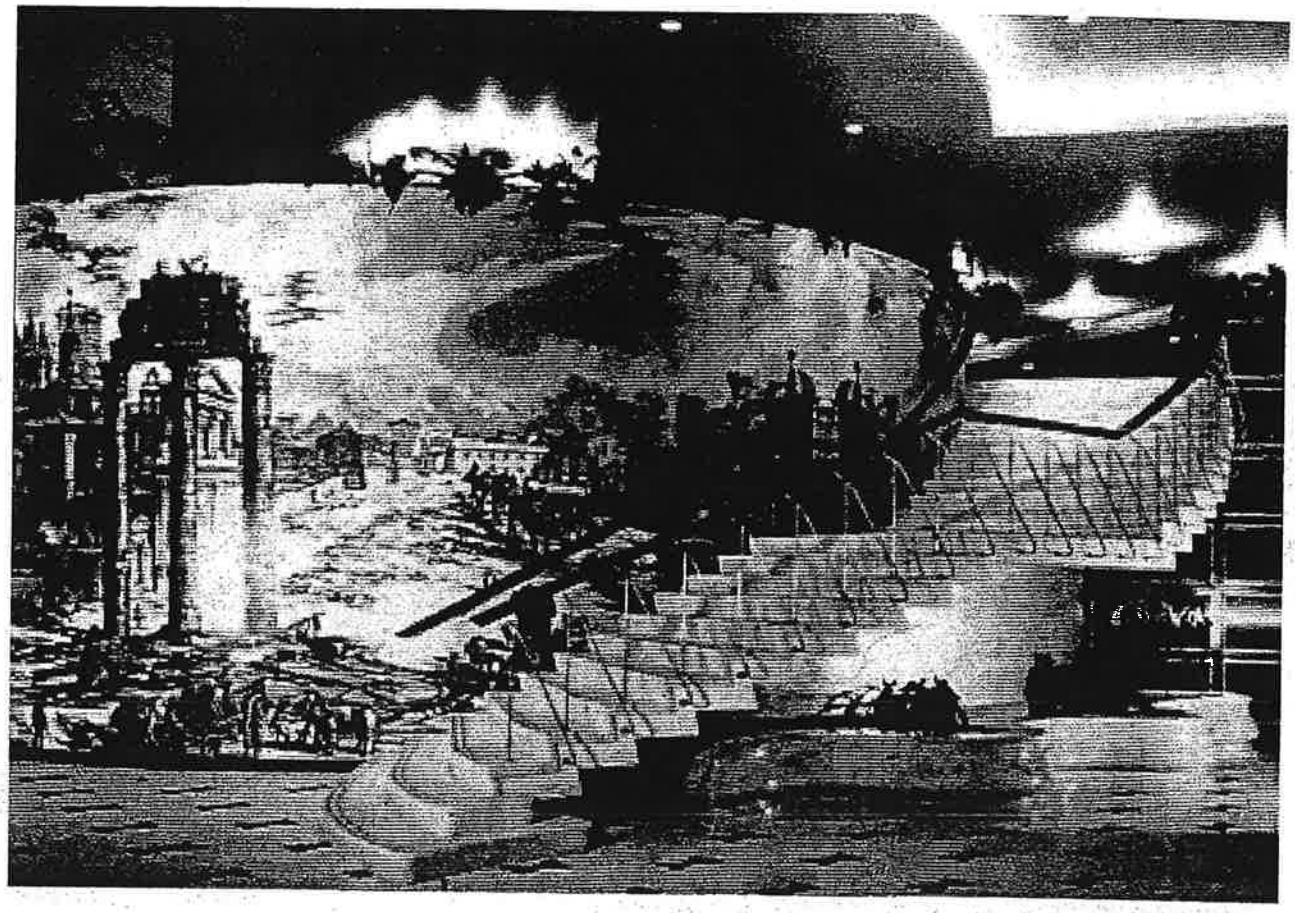
Fontainebleau Hotel

Miami Beach



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The Fontainebleau Hotel

pic from

26 of 36

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

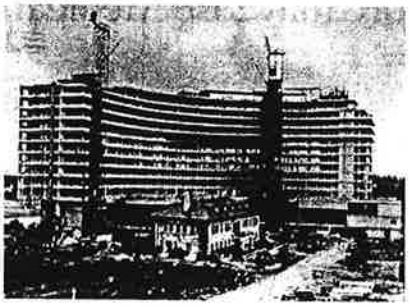
The Fontainebleau Hotel is one of the most historically and architecturally significant hotels on Miami Beach. Built in 1954 and designed by Morris Lapidus, it was considered the most luxurious hotel on Miami Beach at the time of its opening and for a long time after that, and is also thought to be the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

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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
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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

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
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

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 newspa-per'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 park-ing spaces for the 138 units
1970	Novack added another 265 rooms in buying the neighboring Sorrento Hotel, rebuilt with spa as Fontainebleau South

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/restaurant 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 "contractual 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
1926	Harvey Firestone
1927	Harvey Firestone
1928	Harvey Firestone
1929	Harvey Firestone
1930	Harvey Firestone
1931	Harvey Firestone
1932	Harvey Firestone
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1951	Harvey Firestone
1952	Harvey Firestone
1953	Harvey Firestone
1954	Fontainebleau Hotel
1955	Fontainebleau Hotel

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
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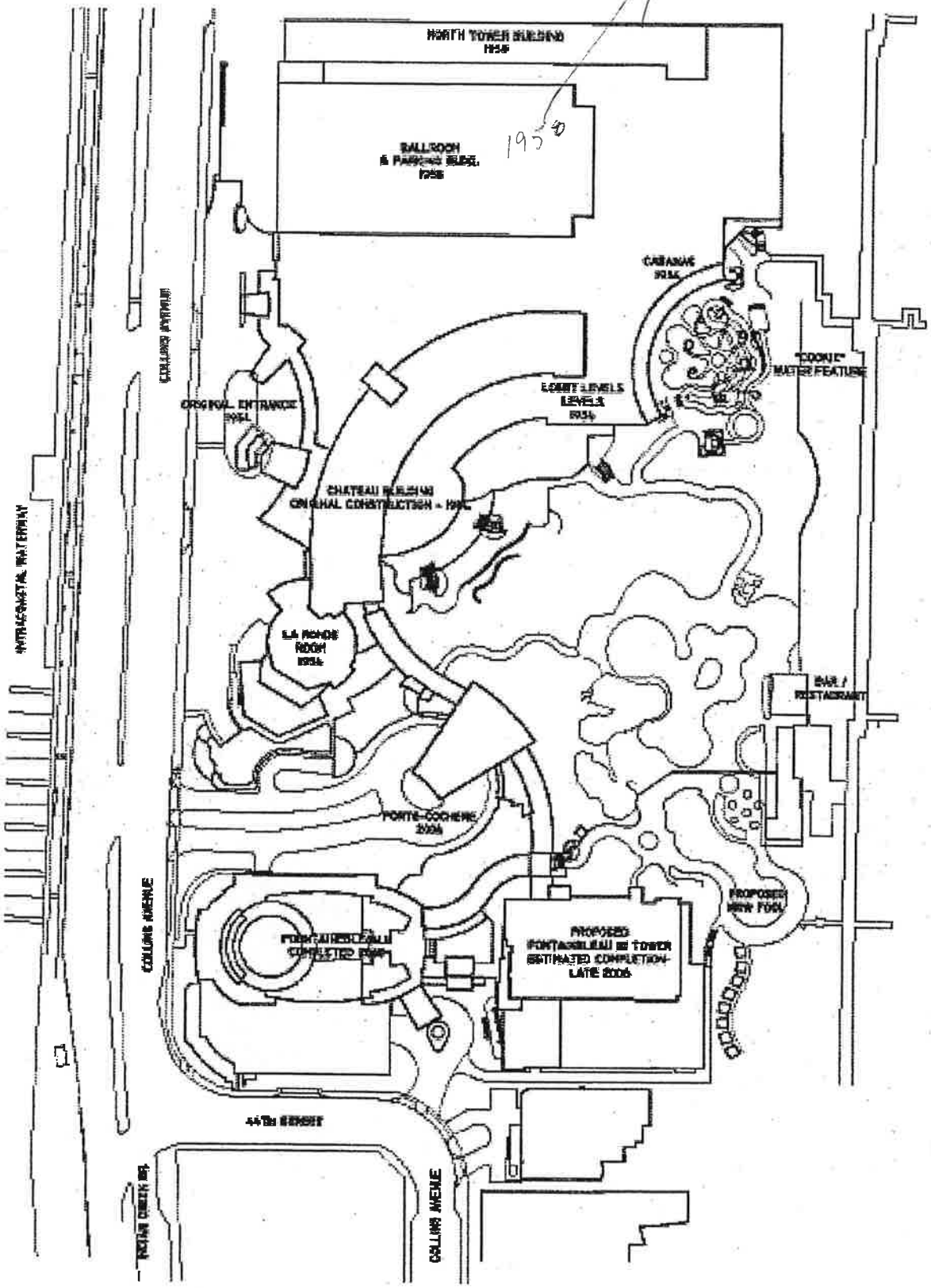
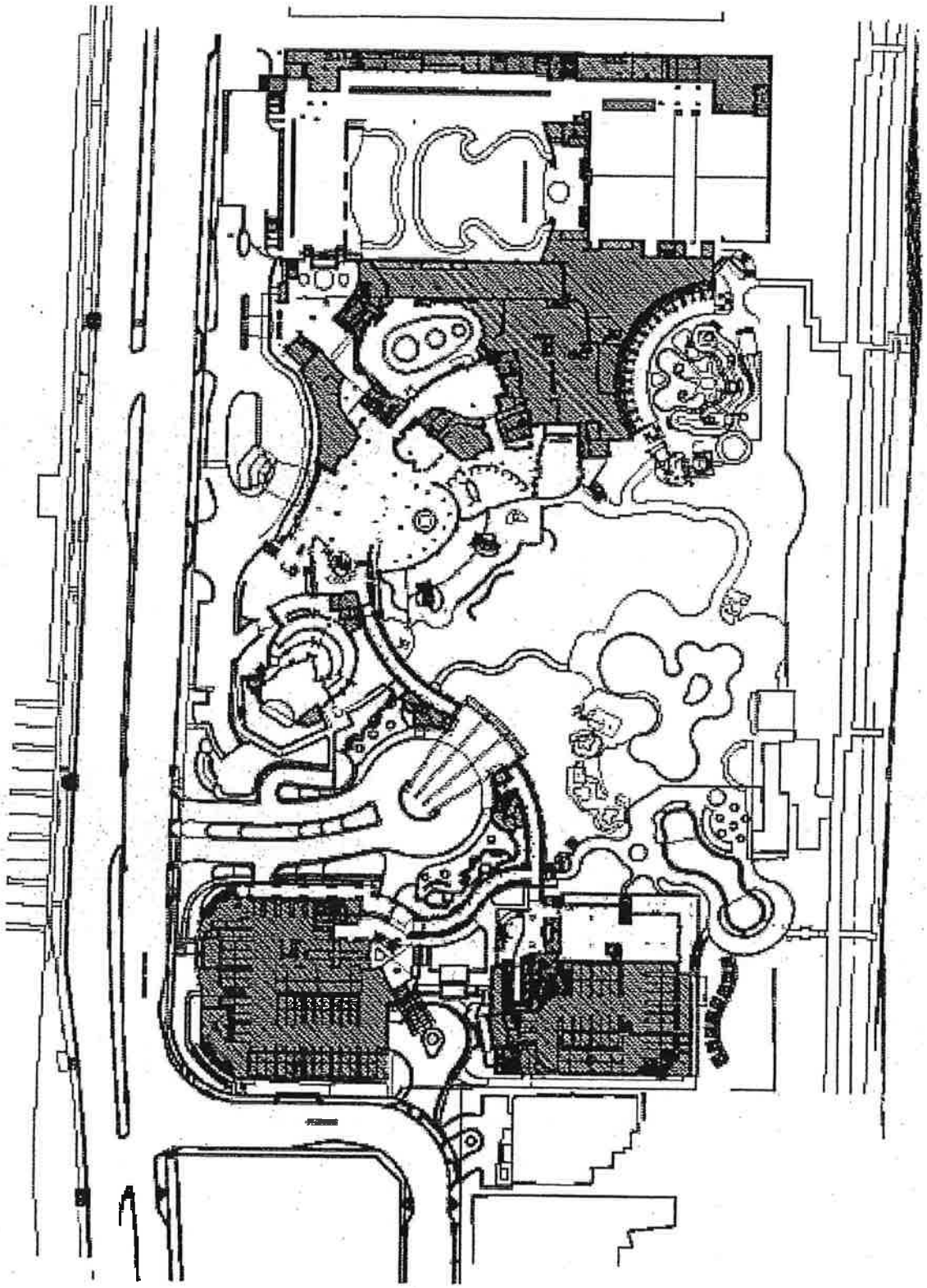
1976 Fontainebleau Hotel



Existing Roof Plan, including Proposed Fontainbleau III



"Nolli" Plan including Proposed Fontainbleau III

Fontainebleau Hotel
Miami Beach

Historical Analysis

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

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 postcard
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida postcard collection

Firestone died in his sleep on February 7, 1938 at age 69 [3] 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.

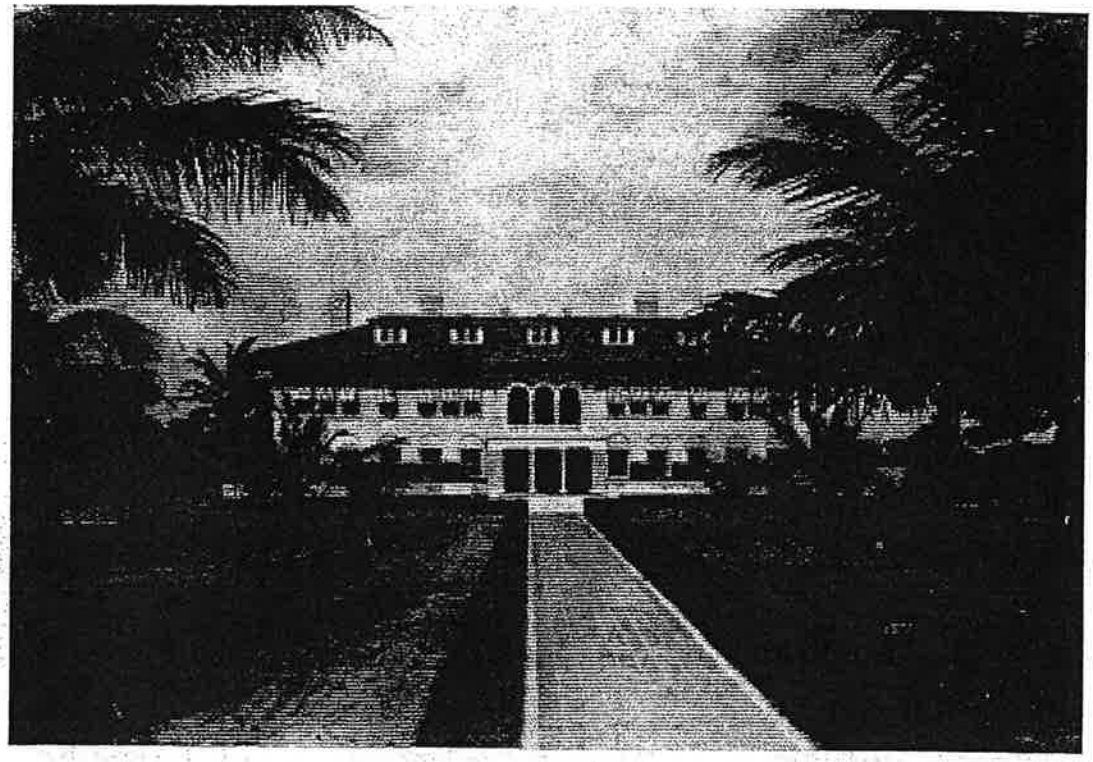
[2] Harold Gardner, publicity office for Fontainebleau, copy of undated press release draft, circa December 1954.

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

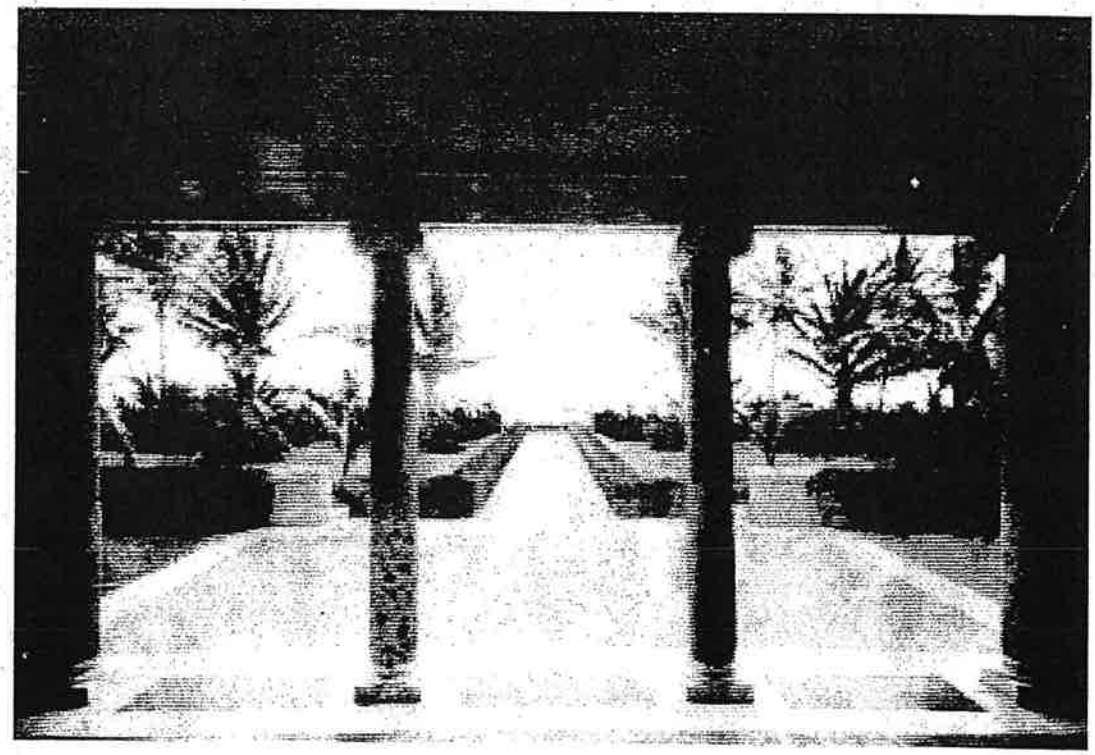
[4] The name "Harbel," given to their Miami Beach home, merged "Harvey" and "Idabelle." The title was also given to their rubber plantation in Liberia, so vast at one million acres, that it is also the name of the nearby town. (New Internationalist magazine on-line, www.newint.org/issue131/rubber.htm,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

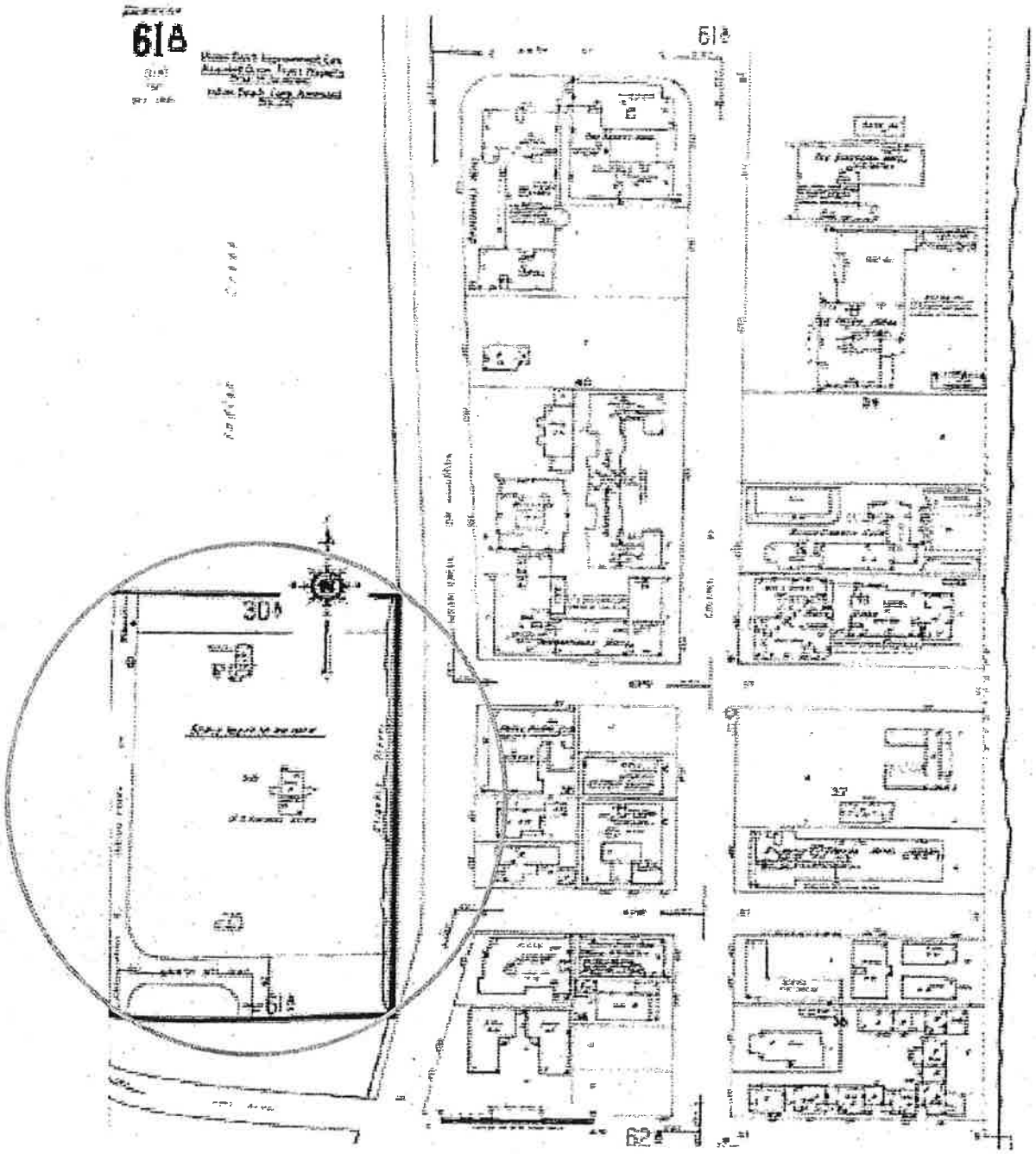


Firestone Estate, 4441 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Matlack Collection



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)



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 furnishings [2] 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 fi' 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 southeast 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 form 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 postwar 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.

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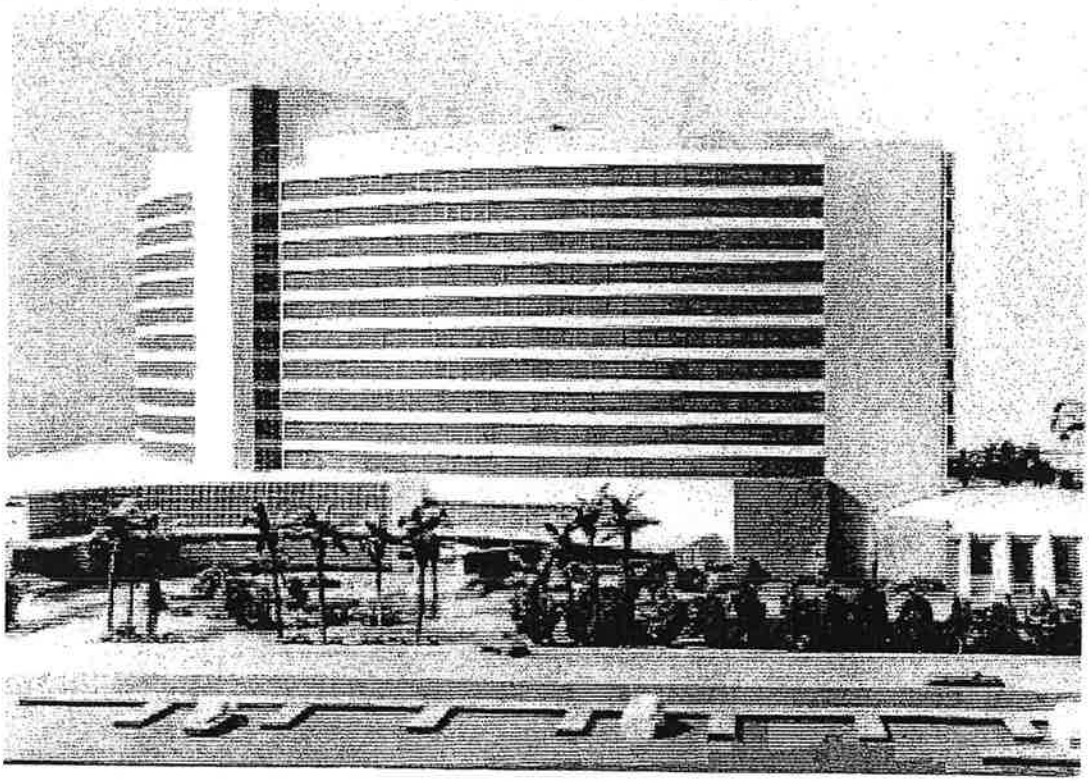
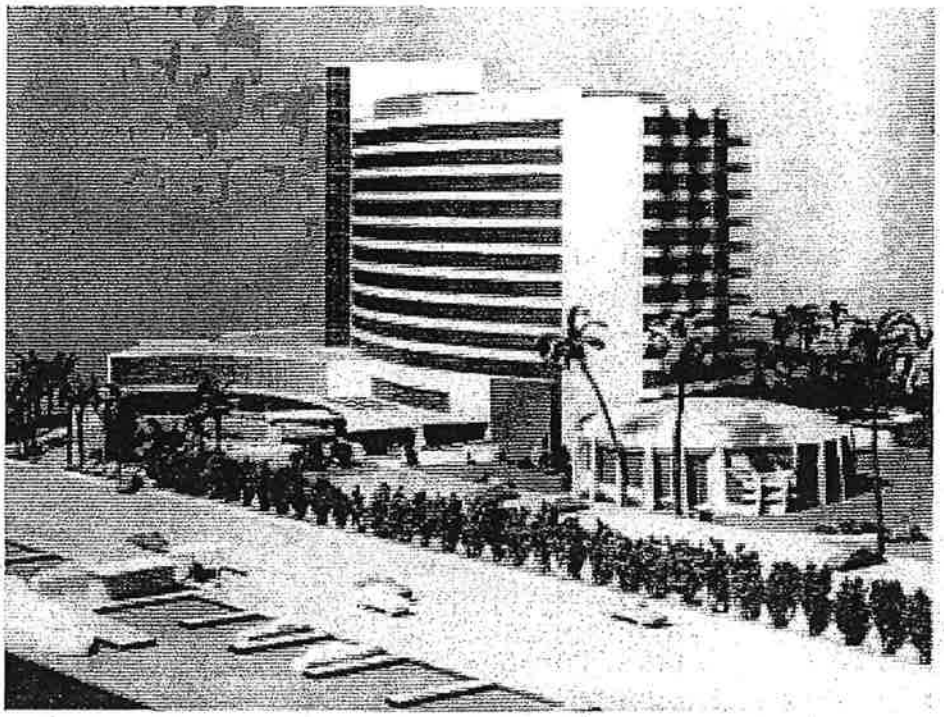
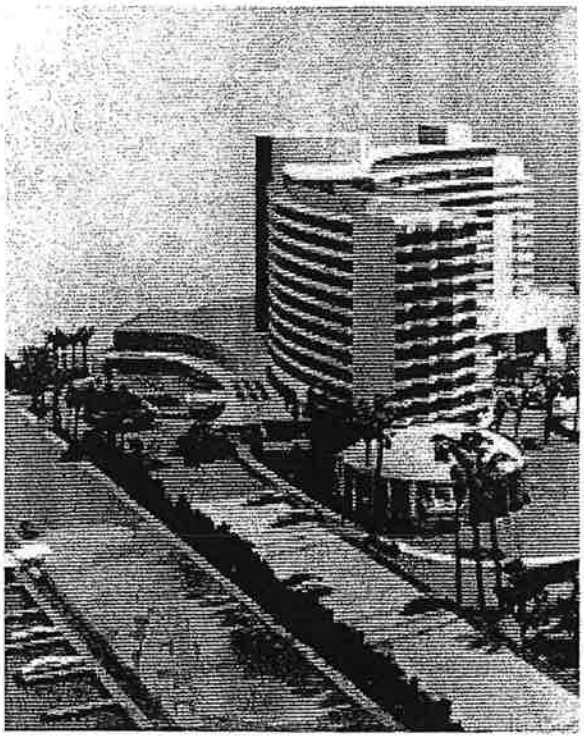
Model, view from southwest (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



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)
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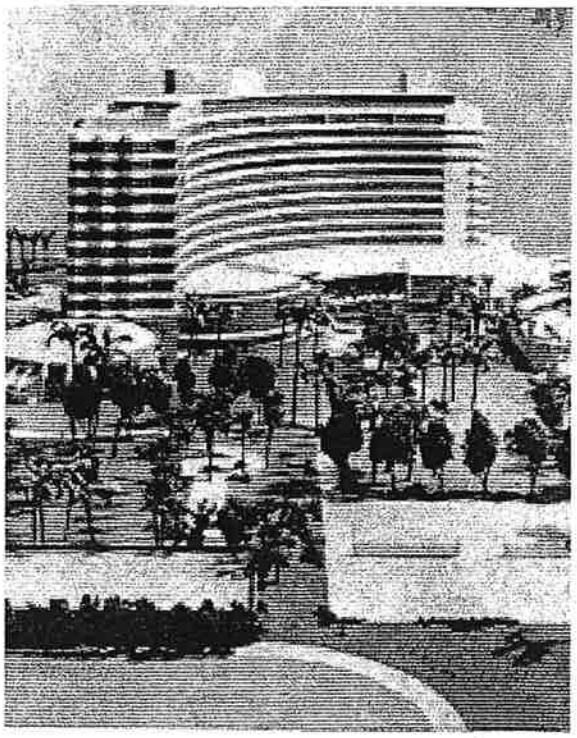
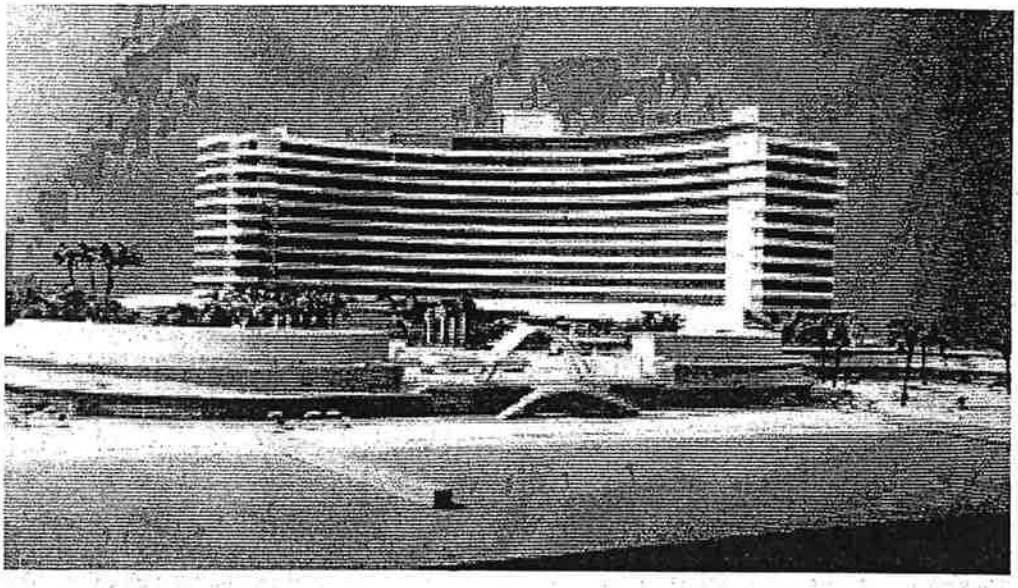


Model, view from south (1954)
Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

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



Model, view from northeast (1954)
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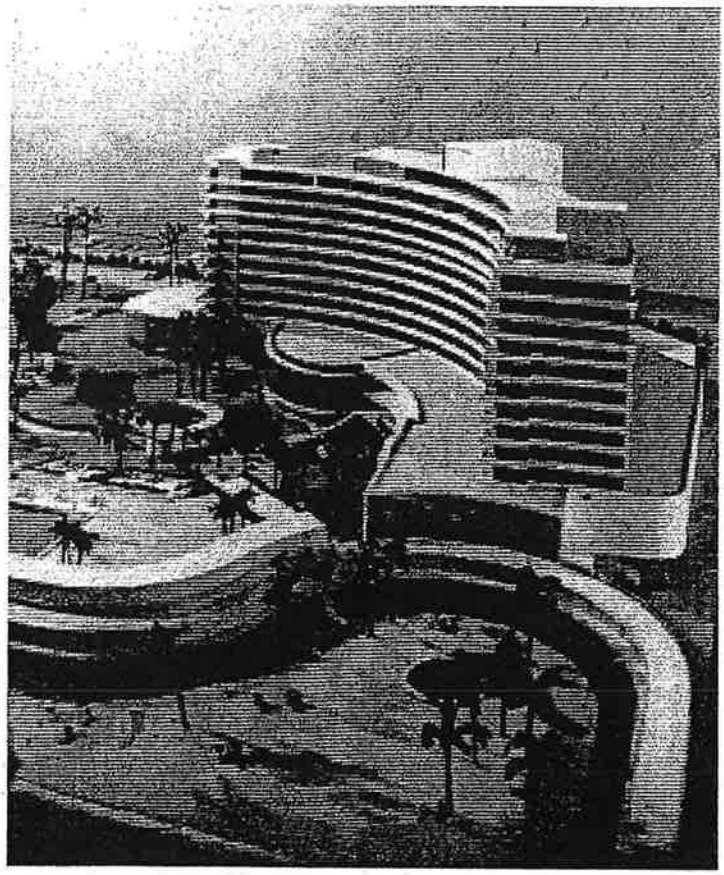

Model, view from southeast (1954)
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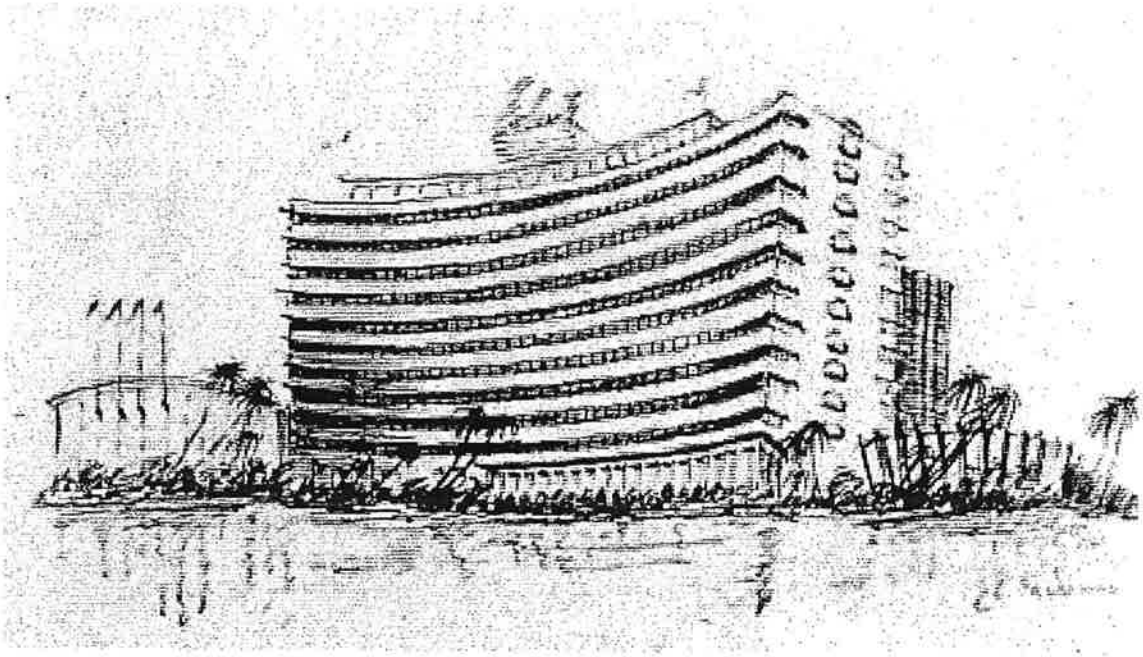
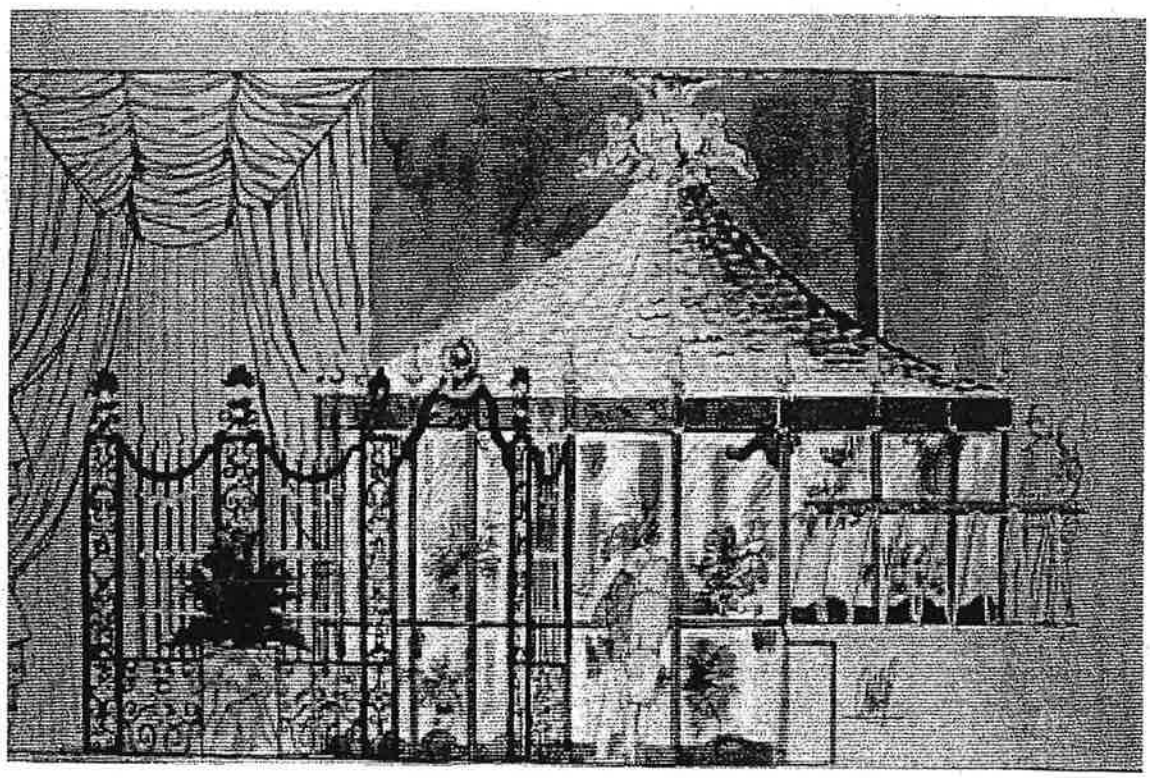
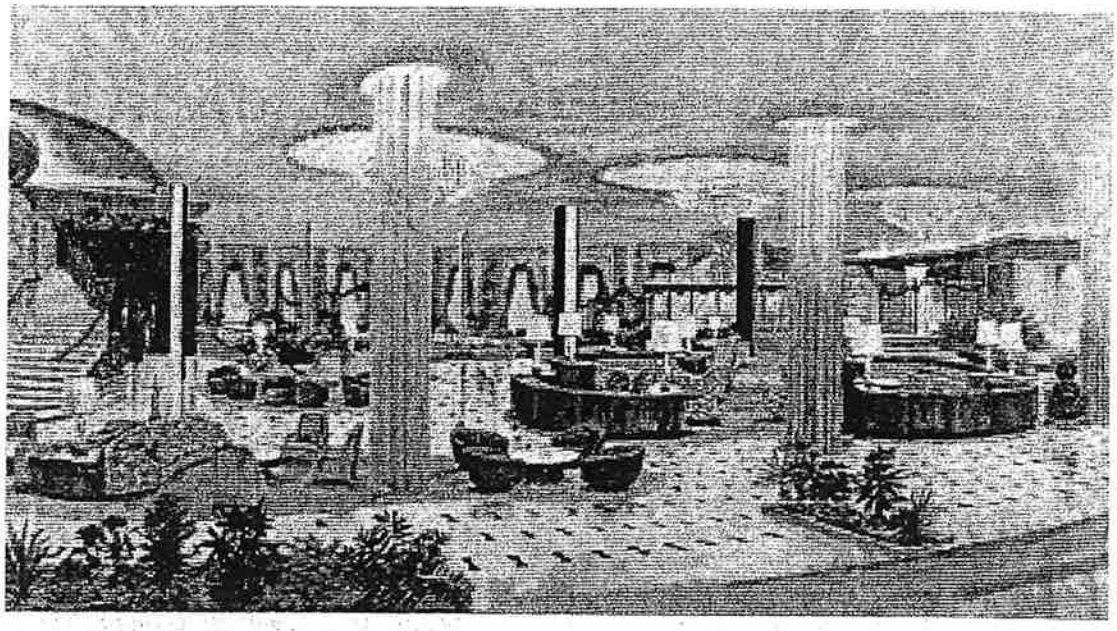


"One of Lapidus' sketches for the Fontainebleau Hotel, 1952"
as published in Too Much is Never Enough. Lapidus' autobiography, (Rizzoli, 1996)



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"
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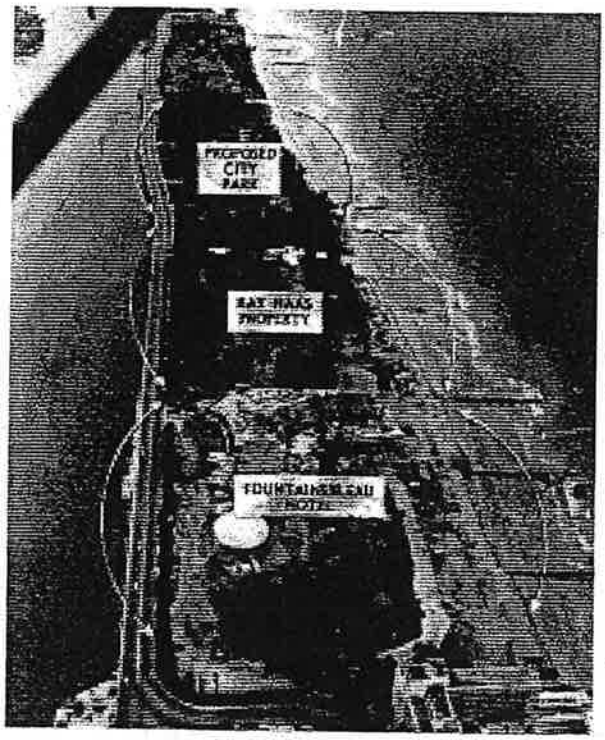
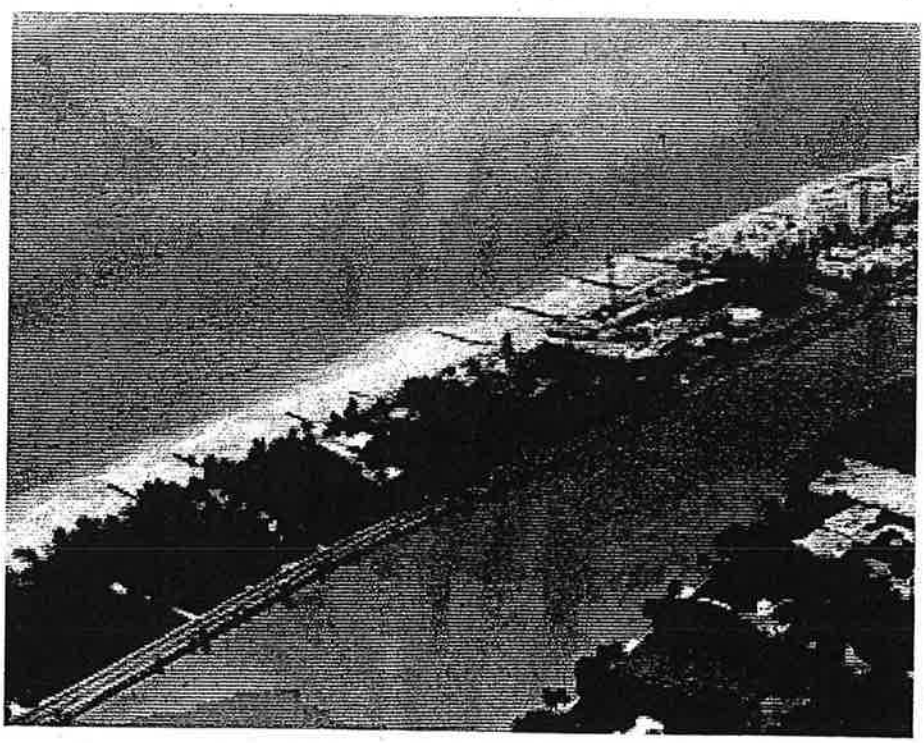
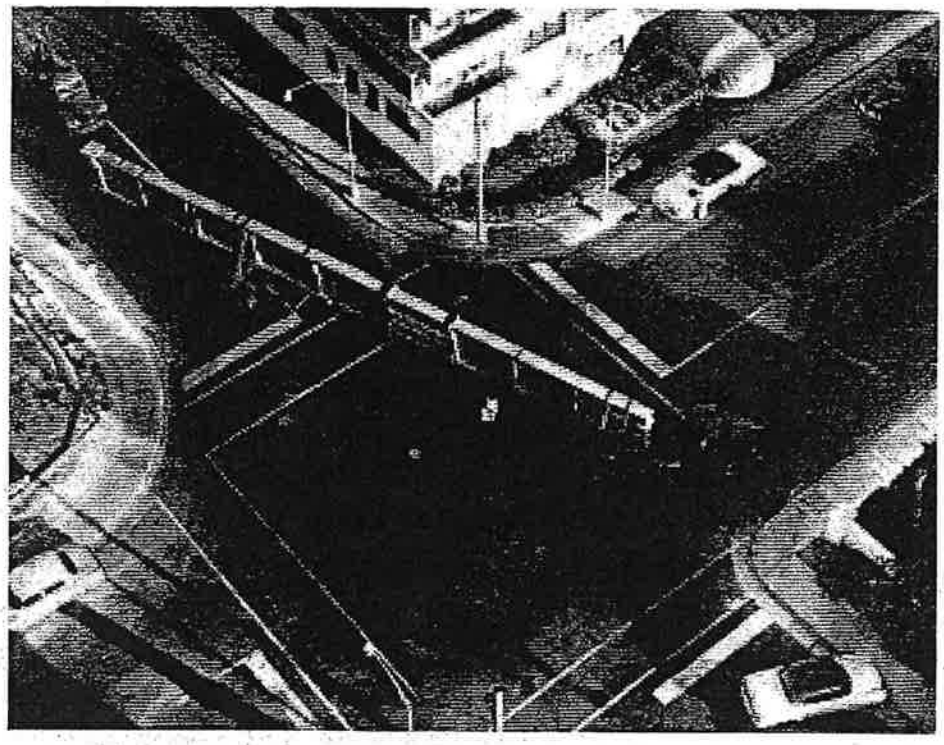


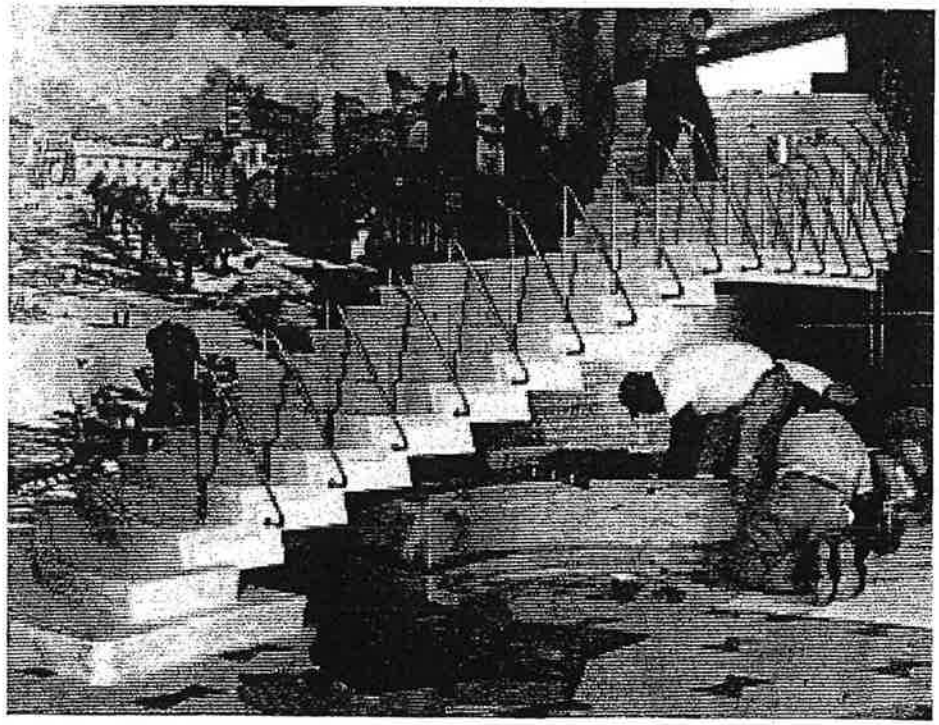
Construction Site (1954)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



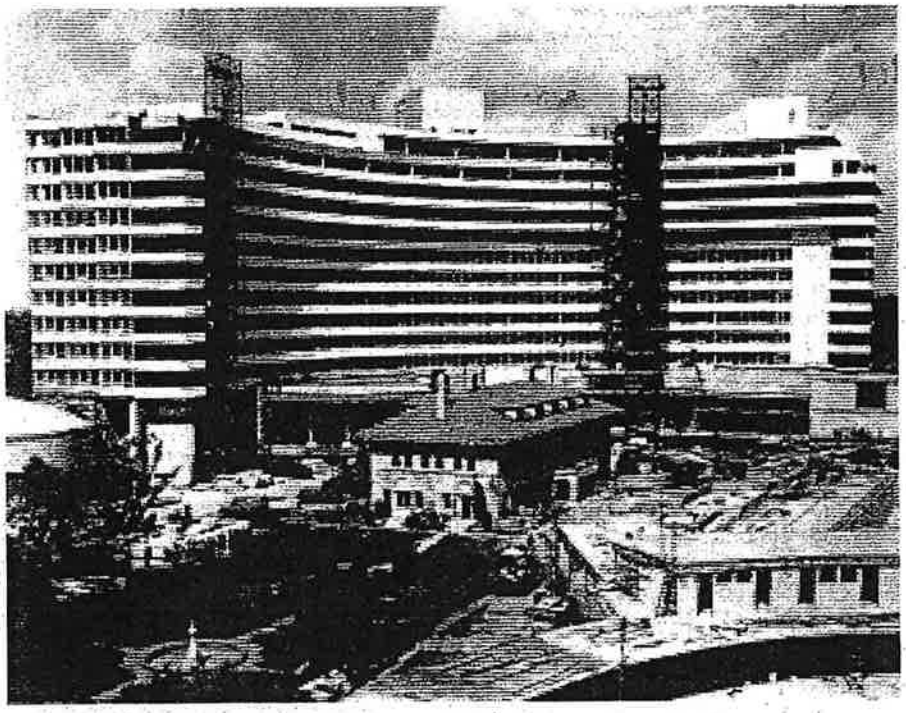
Fontainebleau under Construction
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



