came to Miami in 1932. He was a practicing architect in Miami Beach for over 20 years and was one of the most prolific. His firm designed over 300 buildings in the Miami area and he is “generally credited with being the originator of modernism in Miami Beach.”⁸ His fine execution of the Art Deco style in so many beloved buildings has contributed enormously to the success of the Miami Beach Architectural District and to its listing in the National Register of Historic Places in 1979.

Just a few of Hohauser’s buildings in Miami Beach’s historic districts are:

Park Central Hotel	640 Ocean Drive
Colony Hotel	736 Ocean Drive
Edison Hotel	960 Ocean Drive
Cardozo Hotel	1300 Ocean Drive
Davis Hotel	1020 Washington Ave.
Collins Park Hotel	2000 Park Ave.
Essex House	1001 Collins Ave.
Sherry Frontenac	6565 Collins Avenue

UPDATE ON:
81 WASHINGTON AVE. / 230 FIRST STREET, MIAMI BEACH

This is an appendix to the historic analysis written in 2007 for 230 First Street, designed by Henry Hohausser in 1938 as the Crystal Apartments, and its 1993 addition facing Washington Avenue. At the time of the previous report, the First Street building was occupied by the XS Fitness studio, and the Washington Avenue building housed the Pommier modeling agency.

These conjoined buildings have undergone no exterior structural changes in the past ten years, but the Dacra Company converted them to mixed-use circa 2002, and the tenants have changed. XS Fitness and Pommier have left; restaurants (Au Pied du Cochon and La Gloutonnerie) have operated on the first and second stories, now vacant; and the third floor is currently occupied office space.

---Carolyn Klepser, May 28, 2017

Information supplied by David Holtzman at

Dacra

⁸ Howard Kleinberg, Miami Beach: A History; Centennial Press, Miami, 1996; p. 129.

A440p

Crystal Apts. Exterior view.

230 First Street, M.B.

Taken for Henry Hohouser, Archt.

July 13, 1940.