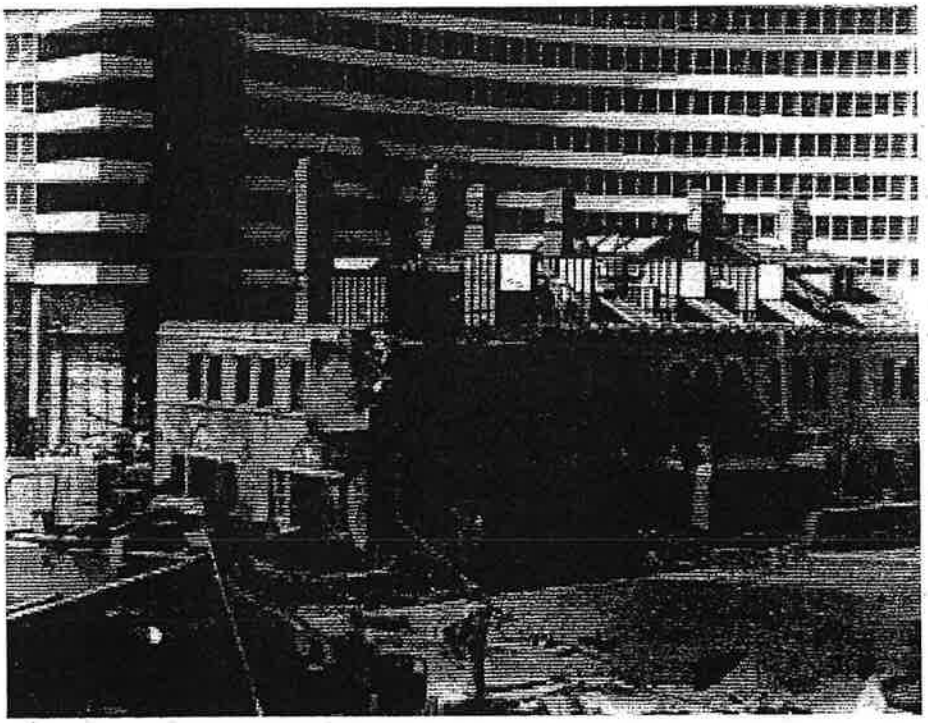
Trailer hauling what was believed to be the largest girder built in Miami for the Fontainebleau construction
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



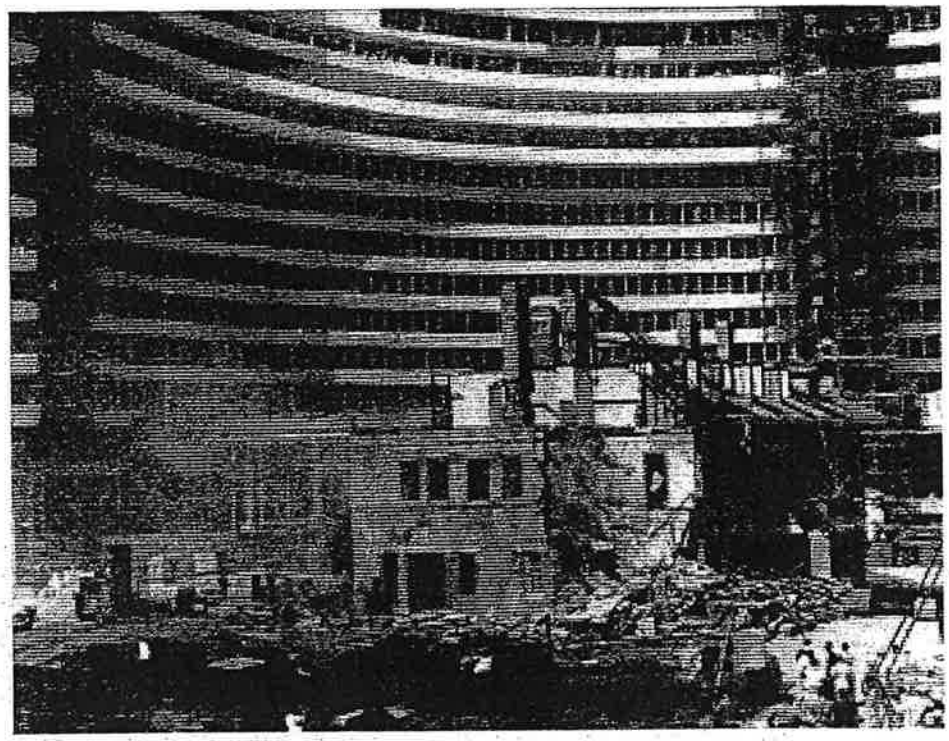
Lobby Stair under Construction
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



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



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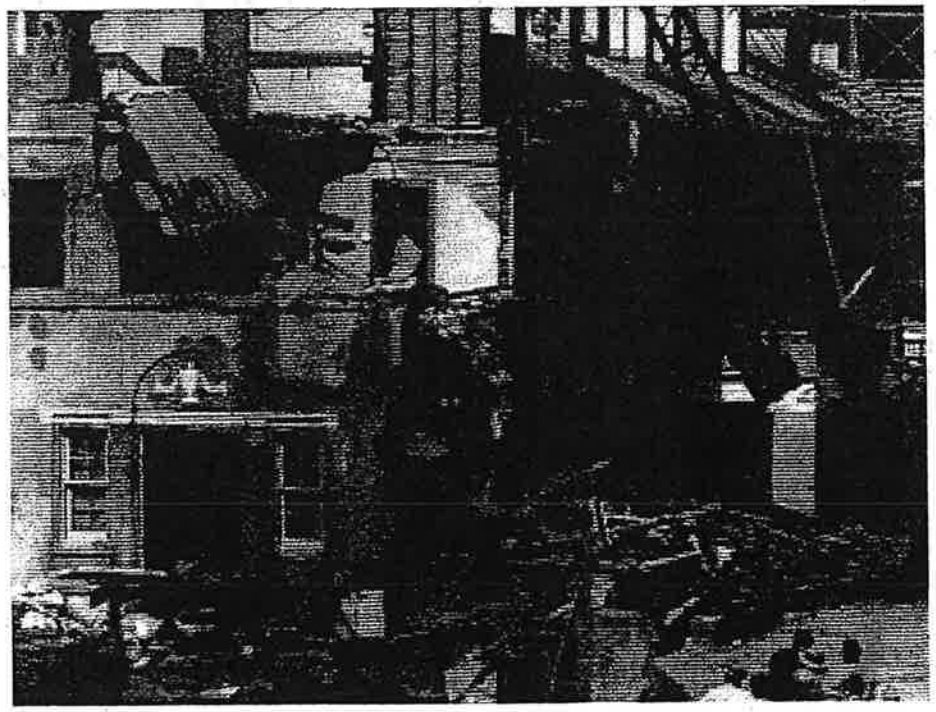

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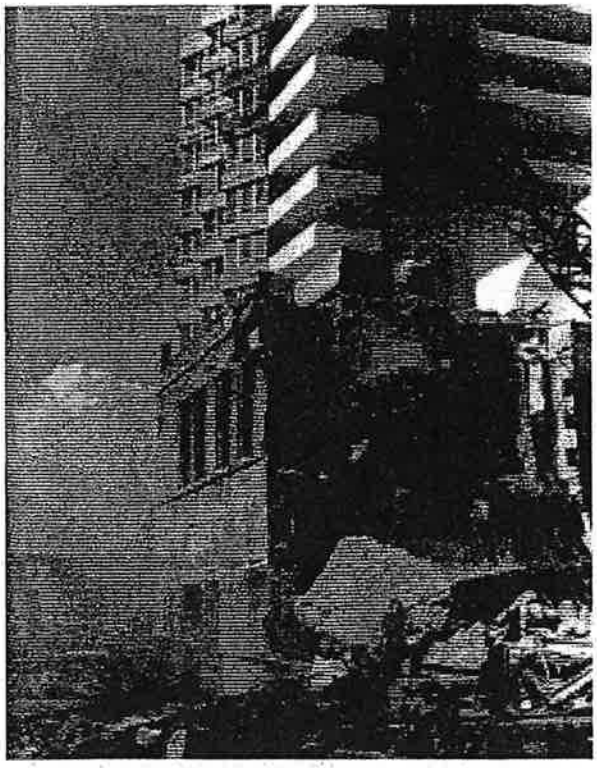

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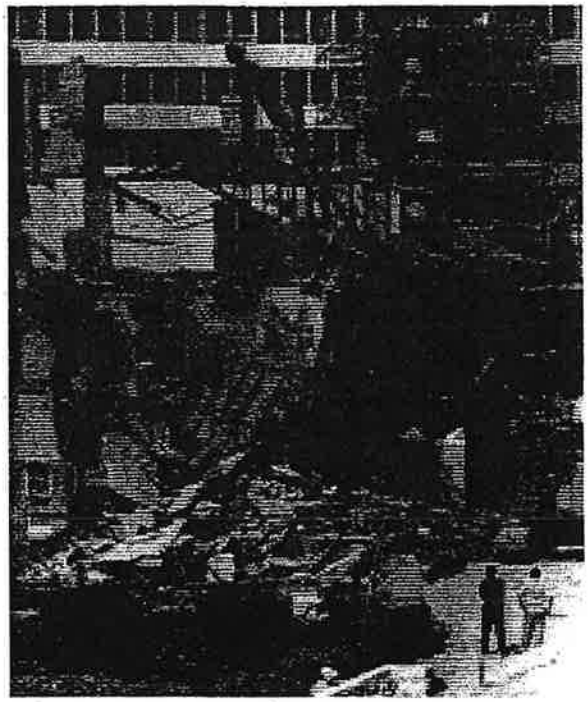

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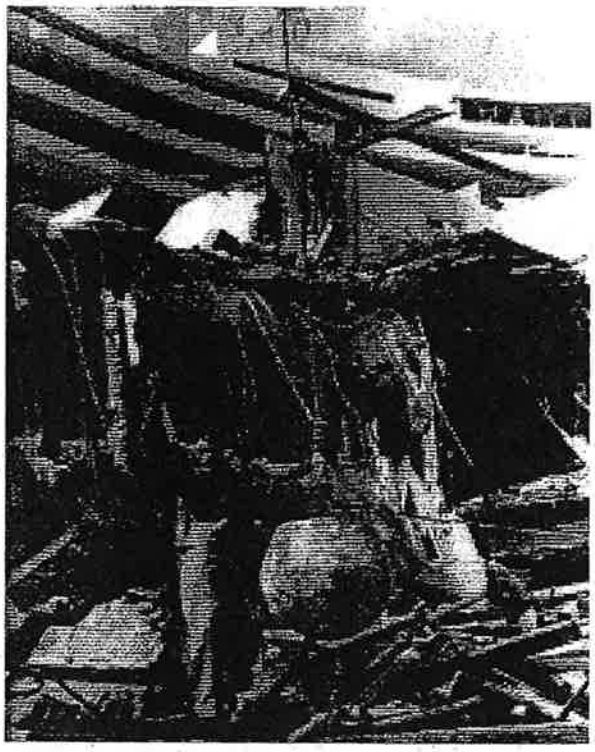

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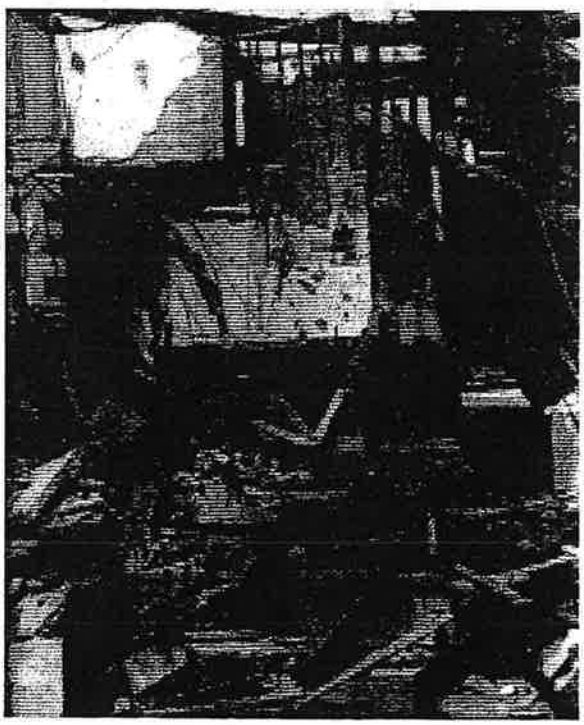

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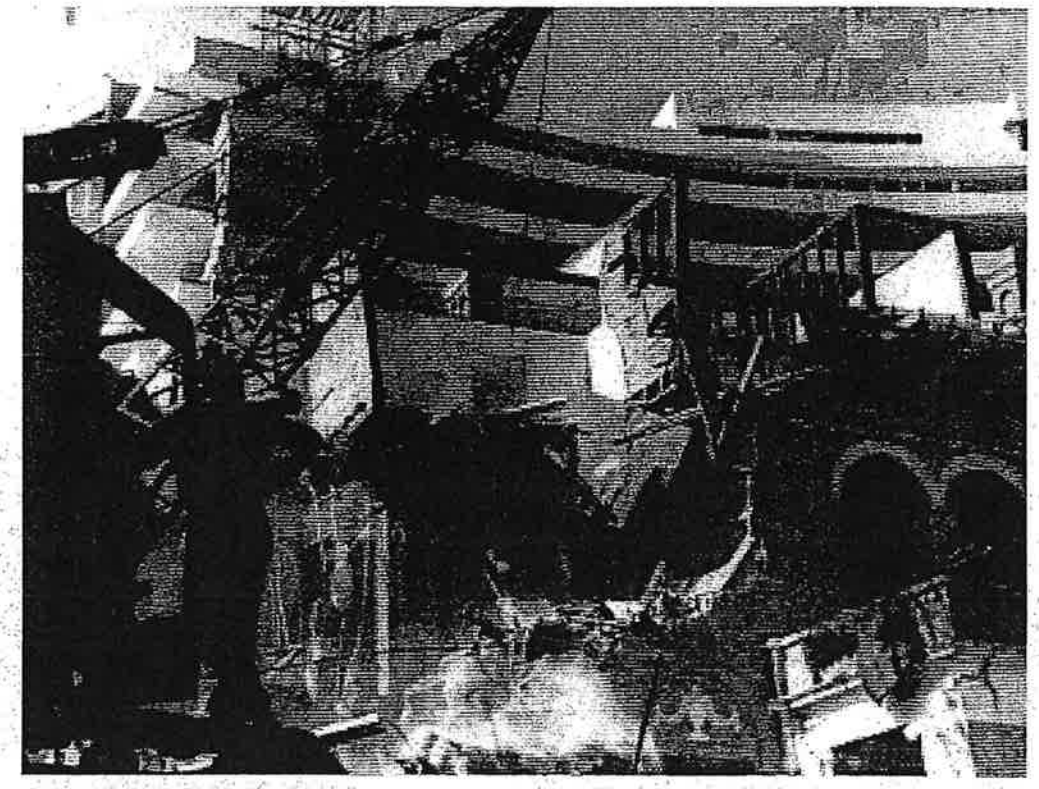


Demolition of Firestone Mansion
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives

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

Fontainebleau

Officiating at the tree-planting ceremony and presentation of plaque at 11:00 A.M., Monday, December 26th were - left to right -

Captain George Jerval Salvo
Doctor Leonte Nardoso
Deth of Nicaragua;
Ben Kovack, President of the Fontainebleau;
Senator Hubert Pujol, Mayor of Fontainebleau, France;
Guy de Schempre, representing the French Government;
Mayor Harold Shapiro, Mayor of Miami Beach;
Morris Lapidus, Architect and Designer.

The plaque reads:

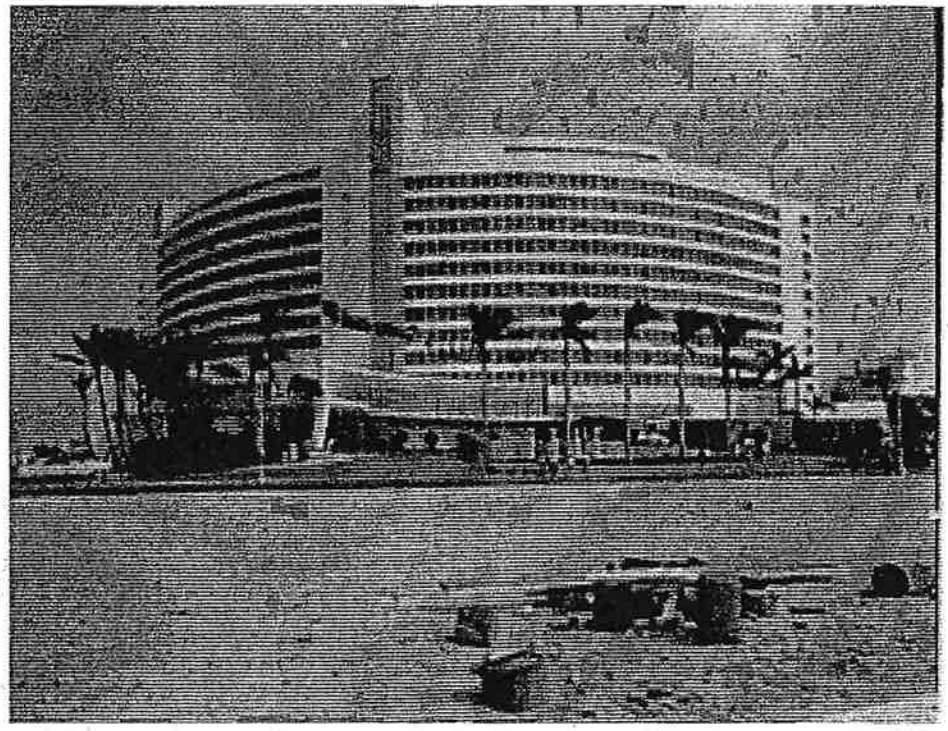
The City of Fontainebleau, France, extends every good wish for a pleasant and healthy vacation to all guests of The Fontainebleau, Miami Beach. May the sun warm your days and the moon and stars bring happy evenings and may you return again and again to taste the pleasures and elegant living at this most famous of all resorts.

Senator H. Pujol
Mayor of Fontainebleau, France

At the left top hand corner 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 tree that was planted was a pine from the famed forest of Fontainebleau, France, and was brought here by Senator Pujol.

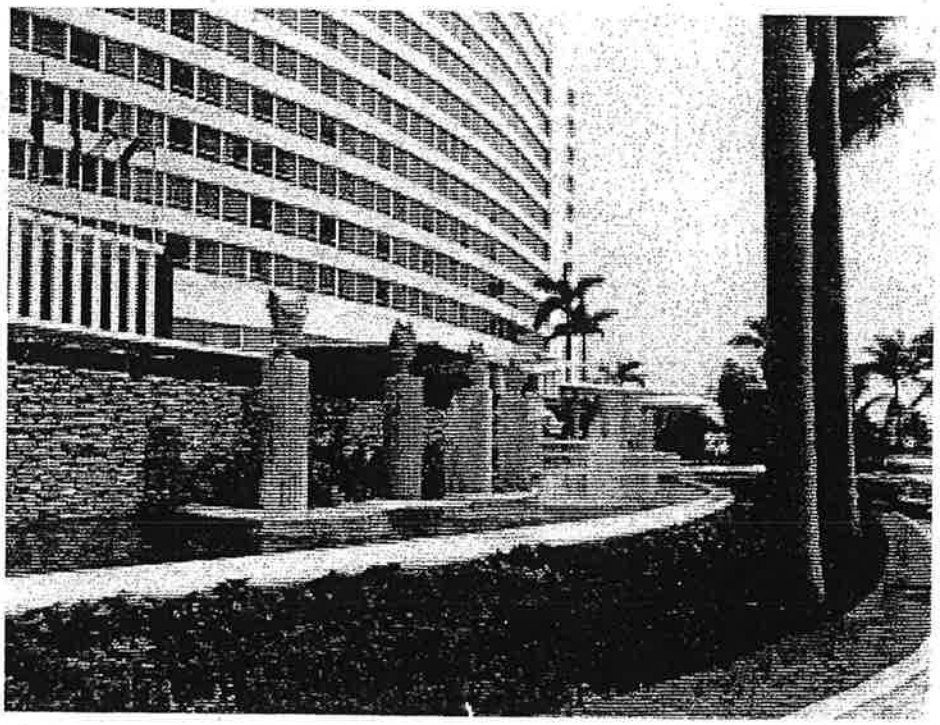
Press release announcing presentation of plaque by Mayor of Fontainebleau, France at opening of Fontainebleau Hotel, December 1955.
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



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

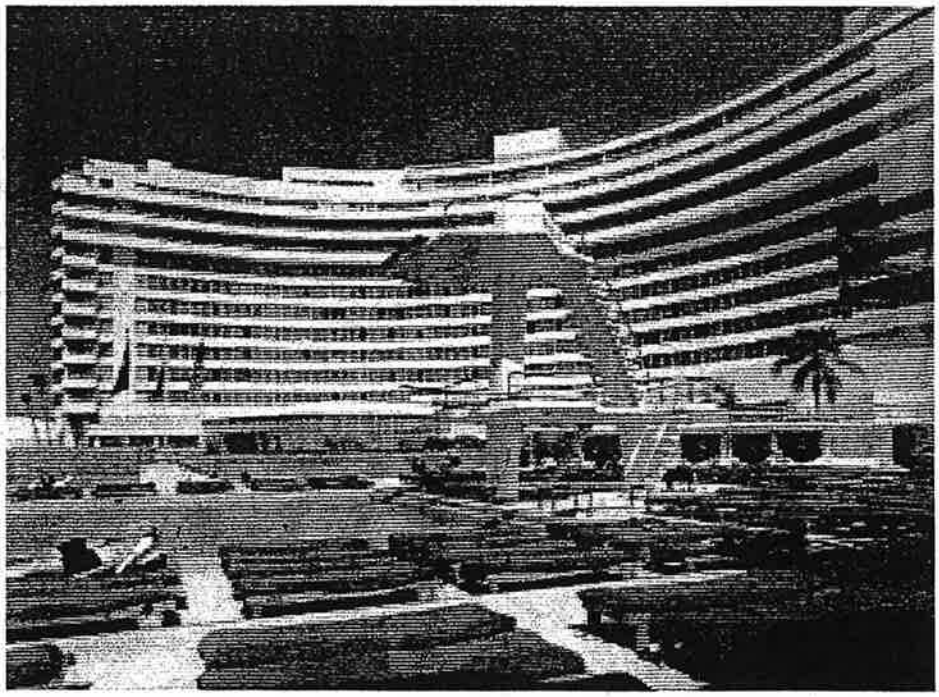


Fountain along west side (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

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

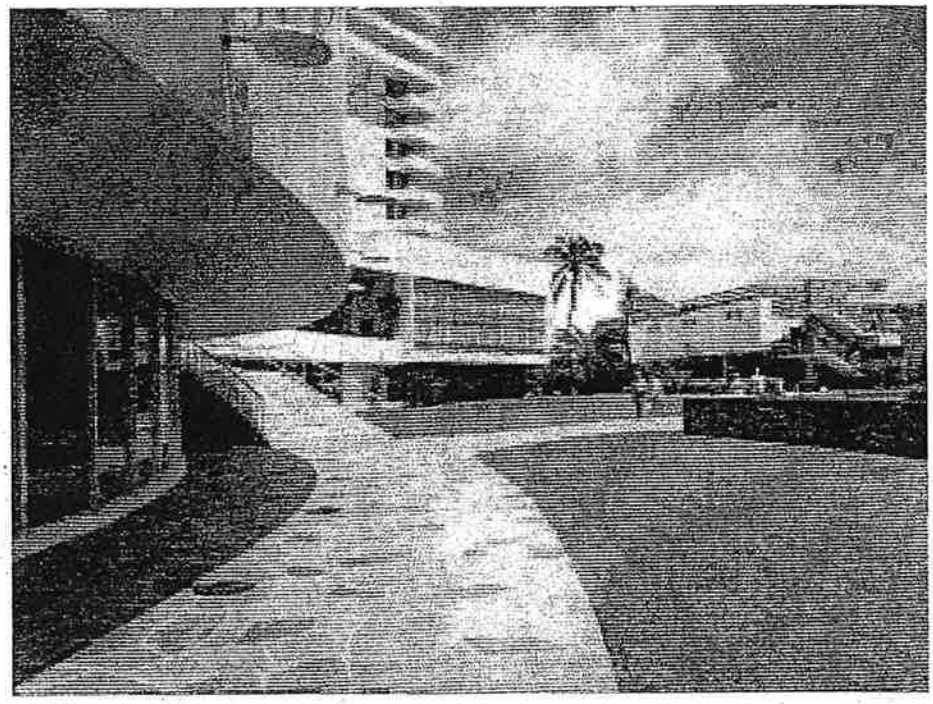
Exterior of Garden Lobby, view from Formal Gardens (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



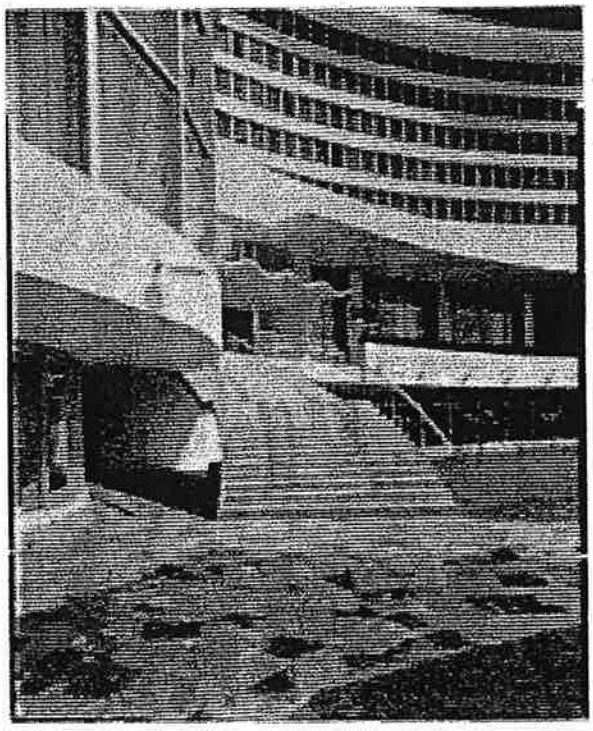
Dive Tower & Pool Deck (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Exterior Garden Lobby and Night Club (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

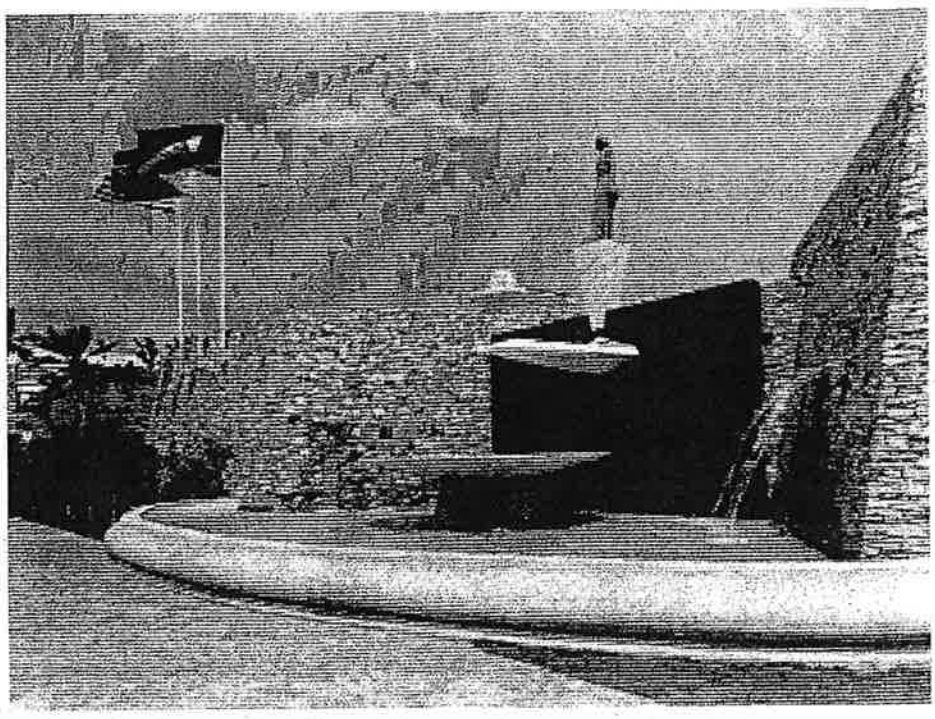
Pool & Cabana, View from Archway to Beach (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



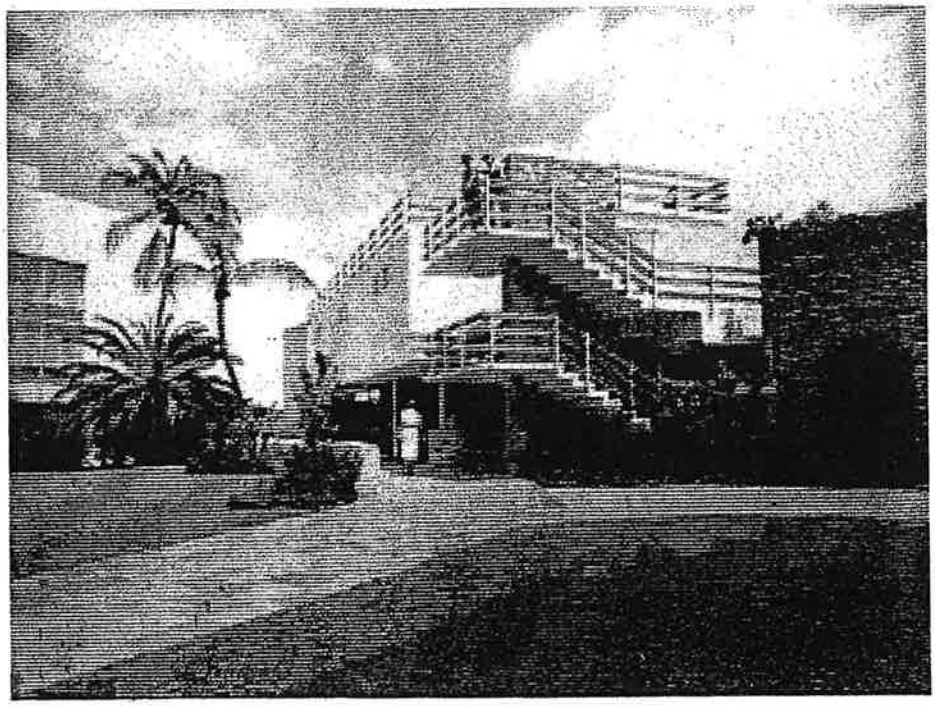
Stairs to Garden Lobby, View from Lower Lobby (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



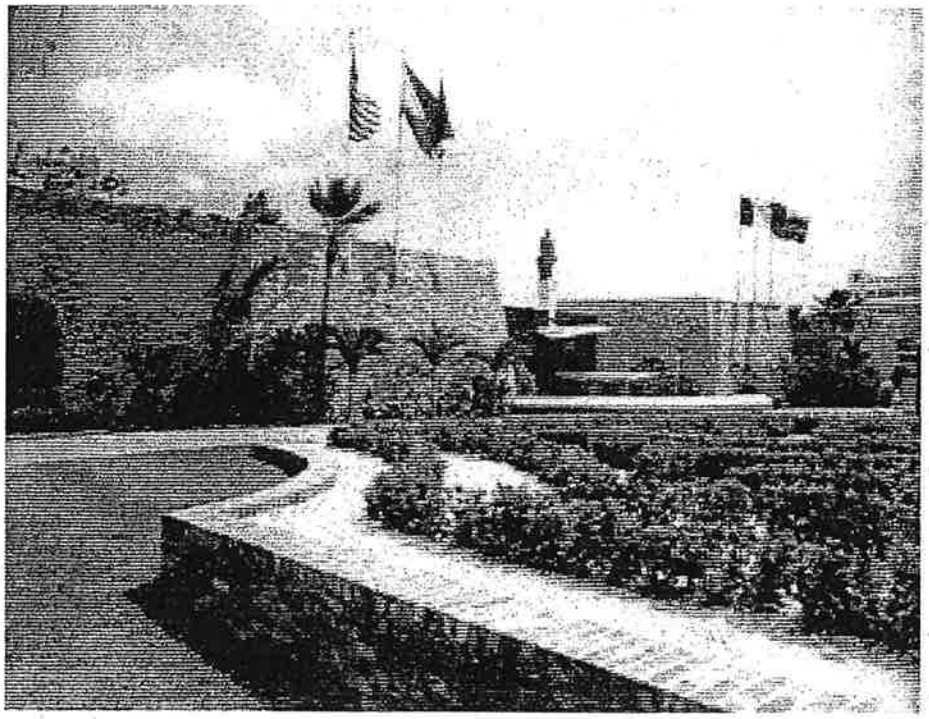
Stairs to Garden Lobby (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



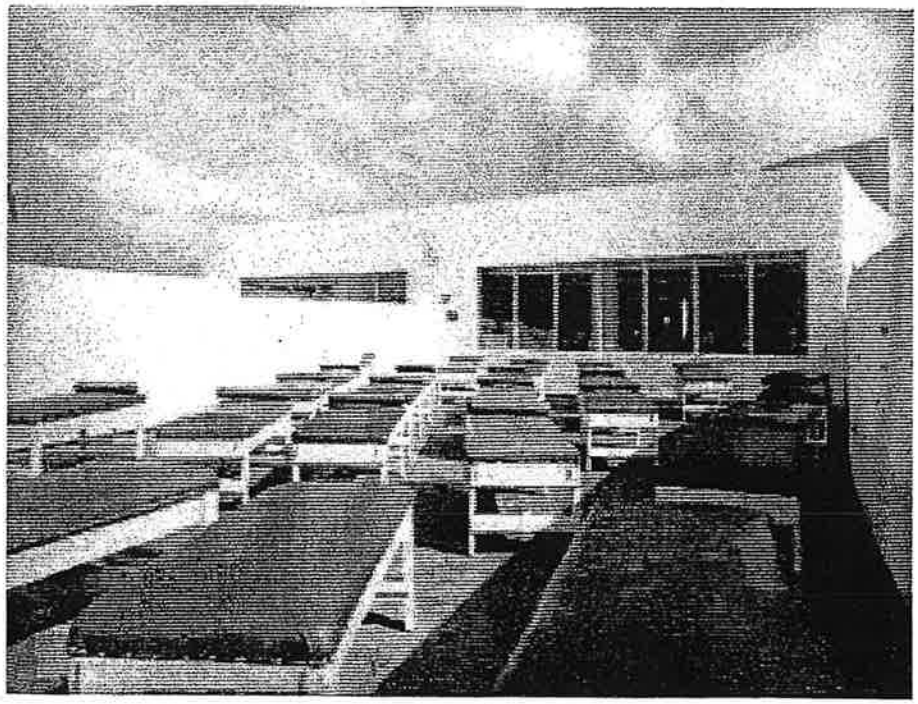
Normandy Figure, Fountain near Formal Gardens (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



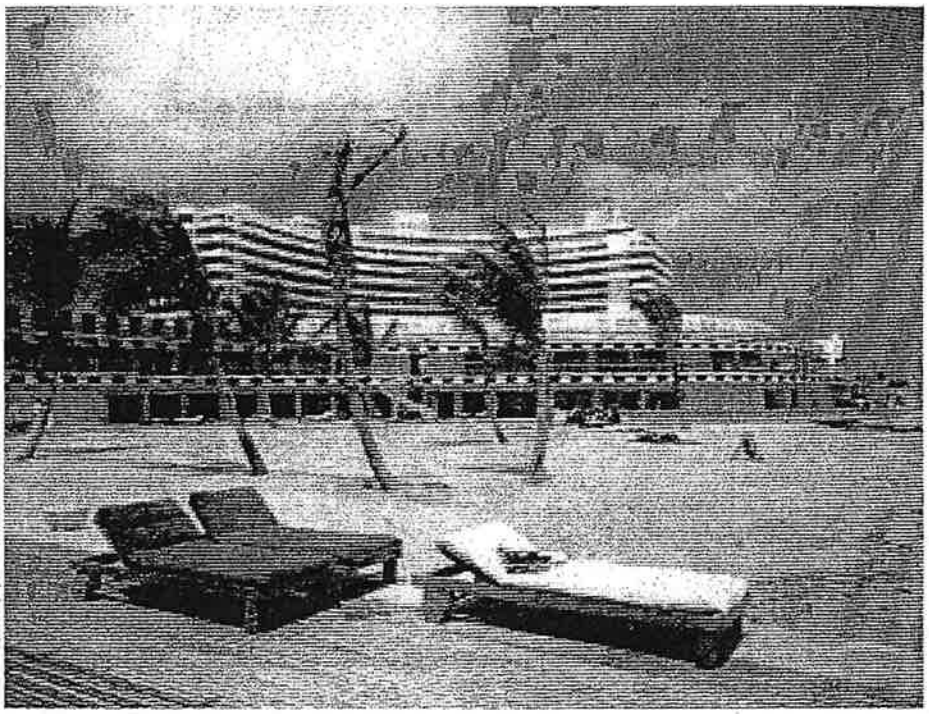
Stairs to Cabanas & Pool Deck (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



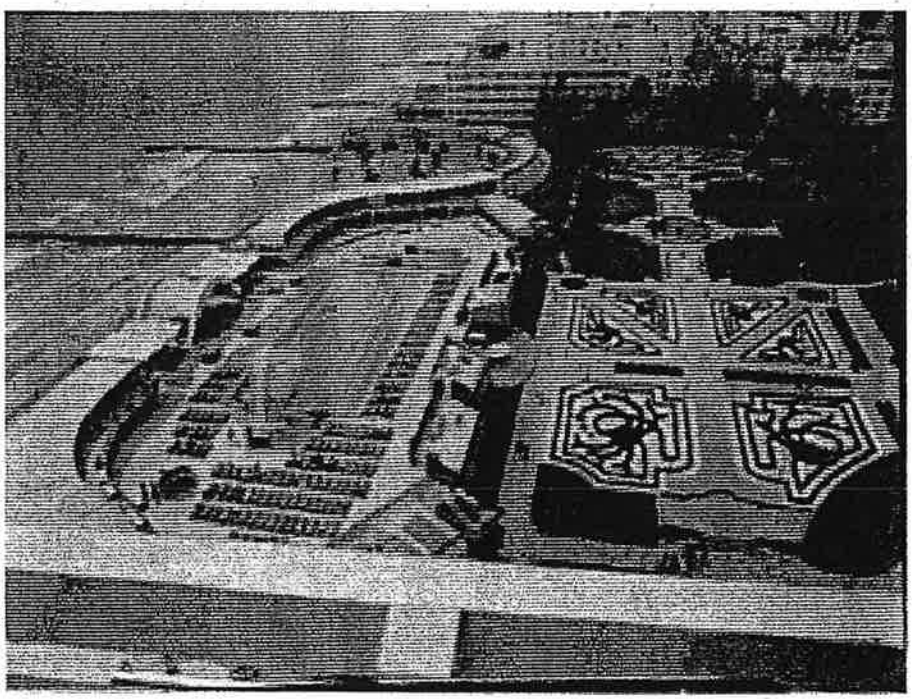
Garden, View towards fountain (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



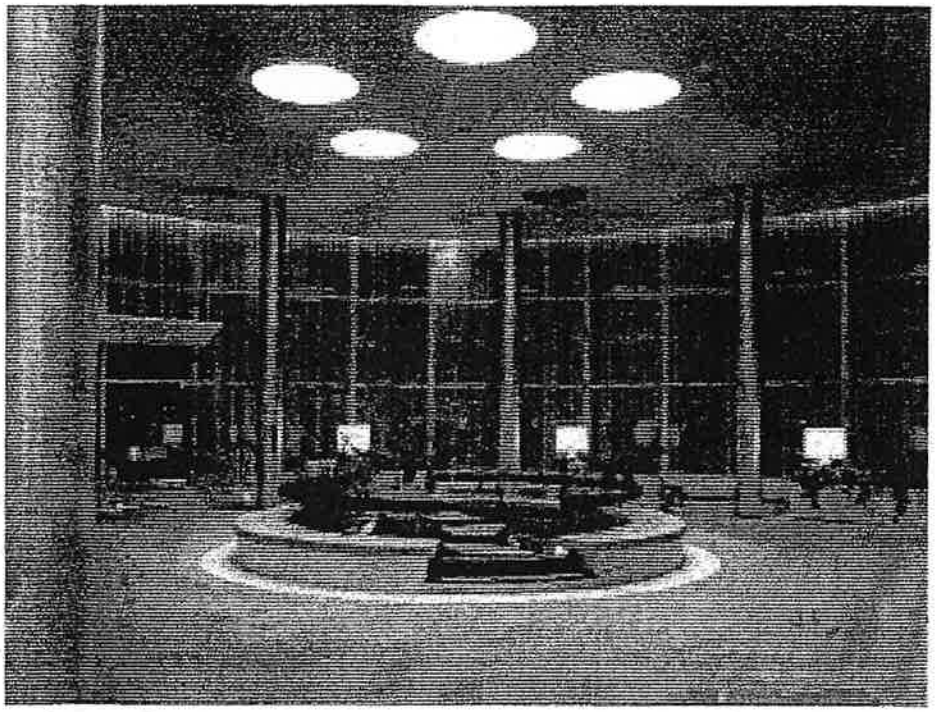
Solarium (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



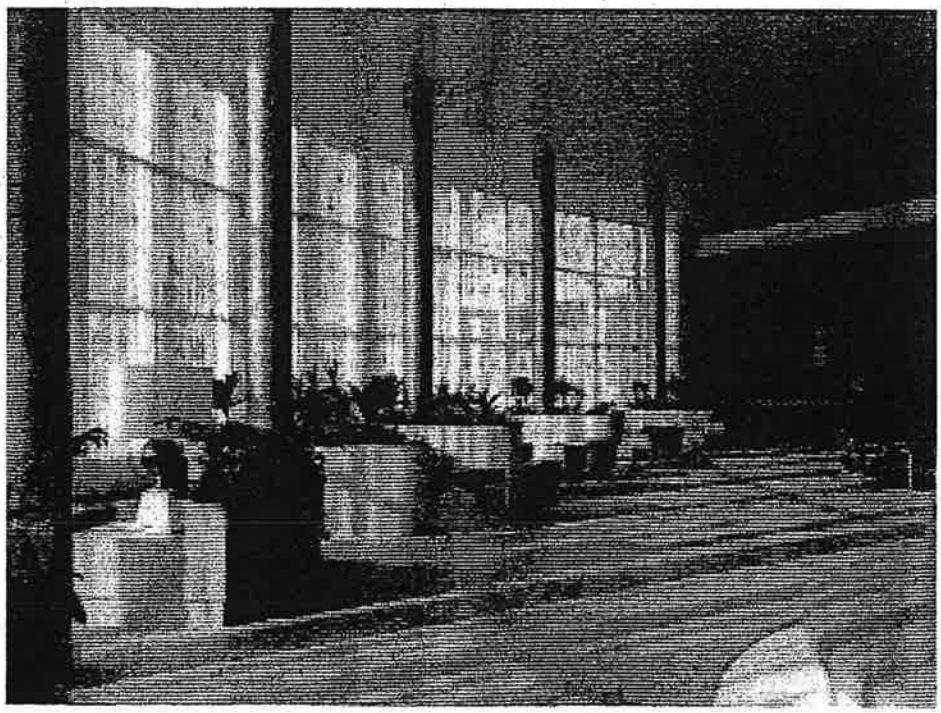
View to Cabanas (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



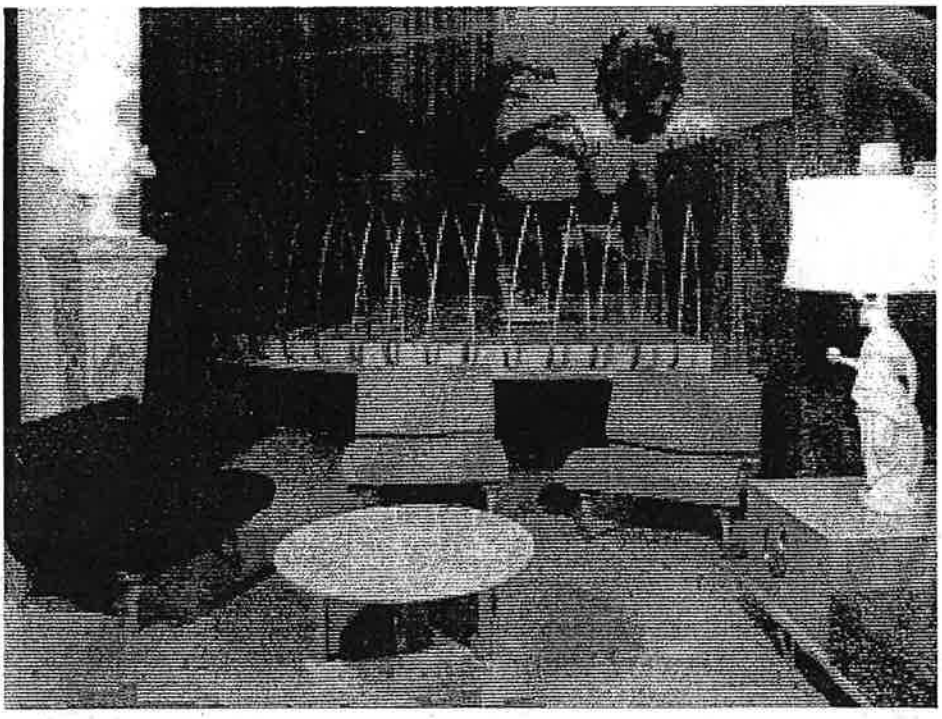
Aerial View of Pool Deck and Gardens (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



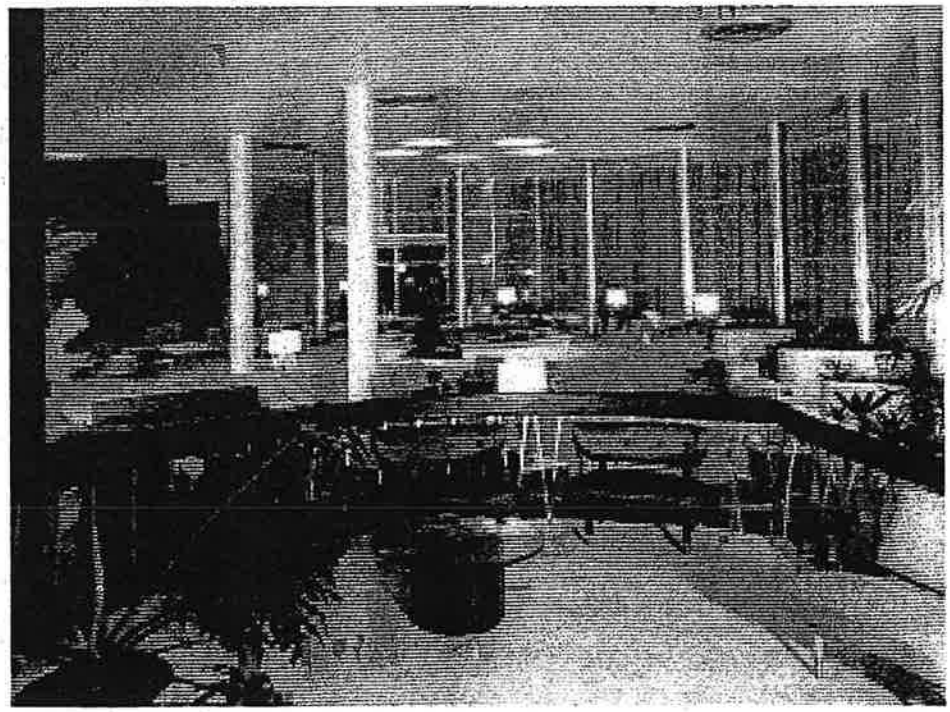
Garden Lobby (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Garden Lobby (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Garden Lobby (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Garden Lobby (1955)
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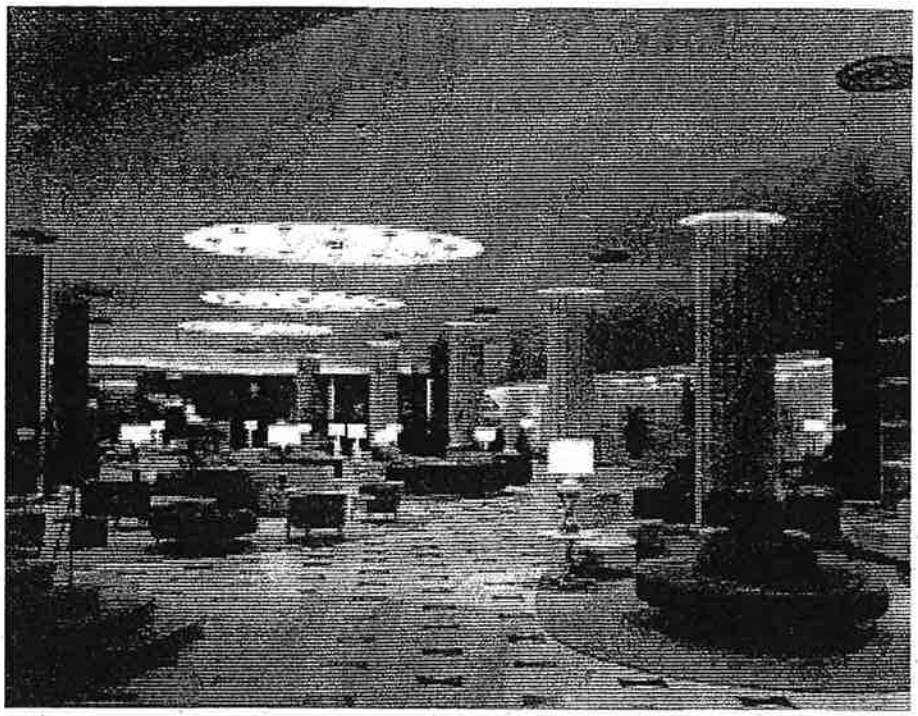
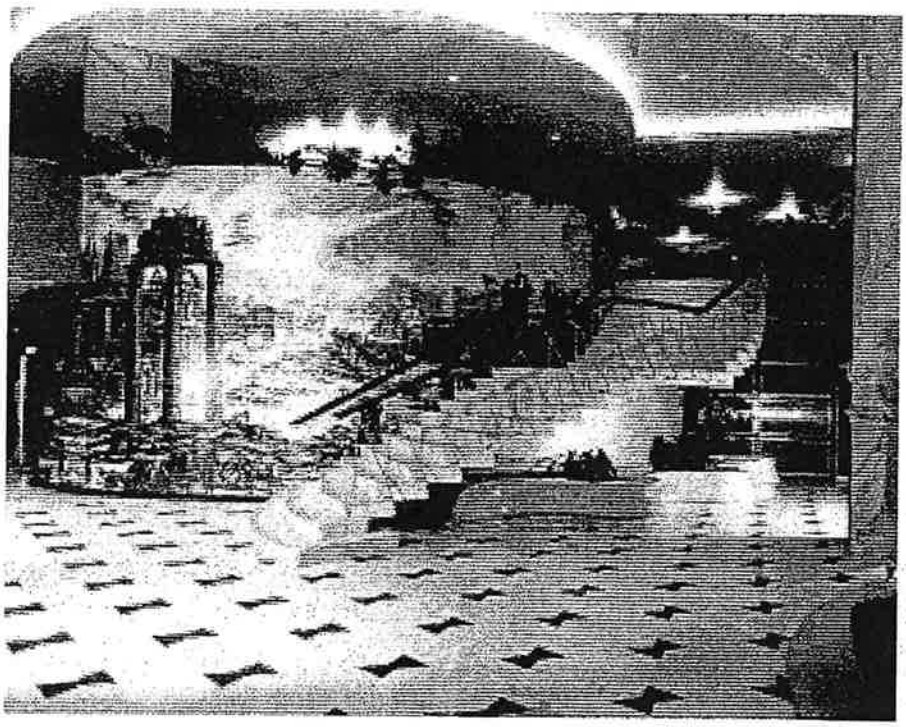
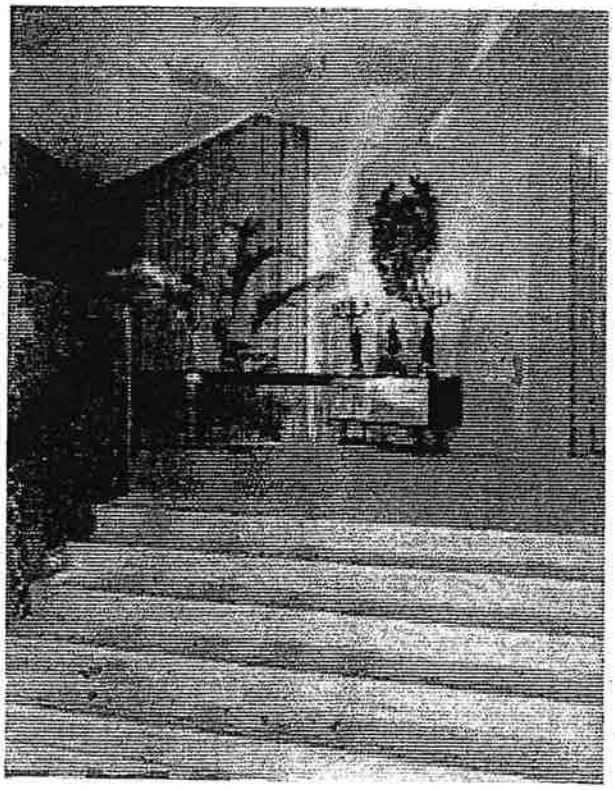


Main Lobby, looking north (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection
(see footnote #10, page 11 on historic interior)

Main Lobby, looking north to La Ronde Club entrance(1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection
(see footnote #10, page 11 on historic interior)

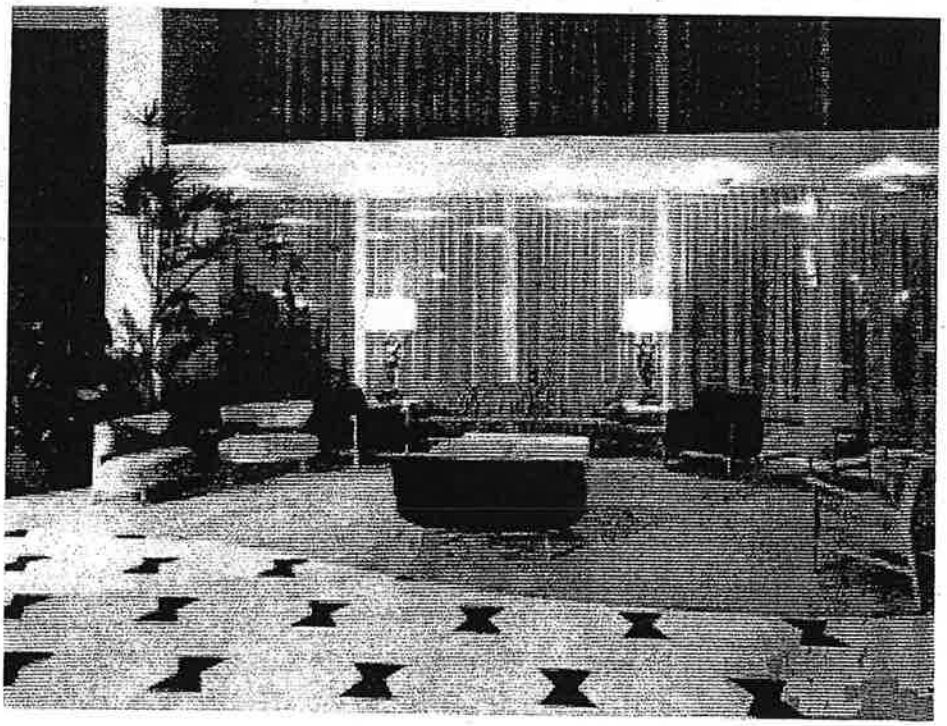


Main Lobby "Stairs to Nowhere" (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

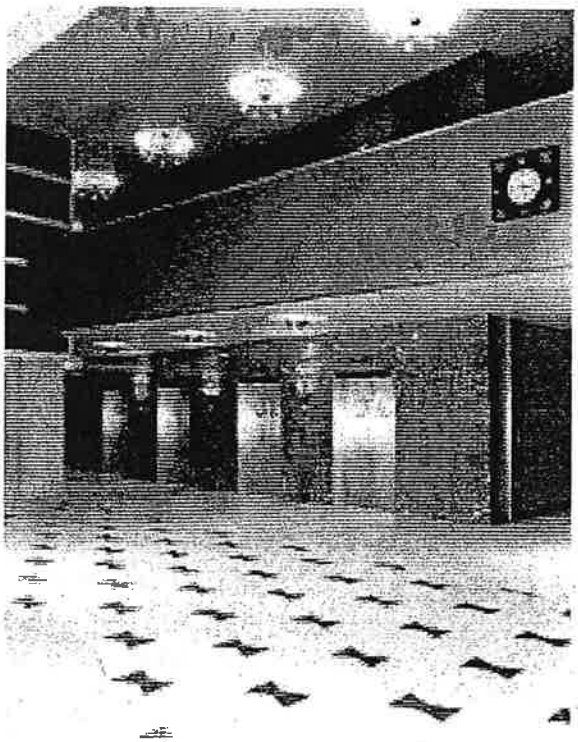


Main Lobby Stairs (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

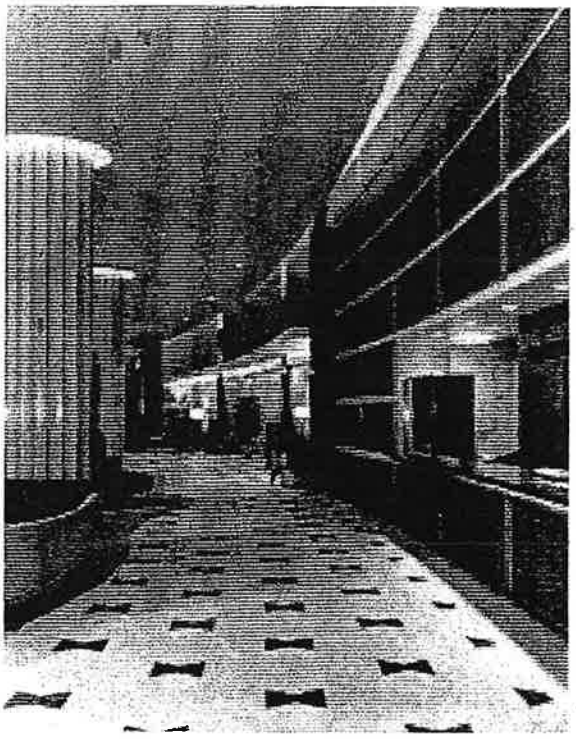
Main Lobby Stairs (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Main Lobby Seating Area (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



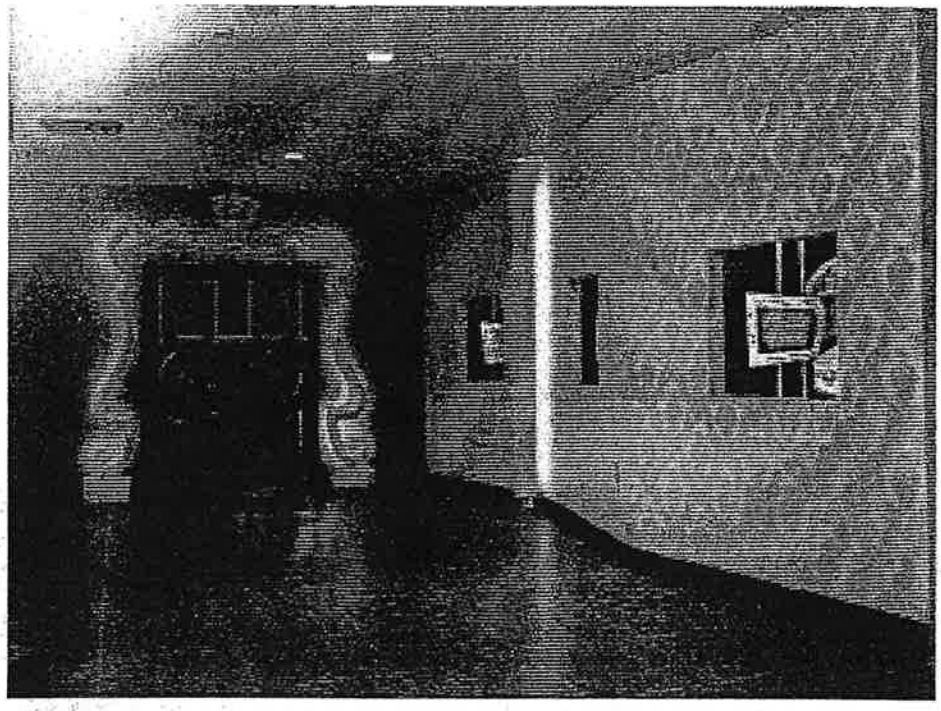
Main Lobby Elevators (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



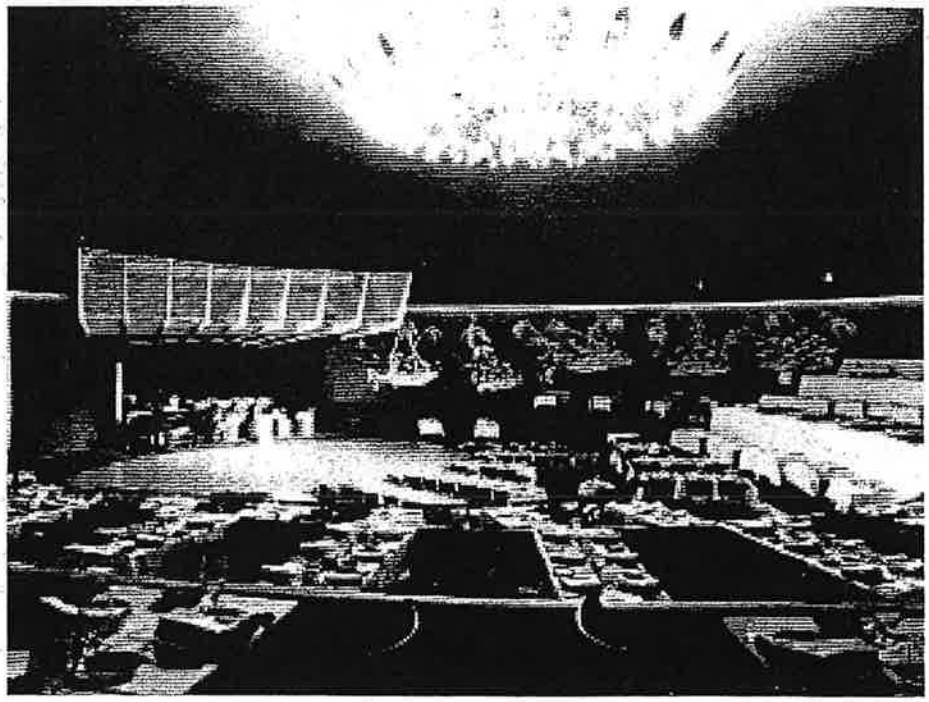
Main Lobby, cashier's desk and retail shops (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Lower Lobby retail (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

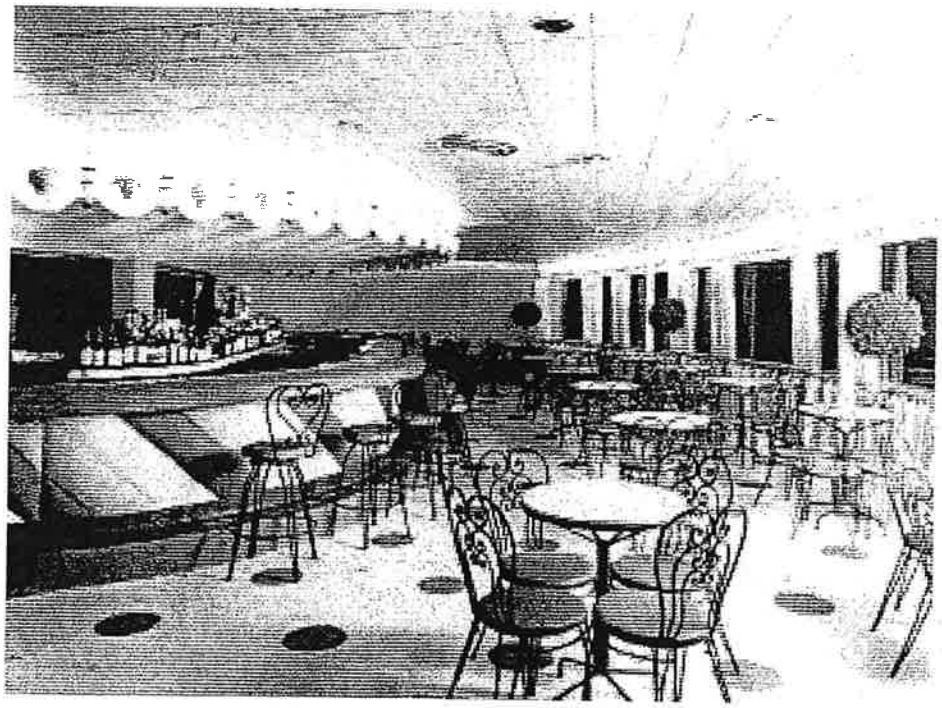
Nat Koslov Jewelry Shop (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



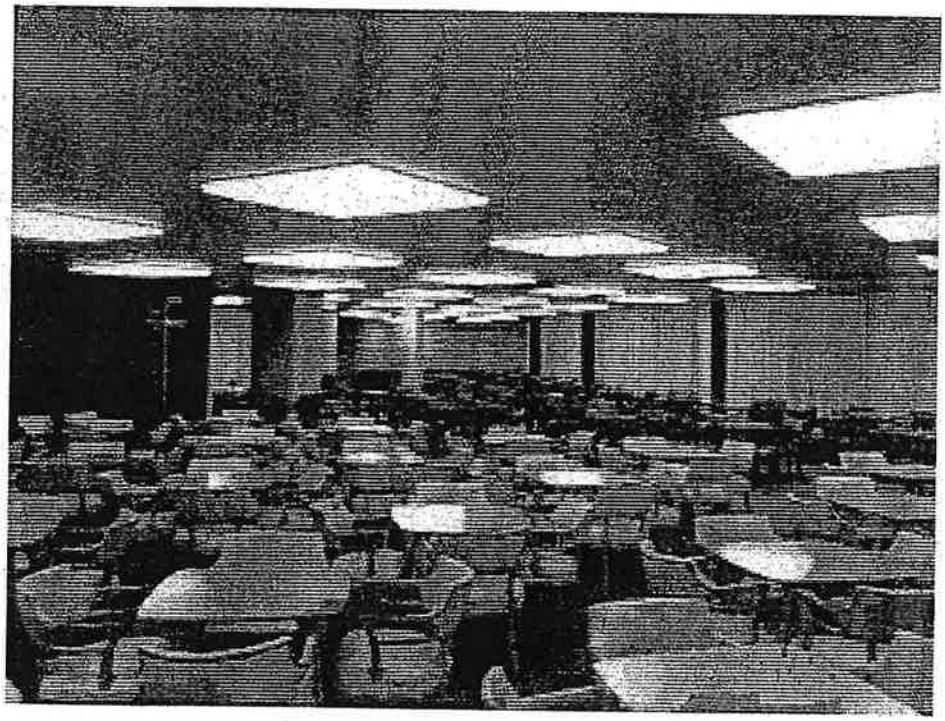
Entrance to La Ronde Club (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



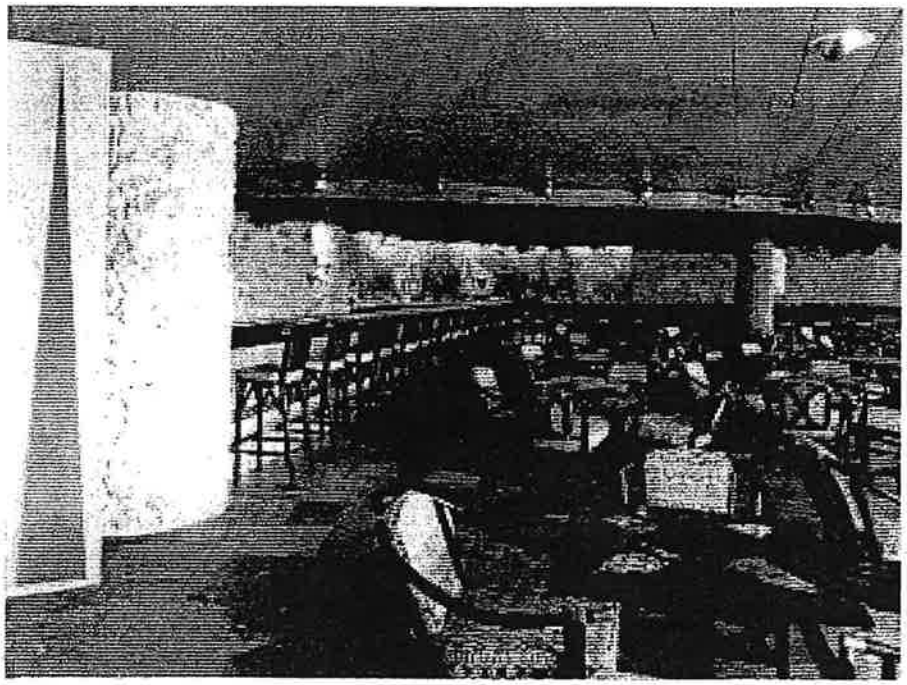
La Ronde Club (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



La Ronde Bar (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Card Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Boom Boom Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Boom Boom Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Ballroom and Dining (Fleur de Lis) room combined (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

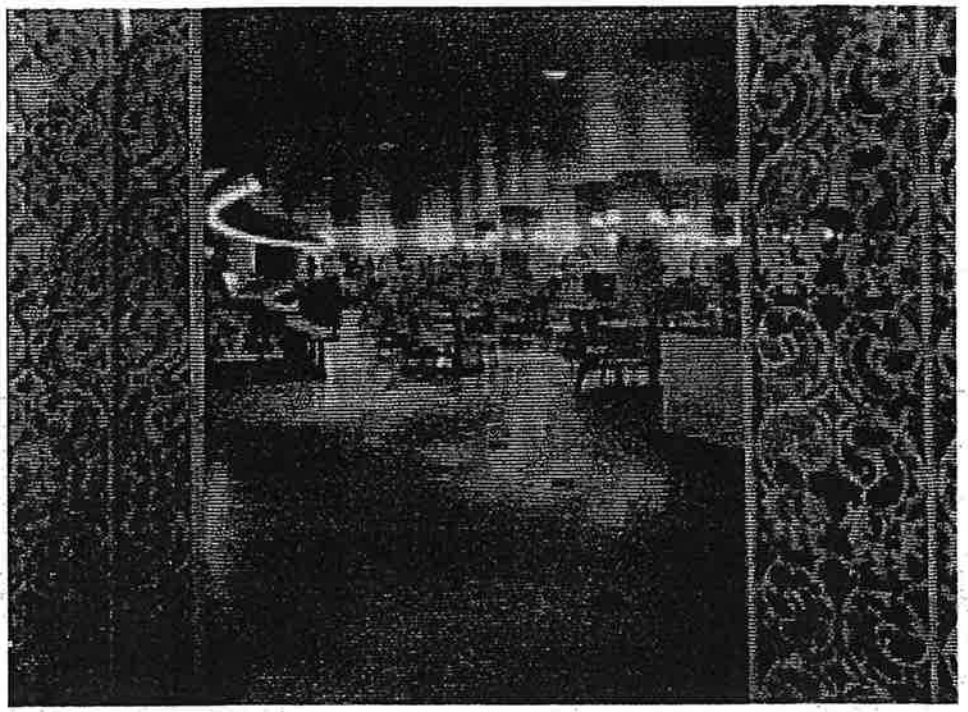
Ballroom (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Dining (Fleur de Lis) Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

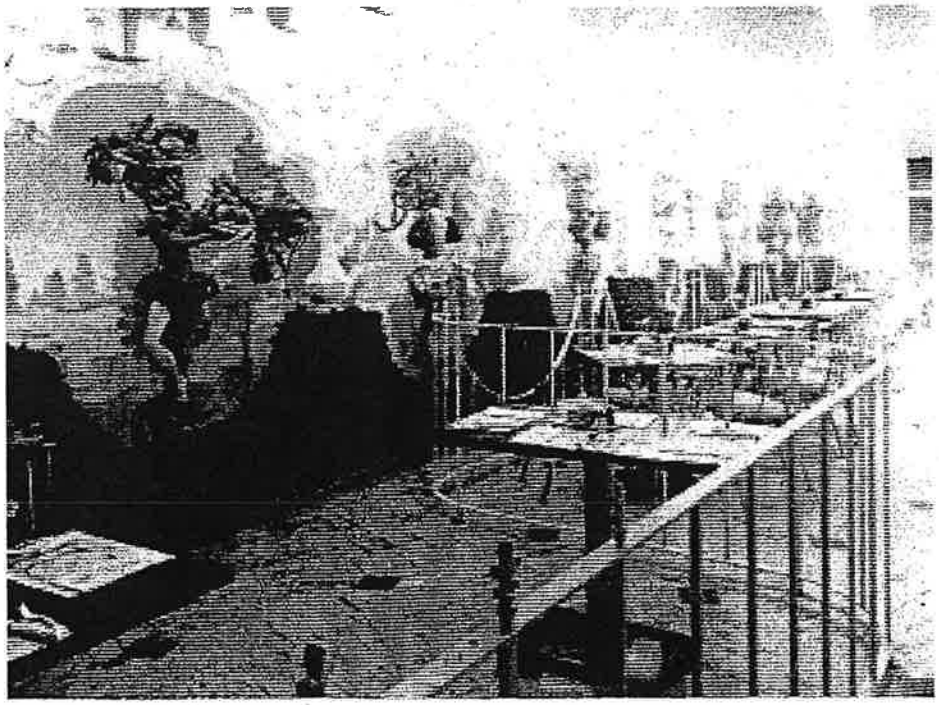
Dining (Fleur de Lis) Room looking toward Ballroom (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Dining (Fleur de Lis) Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection

Poodle Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Chez Bon Bon coffee shop (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



Chez Bon Bon coffee shop (1955)
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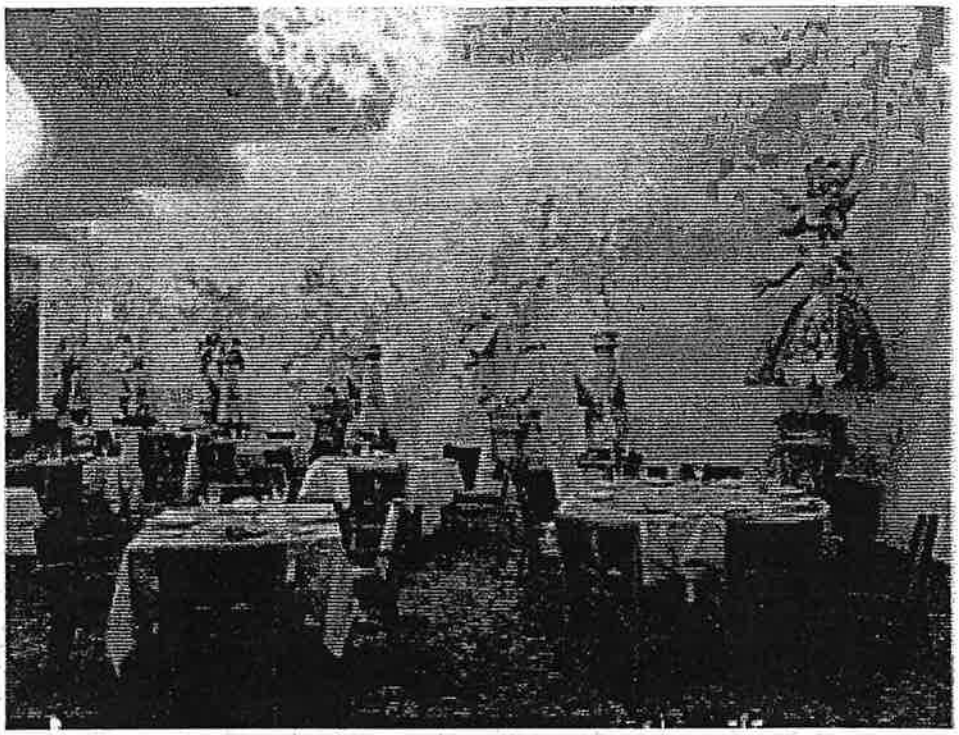
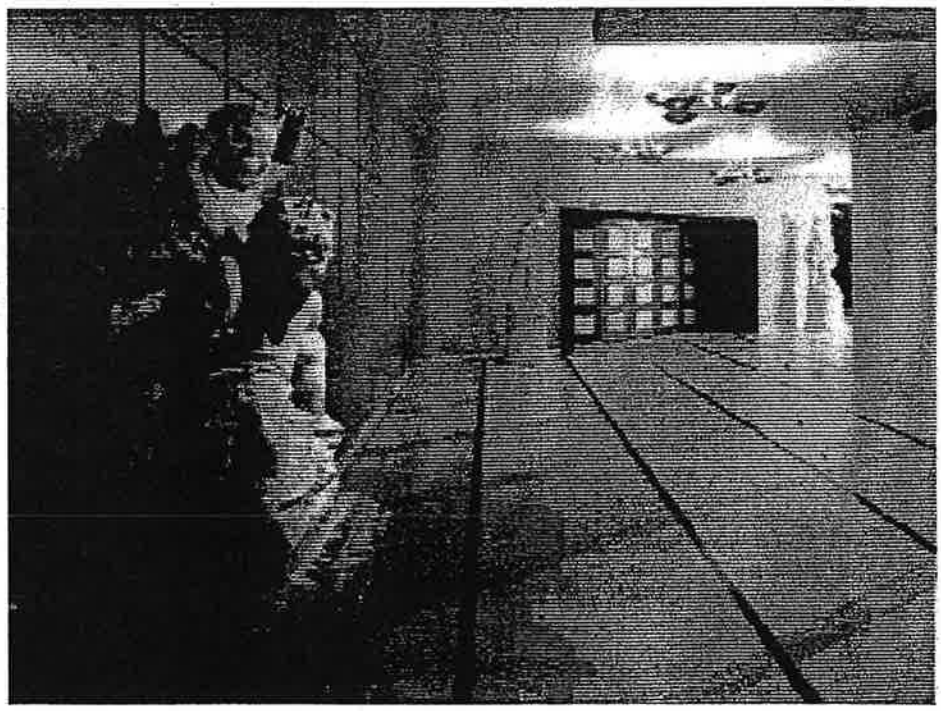
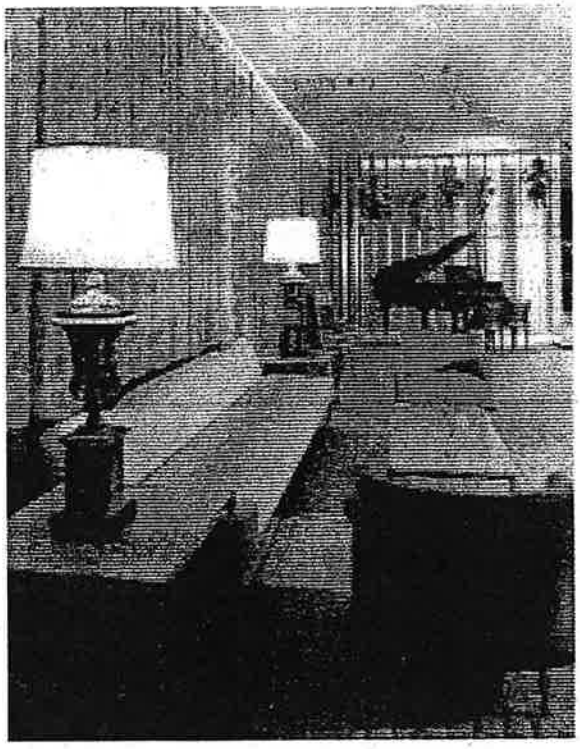


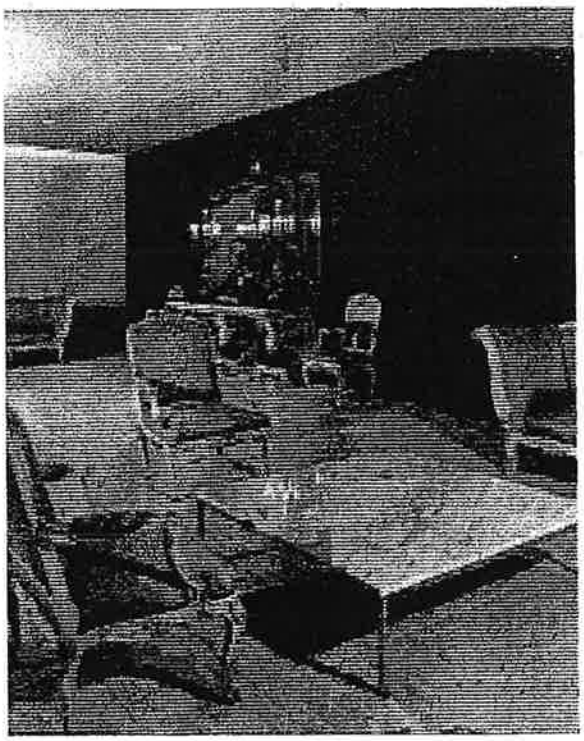
Louis XIV Dining Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



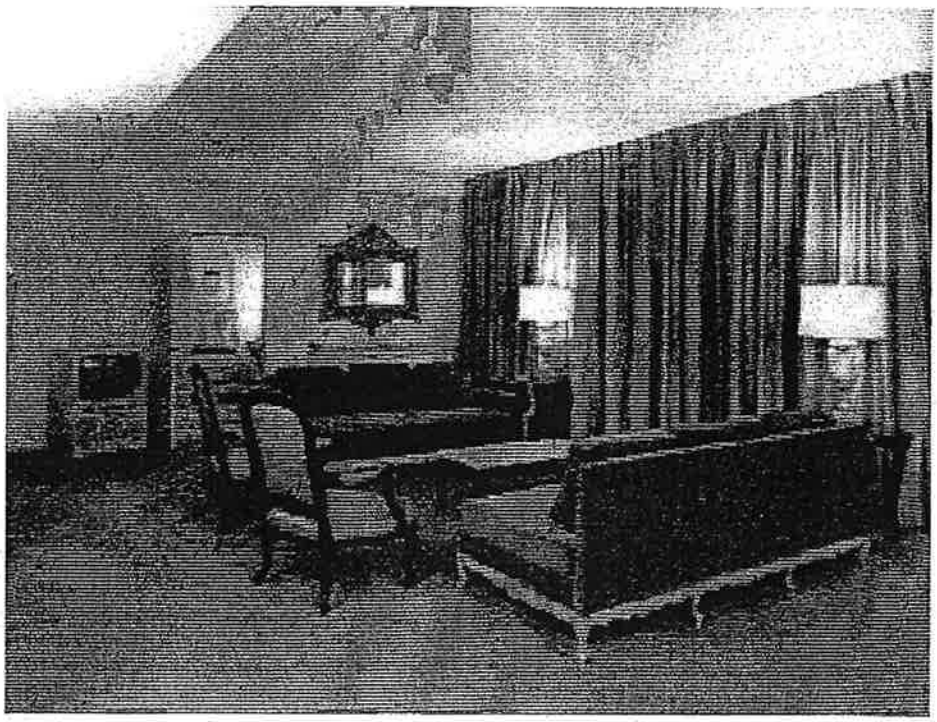
Entrance to Ballroom (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



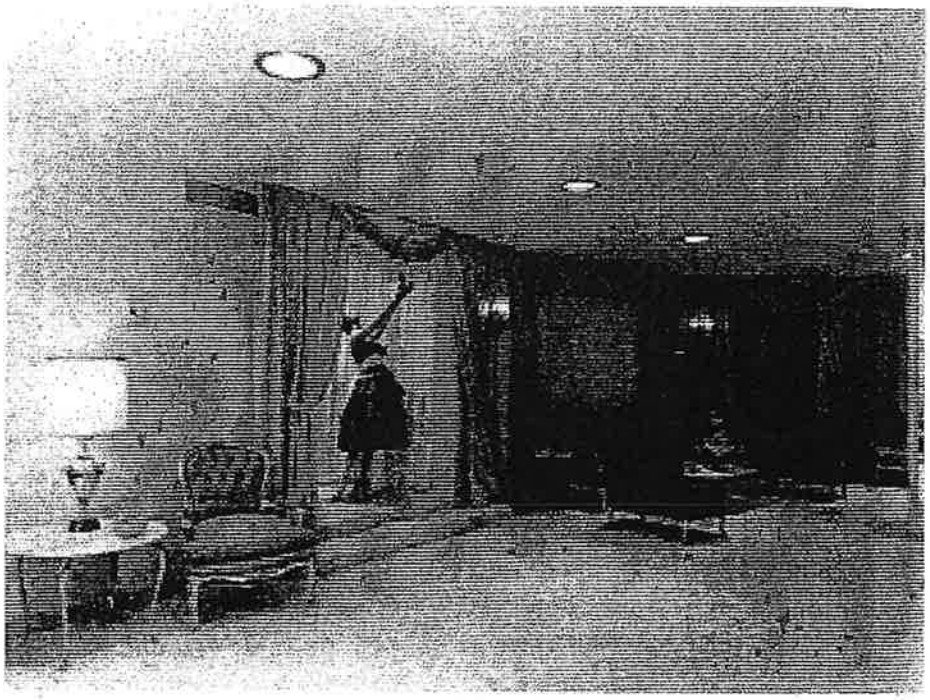
Music Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



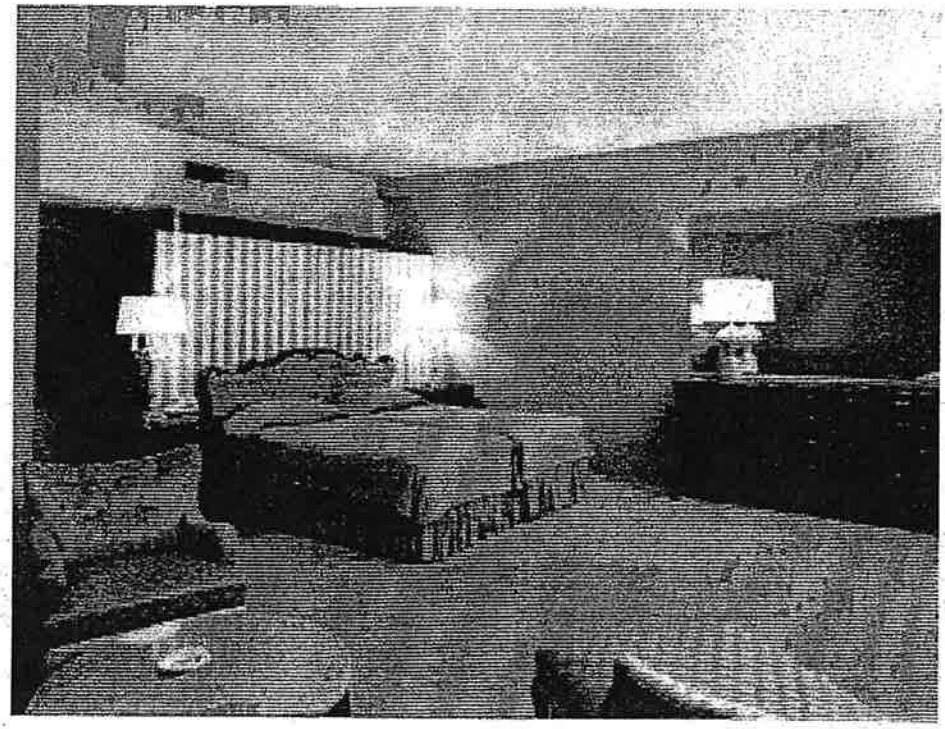
Music Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



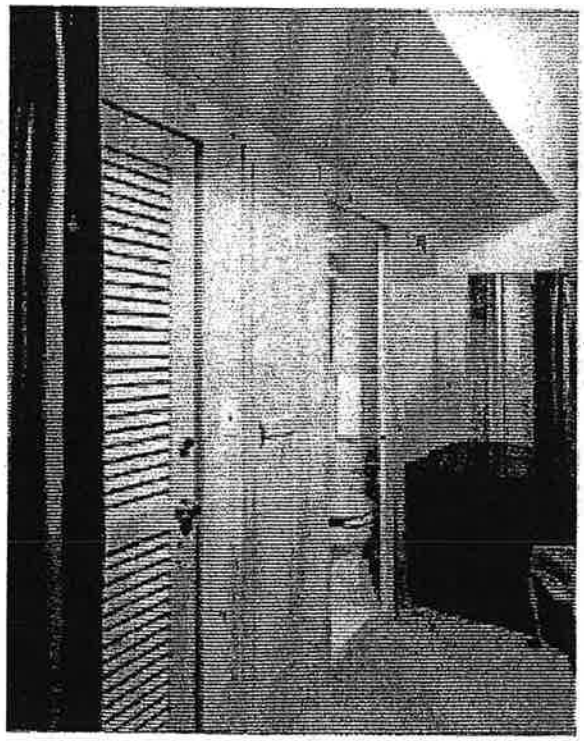
President's Suite (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



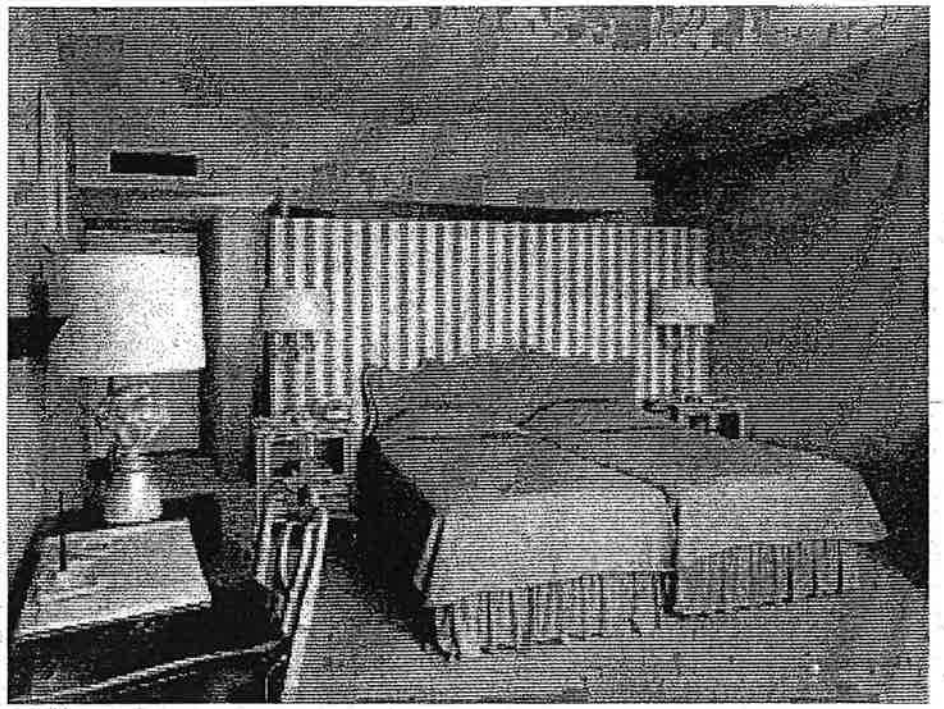
Lustig Shop (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



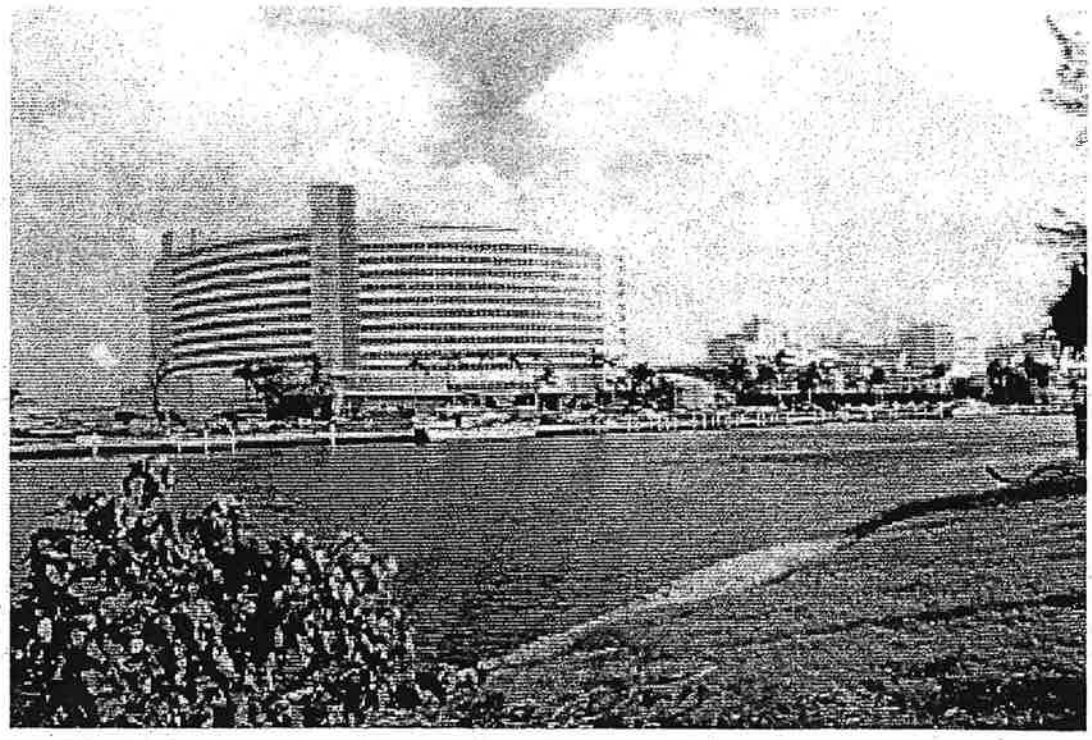
Bedroom "1452" (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



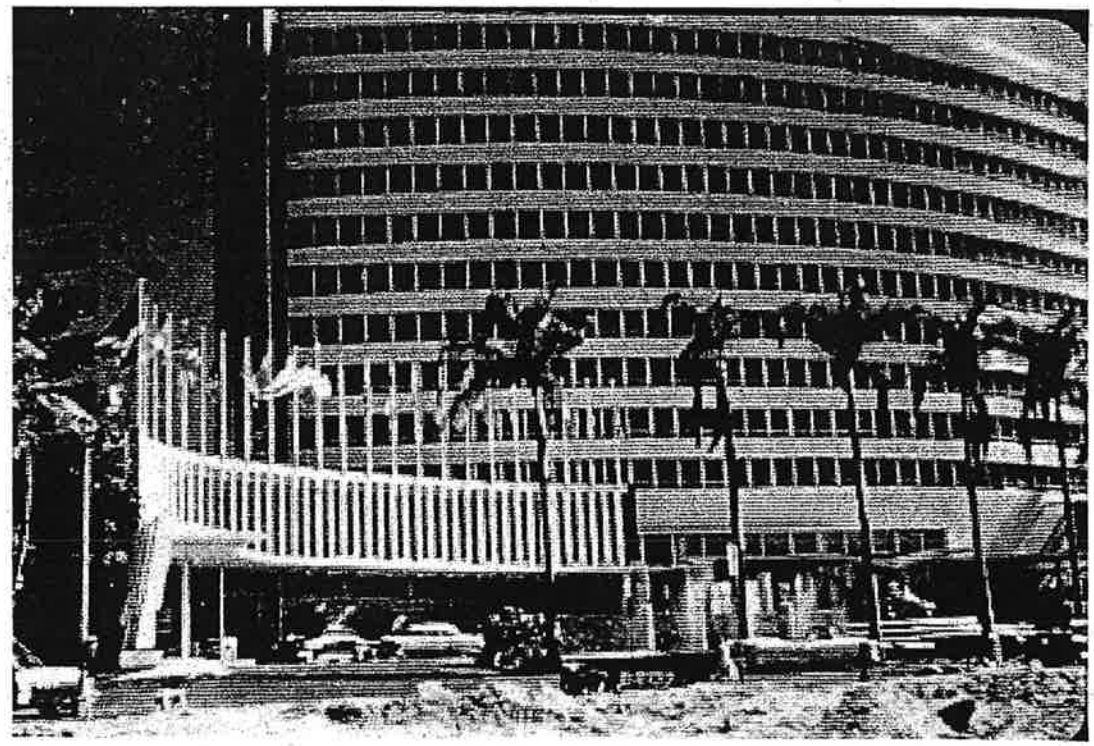
Dressing Room (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



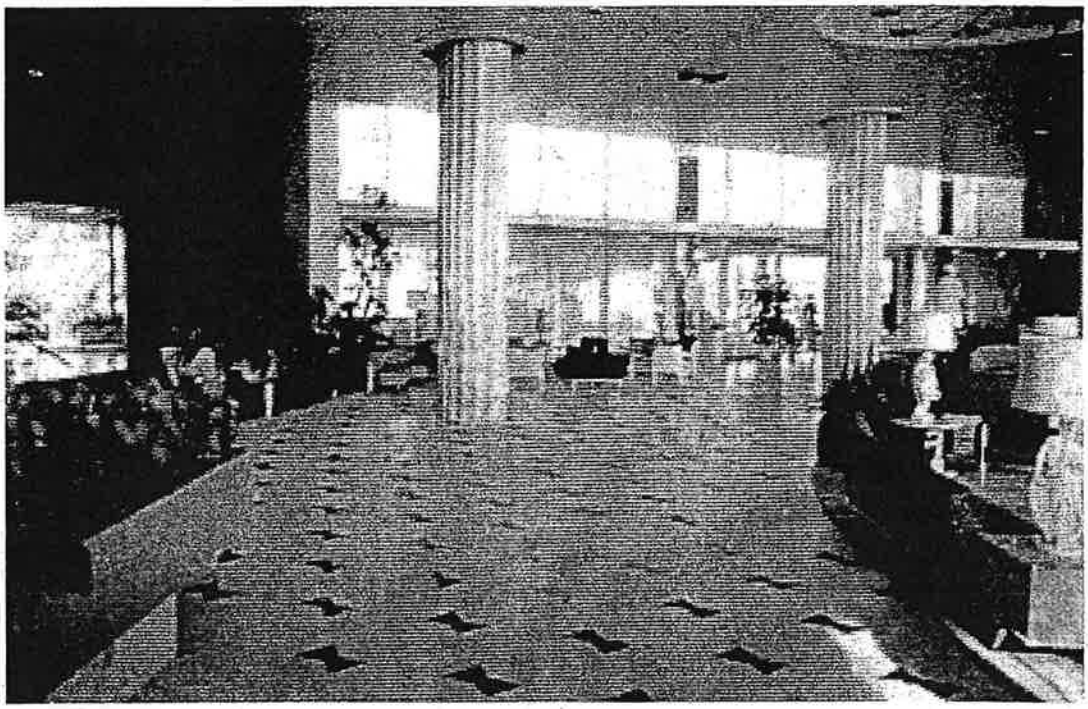
Bedroom (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Library of Congress, Gottscho-Schleisner Collection



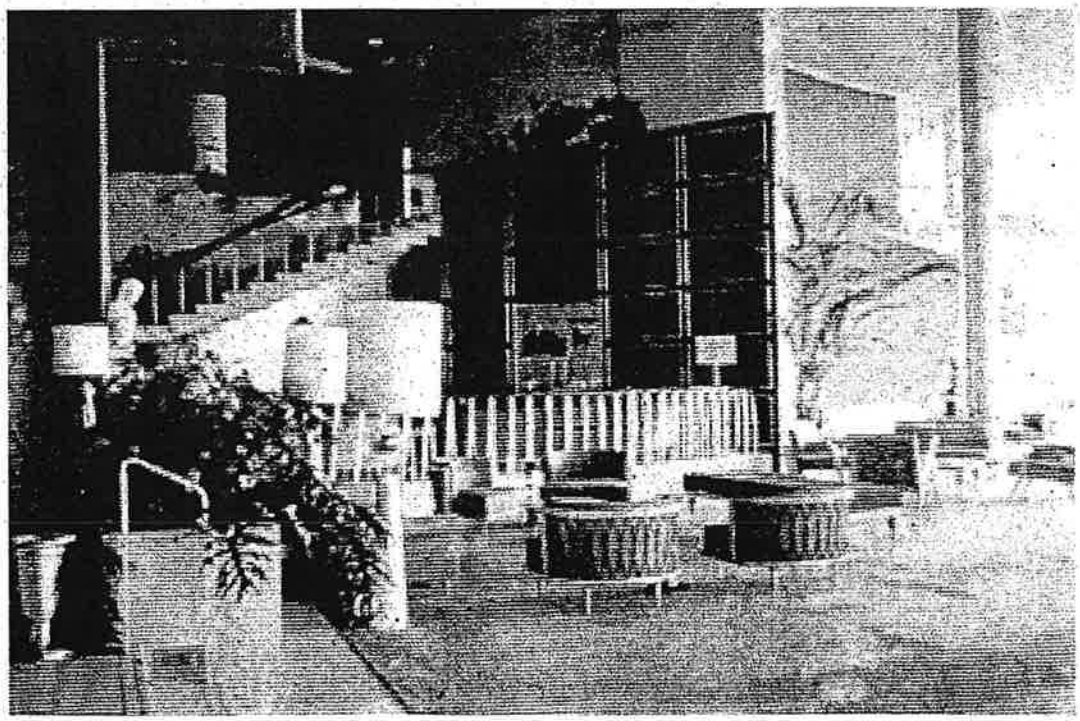
Perspective View of the Fontainebleau Hotel
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins



Porte-Cochere
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

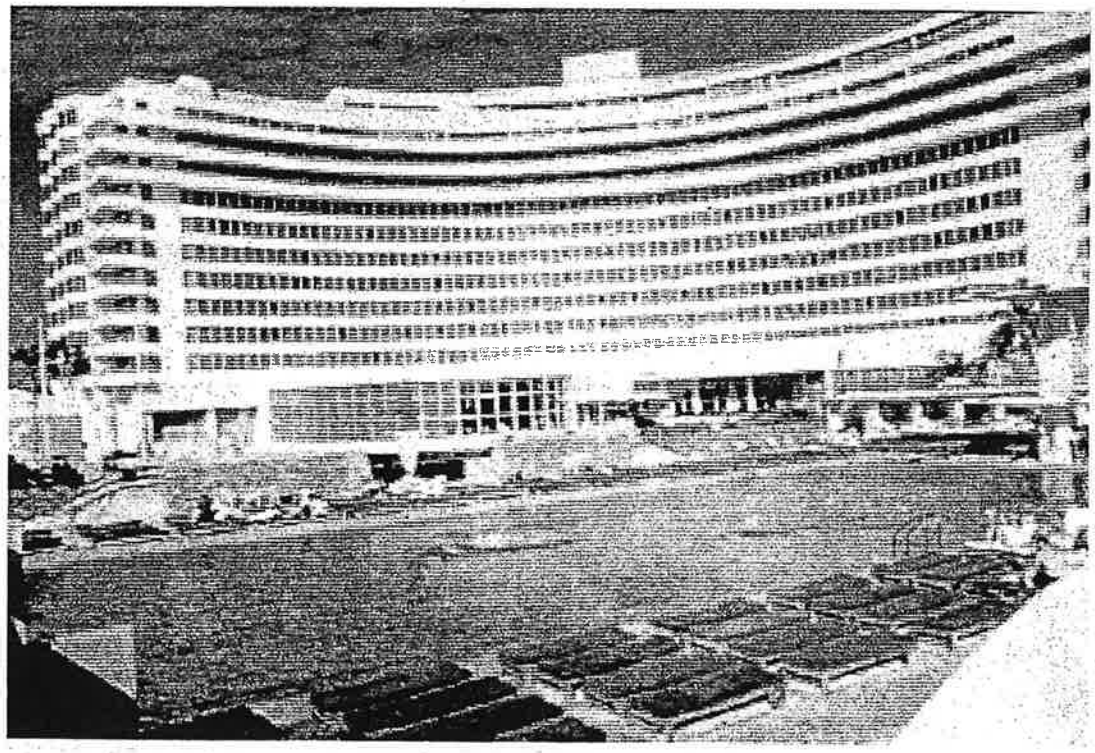


Lobby
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

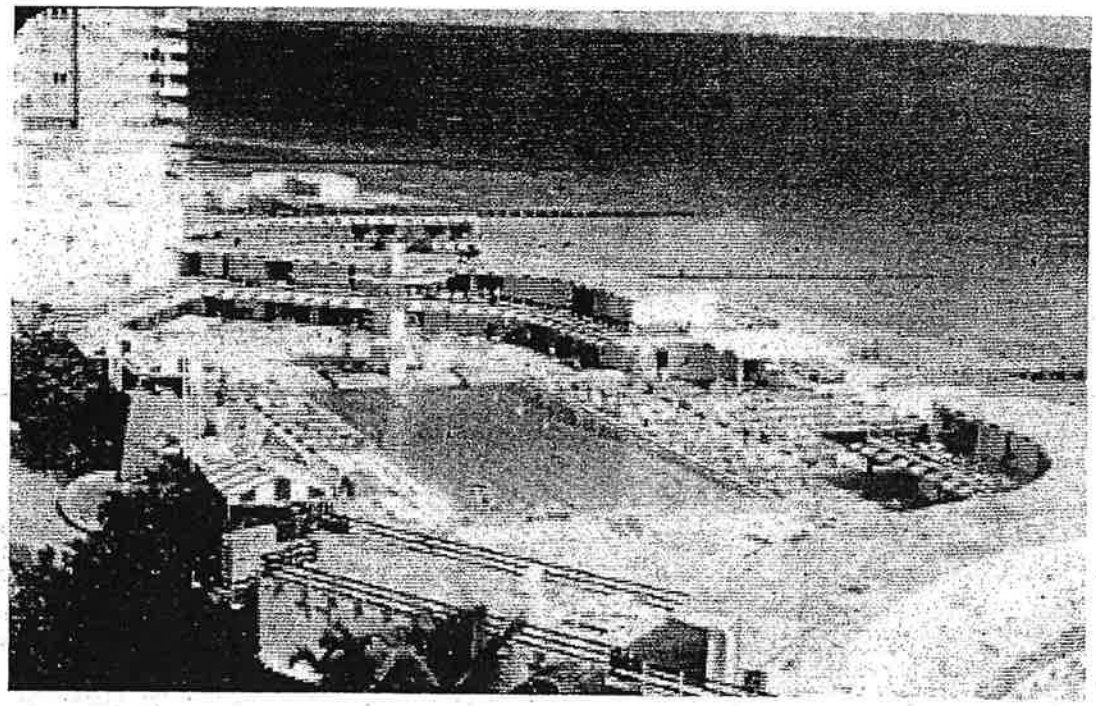


Lobby Stair
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

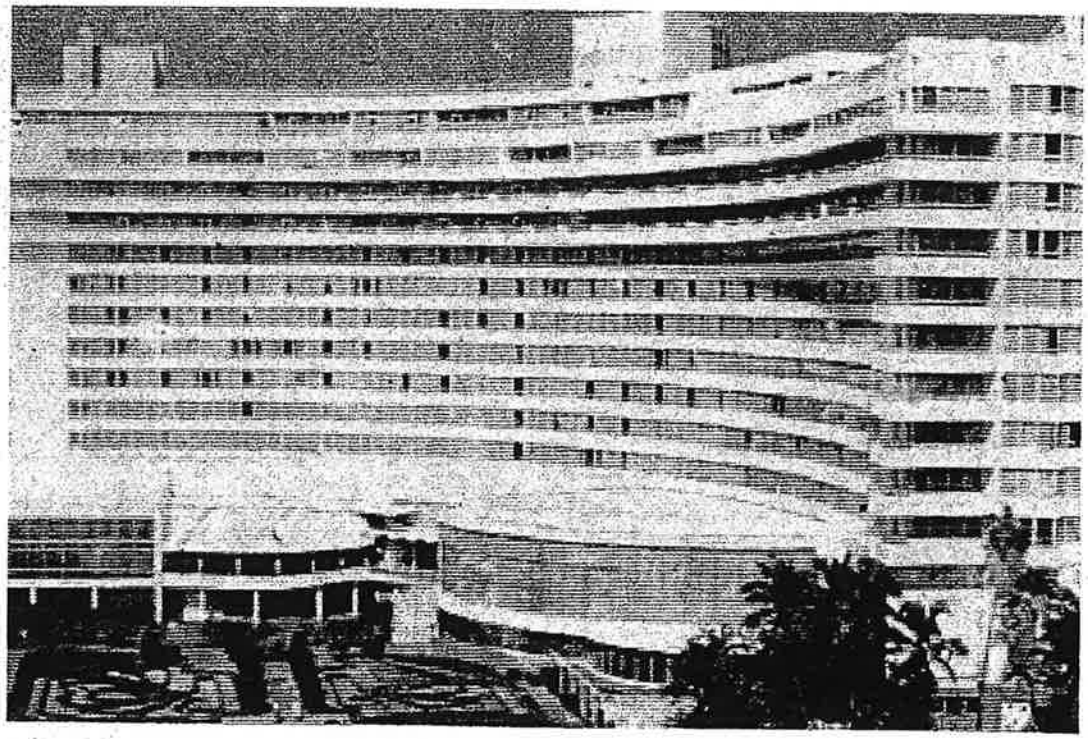
Fontainebleau Pool Deck and Cabanas
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins



Fontainebleau Pool Deck
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

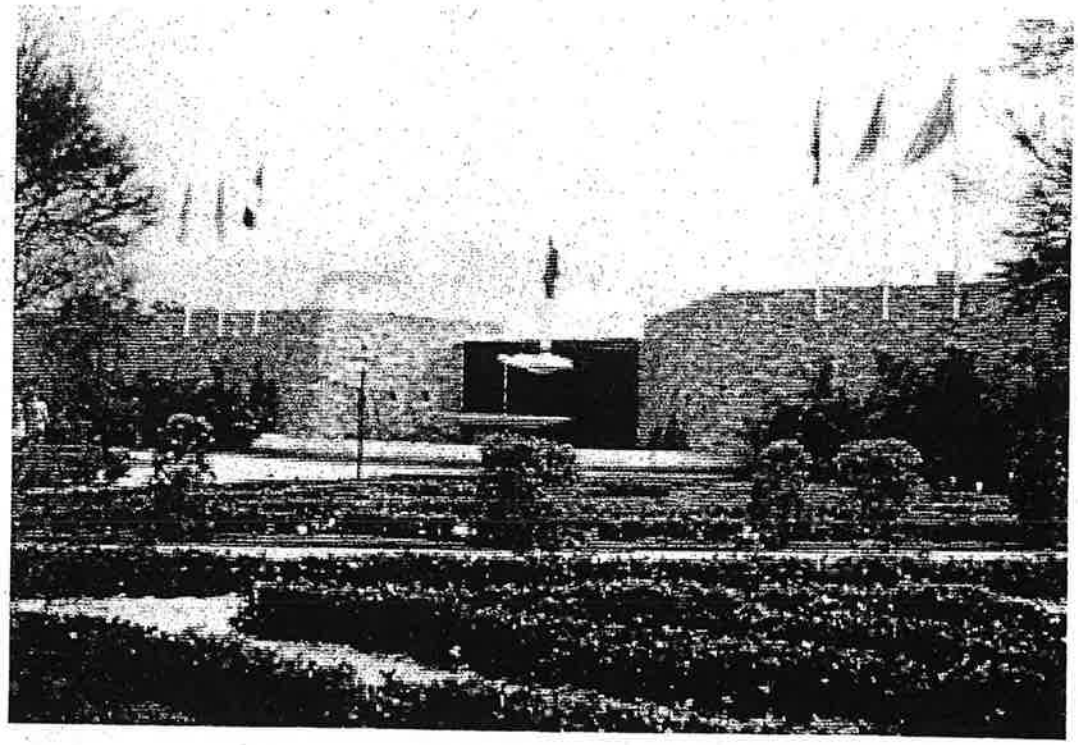


Fontainebleau Pool Deck and Cabanas
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins



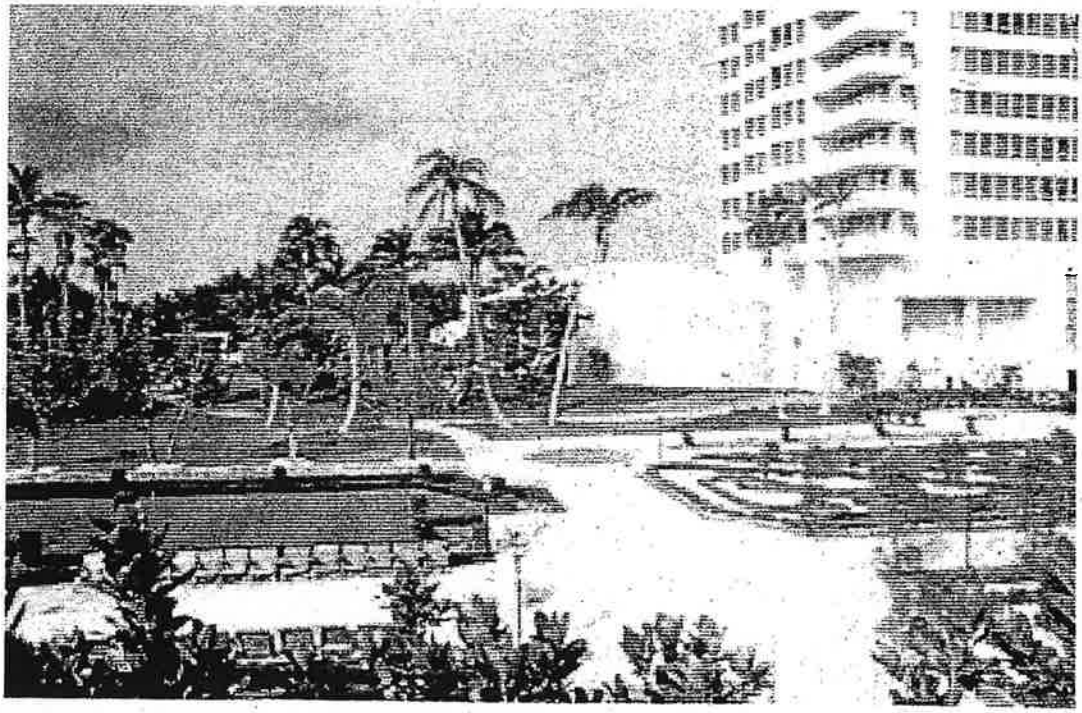
Perspective View of the Fontainebleau Hotel
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

Perspective view from the Garden
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

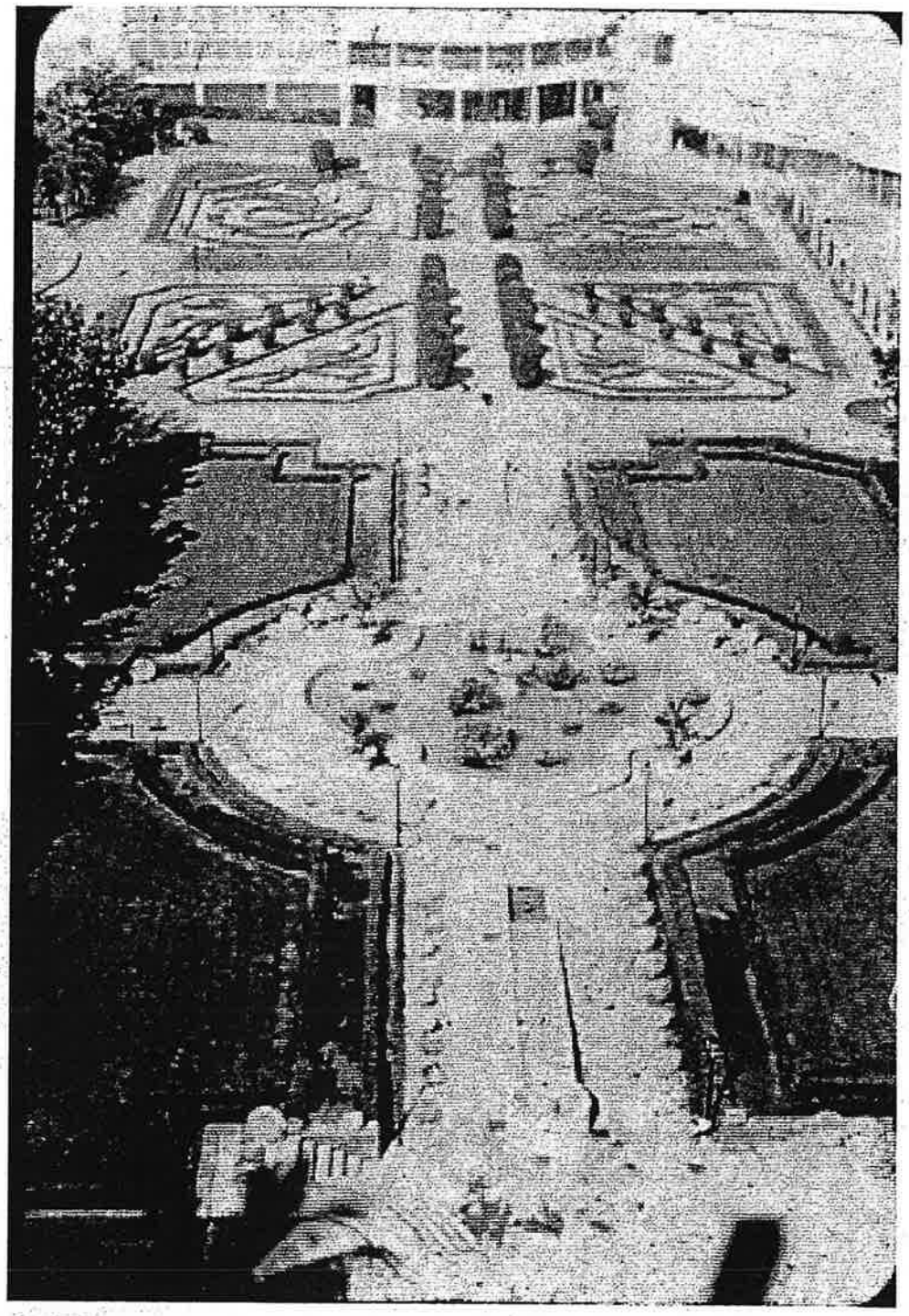


Normandy Figure, Fountain near Formal Gardens
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins

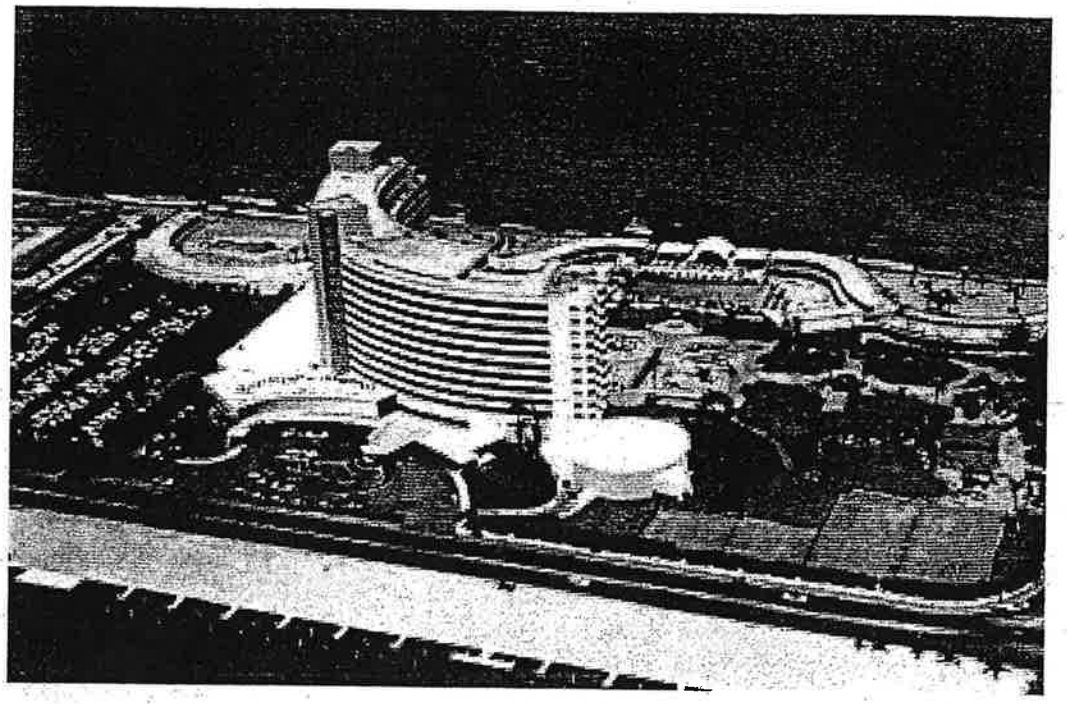
Formal Gardens
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins



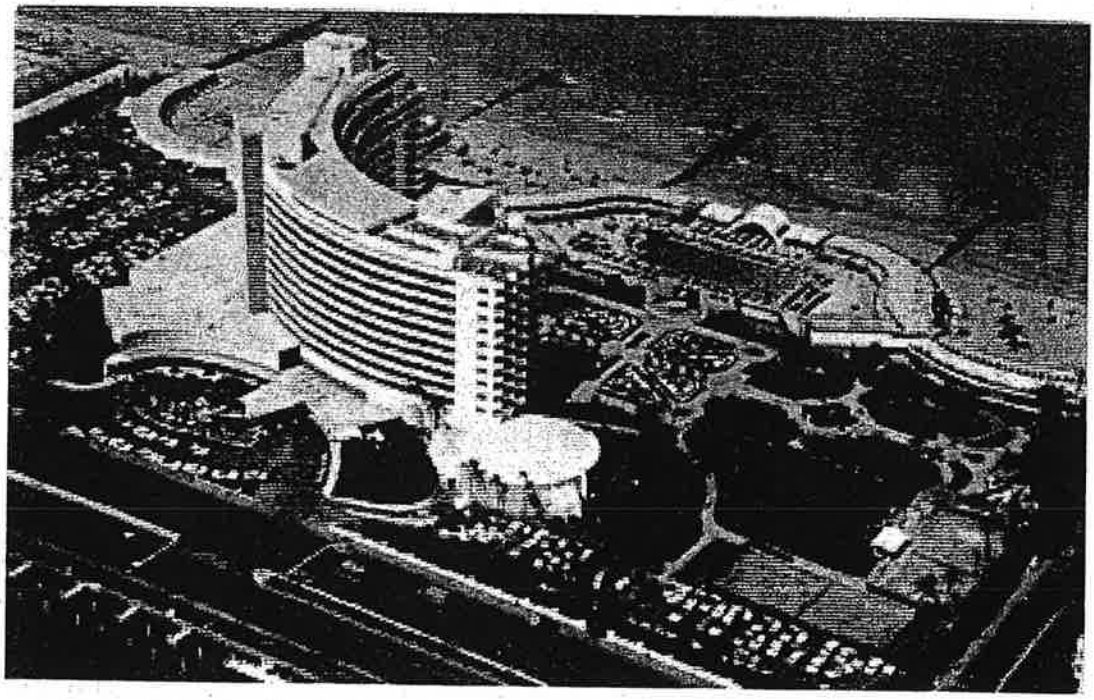
Nightclub as seen from the Garden
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins



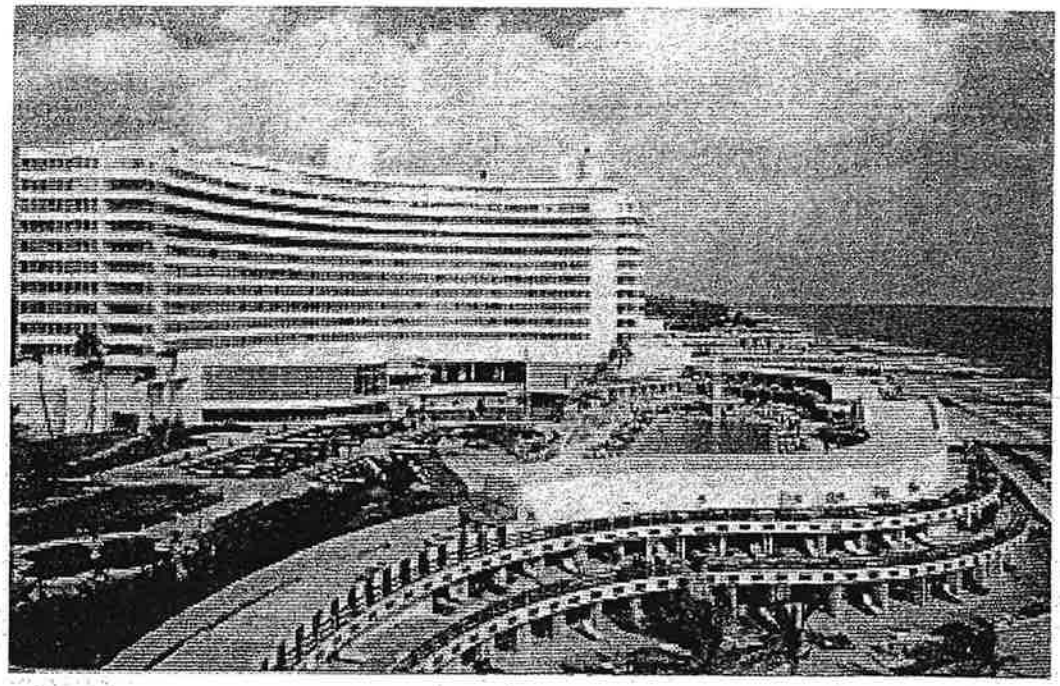
Aerial View of Gardens
Slide image courtesy of L. Wiggins



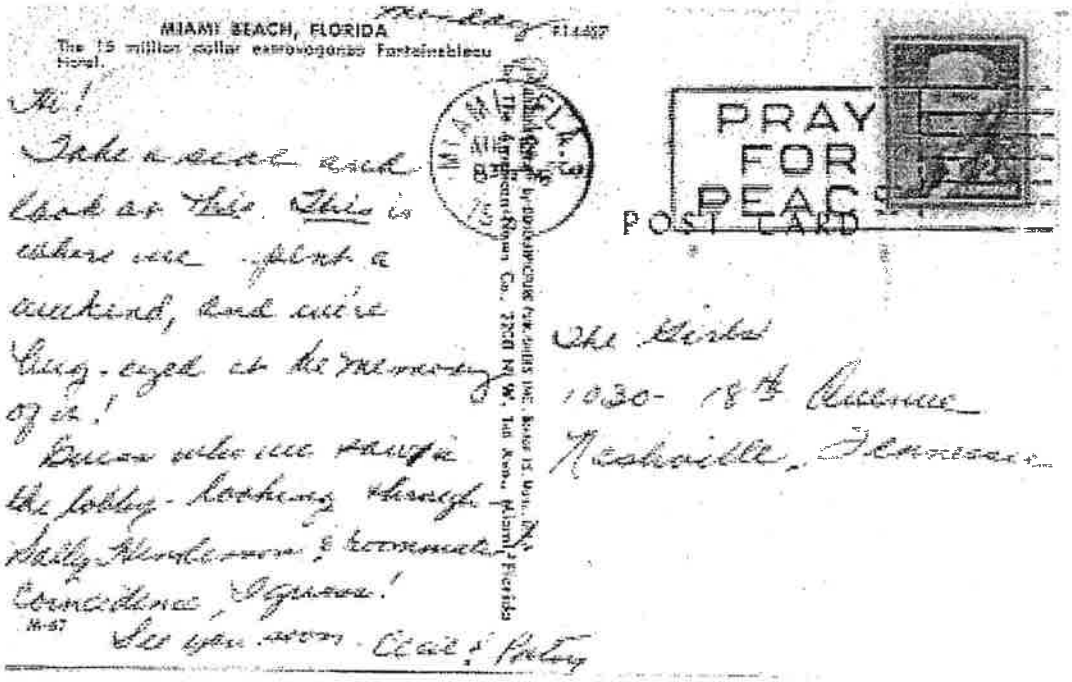
Postcard: America's Largest and Finest Resort-Hotel
Published by Curteichcolor (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



Postcard: Air View of the Magnificent Fontainebleau
Published by Palm Color Card Co., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



Postcard: Fountainebleau Hotel (postmarked 1956)
Published by Colourpicture Publishers, INC
Image Courtesy of ATS



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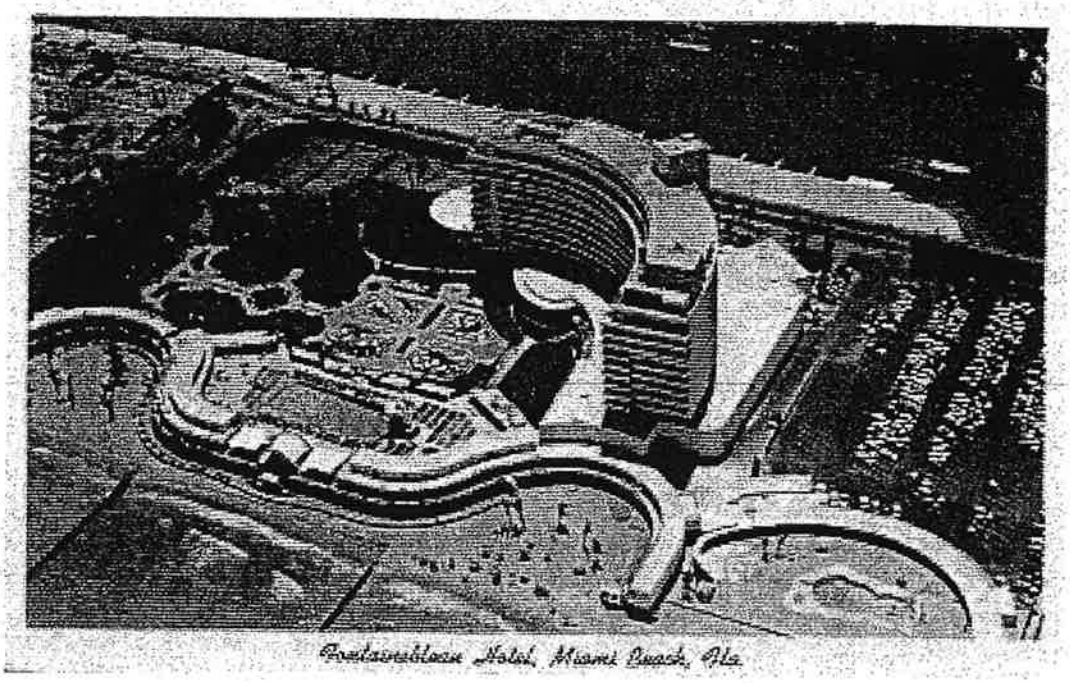
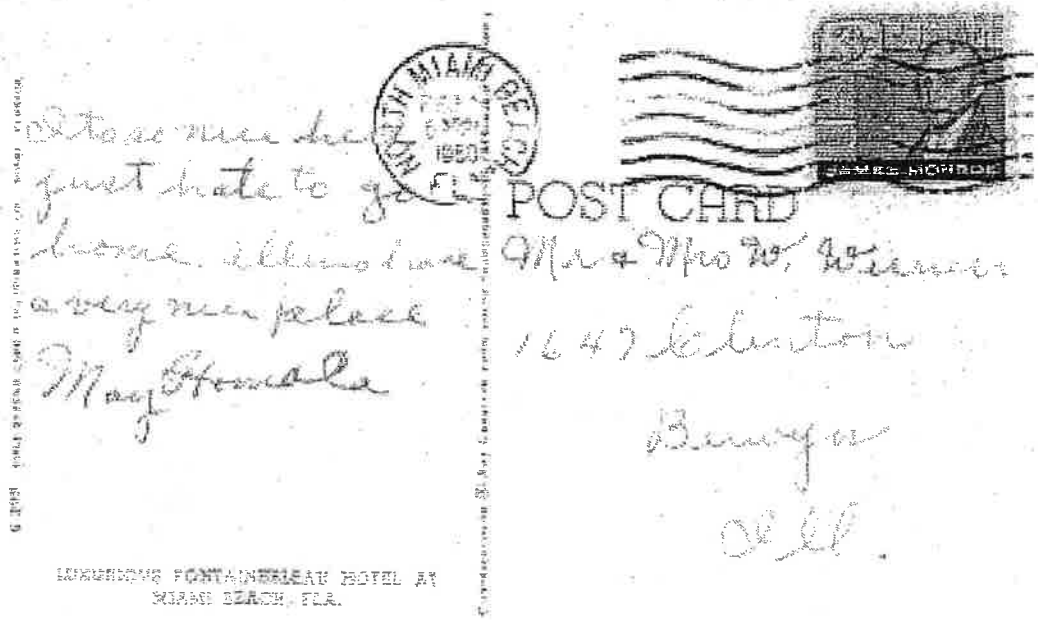


Postcard: Luxurious Fountainebleau Hotel (postmarked 1960)
Published by Curteichcolor
Image Courtesy of ATS



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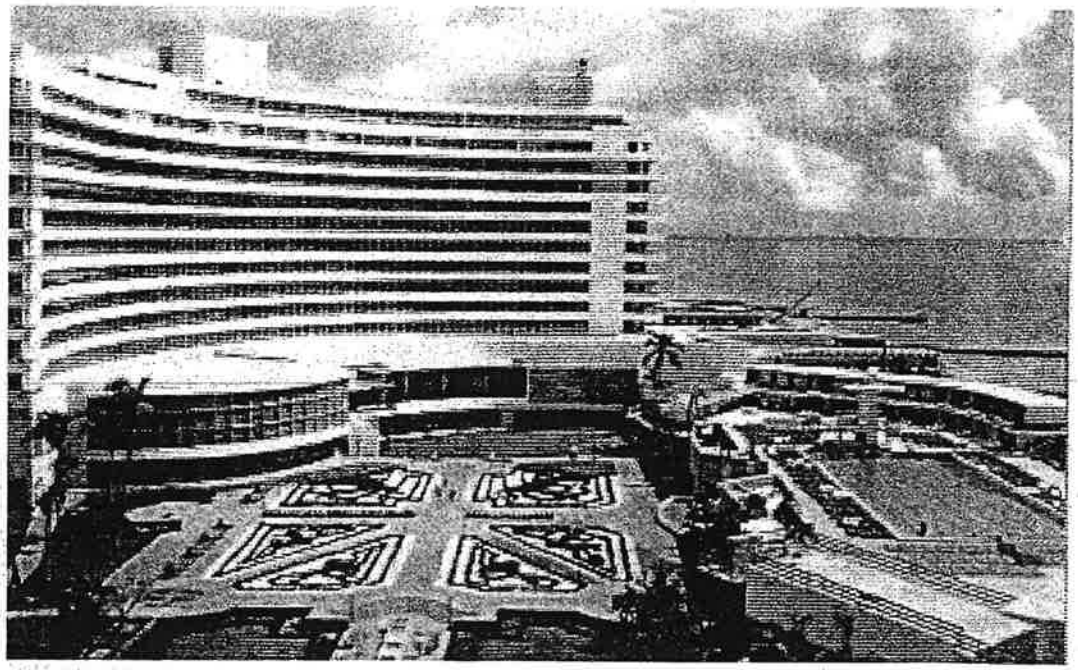
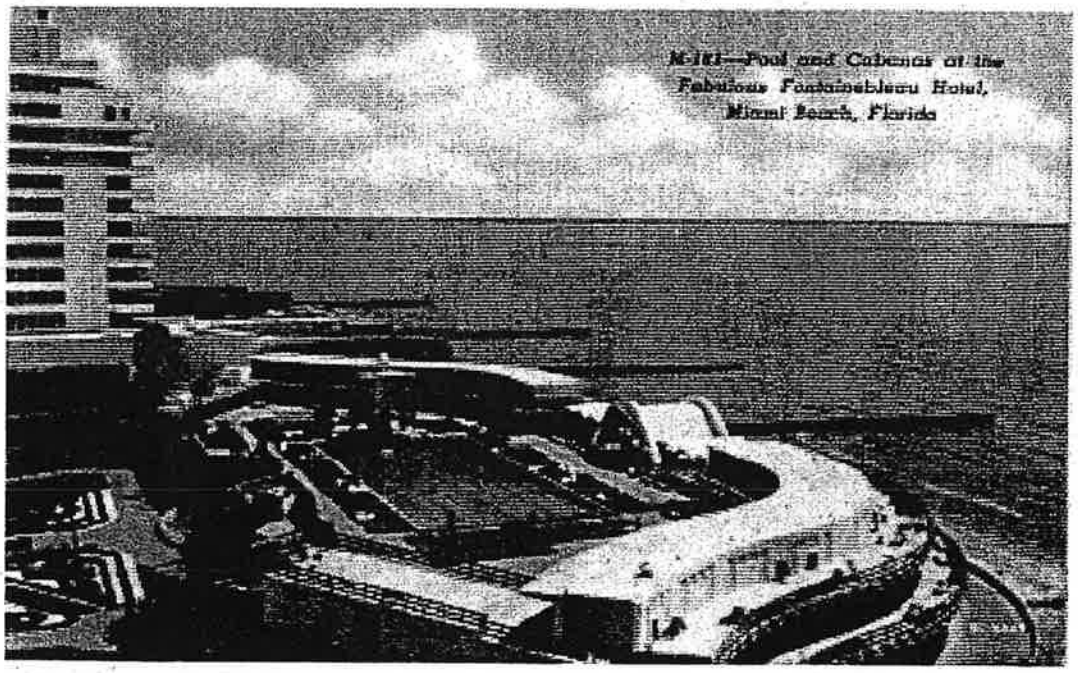
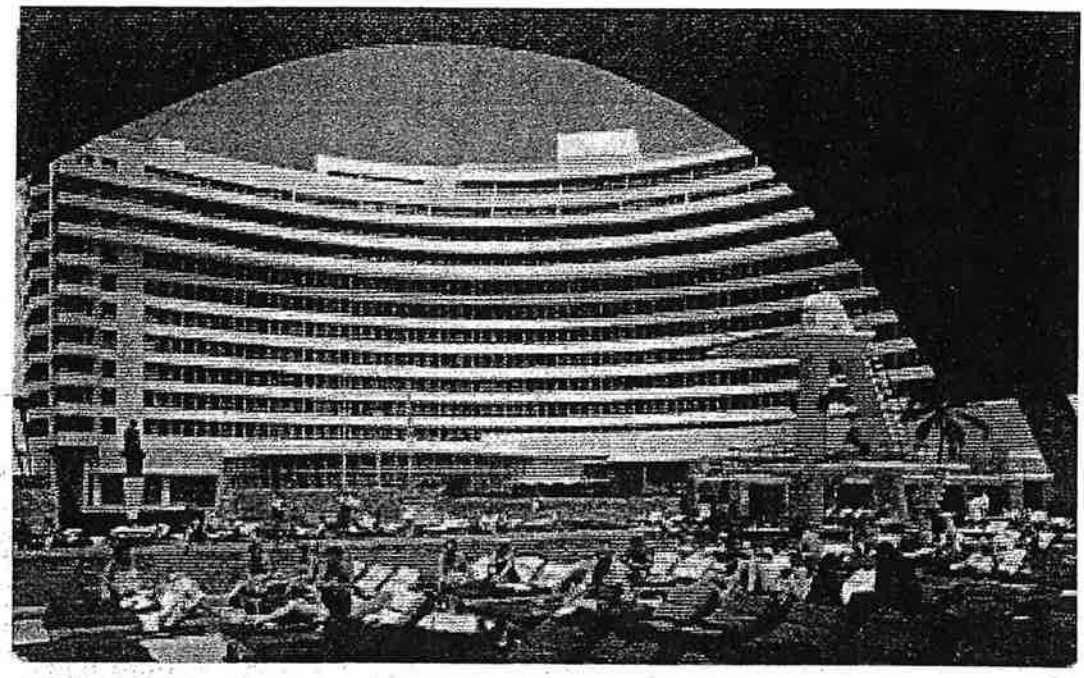


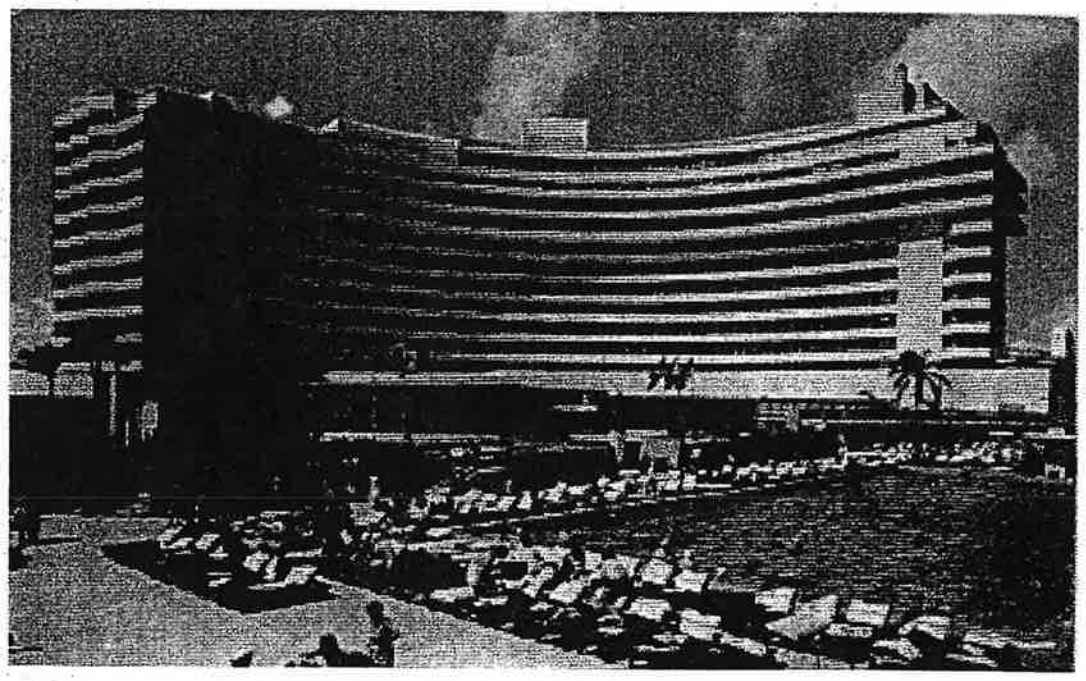
Postcard: Magnificent Fontainebleau Hotel
Published by Gulf Stream Card & Distributing Co. (1955)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



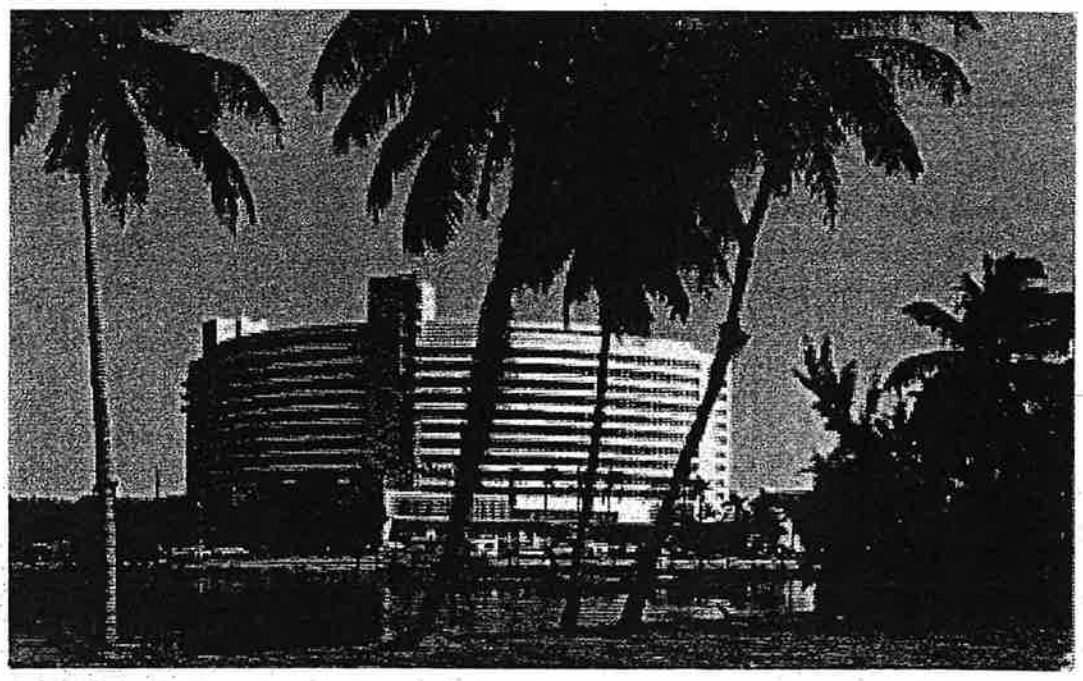
Postcard: Pool and Cabanas at the Fabulous Fountainebleau Hotel
Published by Genuine Curteichcolor-Chicago
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



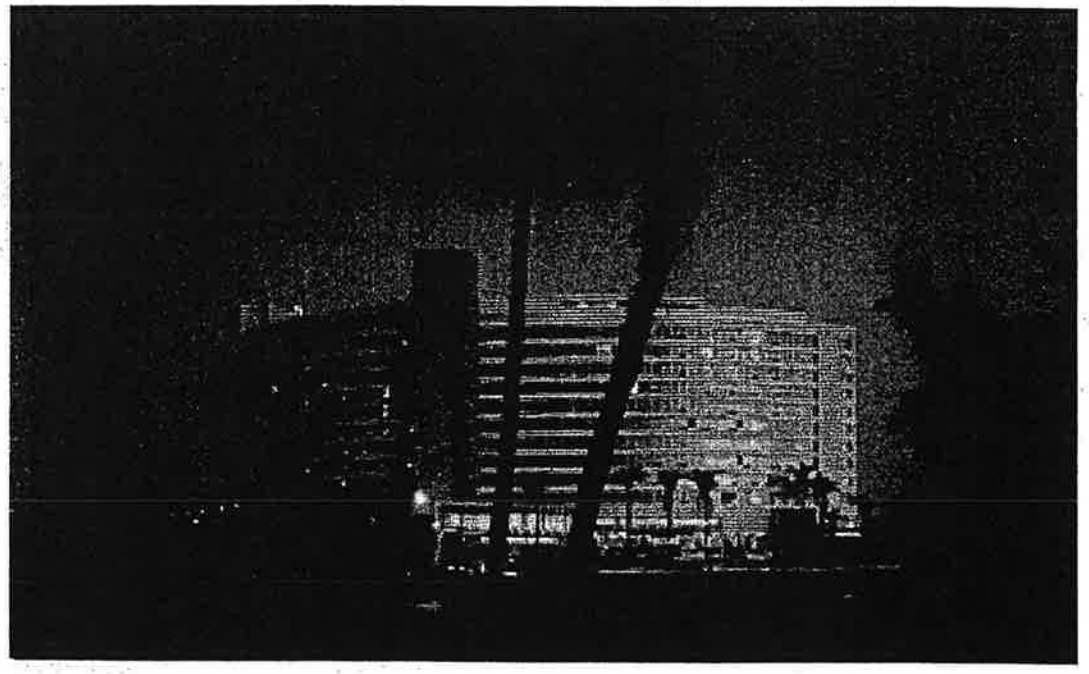
Postcard: Pool and Cabanas of the Fabulous Fontainebleau Hotel
Published by Natural Color Publishers
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



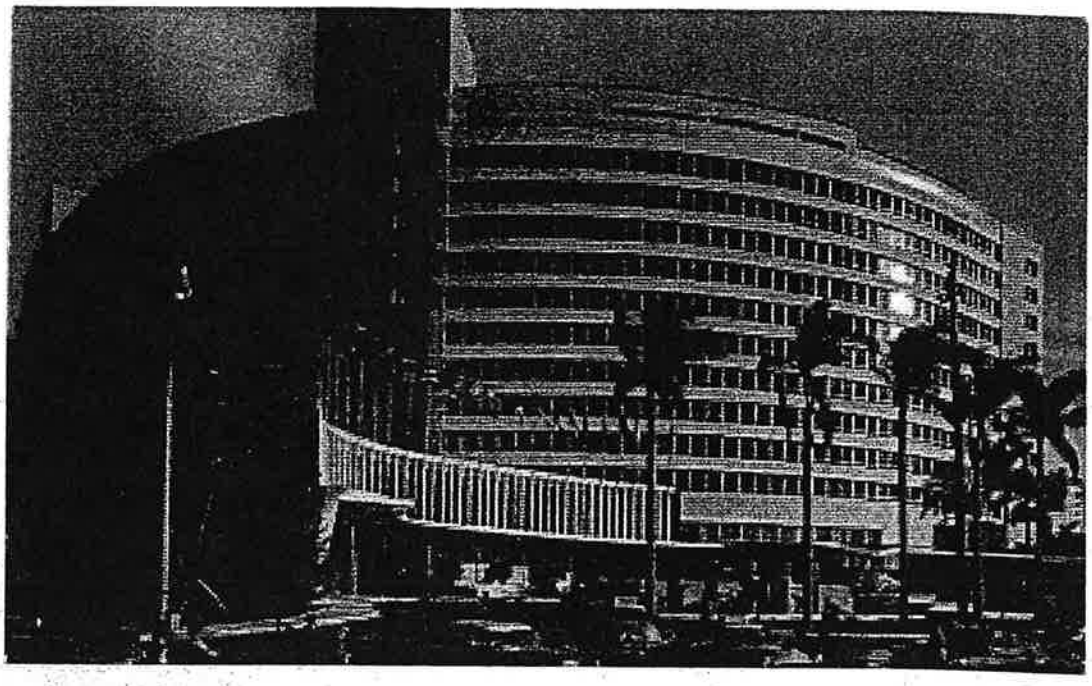
Postcard: The Largest Luxury Hotel in the World
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



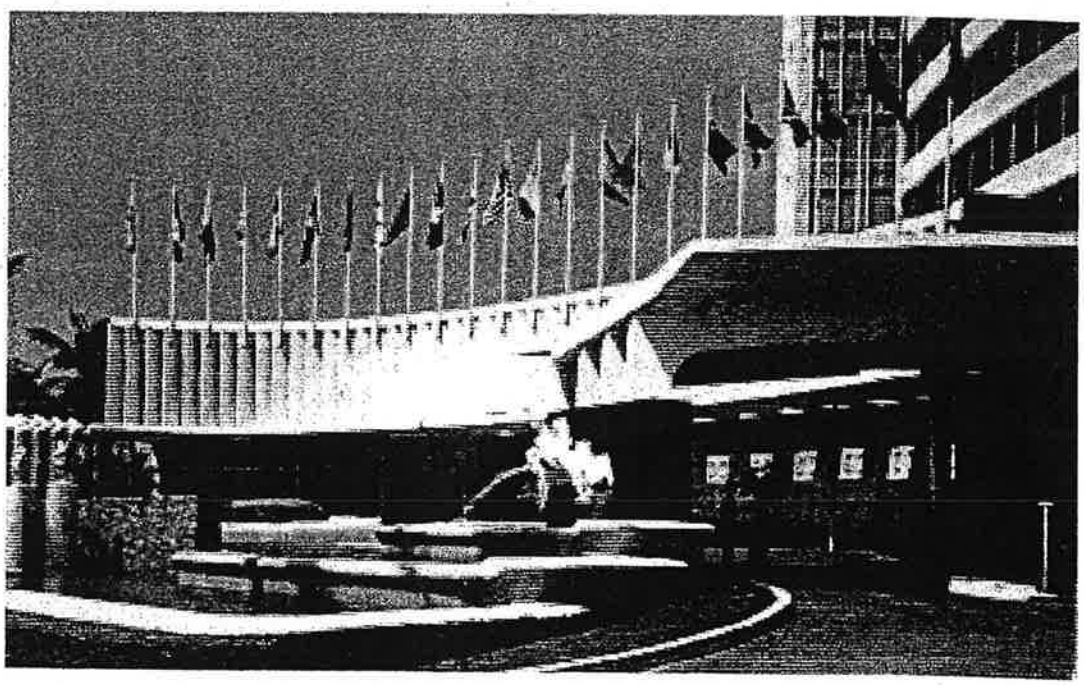
Postcard: Fabulous Fontainebleau Hotel
Published by Genuine Curteichcolor-Chicago
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



Postcard: The Fabulous new Fontainebleau Hotel
Published by Florida Natural Color, Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



Postcard: Fontainebleau Postcard
Published by Valence Color Studios
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



Postcard: America's Largest and Finest Resort-Hotel
Published by Curteichcolor
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

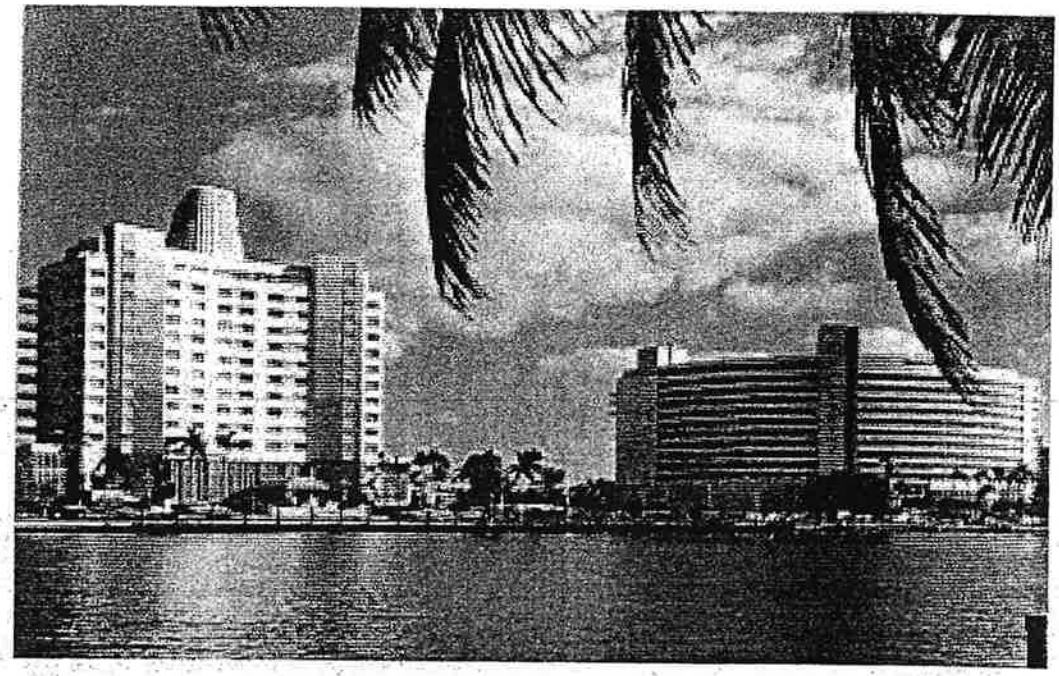
Postcard: Fontainebleau Postcard
Published by Tichnor Bros., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

Expansion Northward: Fontainebleau vs. Eden Roc (1958-1961)

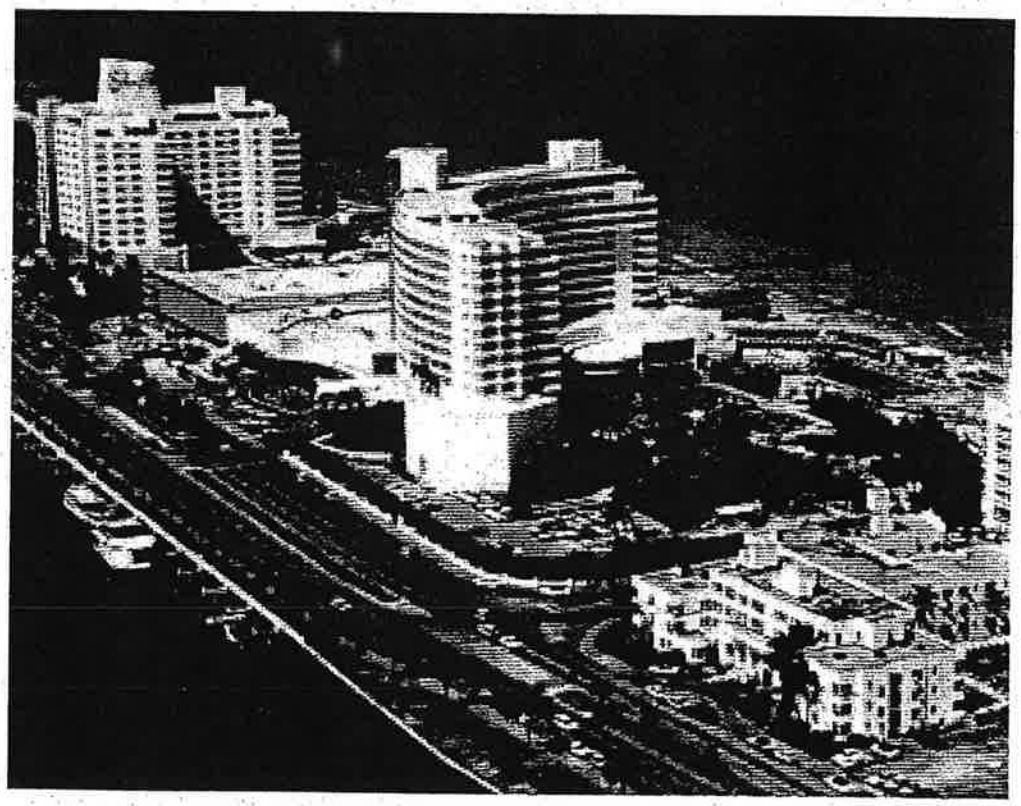
Novack's Fontainebleau was an original new landmark, but it was also the model for a new generation of luxury resort hotels. The repeatability of the model became apparent almost immediately, and directly next door, when "Lapidus was hired by Harry Mufson, Novack's ex-partner, to create a hotel of equal glamour, if somewhat smaller, immediately to the north. Mufson wanted glitz to out-glitz the Fontainebleau. … and stylistic flourish was again part of the formula. According to Lapidus, the Italian Renaissance and Baroque were discussed, at which point Mufson said: "I don't care if it's Baroque or Brooklyn, just get me plenty of glamour and make sure it screams luxury."[1] Of course, Lapidus' acceptance of this commission ensured that Novack would never speak to him again.

Ben Novack later found a way to exact a type of revenge. In 1959, he nearly doubled the hotel, adding a major new ballroom, parking garage, and most famously, the 335 room Fontainebleau Towers, on the North side of the existing structures. Facing Collins Avenue, an apparent loggia architecturally rendered in concrete vaults and recessed walls punched with circular 'cheese-hole' windows fronted the massive ballroom and connected the new Fontainebleau Towers to the original lobby. Designed by architect A. Herbert Mathes, it created a new landmark façade often mistaken for the work of Lapidus. More importantly, the new tower was the object and subject of a massive controversy, as it seemed clearly engineered to cast shade on bathers at the Eden Roc. It was, as Don Bedwell has noted, "The world's biggest spite fence." [2]

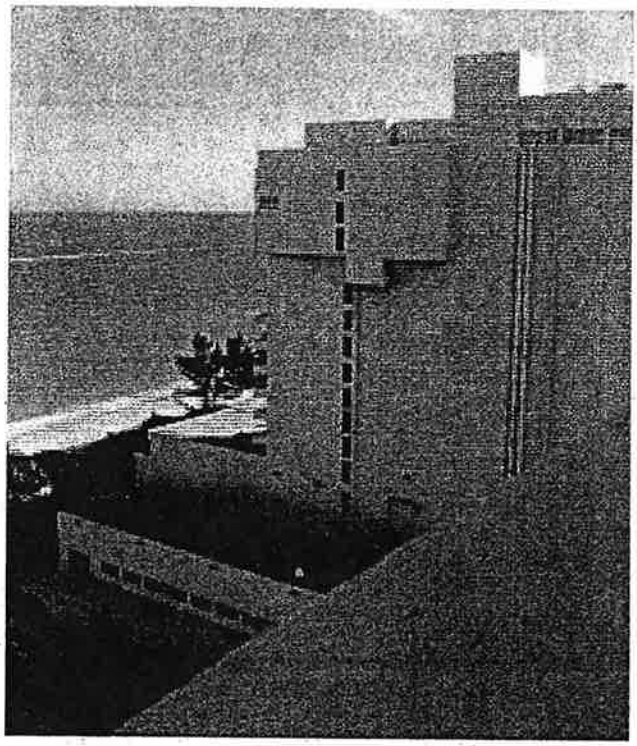
When plans for the tower addition were made public, the owners of the neighboring Eden Roc protested to city authorities that the looming fourteen stories would shield their pool deck from the afternoon sun, taking away the one of the resort's most valuable commodities. The city council, to prevent such 'obstructive' construction in the future, passed an ordinance for new buildings requiring a series of setbacks for each floor built over a specified height. Litigation in circuit and appeals courts resulted. For residents here, the legal fight that held up construction of the largest of the projects, the new wing for the Fontainebleau, was an engrossing one.[3] Finally the Florida Supreme Court ruled that the city of Miami Beach may not legislate sunshine and shadow on oceanfront property.[4]



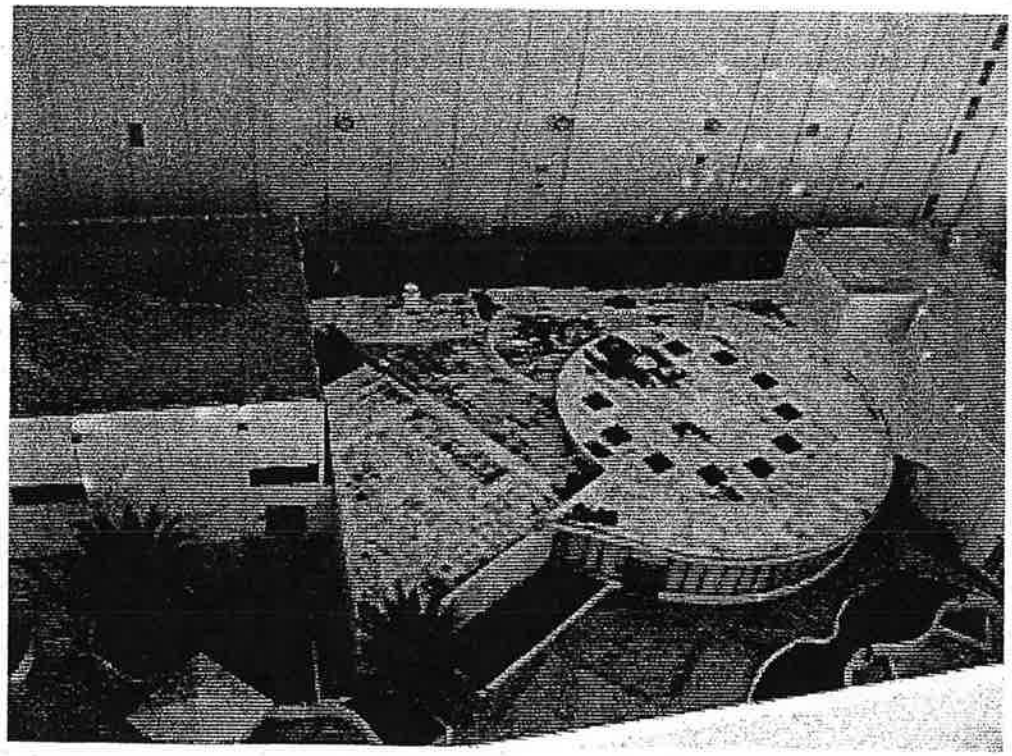
The Eden Rock & the Fontainebleau (pre-1959)
Published by The American News Co.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



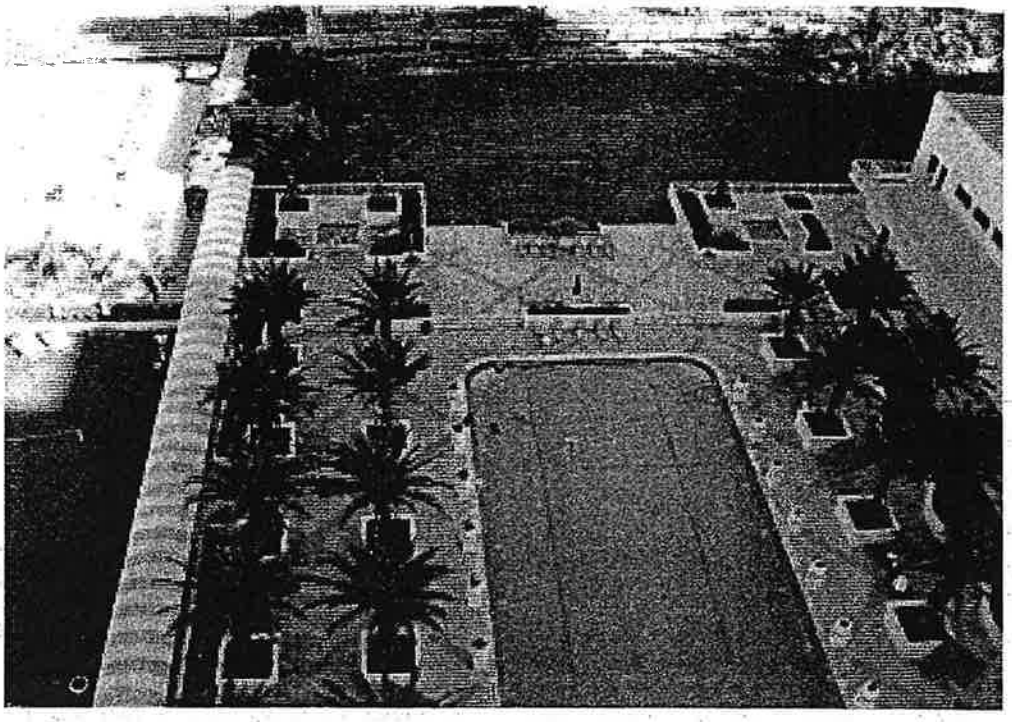
Aerial Photograph looking Northeast, showing La Ronde and ballroom additions, before North Tower, and Eden Roc Beyond (1958)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection



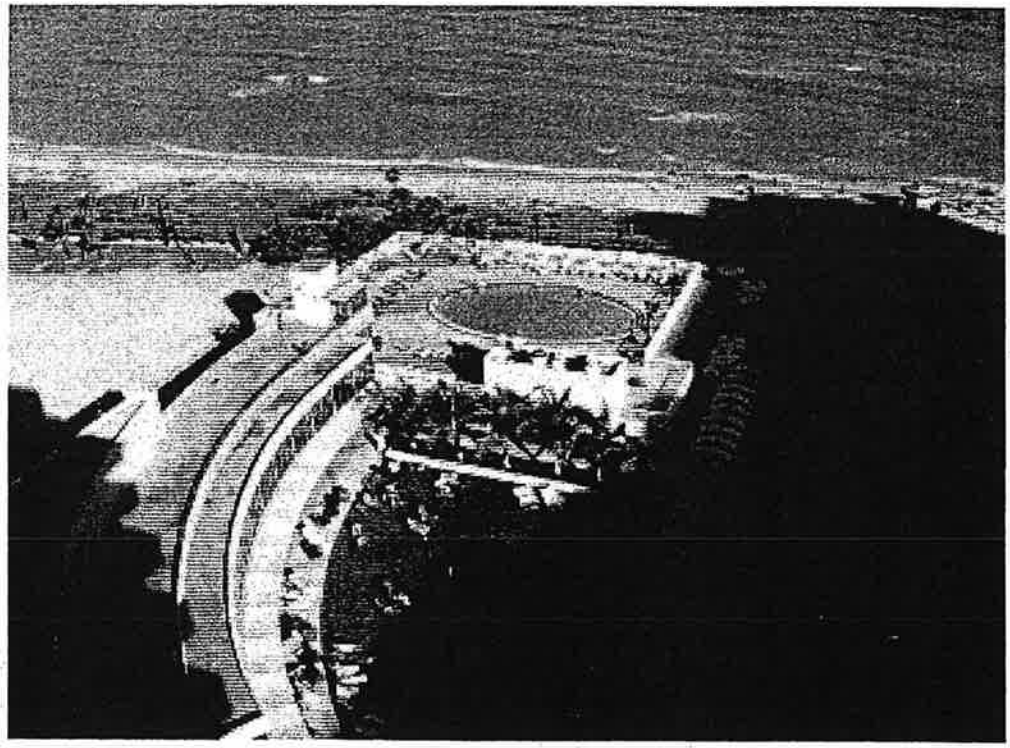
View of Fontainebleau North Wall
ATS 2005



Aerial View of Eden Roc Topiary Room showing shadow cast by Spite Wall
ATS 2005



Aerial View of Eden Roc Southern Cabanas and Pool
ATS 2005



Aerial View of Oceanfront Pool and Cabanas
ATS 2005

To make way for the new ballroom and tower addition, approximately 16 cabanas on north side of property were demolished in July 1958. The massive additions, were subsequently permitted on July 31, 1958. The ballroom and convention facilities comprised 73,500 square feet (210' front, 416' depth, 47' height) in one and two stories, depending upon the section of the plan. It provided one floor and a mezzanine of public space and two parking levels for 273 cars. The baroque interiors of the Ballroom and Grand Gallery were reportedly designed by Gerald Ward, current president of the NSID Florida chapter.[5] The tower atop these facilities was permitted as a 14 story CBS building with 339 hotel rooms and 18 apartments. Its footprint alone was 20,500 square feet and it required a variance (granted on July 23, 1959) to extend three building wall projections six feet into the north 20 foot side yard setback along the north wall. Activities at the expanded hotel, given its new large function rooms, required expanded parking capacity. On May 9, 1960 the Zoning Board granted a variance for a three-level parking garage on the southwest portion of property to extend within five feet of both Collins Avenue and 44th Street. Other hotel amenities followed, including a bowling alley on first floor level of existing cabanas (October 1961) and an ice skating rink (March 1962). An addition to the La Ronde Supper Club on the southwest corner of the circular theater was permitted around the same time, in October 1958, to provide added stage and backstage space for more ambitious performances. The cumulative effect of these additions was to ensure the Fontainebleau's virtual monopoly as the city's premier convention hotel while providing an ever increasing menu of amenities for its resort and business clientele.

Expansion Southward

A decade later, Novack further expanded the Fontainebleau by purchasing the Sorrento Hotel, its neighbor to the south. As part of the Sorrento's subsequent facelift and integration into the Fontainebleau property, a variance was granted (May 12, 1969) for an addition to the northeast portion of the Sorrento, extending to the southeast portion of the Fontainebleau property, now under one ownership, to a setback of 90 feet from the harbor line. The condition attached was that construction had to commence within six months. The applicant additionally had to provide 208 parking spaces for the 138-unit increase. Presumably to make way for this expansion, the south section of cabanas was permitted to be demolished on August 27, 1968. Judging from historic photographs, a line of temporary cabanas was constructed on the beach, just southeast of the pool deck. On May 11, 1970, the Fontainebleau requested another variance, this time to construct a canopy for restaurant to be known as the "Gaslight Club."

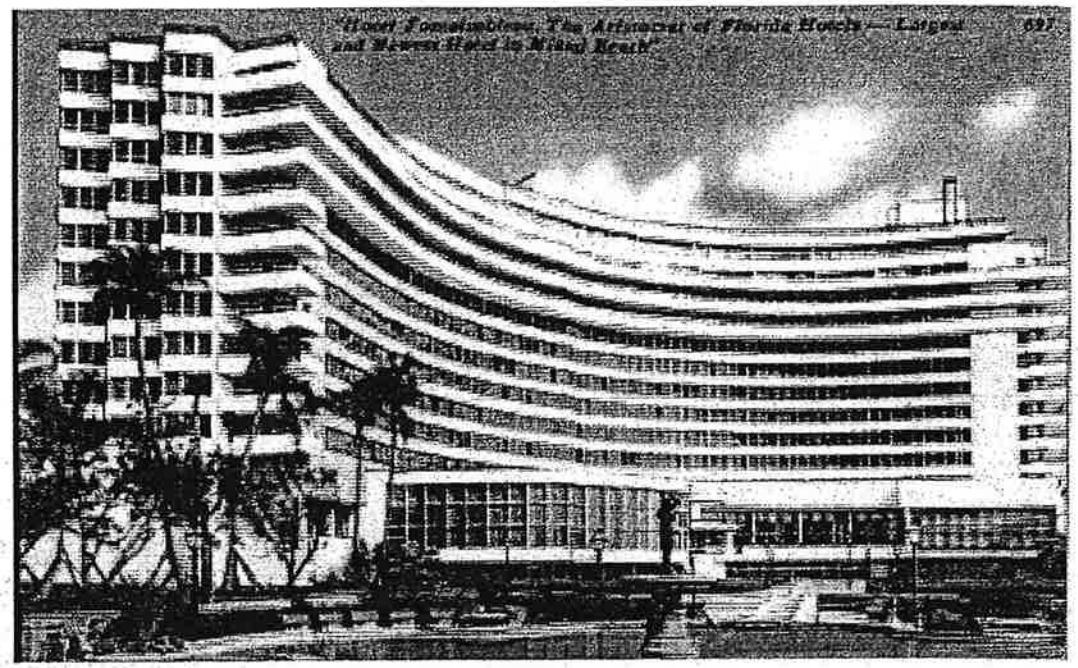
[1] Wolfe, Kevin, "Morris Lapidus," *Metropolis*, December 1995.

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

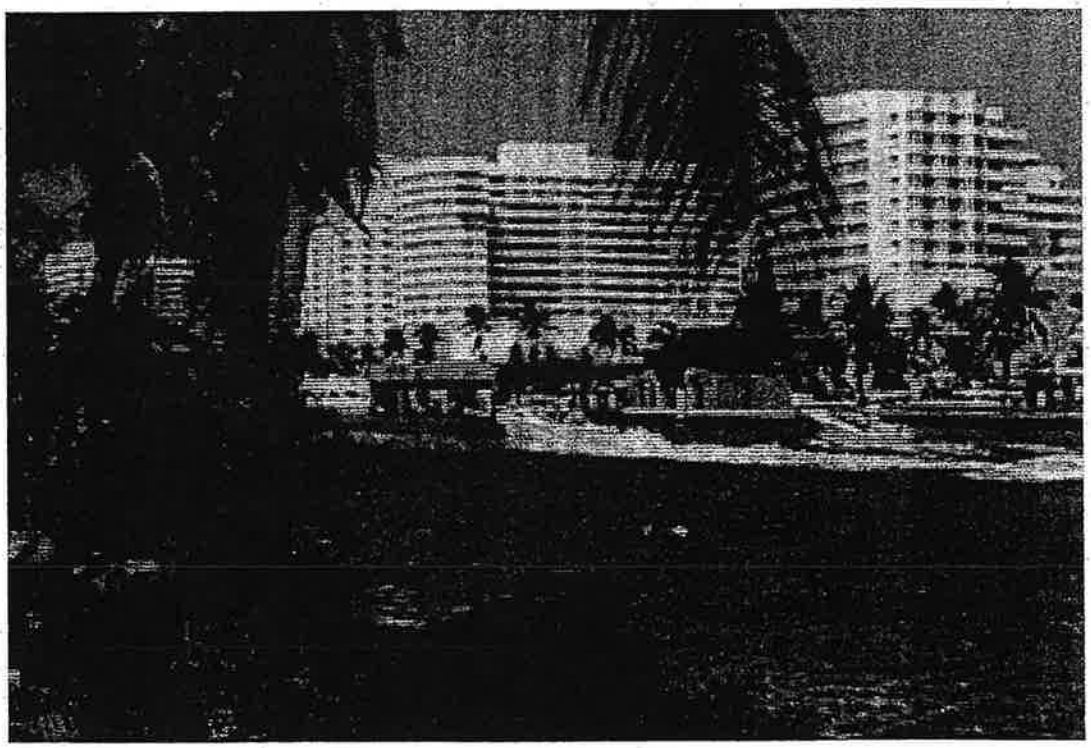
[3] "Return of a Boom," *New York Times*, June 7, 1959.

[4] "Legislating the Sunshine," *New York Times*, May 10, 1959.

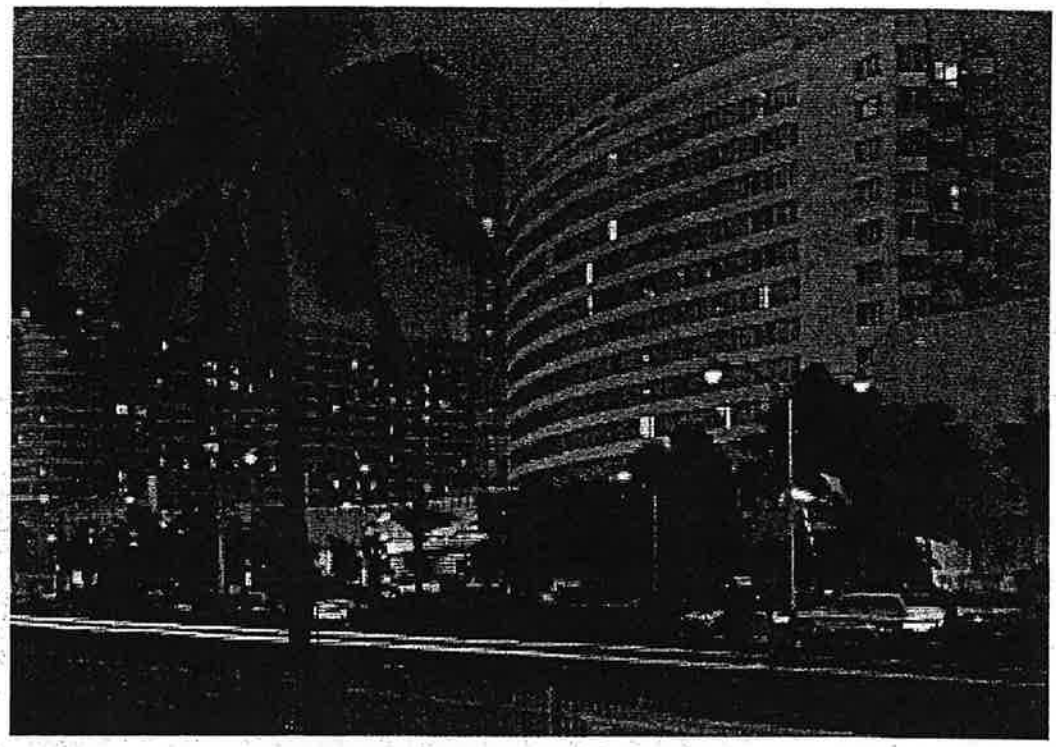
[5] "For the Miami Cadillac Trade," *Interiors*, May 1961, v. 120, pp. 110-113.



Postcard: Fontainebleau Postcard
Published by Tichnor Bros., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

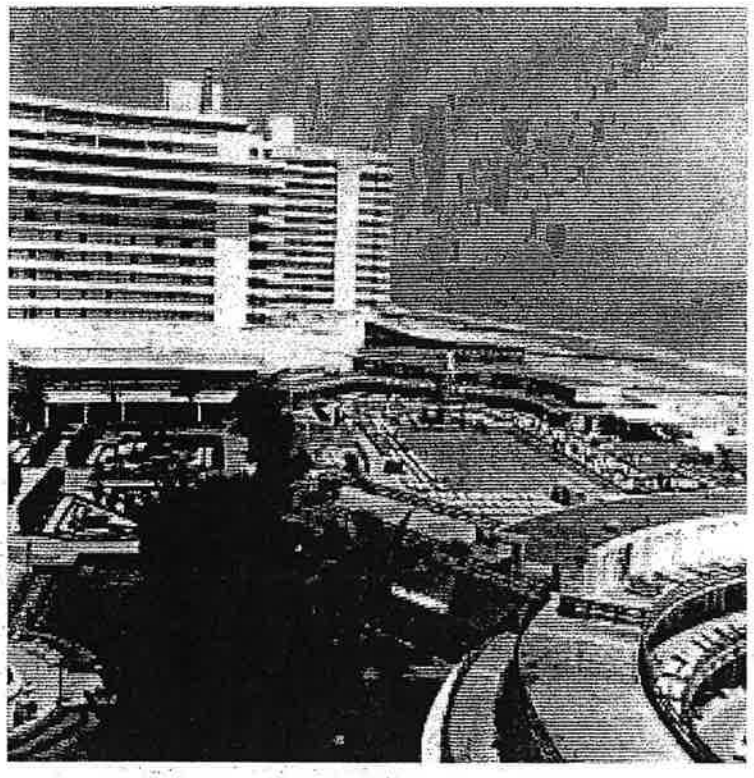


Postcard: View from Indian Creek Waterway
Published by Florida Natural Color Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



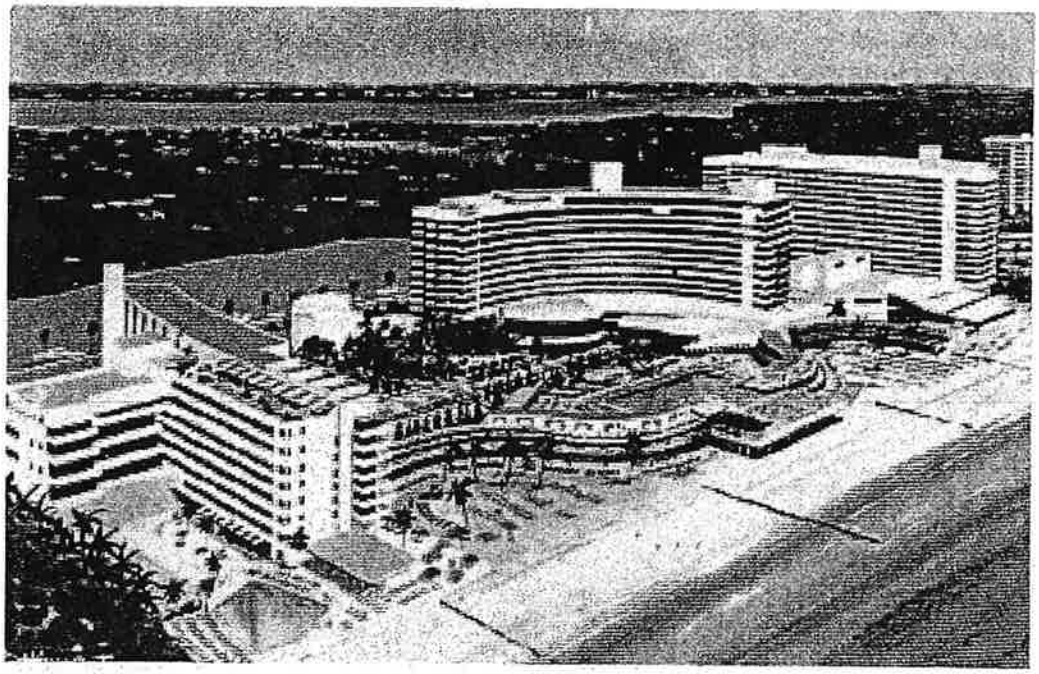
Postcard: Fabulous Hotels line Collins Avenue, Night View
Published by Gulfstream Card Co., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

Postcard: Air View of the Magnificent Fontainebleau
Published by Palm Color Card Co., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

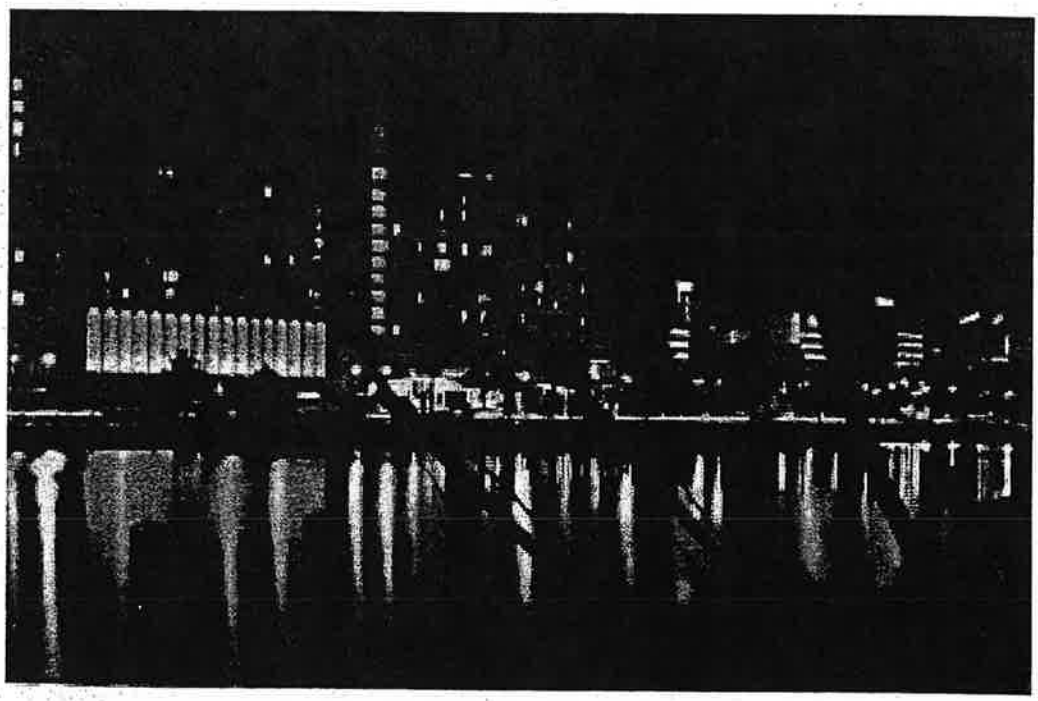


Cabanas, Gardens, & Pool view from South
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection

Aerial Photograph looking Northwest (1968)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection

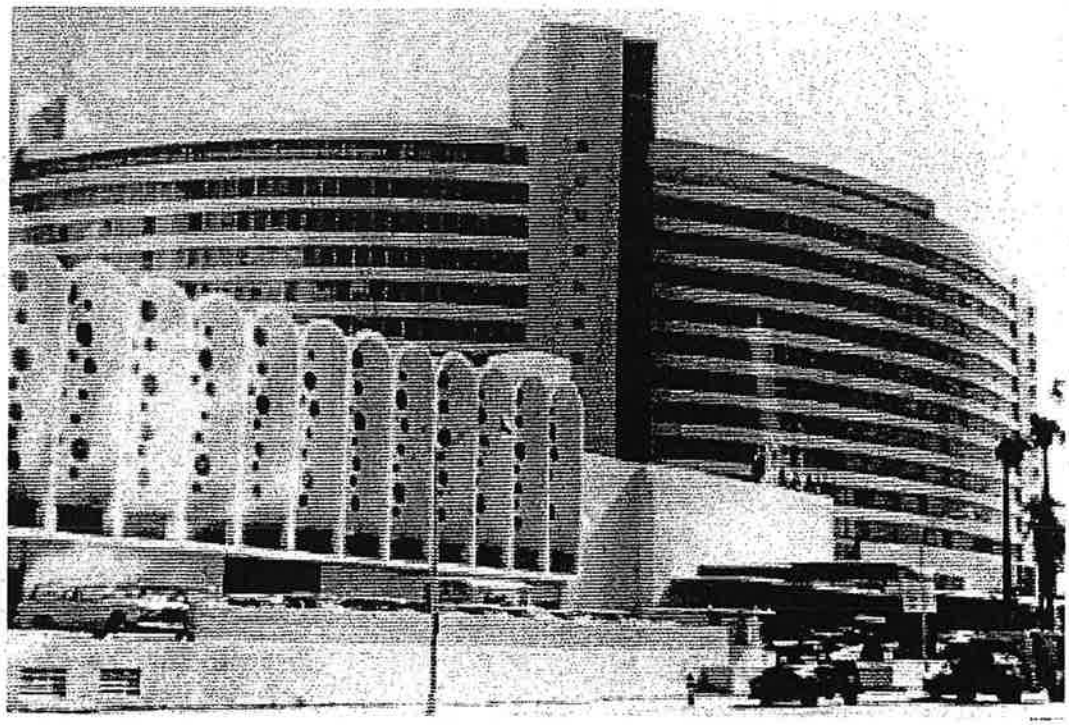


Postcard: Aerial Perspective Rendering including North Tower & Ballroom Addition (1969), Published by Curteichcolor
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

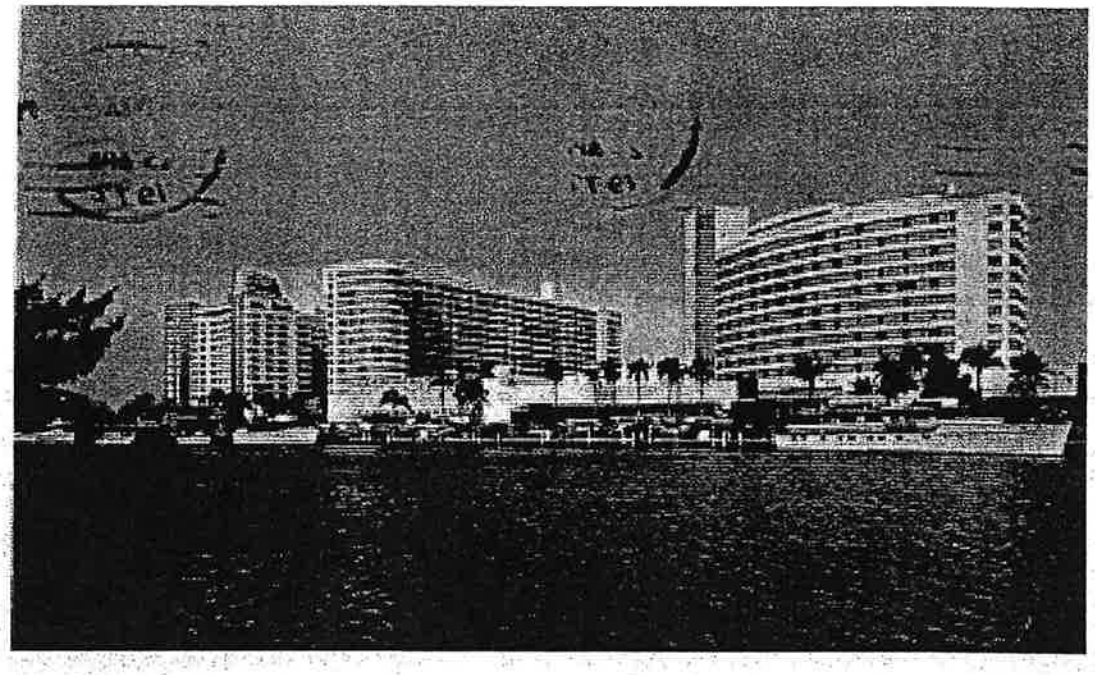


Postcard: Miami Beach Skyline at Night
Published by Curteichcolor
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

Collins Avenue looking North:
View of North Tower & "Cheese Wall" with Eden Roc Beyond
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection



Collins Avenue looking South
View of Chateau & "Cheese Wall"
Image courtesy of Elliot Erwitt, MagnumPhotos



Postcard: Millionaire Yacht at the Fontainebleau Dock (Postmarked 1972)
Published by Dukane Press
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

The Fontainebleau as a Mid-Century Cultural Icon

From its opening day the Fontainebleau attracted a range of leisure-class tourists, from newly wealthy Americans to rich South Americans. It also attracted the attentions of the press, and celebrities. The hotel's register included the biggest names in show business, politics and popular culture, while performers like Frank Sinatra, Joey Bishop, Dean Martin, Red Skelton and Sammy Davis Jr. performed on the stage of the La Ronde Room.[1] Miss Universe was crowned at the Fontainebleau, and in 1972 the Republican and Democratic conventions were both held there. Along with the sparkle of gowned and jeweled guests often came rumors of questionable financial dealings and the involvement with organized crime.

Publicity, good and bad, preceded the completion of the hotel. During construction, a bomb went off and shattered a concrete pillar. Engineers rushed out at 3:00 am to prevent the collapse of the entire structure. Lapidus later recalled: "A year later, the hotel was open and we were sitting having dinner with a man – I won't tell you who or what he was – and I said your boys weren't very smart. You should have bombed a central pillar in the lobby. It would have collapsed the whole building. He said, Mr. Lapidus, our boys know our business very well. We didn't want to collapse the hotel. We just wanted to send a message."[2] One may only guess the nature of the message.

People wanted to be part of this exciting building, and the Fontainebleau was often rumored to be for sale, or sold. The first of these rumors surfaced in 1955, within a year of its completion, when it was reported that Conrad Hilton had offered $18 million.[3] The Hilton would, eventually, manage the hotel, but only after the ousting of Ben Novack, who would operate the Fontainebleau as a private fiefdom. Novack operated the hotel while making his home for over 20 years in the Governor's Suite. It boasted five bedrooms, a billiard room, full kitchen, dining room, gold faucets and marble bathtubs.

Within the complex organization of the hotel's ownership, battles were sometimes raged over control. In November 1957, a palace coup erupted into the public eye when Novack was briefly deposed from the management of the hotel. The *New York Times* reported that the movement against Ben Novack was led by Arnold Kirkeby, wealthy hotel chain owner, who like Novack possessed 40 shares of the hotel (minority partners comprised the remaining 20 shares). While the rival stockholders were ousting Novack in a special meeting, the managing owner's attorneys were in Circuit Court filing a temporary injunction. Novack charged Kirkeby with 'fraud' in the suit, as Kirkeby apparently immediately sold his 40 shares back to the corporation for $4,500,000. [4]

Over time, the frequency of certain guests returning to the fabled destination earned them permanent places at the hotel as well. Their rooms had acquired names, consecrated with brass plaques: the Frank Sinatra Suite, the Bee Gees suite and the Burt Reynolds suite.

Political organizations too knew that the Fontainebleau was the place to stage a drama and get attention to their issue. When the AFL/CIO (the hotel employees union) chose the busy winter season to renew its organizing campaign at oceanfront hotels, picketers took their place in front of the Fontainebleau hotel early in the morning, just a few days before Christmas when holiday vacationers were at their most active. Bert H. Ross, union vice president in charge of the Greater Miami organizing campaign, said the hotel "had 'stalled' on a union request to discuss recognition of the union as bargaining agent for hotel employees." Novack, of course, denied the accusation.[5]

As Miami Beach's premier emblem, the Fontainebleau attracted the attention of political radicals as well. On September 19, 1977, "A man with a heavy Spanish accent called The Associated Press at 1:50 A.M. identifying himself as a member of the Luis Boitel Commandos and said: 'Listen carefully. We have planted bombs at several Miami Beach hotels. Unless our demands are met, we will take further action. Freedom for all Cuban political prisoners!" Ten minutes later, nearly simultaneous explosions hit the pool area of the DuPont Plaza in Miami and outside the Fontainebleau Spa. There were no injuries.[6]

The Fontainebleau was such a landmark attraction in its own right that on Thanksgiving Day 1961, its management decided to close the grounds to the public. Until that time, it was one of the last luxury resorts on Miami Beach to operate on the so-called 'European plan.' The closure created a private resort club and spa. A hotel spokesman noted that "the clutter of tourists filling the lobbies and grounds during the day and evening prevented the regular guests from enjoying the hotel's facilities. Only guests and their invited friends now will be able to use those facilities."[7]

The hotel's appearance in several movies and a television series makes it possibly the most filmed building in history.[8] Designed chaos arrived at the Fontainebleau Hotel with the filming of "The Bellboy" (1960). The movie, starring Jerry Lewis as author, actor, producer and director, was replete with his callisthenic antics, with Lewis acting out every possible scenario of hotel service disaster. The exaggerated pantomime seems everything that is contrary to the lush, sophisticated theater that is the Fontainebleau Hotel. The filming of the hotel created a stir humorously covered by the *New York Times*. "To say that guests of the hotel, reputedly the largest (and most expensive) resort hotel in the world, have been mildly horrified, would be a gross under-statement. The sight of Mr. Lewis skating wildly out of control across glistening marble floors, and the sudden emergence from elevators of thirty dogs of assorted breeds have created the suspicion that the Fontainebleau is not what it used to be."[9]

In Tony Rome (1967) and Lady in Cement (1968), the Fontainebleau co-stars with Frank Sinatra as a Miami-based private eye in a role that framed the hotel in an increasingly degraded and morally ambivalent social context. Vincent Canby of the *New York Times* called the film, "such a perfect blending of material with milieu that the movie's extraordinary vulgarity and sloppiness can almost be cherished for themselves, like wide-screen graffiti. … Unlike 'The Detective,' an earlier collaboration of Mr. Sinatra, Gordon Douglas as director and Aaron Rosenberg as producer, "Lady in Cement" turns its fakery and garishness into negative virtues that can be appreciated, if not particularly admired. It is to well-planned movies what one of those 10-year-old Miami Beach hotels – one that has begun to crack – is to the Plaza – a reminder of a fantastic, All-American lifestyle that is no less significant because it's not especially good."[10]

James Bond's gaudy gallantry in "Goldfinger" (1968) also seamlessly matched an exotic film persona with the movie set that is the Fontainebleau. Decades later, in a Lapidus retrospective, the film stirred the memory of Herbert Muschamp, who drew a visceral connection between Goldfinger, the hotel and the cultural context they together represented: "The password is … swanky. … The fleeting image is a tan young man in a white bathing suit plunging off the high board, somersaulting out of the deep blue sky into the water of a sky blue pool. Cut to shot of Sean Connery wearing a light blue terry cloth playsuit. Anyone else would look ridiculous in such a get-up, but not James Bond. He looks … swanky. Any piece of architecture would look stupid if it were wearing staircases that went nowhere, ceilings with Swiss cheese holes in them and an allegorical statue salvaged from the first-class dining saloon of the S.S. Normandie. But somehow Morris Lapidus pulled it off. 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. … In the 1960's, everyone I knew 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.[11]

Although landing only a cameo role in "Midnight Cowboy" (1969), the Fontainebleau Hotel holds a symbolic position. The movie's Bronx character, Ratzo Rizzo, slightly deformed and limping with a club foot, dreams of escape from his unheated apartment in an abandoned building to a land of sun and sea. The Fontainebleau's beach and pool deck are the setting for his montage dream sequence in which he becomes helper and hero to a squadron of wheelchair-bound older ladies. In this resort designed "to convince a sucker spending $50 that he's actually spending $100," even a near-homeless cripple can rise to the American Dream in luxury and valor.

[1] "Night of Stars," *New York Times*, November 6, 1960.

[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] Susan M. Burnside, "Fontainebleau Sale Rumor is Denied," *The Miami Herald*, June 17, 1971.

[4] "Battle for Control of Hotel Continues," *New York Times*, November 22, 1957.

[5] Diana Rice, "News Notes from the Field of Travel," *New York Times*, December 25, 1955.

[6] "Around the Nation: 4 Miami Beach Hotels Are Damaged by Bombs," *New York Times*, September 20, 1977.

[7] "From the Field of Travel: Fontainebleau Hotel Set to Become a Private Resort and Spa," *New York Times*, August 27, 1961.

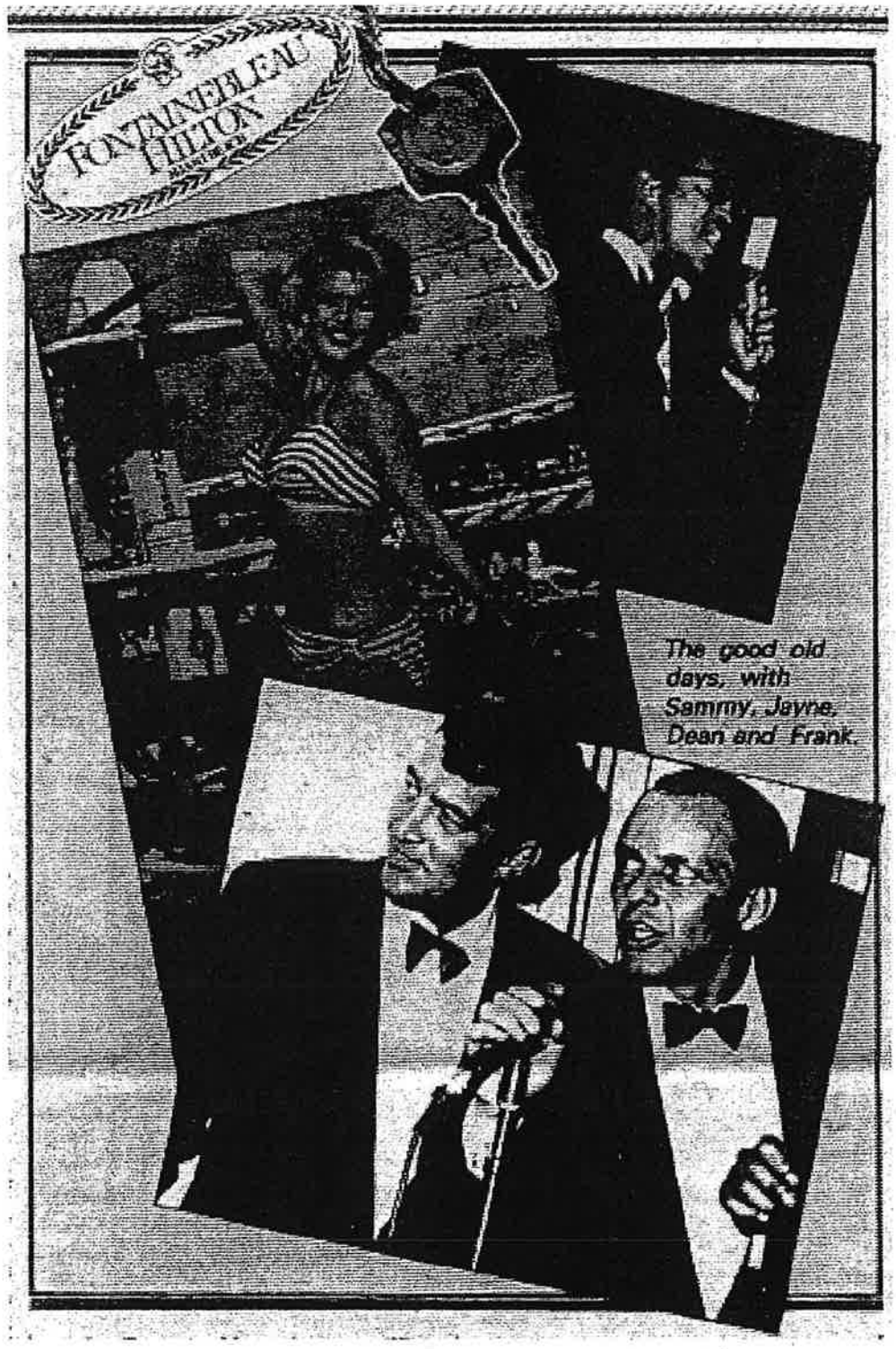
[8] "The Bellboy" (1960), "Tony Rome" (1967), "Lady in Cement" (1968), "Goldfinger" (1968), "Midnight Cowboy" (1969), "The Specialist" (1994).

[9] James W. Merrick, "'Hurricane' Lewis Hits Florida Gold Coast," *New York Times*, February 28, 1960.

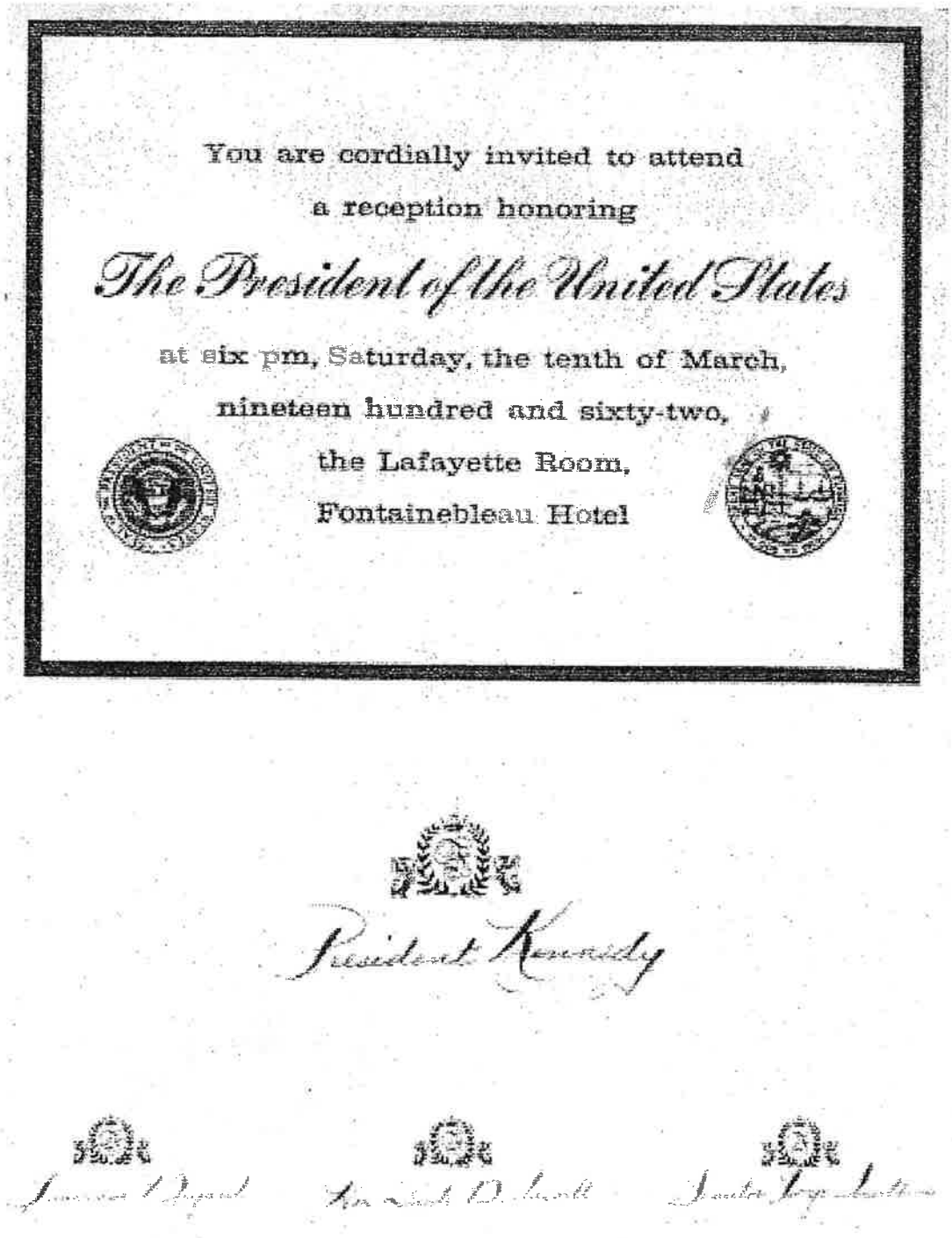
[10] Vincent Canby, "Lady in Cement Here," *New York Times*, November 21, 1968.

[11] Herbert Muschamp, "Defining Beauty in Swanky American Terms," *New York Times*

Chef preparing a dish of Shish Kebabs (1959)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection



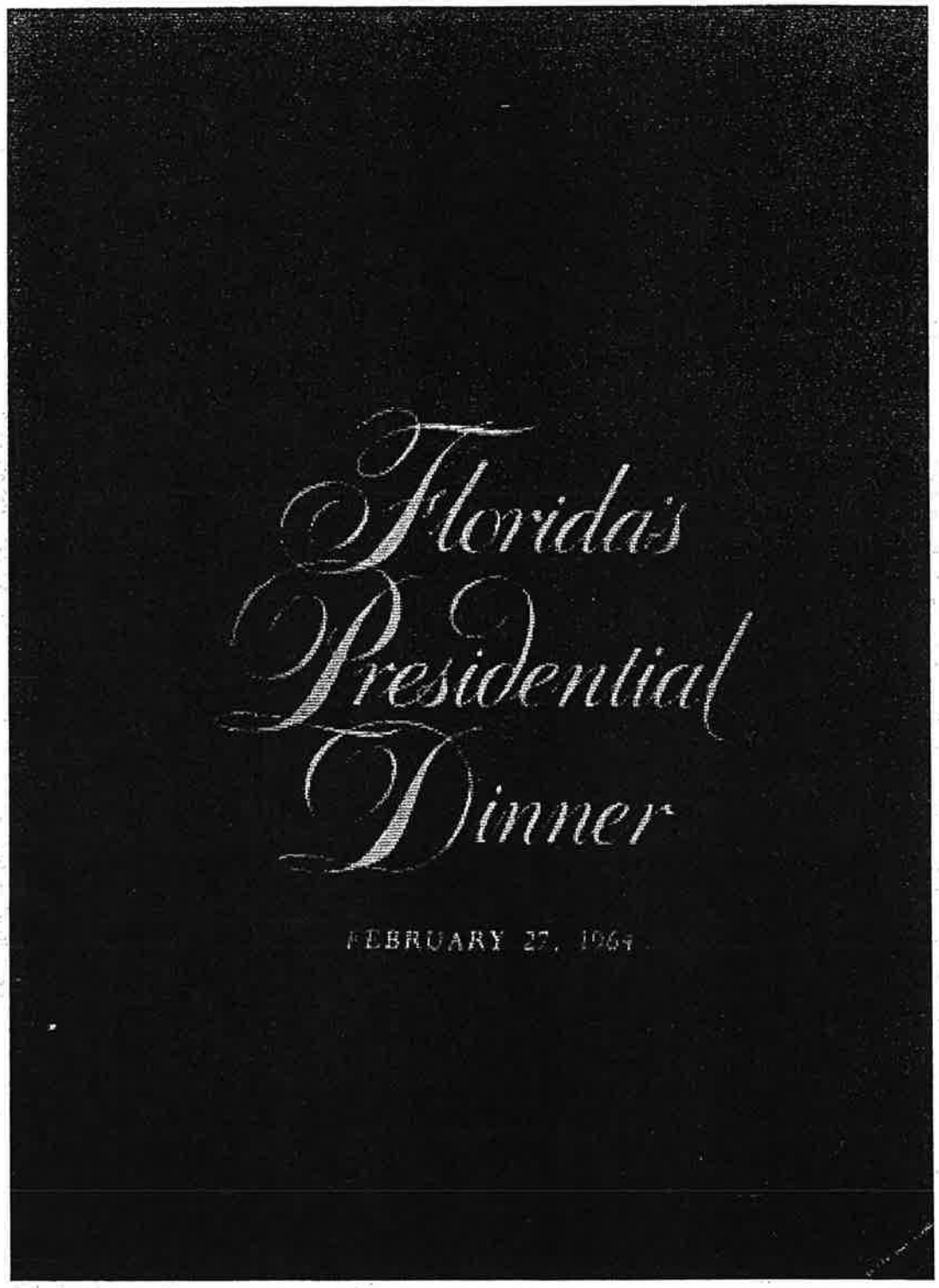
"The good old days, with Sammy, Jayne, Dean and Frank."
from "The Fountainebleau Fairy Tale: Once upon a time comes again"
by Madeleine Blais, The Miami Herald, February 3, 1980
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, WTVJ files



Invitation and placecards for guests of dinner honoring President John F. Kennedy, March 10, 1962
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

John F. Kennedy & George Smathers (1962)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection

President Lyndon B. Johnson (1964)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection



Program from Florida's Presidential Dinner at the Fontainebleau Hotel
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

THE WHITE HOUSE

WASHINGTON

February 25, 1964

Dear Friends:

During my twenty-seven years of service in Washington, I have come to know and respect the able and distinguished representatives you have sent to the Nation's Capital. You may be proud of them.

Mrs. Johnson and I want to take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation for the support of Democrats in Florida.

The days ahead must find all of us working together for a nation free from want, a world that is free from hate — a world of peace and justice, and freedom and abundance, for our time, and all time to come.

Lyndon B. Johnson

Program from Florida's Presidential Dinner at the Fontainebleau Hotel
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

Lobby sign advertising "Star Spangled Bang-Bang" adult show in the Boom Boom Room
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

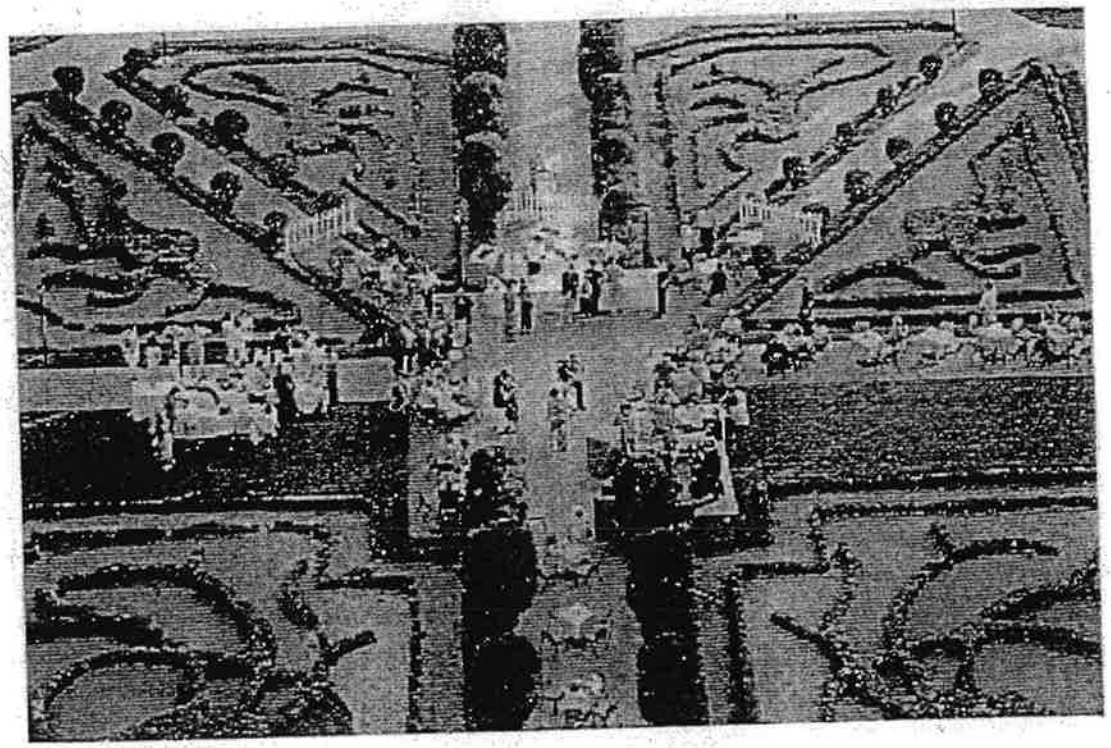
Poolside soiree
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida

Meeting of the City of Miami Beach Tourist Development Authority (1969)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection

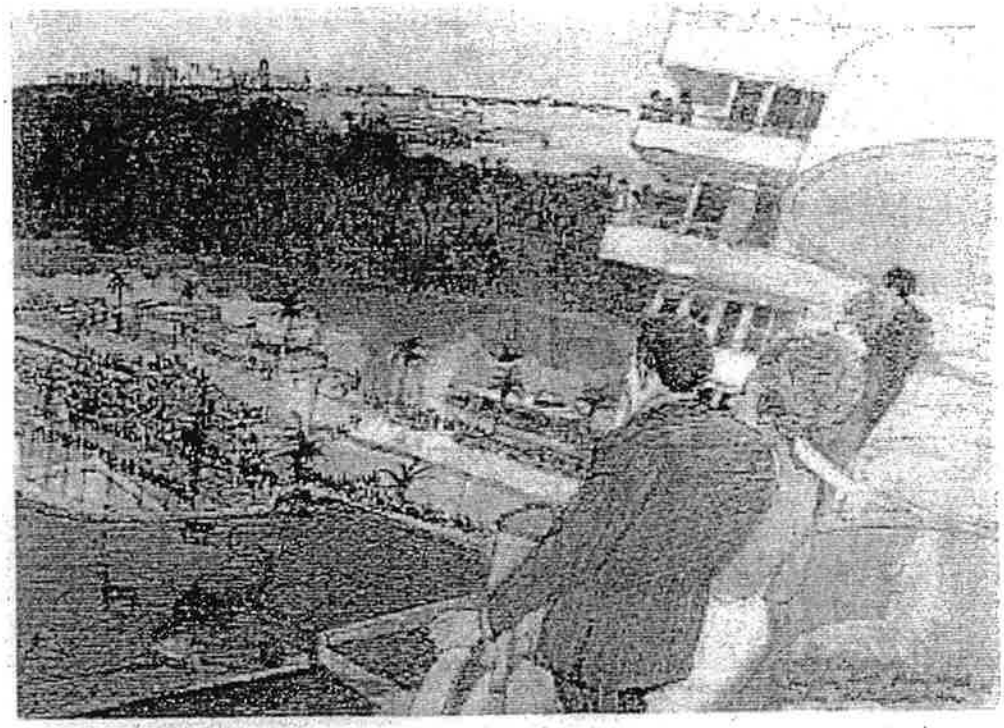
Ana Myers & Rabbi Leon Kronish (1970)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection

President Ford speaking at the Fontainebleau Hotel (1976)
Image Courtesy of the Florida Photographic Collection

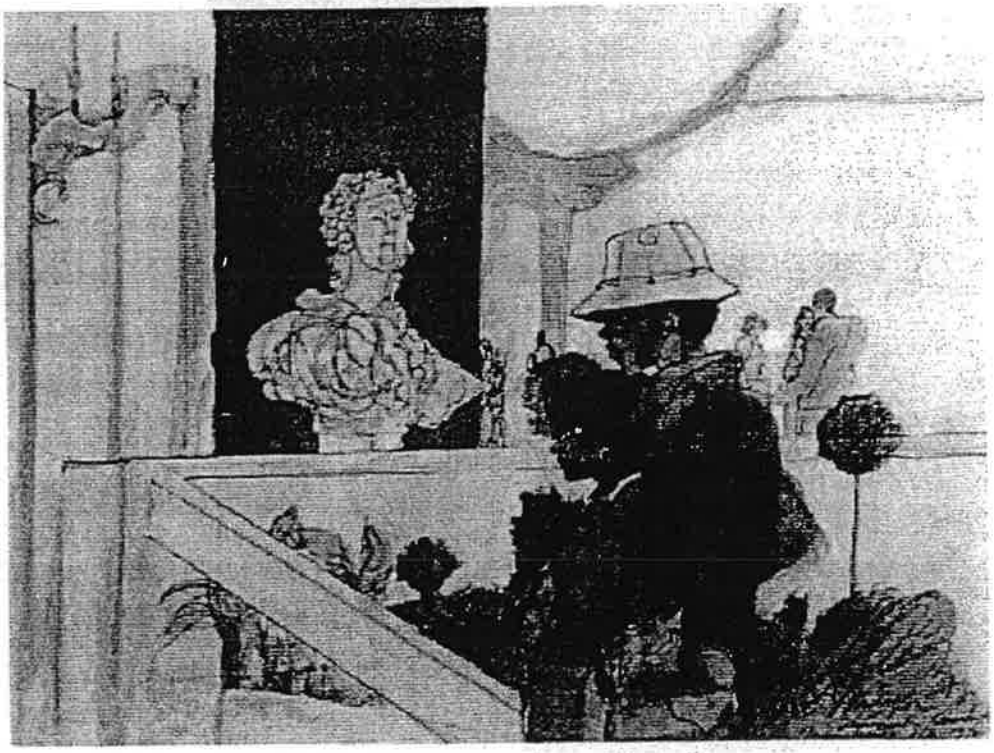
Fleur de Lis Room (1965)
Image Courtesy of Stock Photo



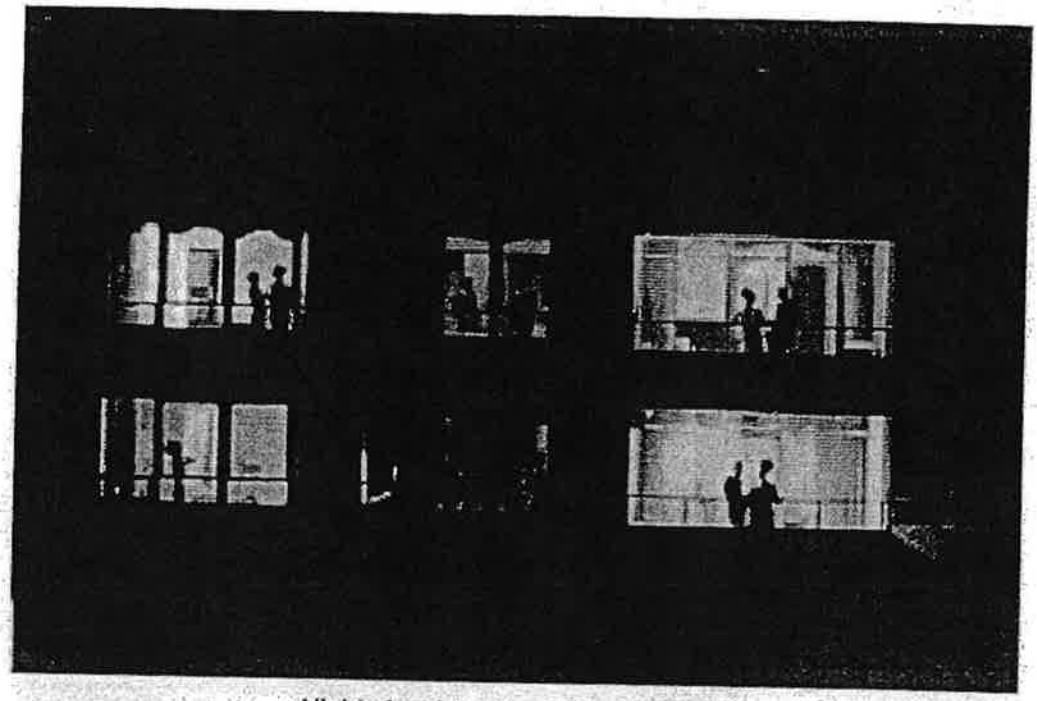
Event at the Formal Gardens
Image Courtesy of Stock Photo



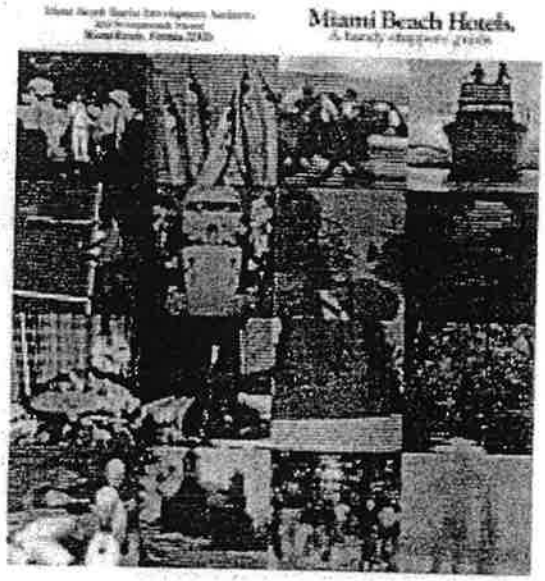
Republican Convention Delegates Watch an Anti-War Protest from Their Hotel Balcony (1972)
Created by Franklin McMahon, Image Courtesy of Corbis



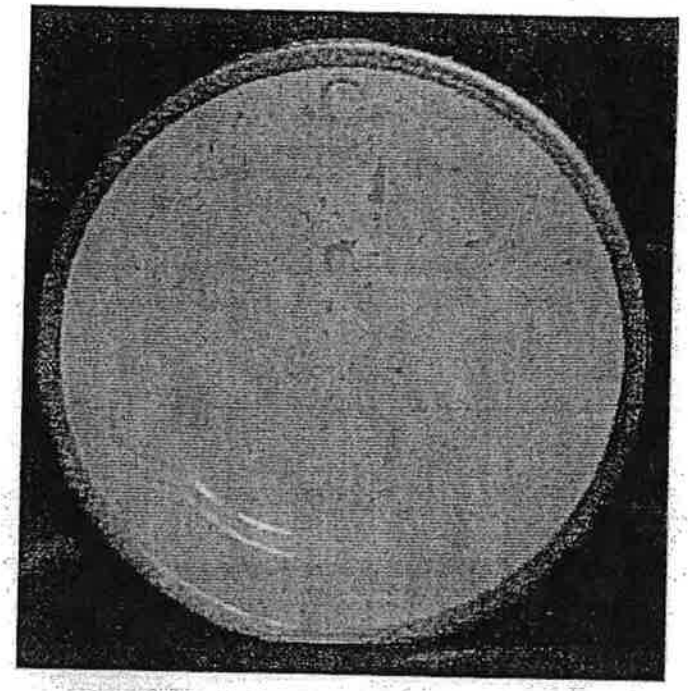
Delegates to the 1972 Democratic National Convention, Miami Beach, Viewing the Fontainebleau Hotel (1972)
Created by Franklin McMahon, Image Courtesy of Corbis



Night view into North Tower (1965)
Courtesy of Stock photo

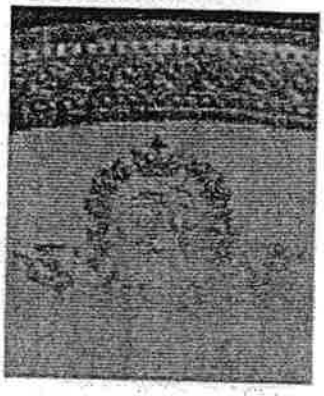


Miami Beach Hotel Guide, cover & Fontainebleau listing
Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



Original gold-trimmed Fontainebleau dinner plateon ebay

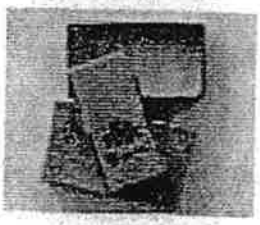
Original logo



Detail of dinner plate

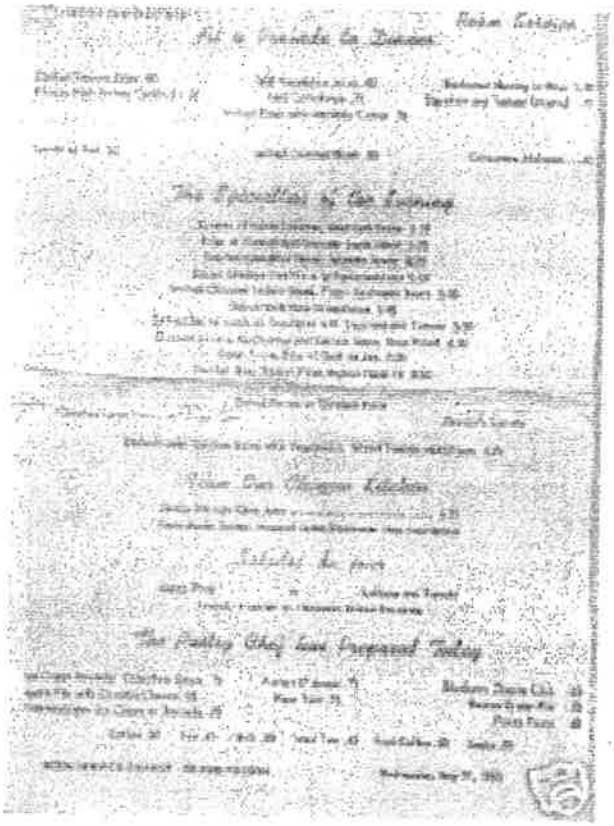
La Ronde Supper Club matchbook

Vintage ashtray

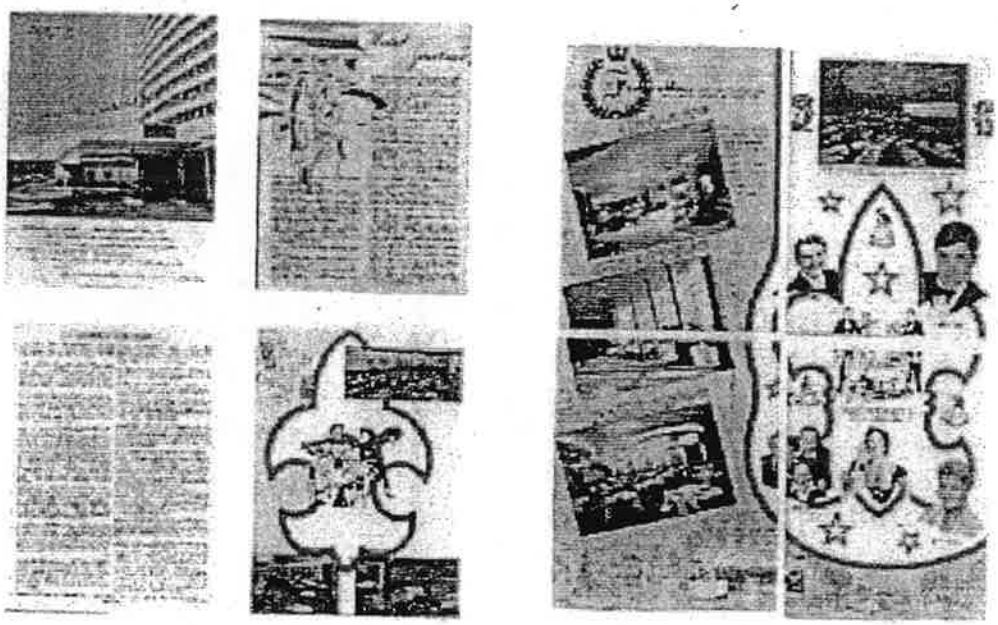


Vintage cigarette lighter

Fontainebleau Momentos
Image Courtesy of ebay

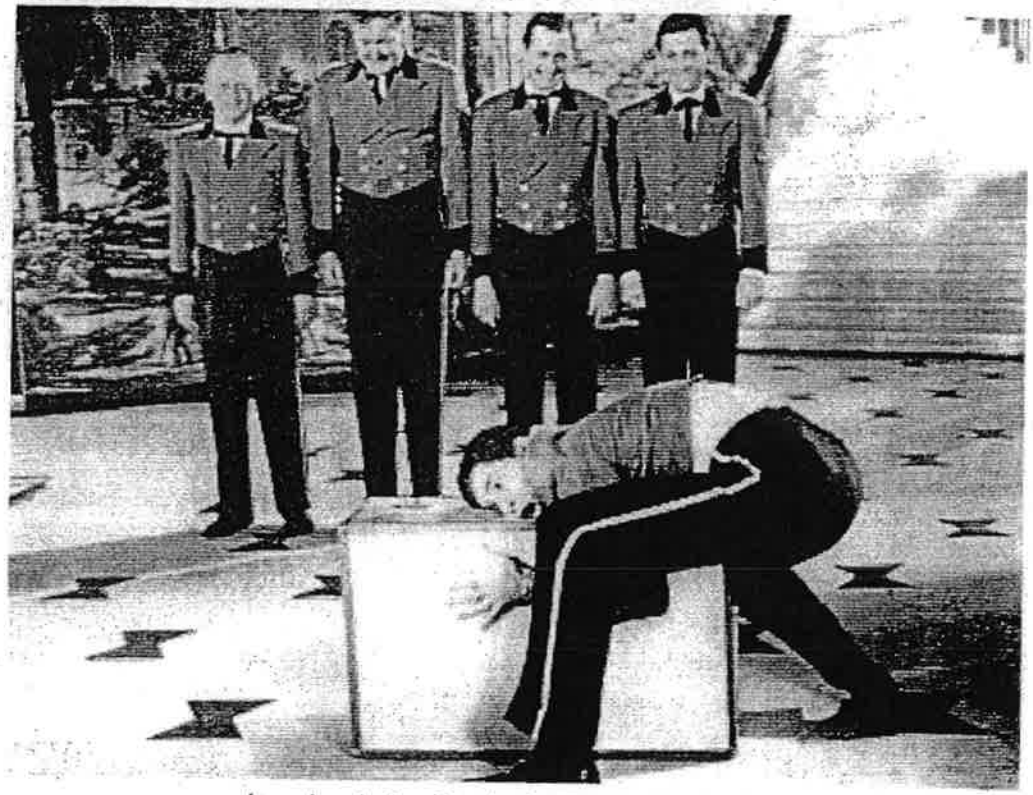


Room service menu from May 1968
Image Courtesy of ebay



Fold-out brochure for Fontainebleau Cabana and Yacht Club, featuring Jerry Lewis, Liberace, Ritz Brothers and Betty Hutton.
Image Courtesy of ebay

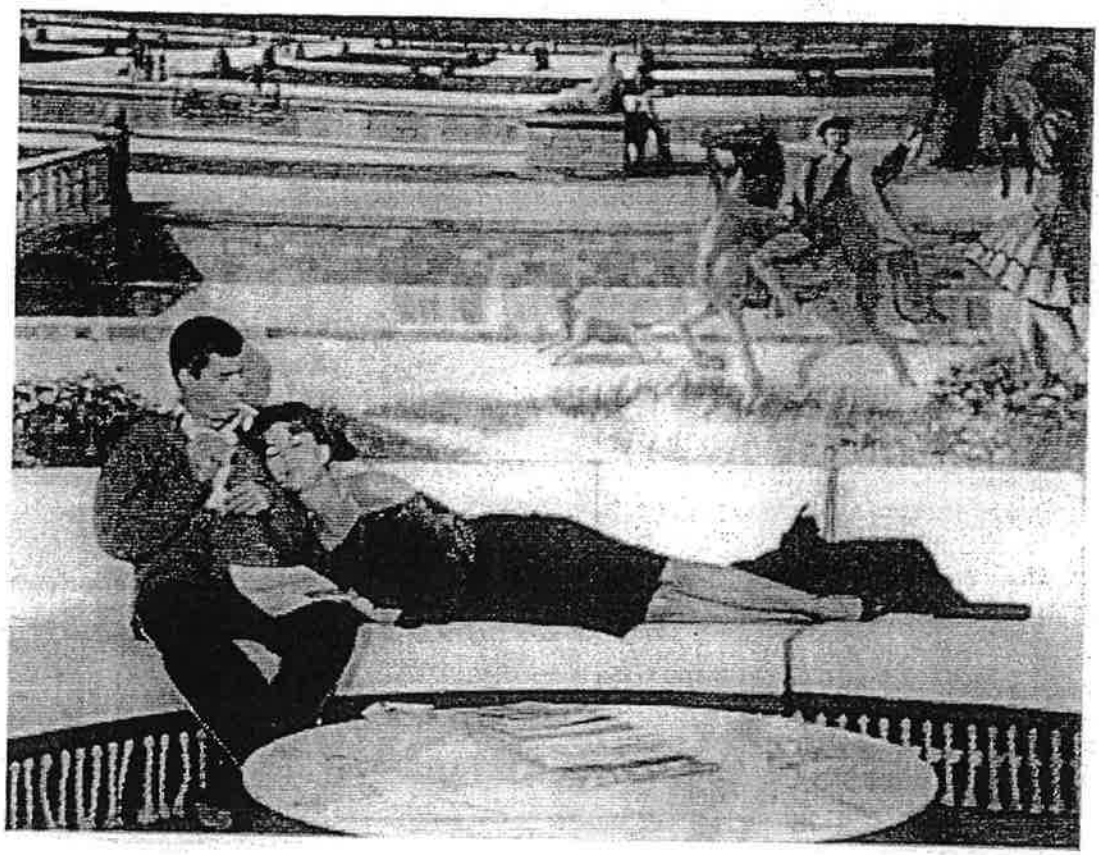
Jerry Lewis (as Stanley), "The Bellboy" (1960)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



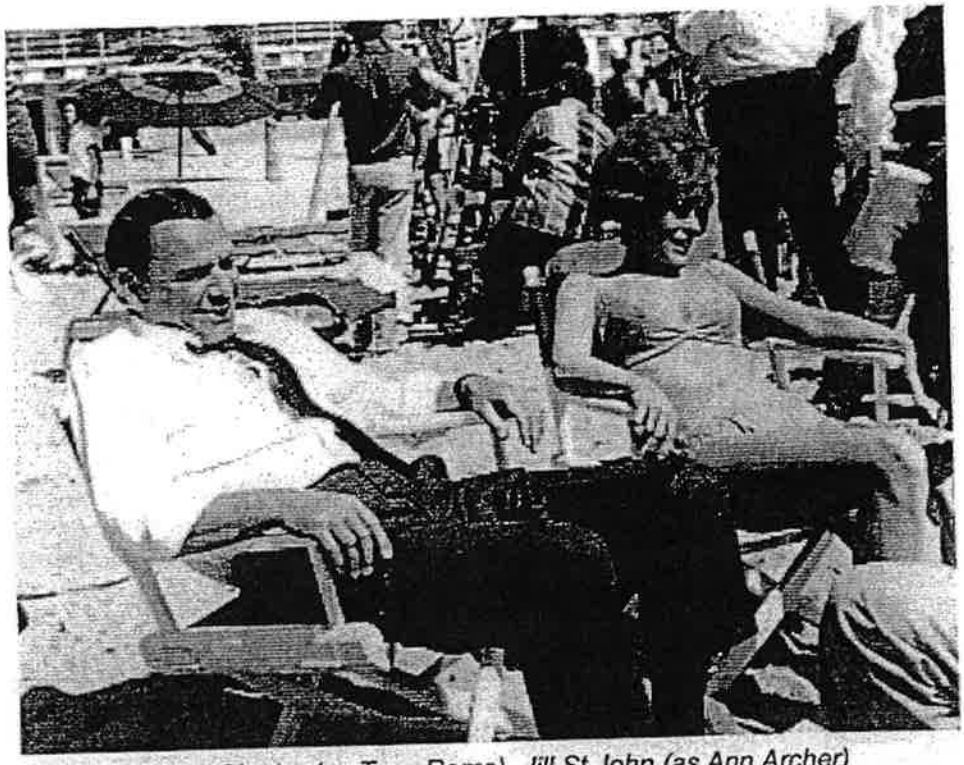
Jerry Lewis (as Stanley), "The Bellboy" (1960)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

Jerry Lewis (as Stanley), "The Bellboy" (1960)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

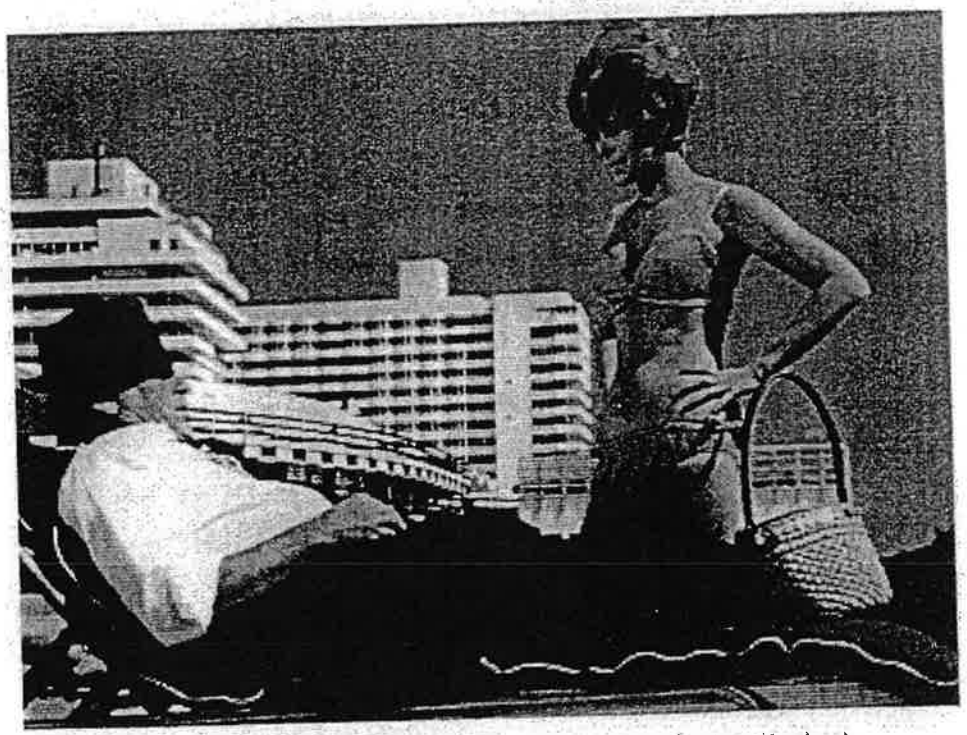
From the left: Alex Gerry (as manager), Jerry Lewis.(as Stanley)
"The Bellboy" (1960)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



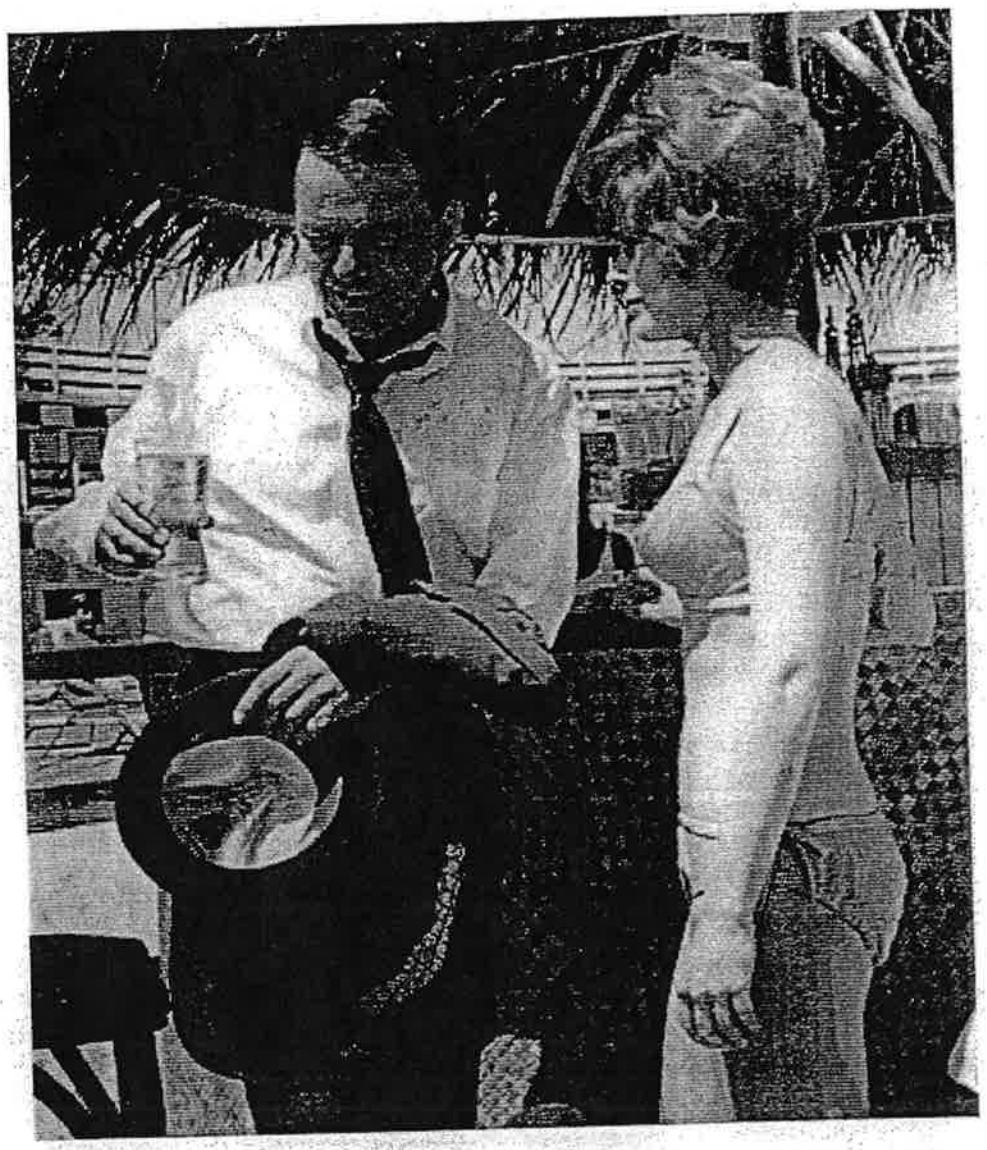
Jerry Lewis.(as Stanley), "The Bellboy" (1960)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



Frank Sinatra (as Tony Rome), Jill St.John (as Ann Archer)
"Tony Rome" (1967)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

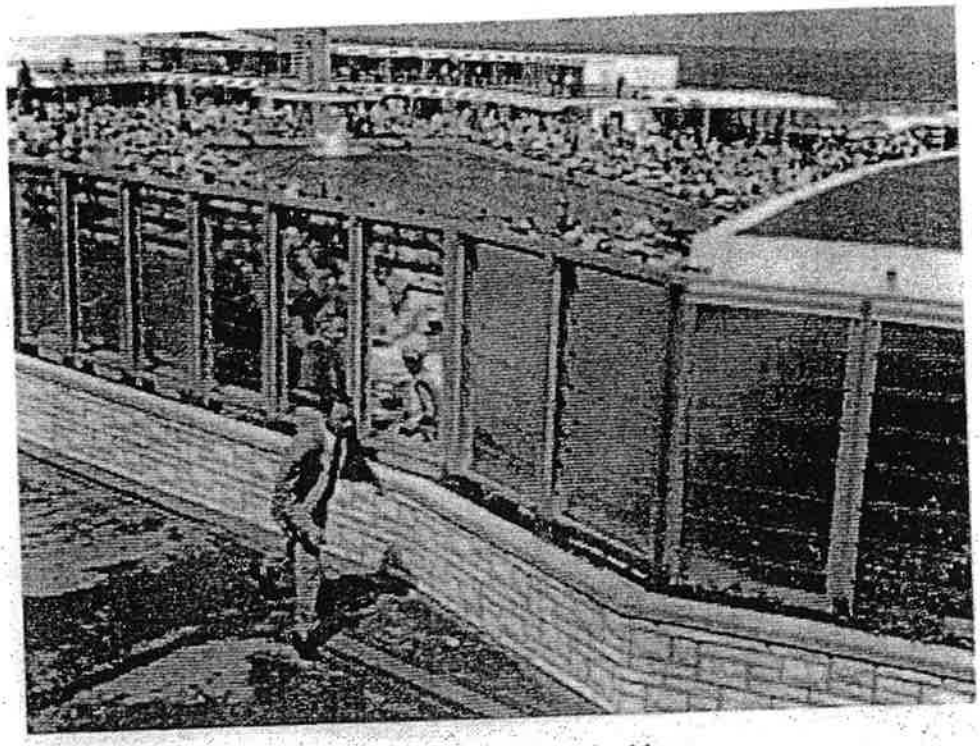


Frank Sinatra (as Tony Rome), Jill St.John (as Ann Archer)
"Tony Rome" (1967)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



Frank Sinatra (as Tony Rome), Jill St.John (as Ann Archer)
"Tony Rome" (1967)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

Jill St. John (as Ann Archer), "Tony Rome" (1967)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

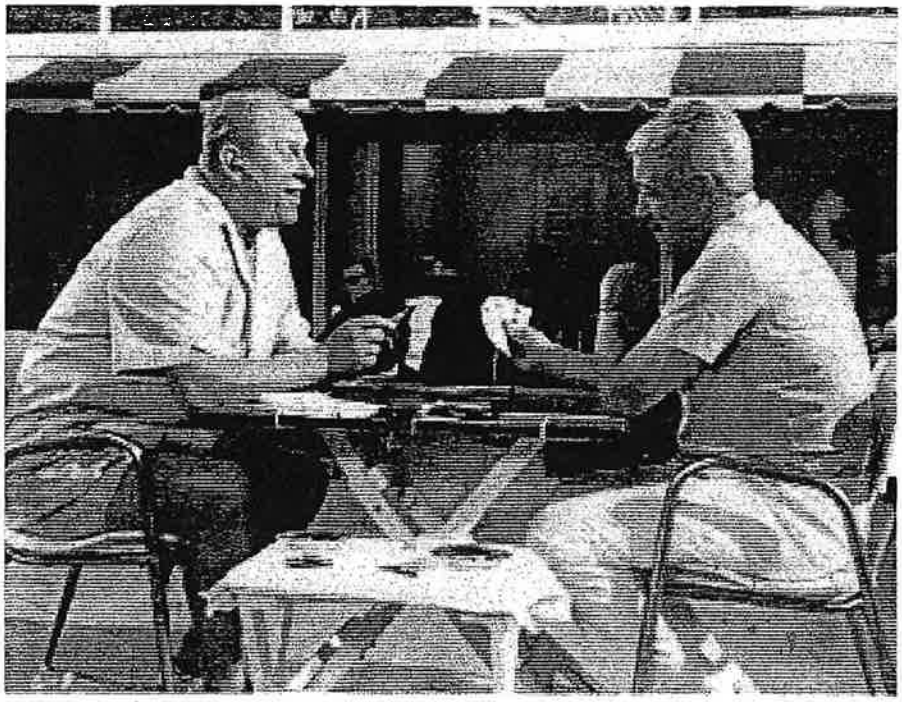


Pool Deck of the Fontainebleau
Richard Conte (as Lt. Dave Santini), "Lady in Cement" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

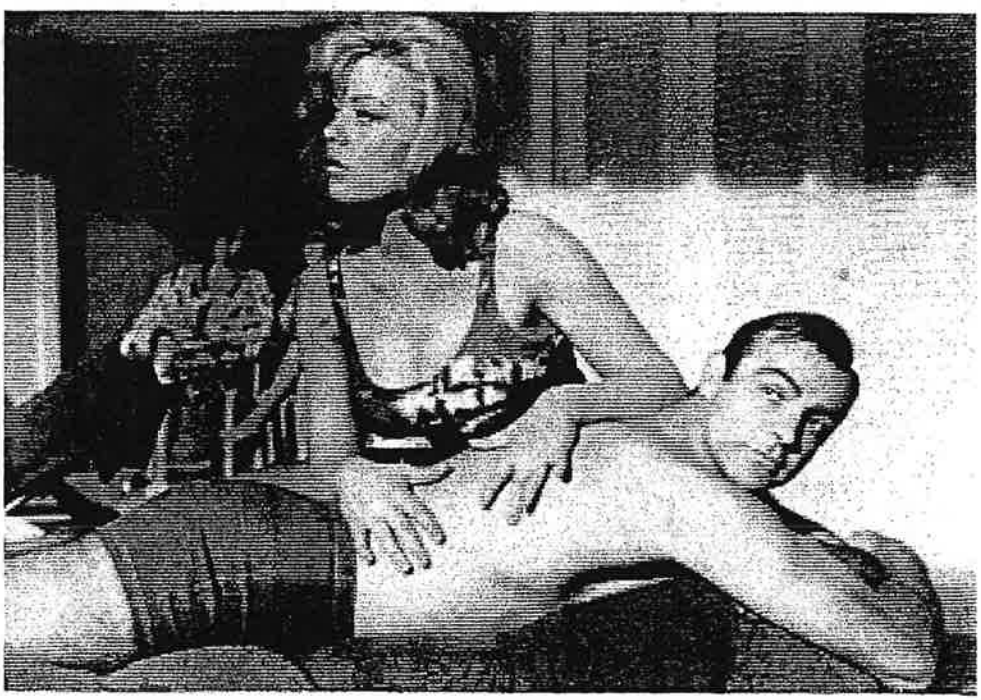
Richard Conte (as Lt. Dave Santini)
"Lady in Cement" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

Sean Connery (as James Bond), "Goldfinger" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

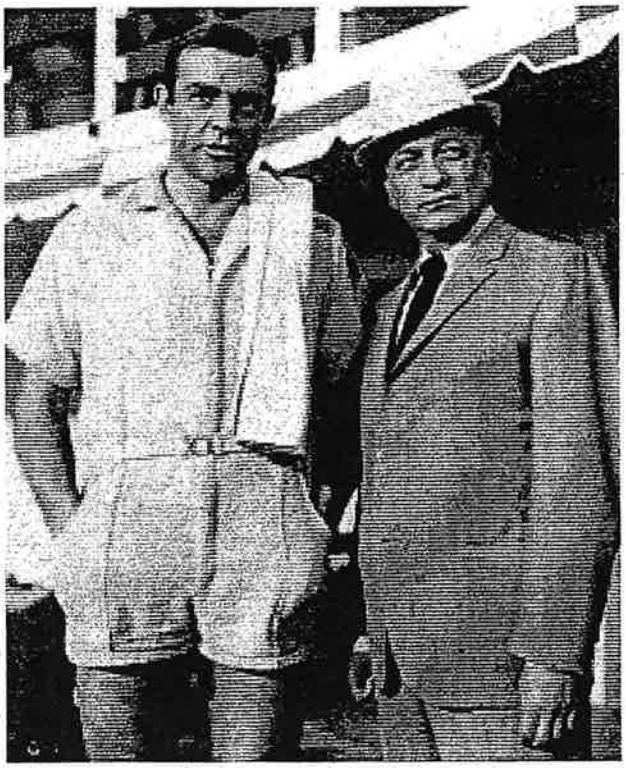
Sean Connery(as James Bond), "Goldfinger" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



Gert Frobe (as Auric Goldfinger), "Goldfinger" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

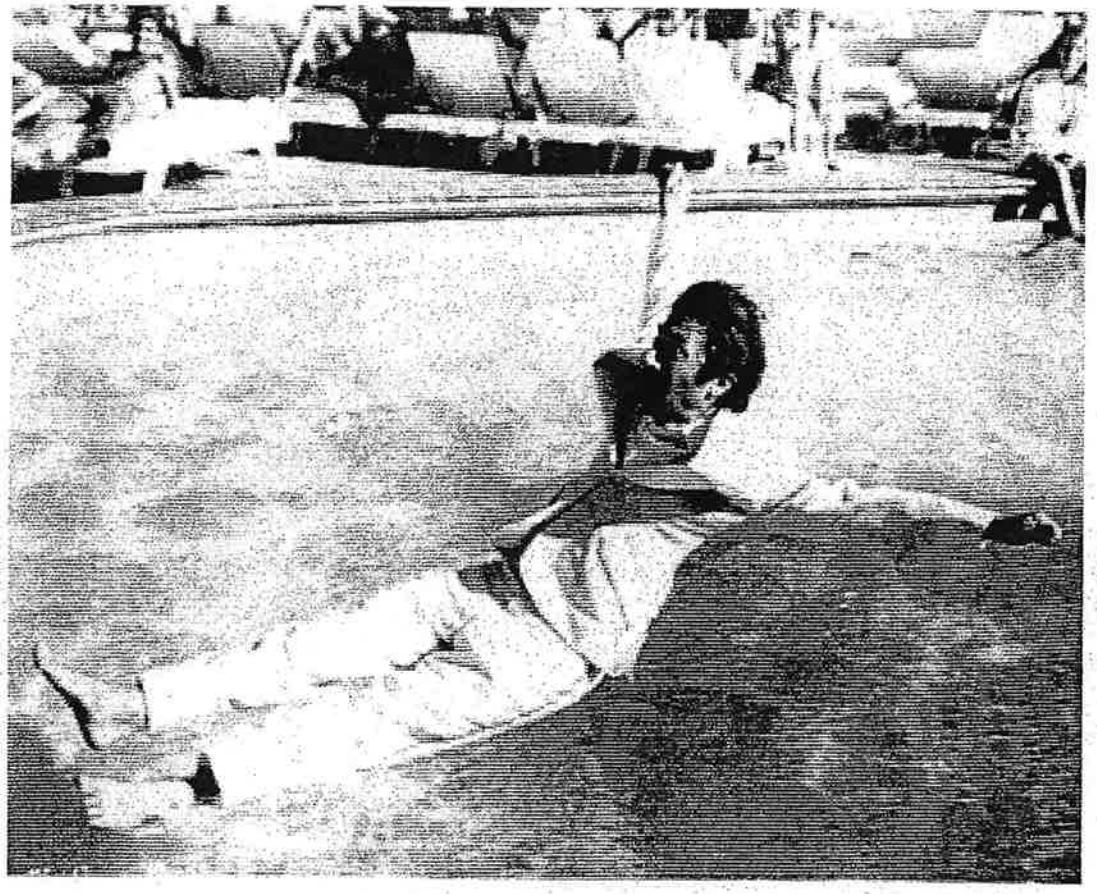


Margaret Nolan (as Dink), Sean Connery (as James Bond), "Goldfinger" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



Sean Connery (as James Bond, Cic Linder (as Felix Leiter), "Goldfinger" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

Sean Connery (as James Bond), "Goldfinger" (1968)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.



Fontainebleau Pool
Dustin Hoffman (as Ratzo Rizzo), "Midnight Cowboy" (1969)
Image Courtesy of Photofest, Inc.

Miami Herald Investigation (late 1960s)

In May 1967, *The Miami Herald* began calling witnesses for depositions, with the intention of exposing a relationship between the Fontainebleau and organized crime. The Miami Beach hotel reacted the following month by filing a $10 million libel suit against *The Herald*, claiming the paper had been undertaking "burdensome and harassment tactics" and publishing "slanted" stories.[1] One target of *The Herald*'s investigation was the opaque ownership structure of the hotel, and the web of financial transactions that paralleled its construction and ongoing operation. For instance, in June 1967 *The Herald* deposed Ben B. Sigelbaum, a local 'investor', who declined to say whether he had ever loaned money to the Fontainebleau or Ben Novack. *The Herald* focused on the connections between Sigelbaum (a former light bulb salesman), Las Vegas gambler Ed Levinson (with whom Sigelbaum had many business interests, including part ownership in the Singapore Hotel) and Jack B. Cooper (a major figure in Dominican Republic gambling casinos before the assassination of dictator Raphael Trujillo). *The Herald* investigated links between this group and 'hoodlums' Isadore Blumenthal and his brother Yiddy Bloom. The wives of Blumenthal and Bloom purportedly owned title to a portion of the Fontainebleau land, and a mortgage on the remaining land. Sigelbaum was also suspected of owning Fontainebleau land, and receiving broker's fees for securing loans for the hotel.[2]

The Herald investigation also turned up numerous contacts with gambling figures. In June, Miami Beach haberdasher Mickey Hayes, a friend of Novack, was subpoenaed by *The Herald* and testified to meetings between Novack and London casino operator John Mills aboard Novack's yacht, the Fontainebleau II, which was touring the Mediterranean as a 'goodwill cruise' during the summer of 1966.[3] *The Herald* reported that Mills was Novack's purported British subject partner in the Miami hotelier's unsuccessful attempt to purchase Cat Cay and its Bahamian gambling permit. Parenthetically, the ship was quickly registered in the Bahamas by the law firm of Bahamian gambling figure Sir Stafford Sands. The yacht, which was normally parked in front of the Fontainebleau in Indian Creek, was detained in 1967 by the U.S. Customs service for payment of an entry duty. In papers filed in relationship to the duty, it was discovered that the boat was owned by Argosy Ltd., a corporation whose stockholders were all Bahamian attorneys in the Sands office. Sands had, the week before, liquidated all holdings and established residence in Spain. His departure followed revelations, in a Royal Commission investigation, that he received $2 million in legal and consulting fees in relation to casino operations after a gambling permit was granted for a casino in Freeport. Sands both spearheaded the gambling license application and sat on the board that granted it. [4]

According to testimony by another Bahamian, George Thompson, Ben Novack's application for a Bahamian gambling permit was held up by his lack of clearance to own a casino by the local police, a result of "problems" with the American FBI. Novack was urged by Thompson to "clear up his position with the FBI so that the [Bureau would] be" be in a position to give a favorable report to the police here. Thompson testified that Peter Graham, cabinet minister in the outgoing white Bahamian government and Novack's lawyer at one time, told him that "Mr. Novack was a gangster." [5] However, Thompson also left the impression that Novack's competi-

tors in Grand Bahama Island may also have squelched the hotelier's bid, principally by awarding consulting fees to cabinet members opposed to granting Novack a license. [6]

Facing a public relations debacle, on August 17th, 1967, the Fontainebleau Hotel asked Circuit Court to "stop 'harassment tactics' by *The Miami Herald* in the libel suit."[7] Specifically, the motion sought to stop *The Herald* from taking depositions and reporting on them. On August 18th, lawyers for *The Herald* successfully argued that the newspaper's inquiry was "in good faith and intended to gather information about the history of ownership and reputation of the hotel." Circuit Court Judge Grady L. Crawford refused to halt or limit *The Herald* from taking depositions in the libel suit.[8] Ultimately, the Fontainebleau lawsuit backfired by providing a rich mosaic of tantalizing information illustrating Ben Novack's questionable business practices and his connections with the world of organized crime.

The Herald's depositions and reporting thus continued in September. On September 19, 1967, the paper reported that five witnesses testified in the case, including Clarence Jones, co-author of *The Herald* articles in question in the suit. Four others, including an ex-convict and a gambling wire operator (who both plead the fifth), a hotel time-keeper and a restaurateur testified.[9] Sam (Radio) Winer testified that he introduced Ben Novack to Bahamian politician George Thompson. Thompson had previously testified in front of a Royal Commission investigating gambling in the Bahamas that Novack had offered him $100,000 in 1965 to lobby for a Bahamian gambling license. The license was denied by the later government of Premier Lynden Pindling.[10]

The depositions soon turned from gambling to the relationship between hotel management and organized crime. In his testimony, hotel General Manager Margulies refused to answer questions about whether he knew Max Eder (alias Maxie Raymond), who *The Herald* called a notorious gambler and labor racketeer who made the Attorney General's list of notorious criminals in 1959."[11] The Miami Beach police had previously identified Eder as a 'behind-the-scenes' figure in the Fontainebleau and the operator of its linen shop.

In fact, known bookmakers and gamblers were known to frequent the hotel. Testimony revealed that according to the Florida Attorney General's office, 4441 Collins Avenue (The Fontainebleau) was "becoming a hangout for hoodlums with a national reputation.[12] The testimony of the night bell captain illustrated a telling event. The bell captain recounted a fight between comedian Shecky Greene and Chicago Mafia figure Joe Fischetti in a public area of the lobby. Greene was performing at the La Ronde Room during Frank Sinatra's engagement there. Joe (Fish) Fischetti, cousin of Al Capone and brother of two deceased Chicago Mafia leaders, was known to accompany Sinatra during his performances at the Fontainebleau. The fight demonstrated the close relationship between the hotel's glamorous and seamy sides.

In fact, Sinatra's relationship to the Fontainebleau came into question not in the investigations of the late 1960s but a few years later. In 1972, convicted mob triggerman Joseph (the Baron)

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 since1962 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 the1963 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

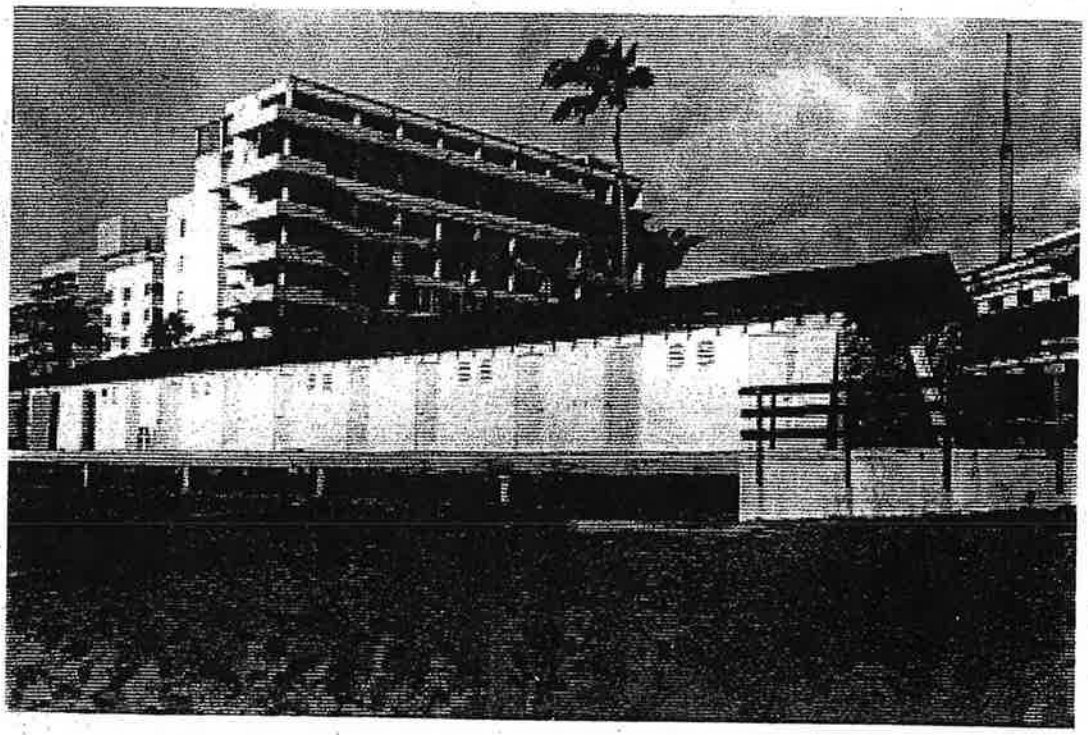


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Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives

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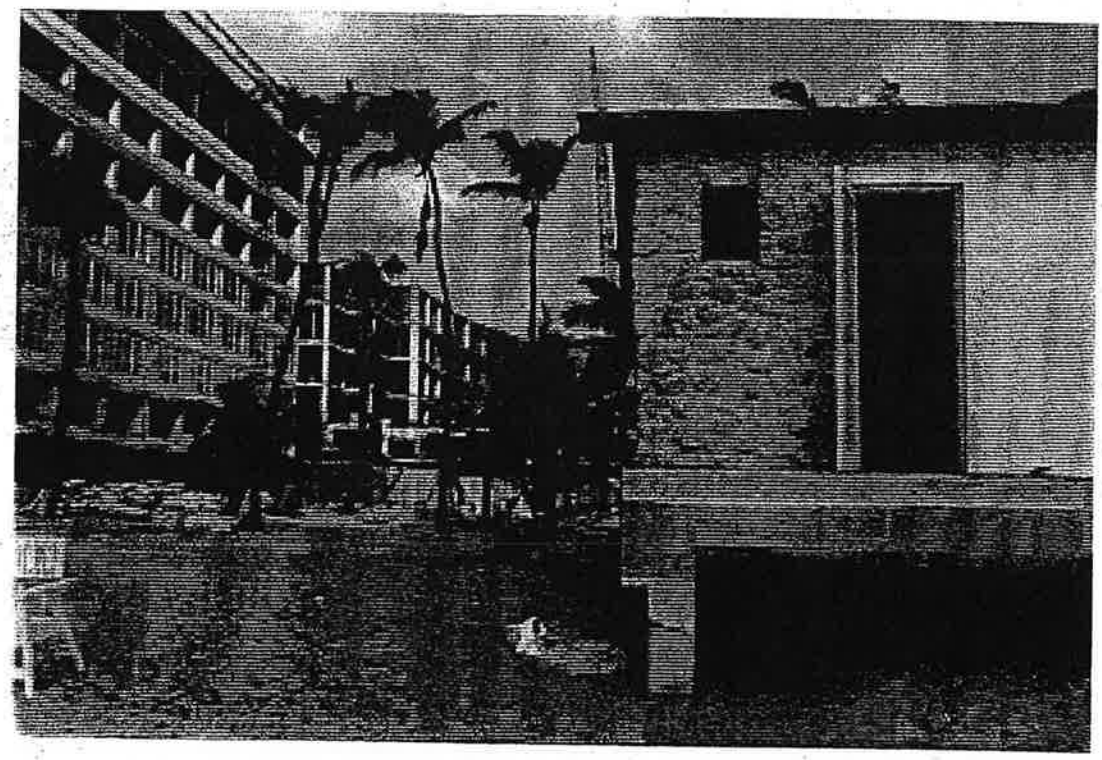

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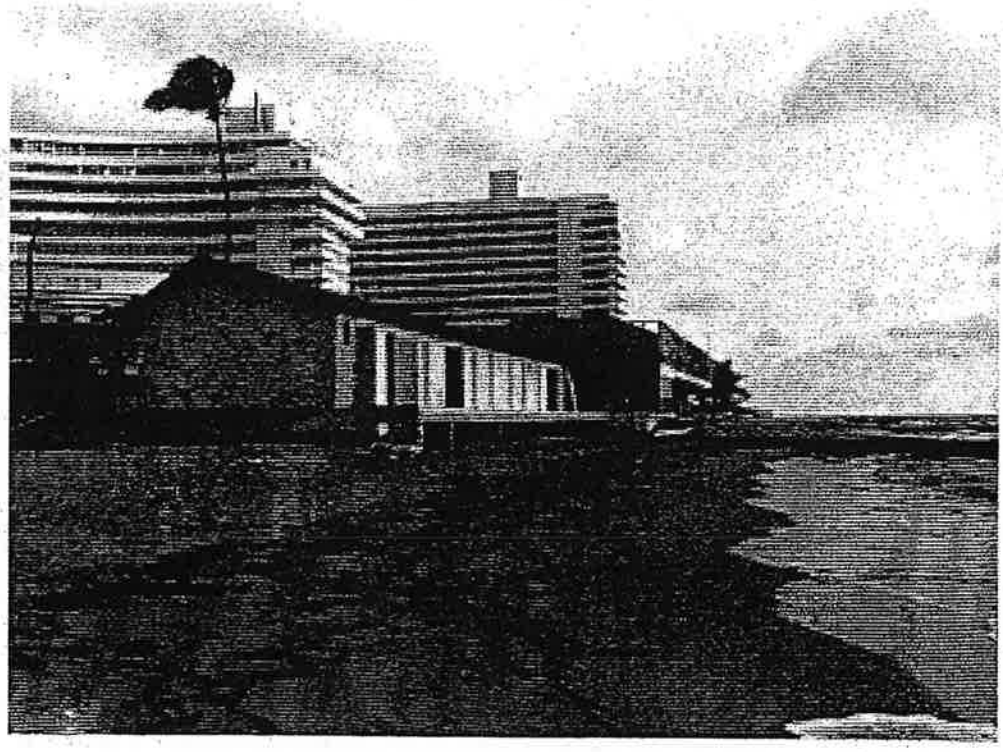
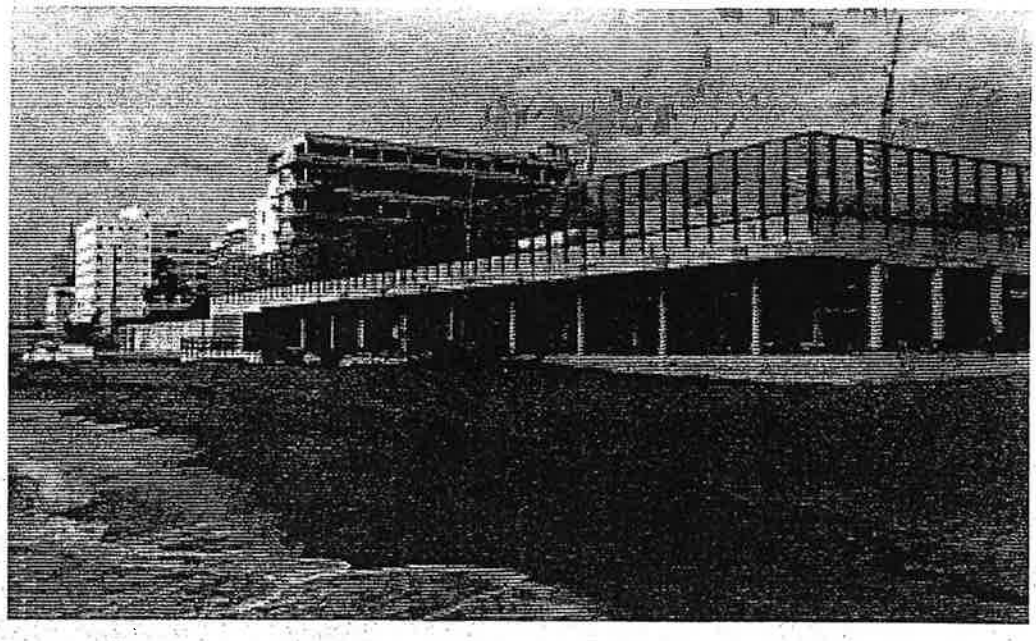


Beachside Cabanas (undated, ca. 1969, during Sorrento addtion)
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives



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

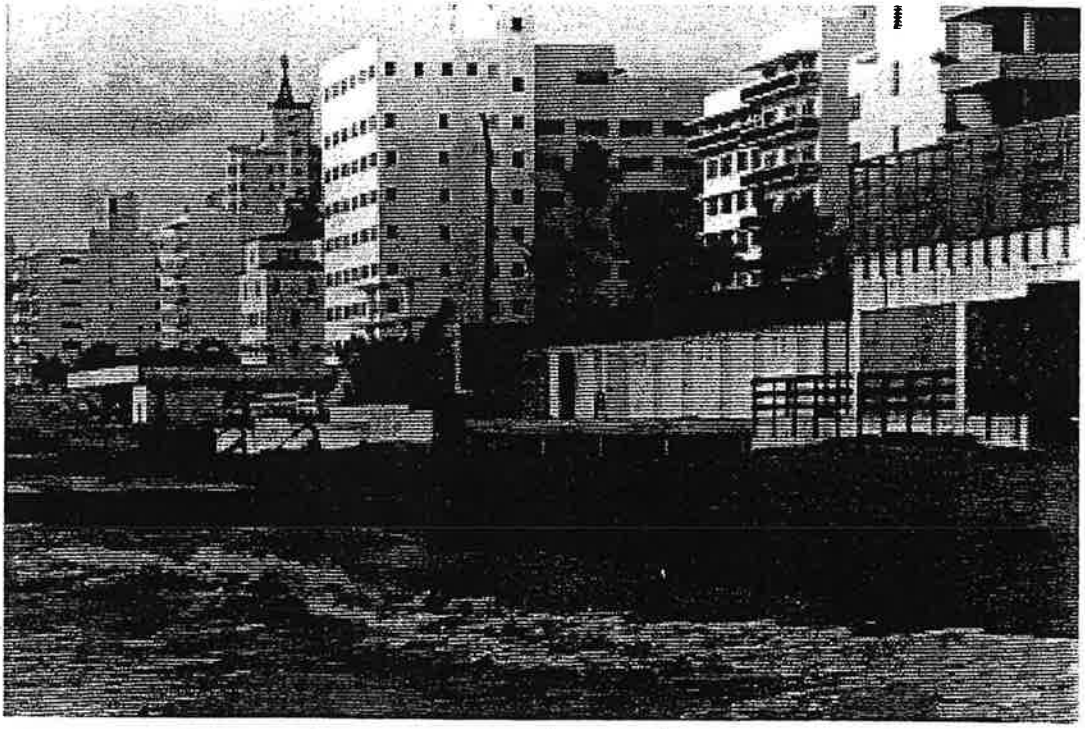


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Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida, Miami News Archives

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

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"[20]if 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 Liechenstein, 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 Licthenstein 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 Hotelerama 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. Hotelerama, 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 Hotelerama. 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 Hotelrama 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 Hotelerama 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 industry[1] 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]

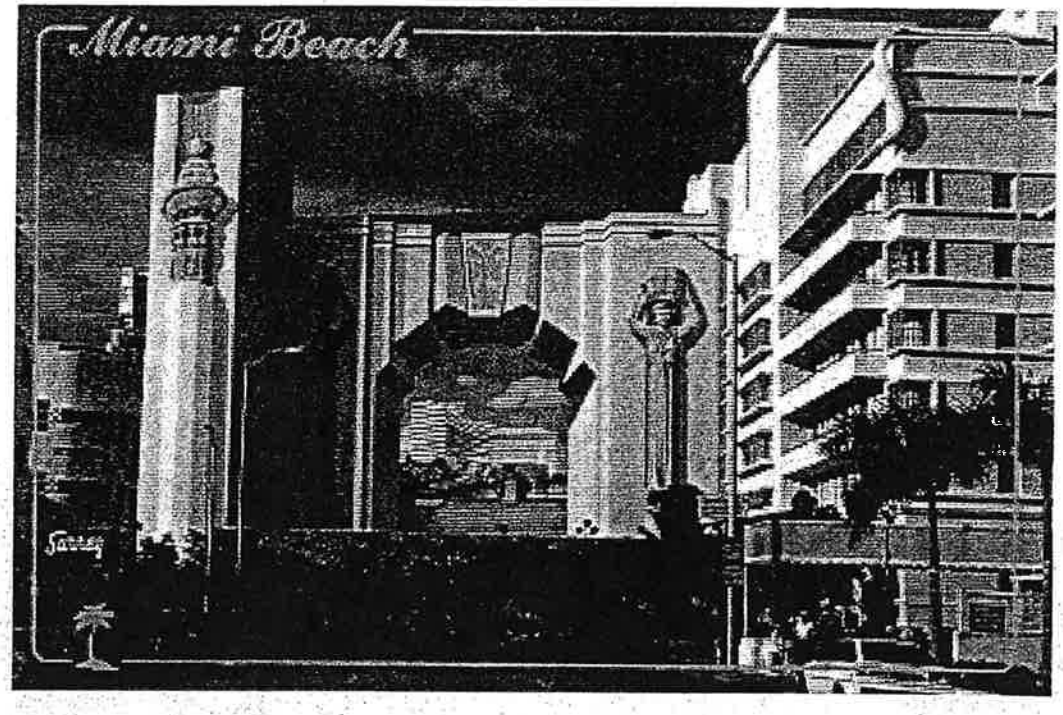
In 1984, the Fontainebleau celebrated its 30th birthday with an intimate party that, as in 1954, headlined the mayor of Fontainebleau (France). The new mayor, Paul Seramy, was to bring a new brass plaque to mount next to the one his processor had laid in 1954. The hotel gave quiet honor to a French pastry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

clerk had been were 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]

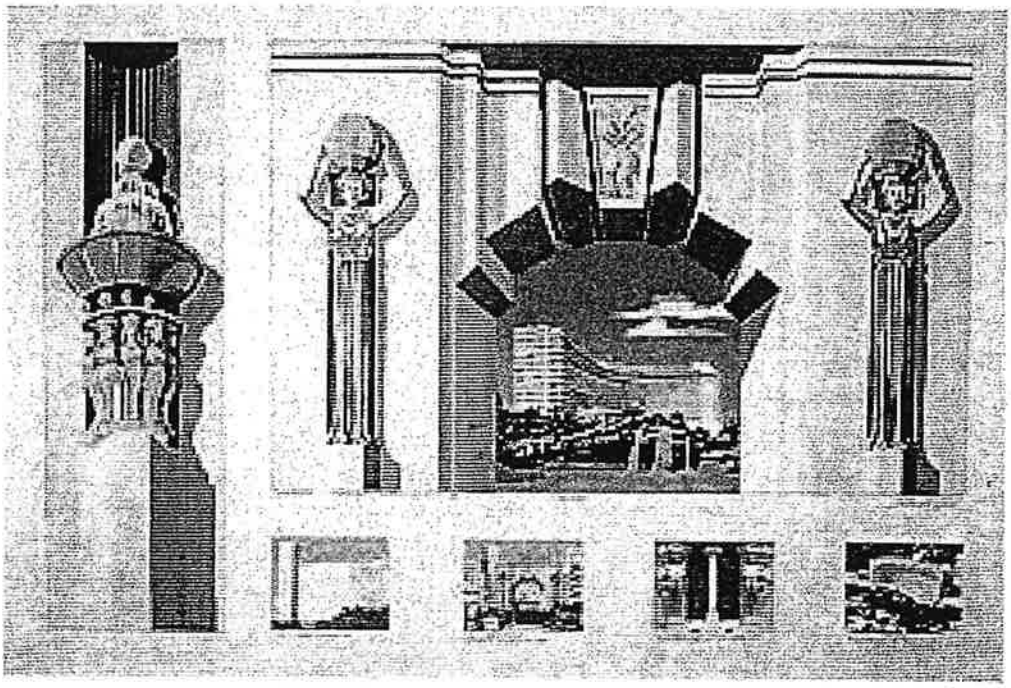
In 1985, the blank south wall of the Fontainebleau Hilton Beach Club along Collins Avenue was transformed by artist Richard Haas into another stage set befitting the drama of the hotel itself. Steve Muss first discussed the mural project with Haas around 1982. The artist commented, "When I saw the site, 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 form it – namely, city as fantasy or, as he puts it, 'city as plausible fantasy."[15]

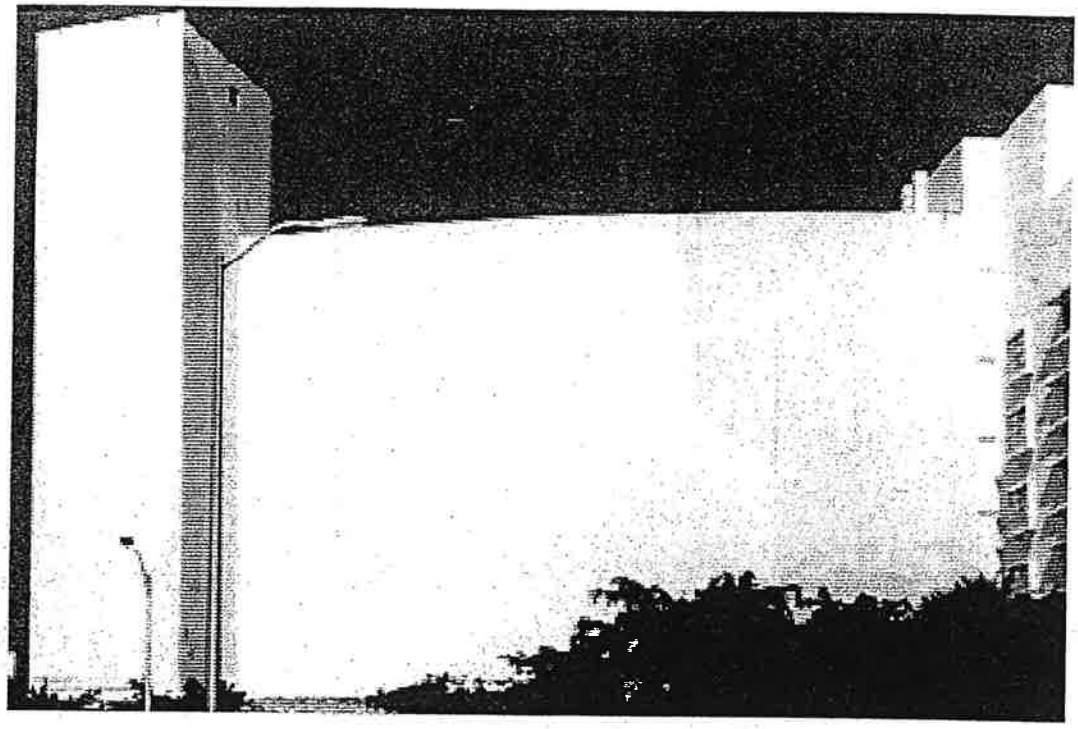
In the late 1980s, few renovations were initiated, and the ones that were mainly small and located on the north section of the property. On May 19, 1987 a Certificate of Occupancy was issued for an upper parking level, as well as for a kosher kitchen, meeting rooms, ballrooms, and promenade on the 4th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



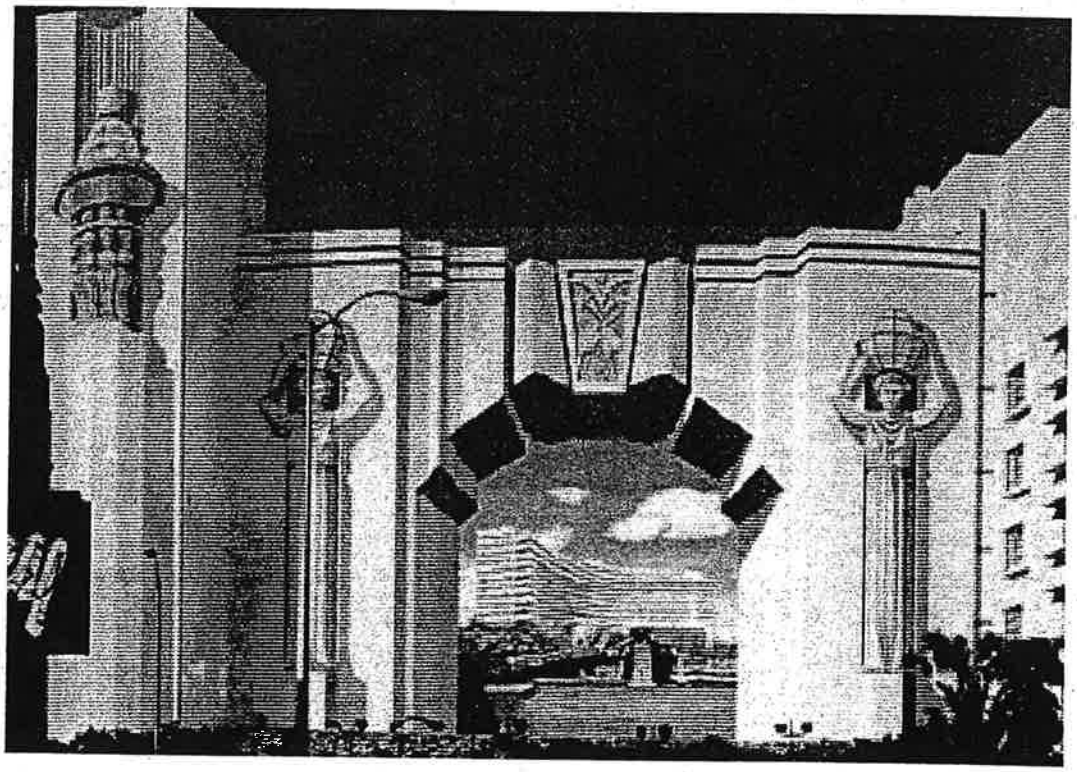
Postcard: Mural on South wall of the Fontainebleau Hotel (1985)
Published by Scenic Florida Dist.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



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

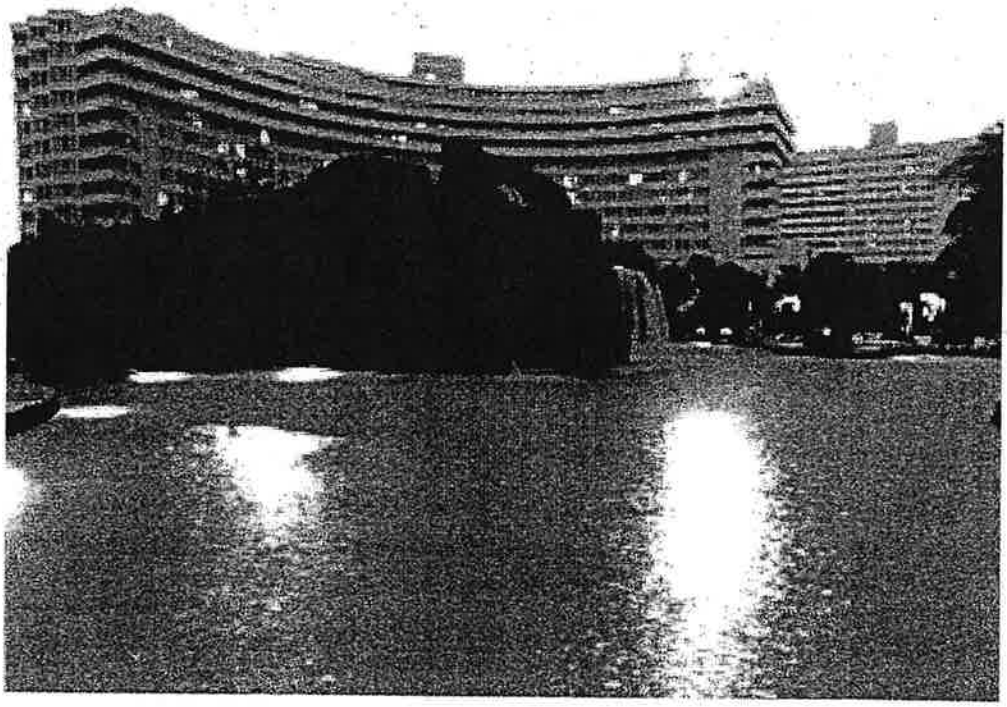


Fontainebleau wall Before Mural
Photograph courtesy of the Richard Hass Collection, Publisher: Brooke Alexander

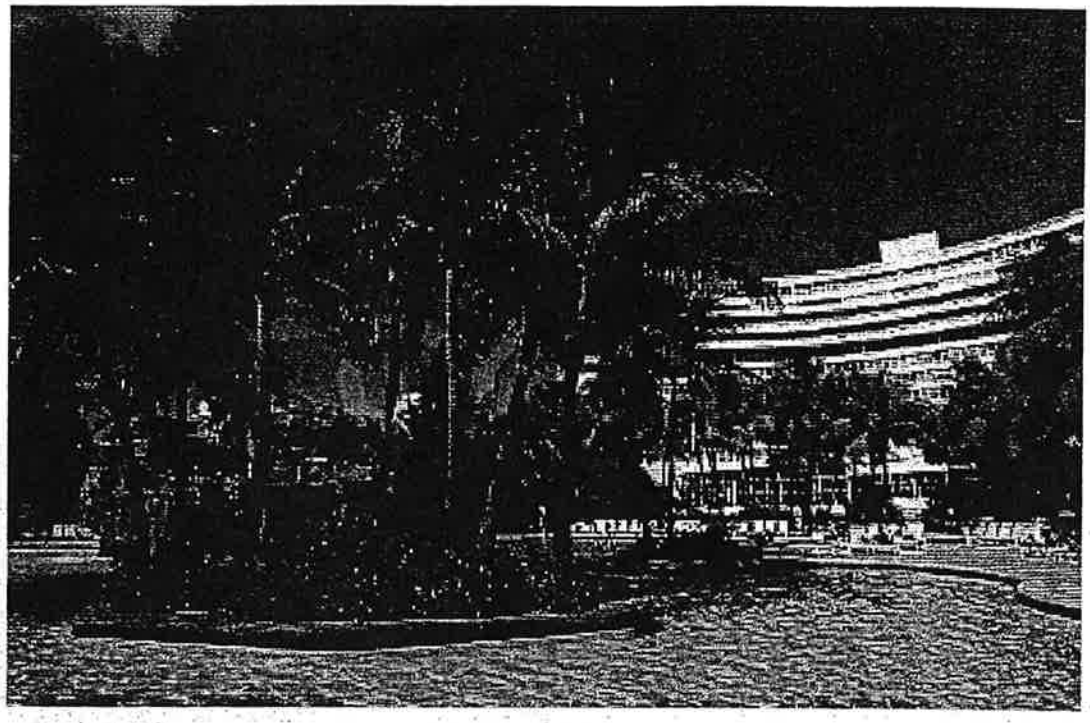


Fontainebleau wall After Mural
Photograph courtesy of the Richard Hass Collection, Publisher: Brooke Alexander

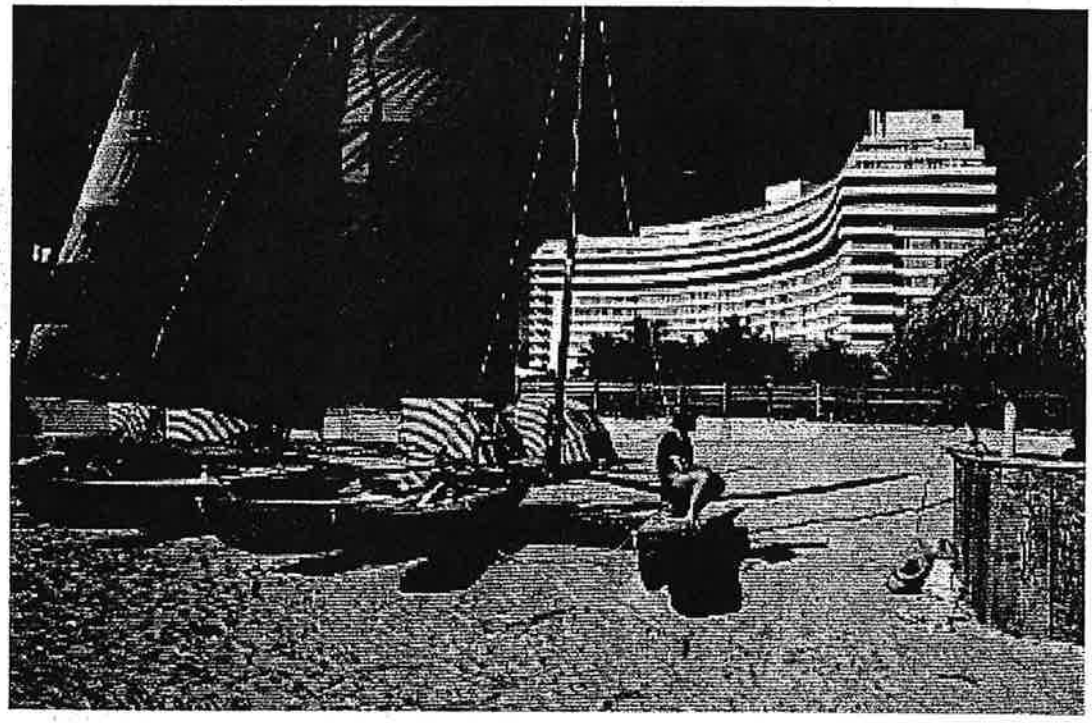
Postcard: Looking North on Florida's Gold coast at the Fontainbleau
Published by Gulfstream Card Co., Inc.
Image Courtesy of the Historical Museum of South Florida



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

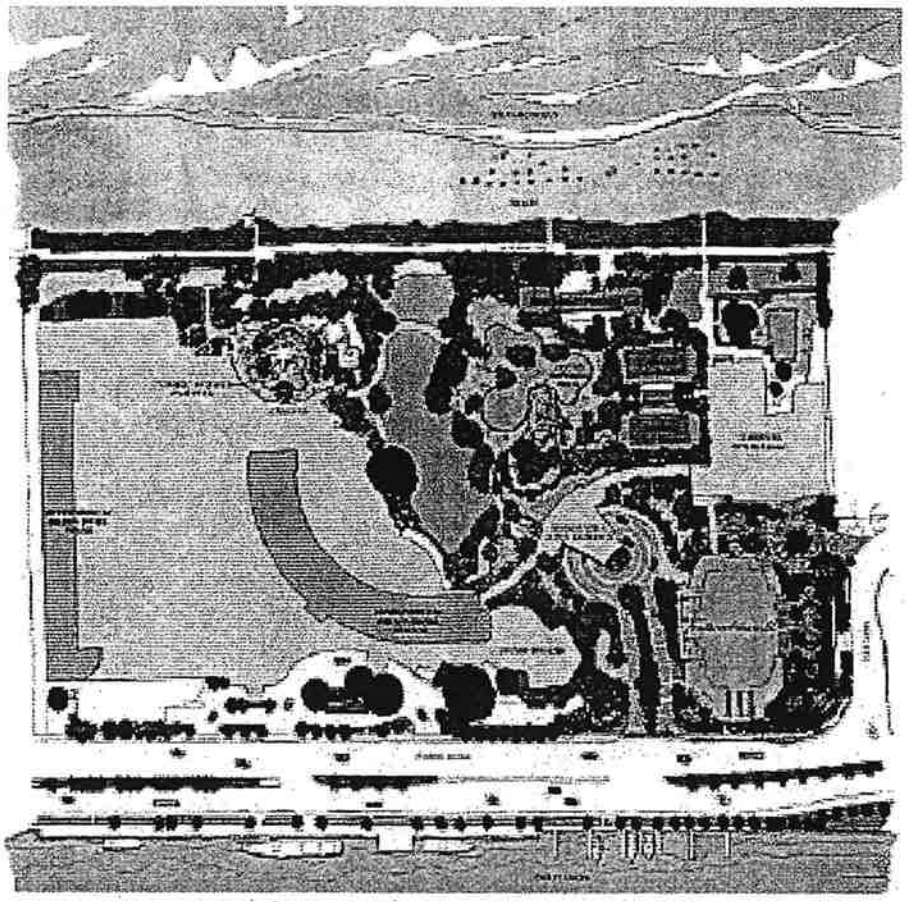
Expansion and Redevelopment (1997-2005)

In 1997, Hotelerama 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 Gooey 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.

Fontainebleau Hotel Owner Ben Novack 22 Years After Building Hotel

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 years 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 Gooey 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.

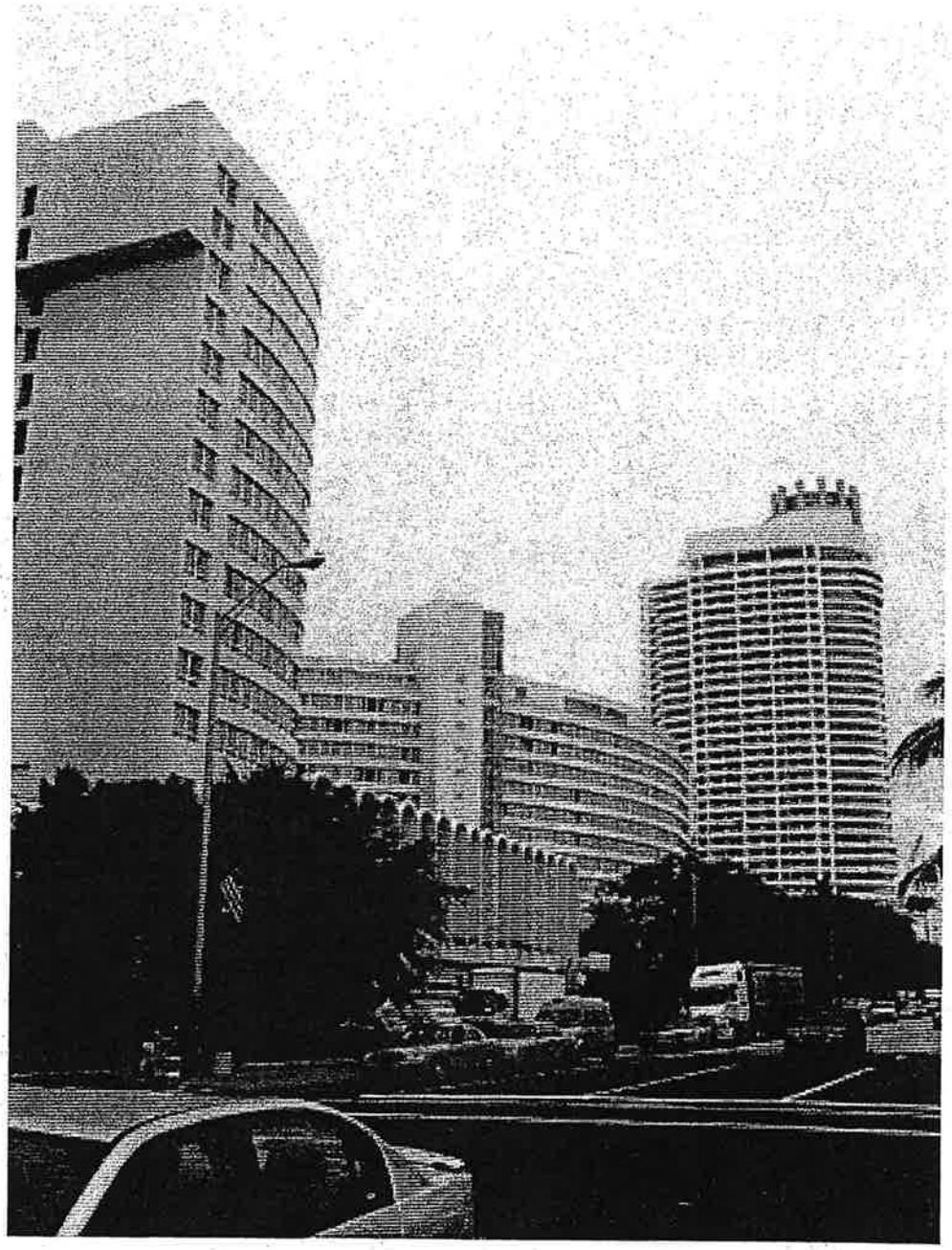
[10] Daisann McLane, "Adios South Beach, Hola Budget Miami," *New York Times*, October 11, 1998.

[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*

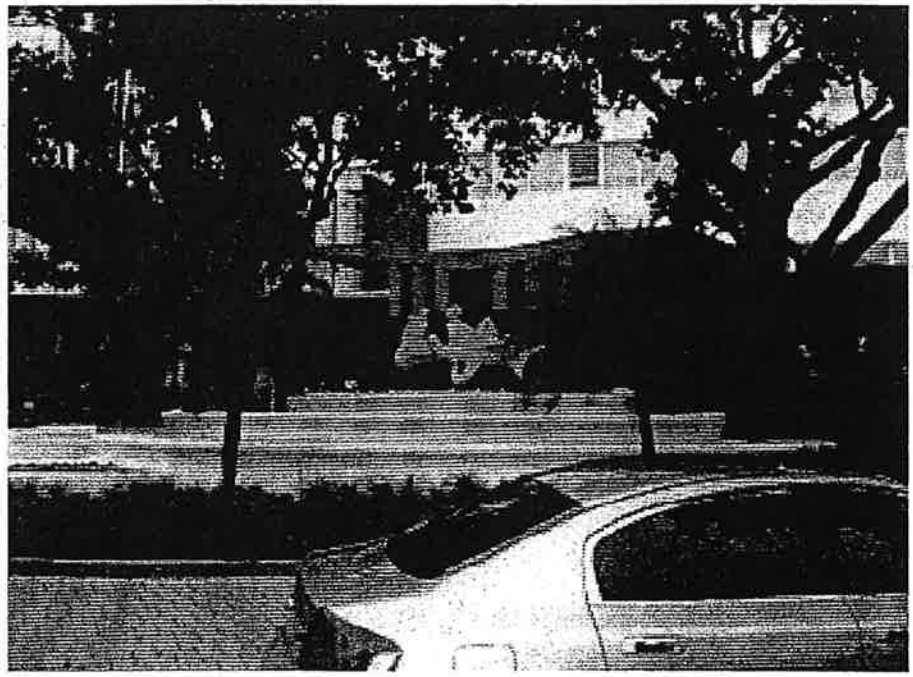
Contemporary Photo Survey

Taken June 2005

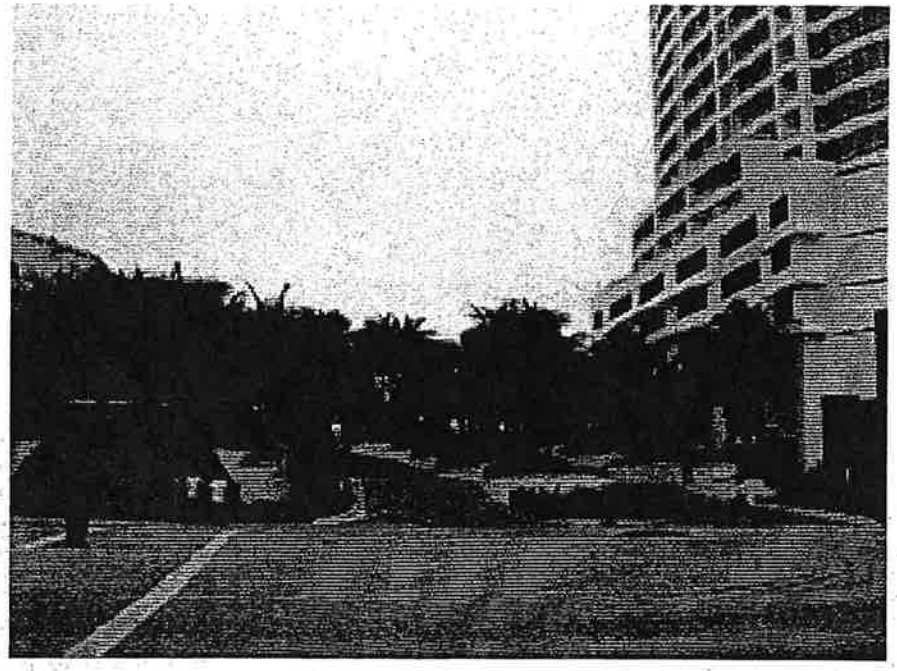


Fontainebleau site, view from Collins Avenue north
ATS photo 2005

Fontainebleau II from Collins Avenue north
ATS photo 2005

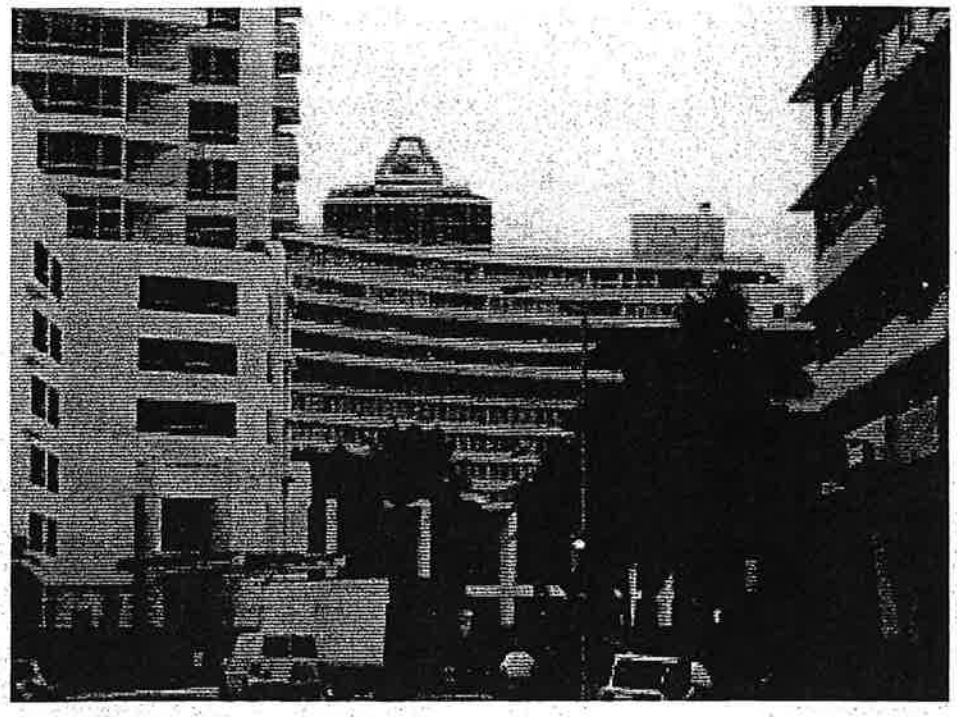


Original Entrance
ATS photo 2005



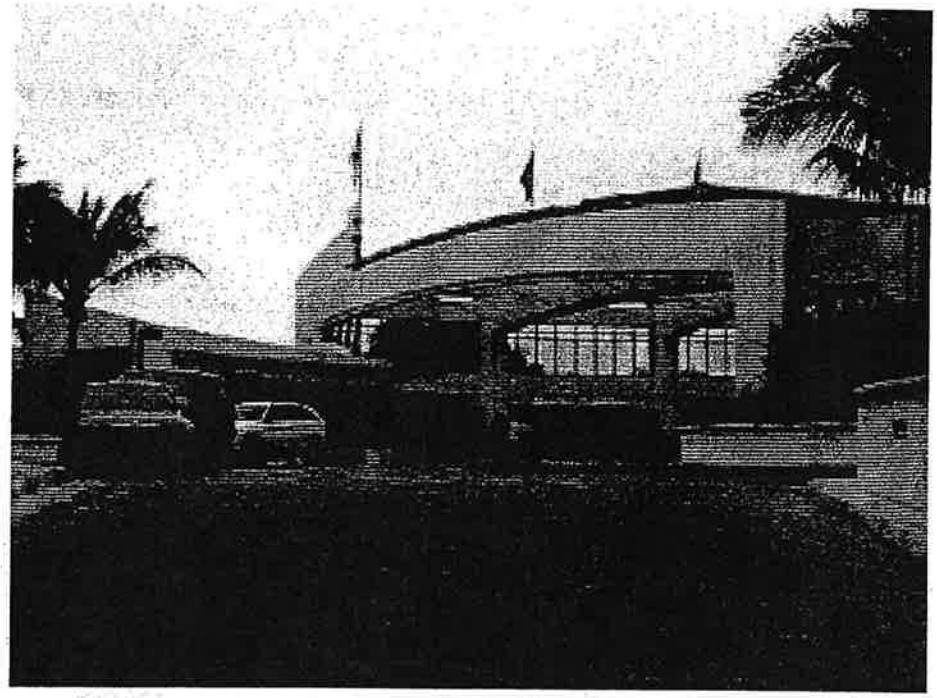
New Entrance from Collins Avenue
ATS photo 2005

Southwest corner of Fontainebleau II pedestal
ATS photo 2005

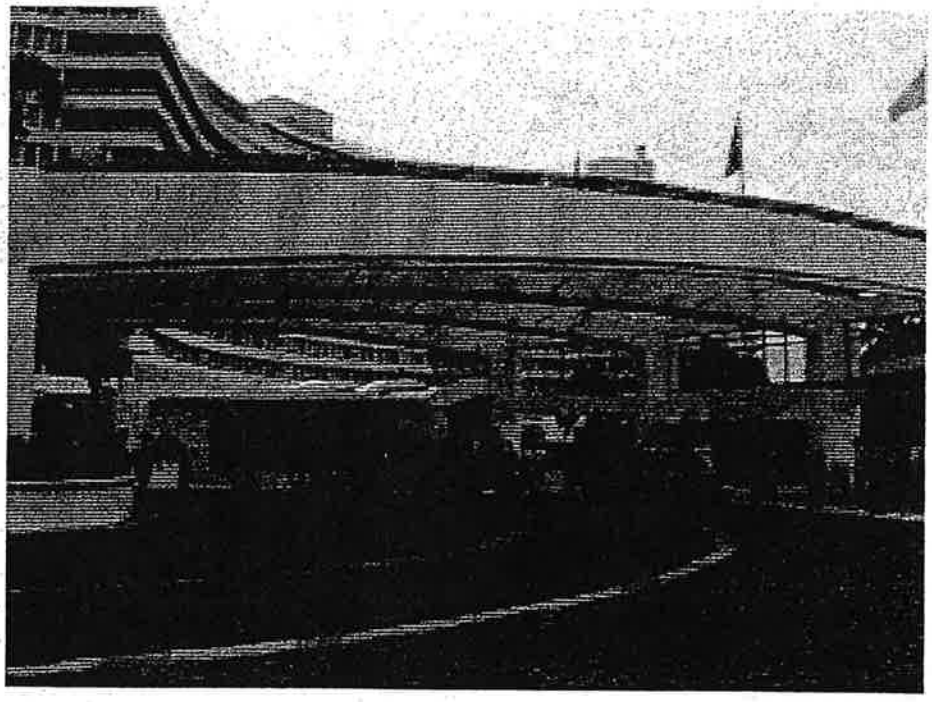


Fontainebleau II pedestal from Collins
ATS photo 2005

Fontainbleau II from Collins Avenue at 44th Street
ATS photo 2005



New Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005



New Porte-Cochere
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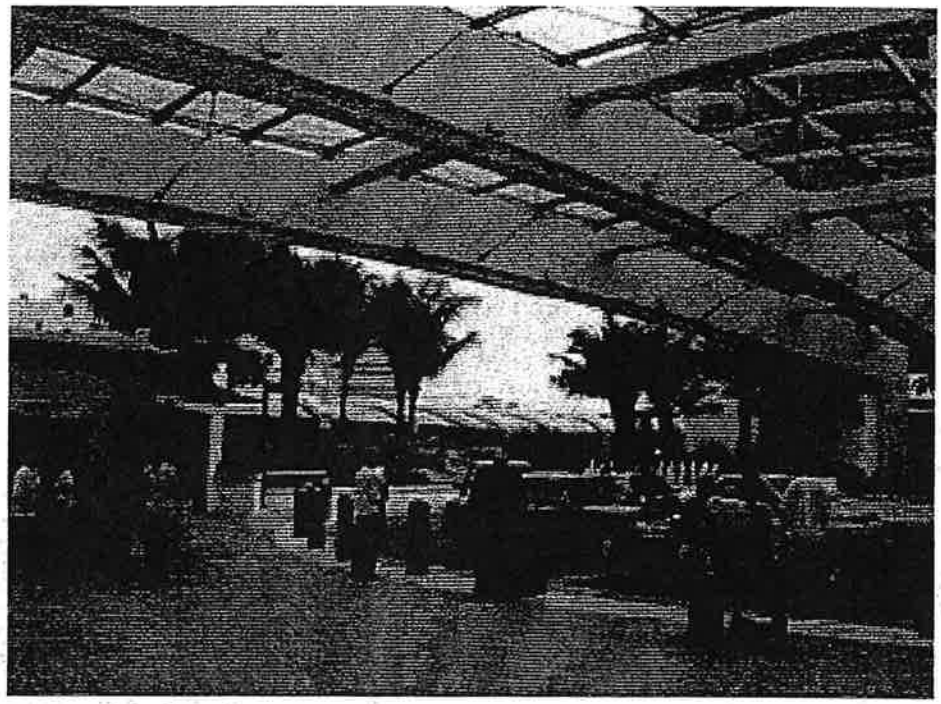
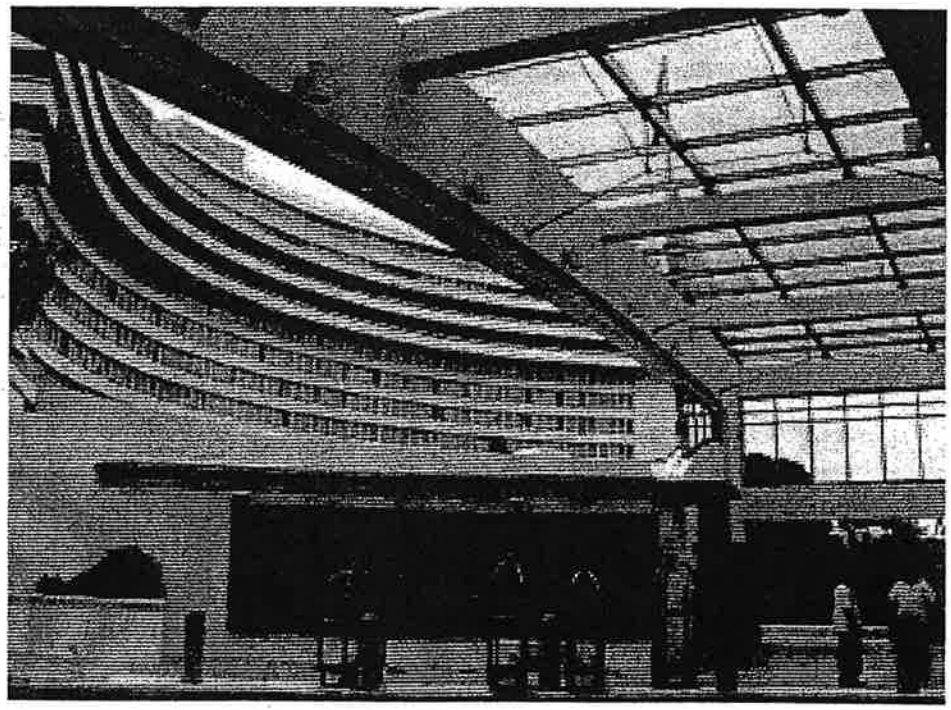
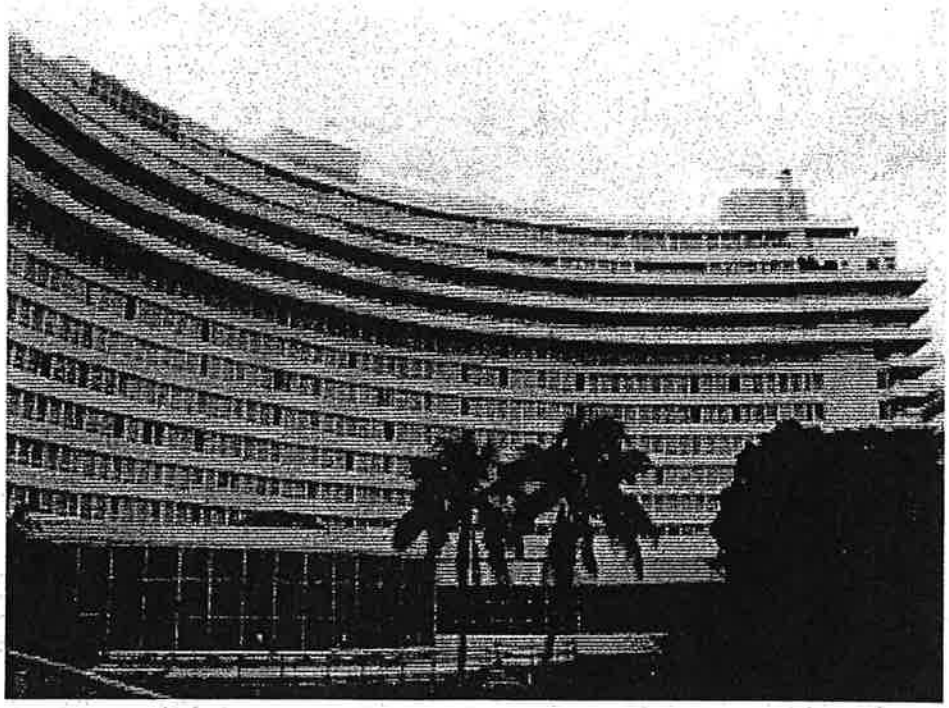


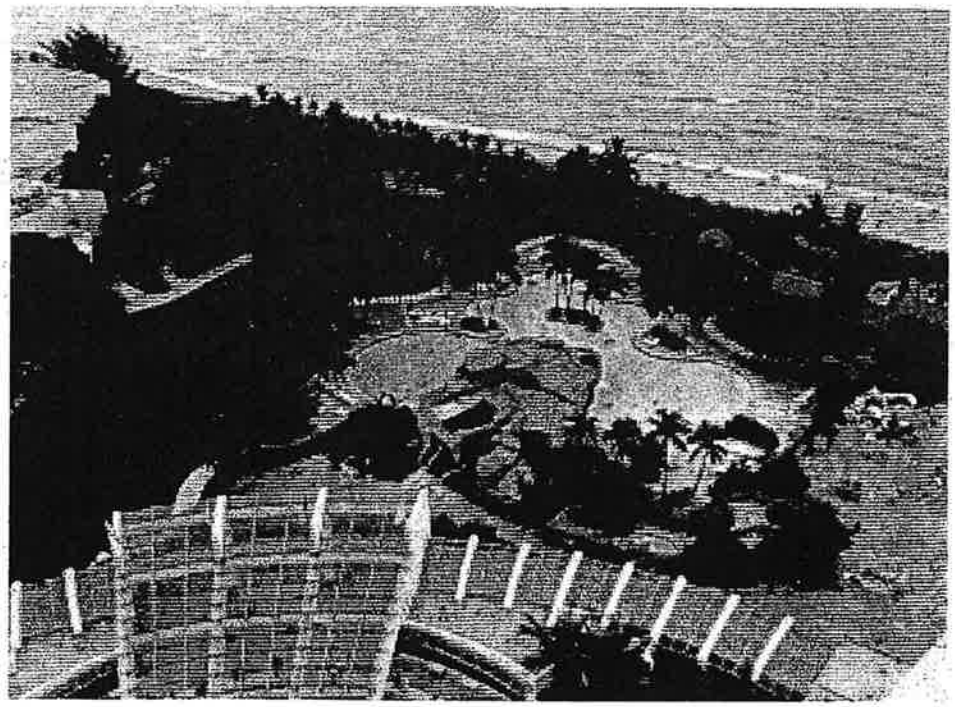
View of connector from Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005



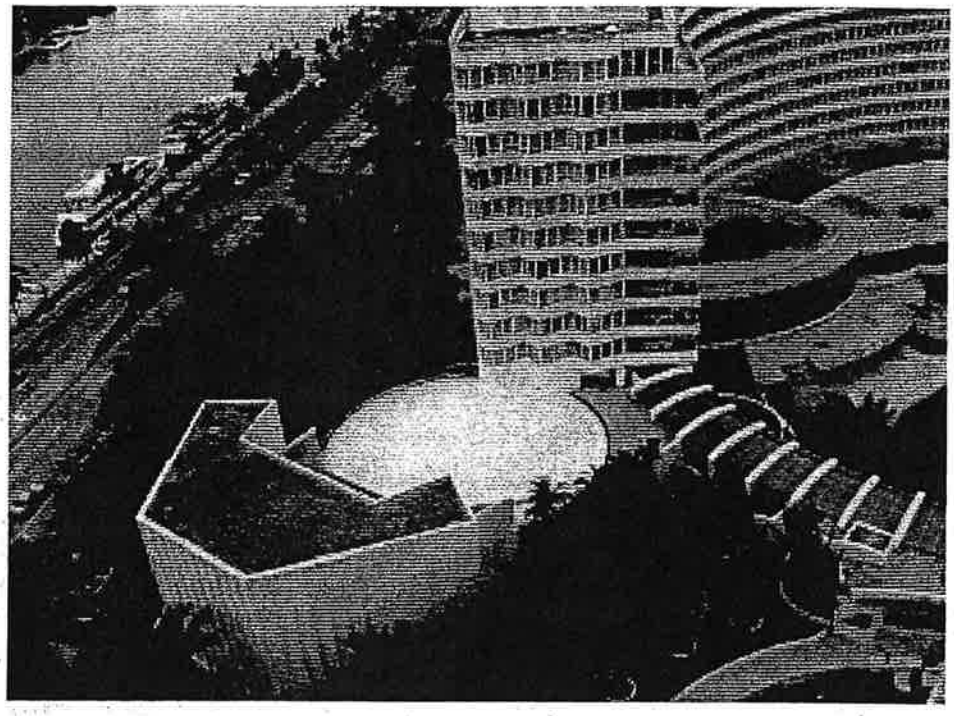
View of Chateau from Porte-Cochere
ATS photo 2005



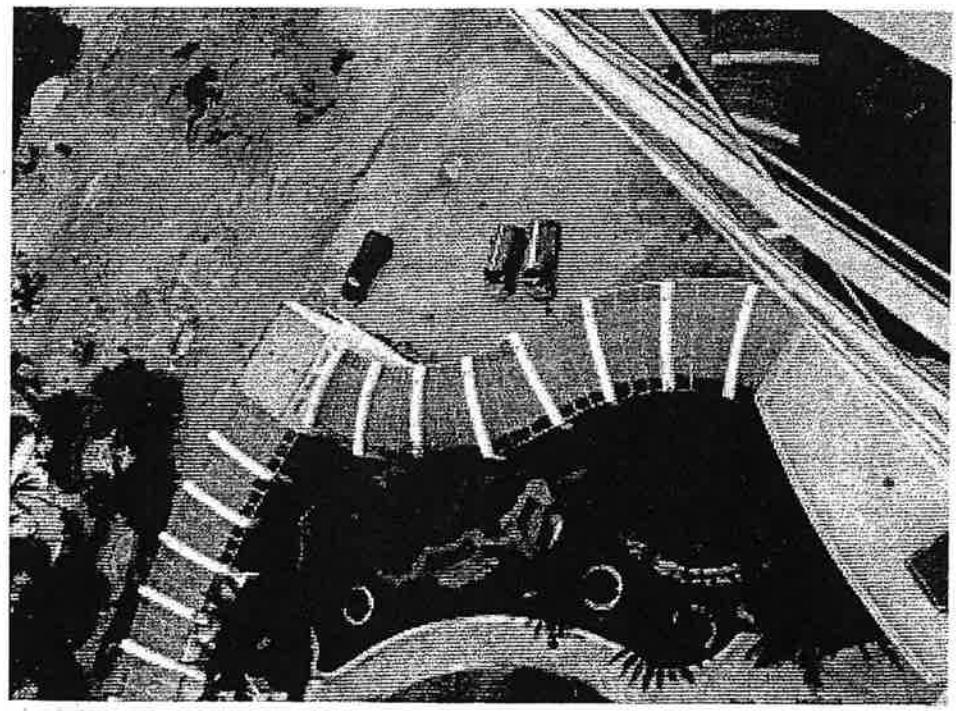
View of Chateau & Garden Lobby beyond new entrance
ATS photo 2005



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



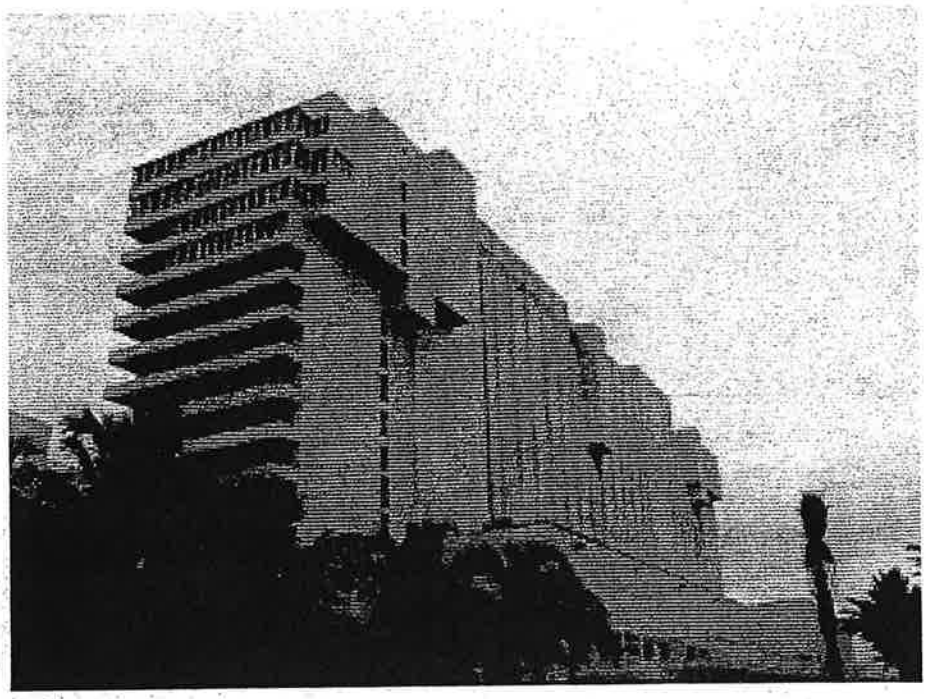
Connector spine to Chateau Building and Tropigala from above
ATS photo 2005



Connector spine to Fontainebleau III
ATS photo 2005

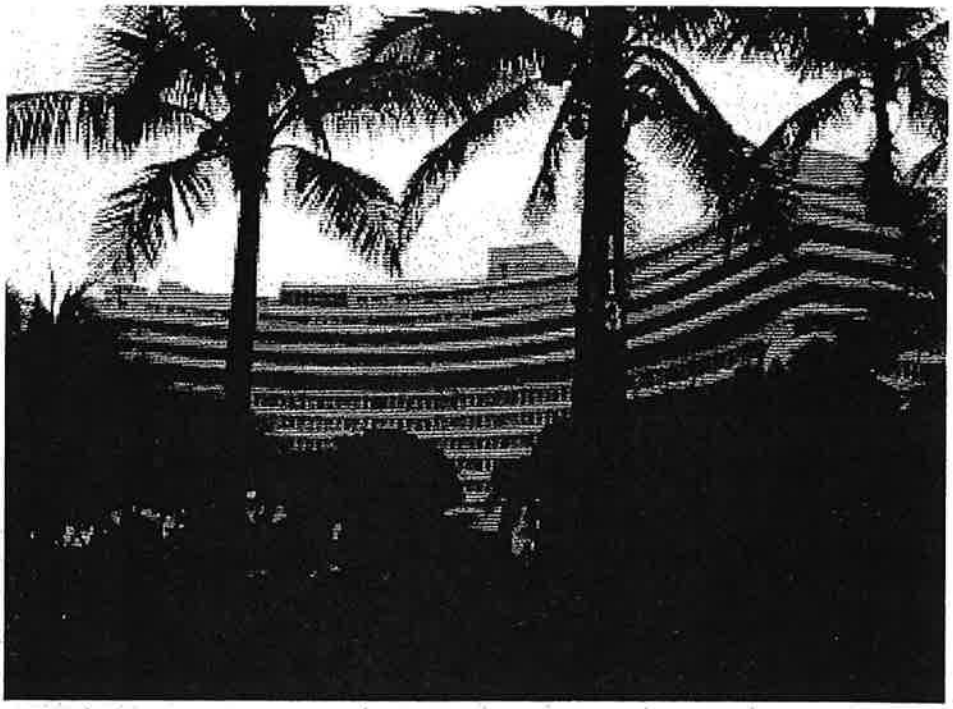
Exterior of Garden Lobby
ATS photo 2005

Exterior Stair from Garden Lobby
ATS photo 2005



North wall of Versailles Tower from boardwalk
ATS photo 2005

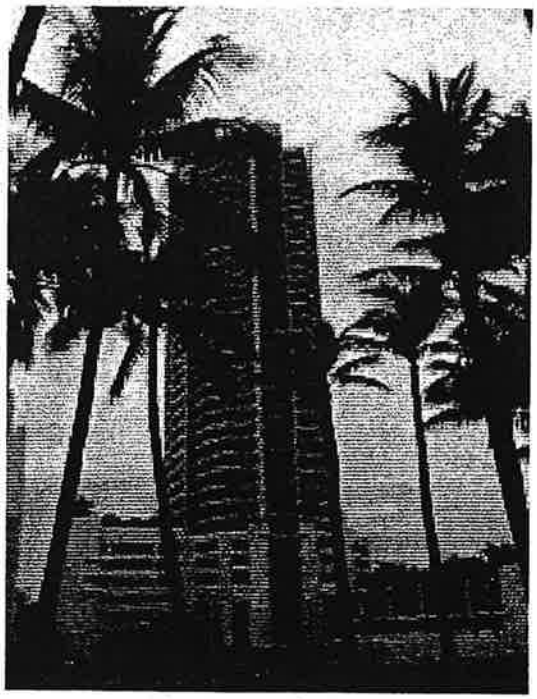
Versailles Tower from boardwalk
ATS photo 2005



View of Chateau from boardwalk east
ATS photo 2005

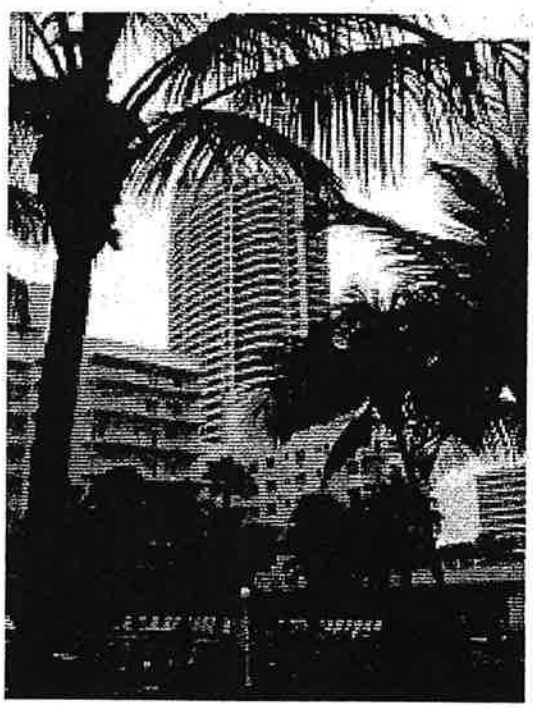
View of Chateau from boardwalk southeast
ATS photo 2005

Porte-Cochere & Fontainebleau II from east
ATS photo 2005



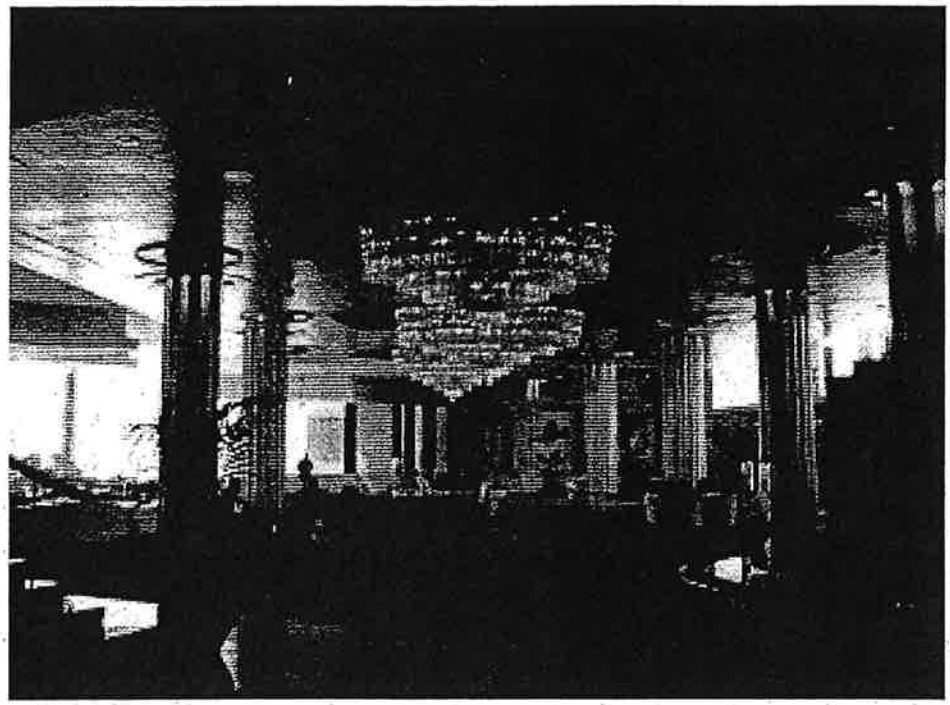
Fontainebleau II from east
ATS photo 2005

Fontainebleau II Pedestal
ATS photo 2005



Fontainebleau II behind Sorrento addition
ATS photo 2005

Chateau Lobby & Tower



Chateau Lobby
CIM photo 2005

Chateau Lobby
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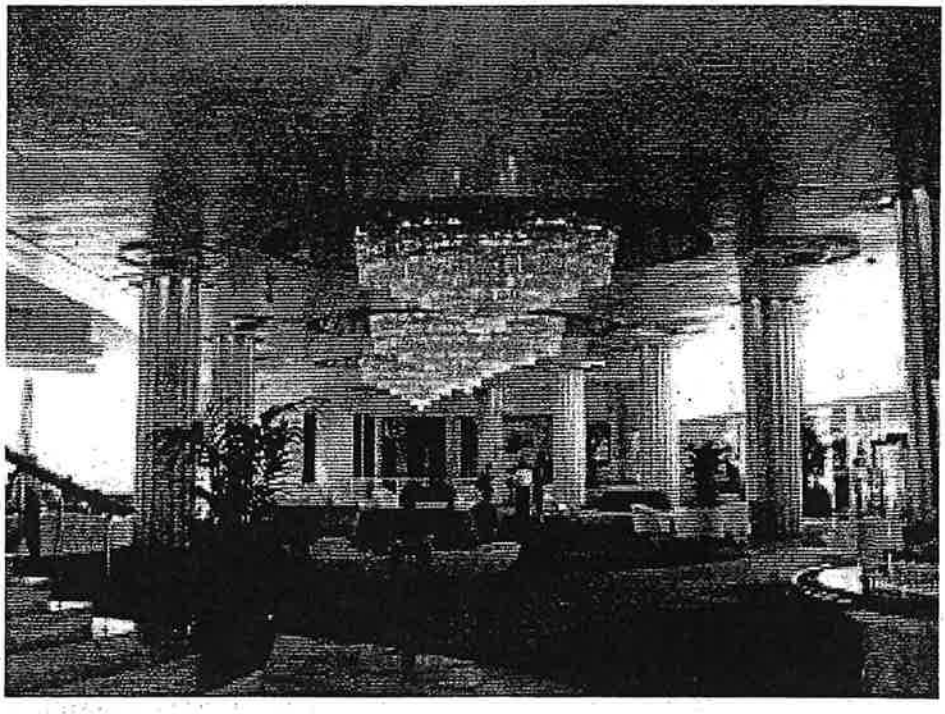

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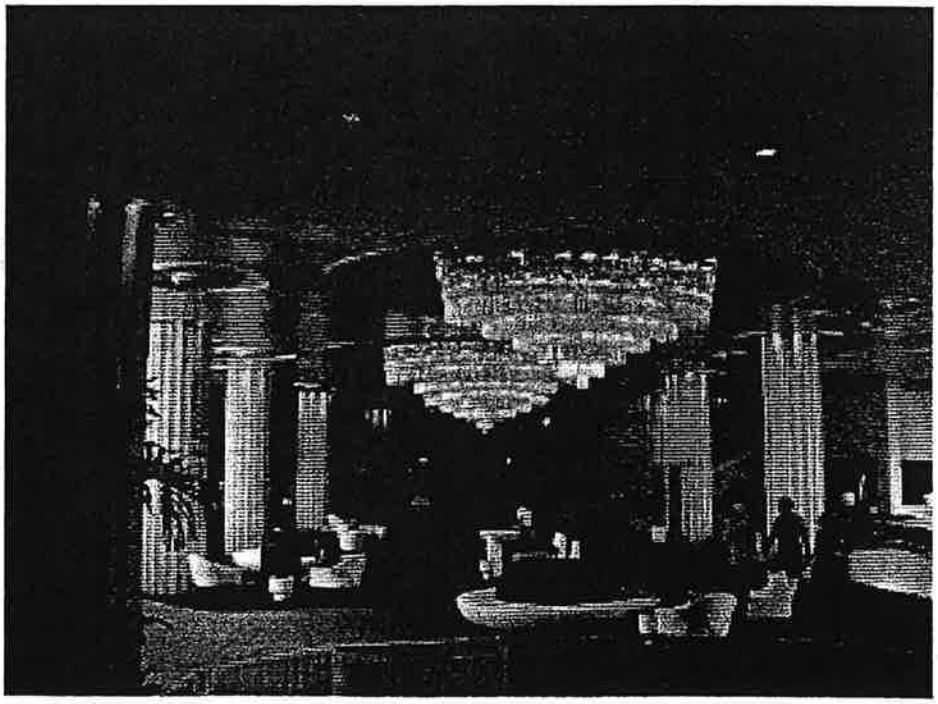

Chateau Lobby
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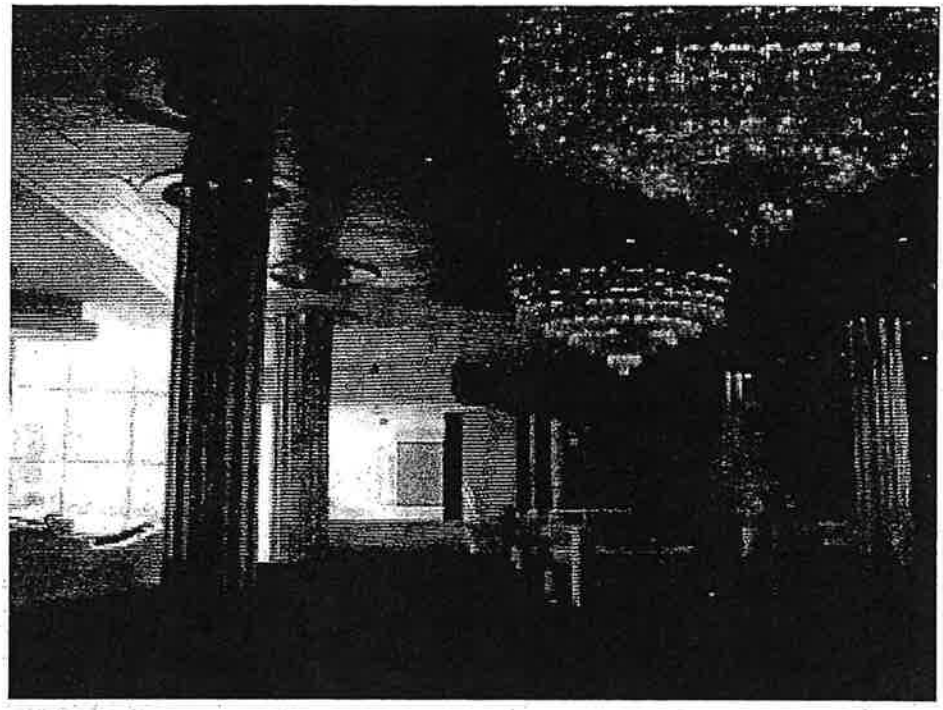

Chateau Lobby
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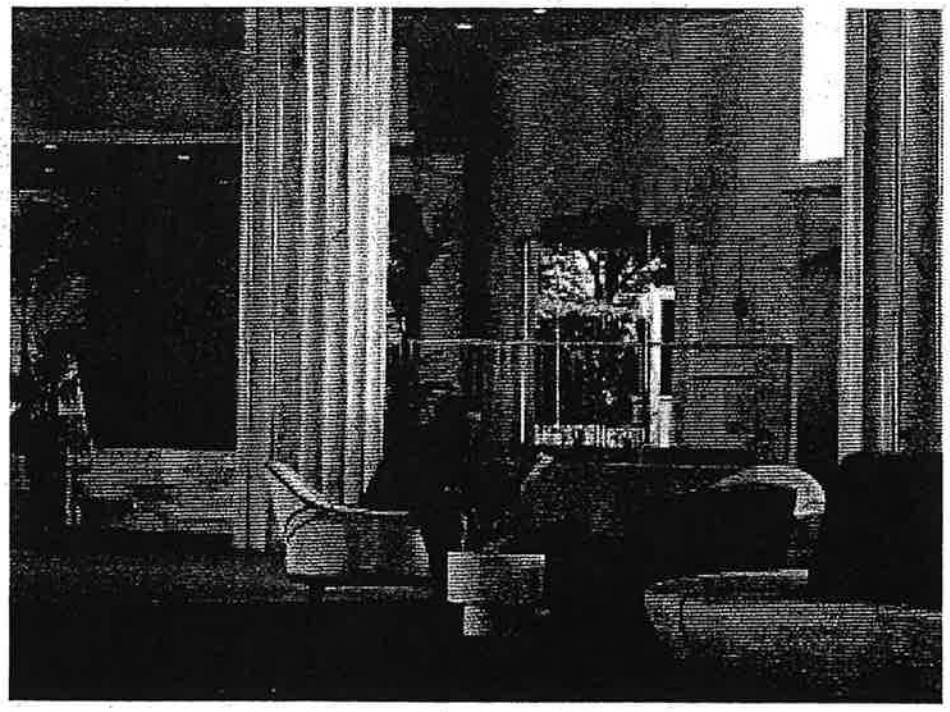

Chateau Lobby
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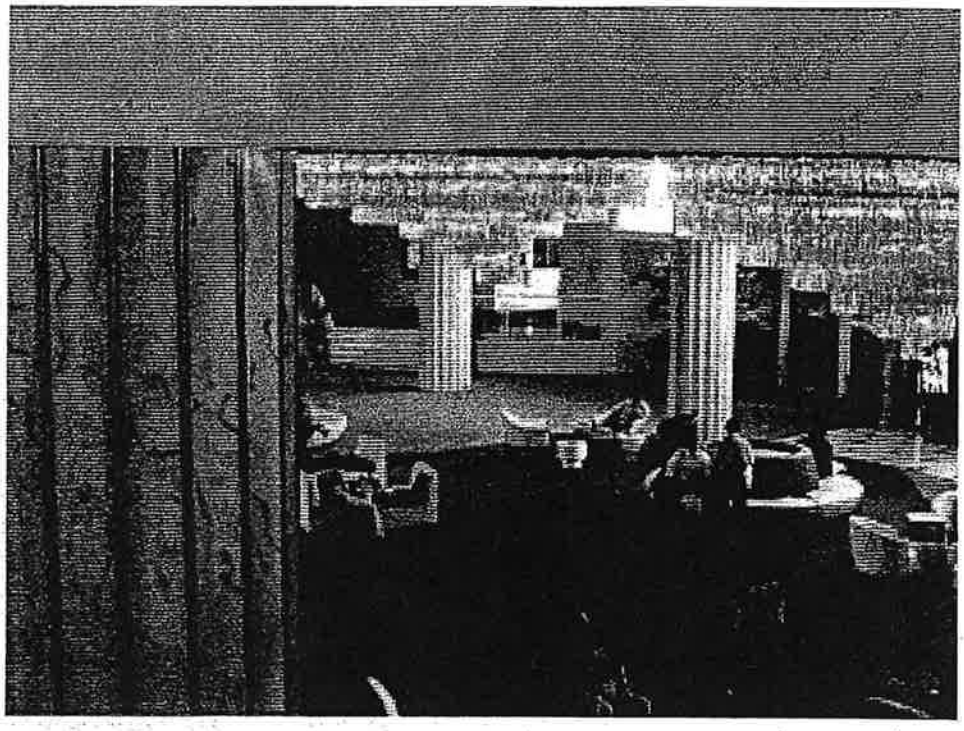
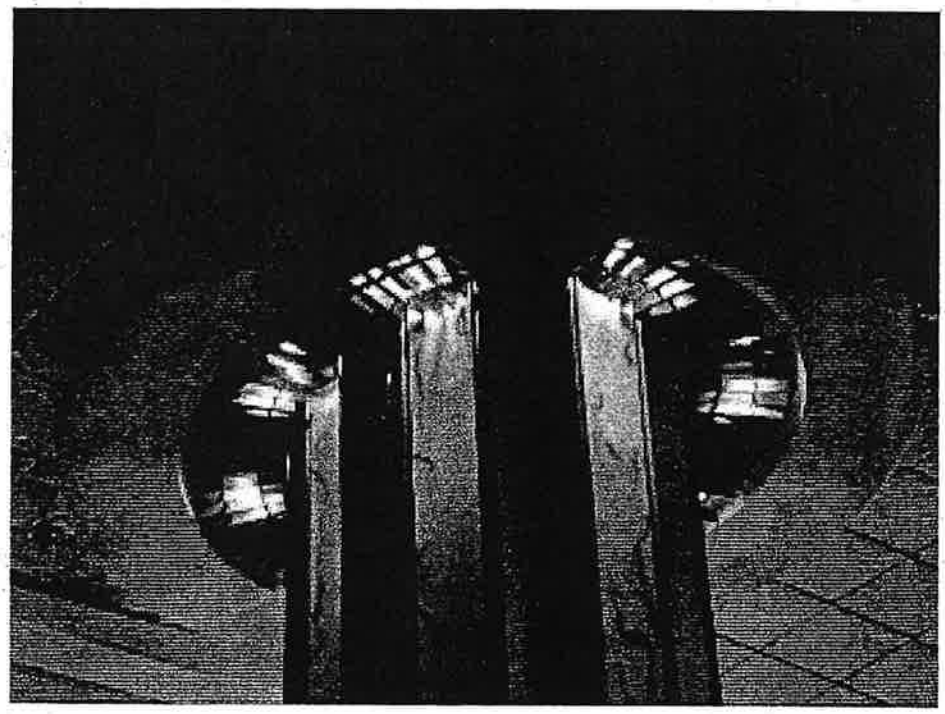


Lobby from Mezzanine
ATS photo 2005



Lobby Column Detail
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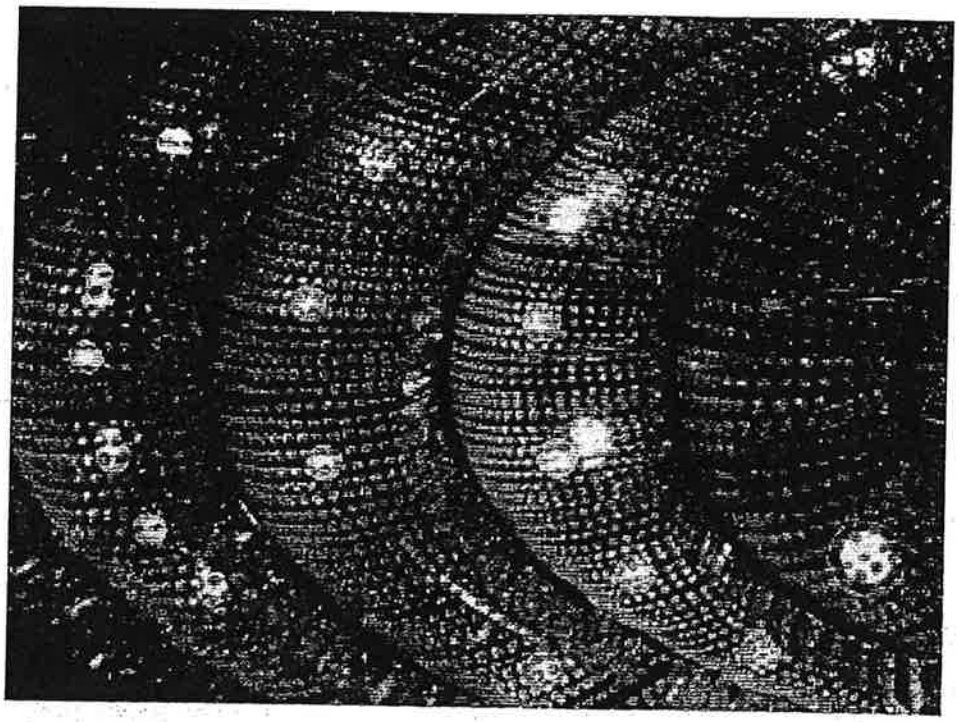

Lobby Chandelier Detail
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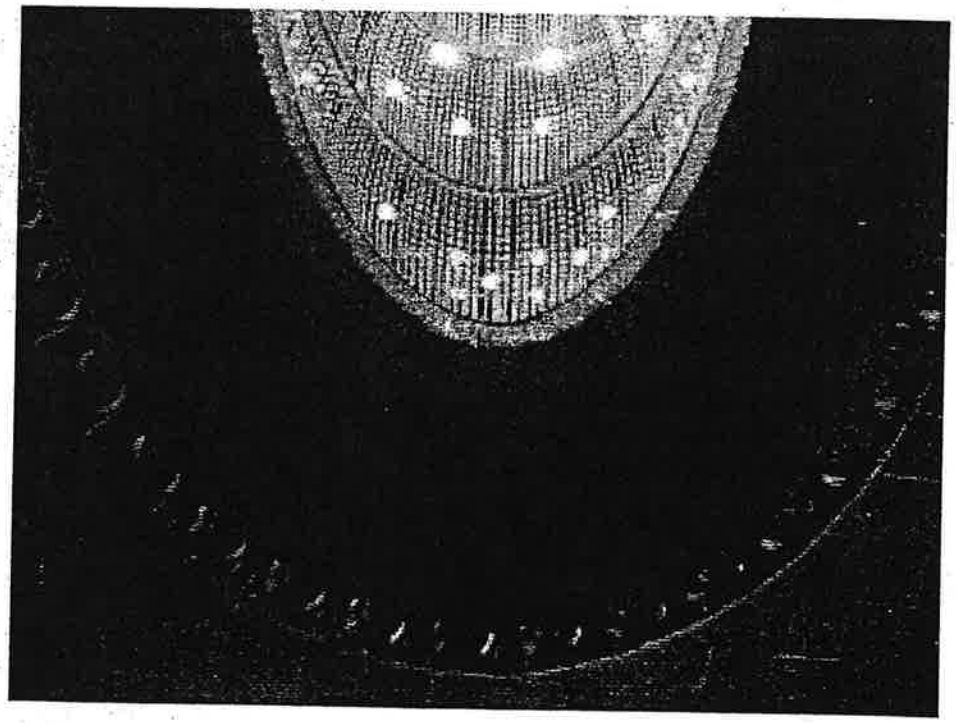

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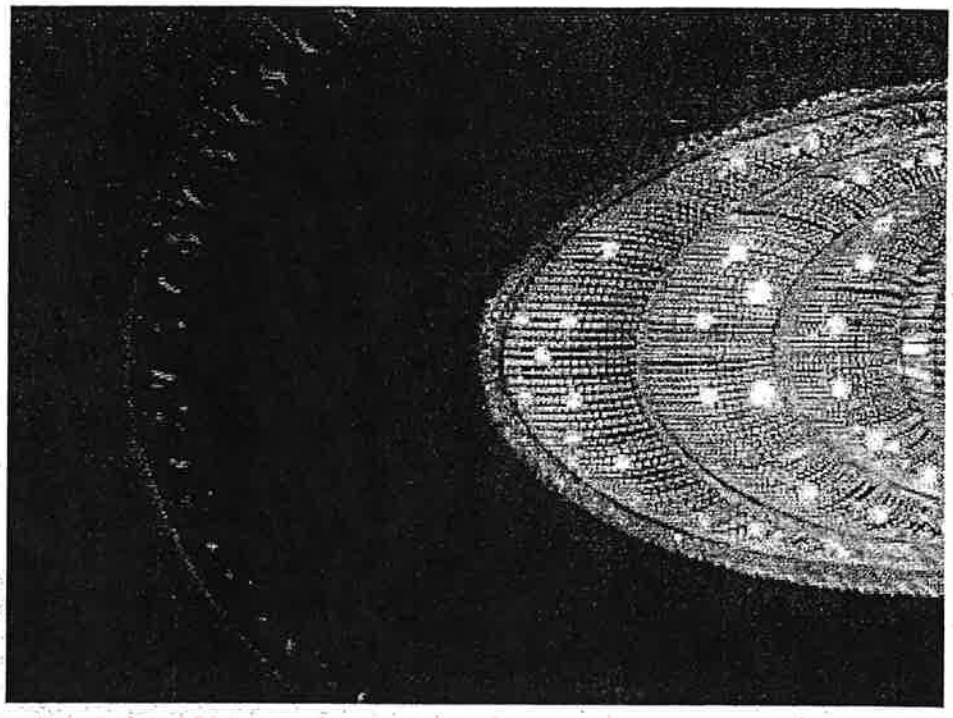

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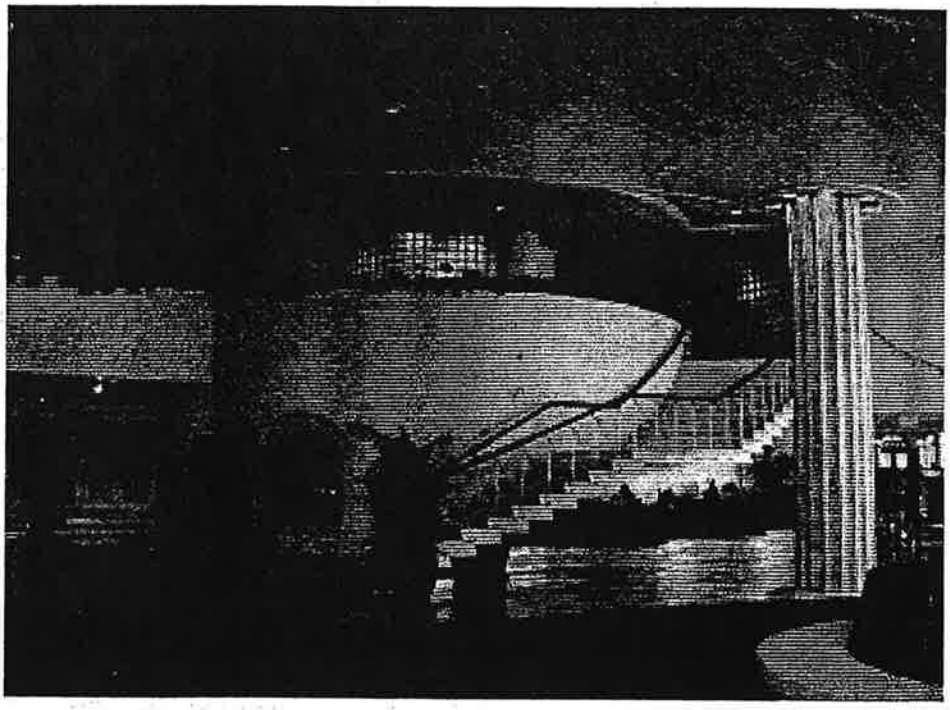
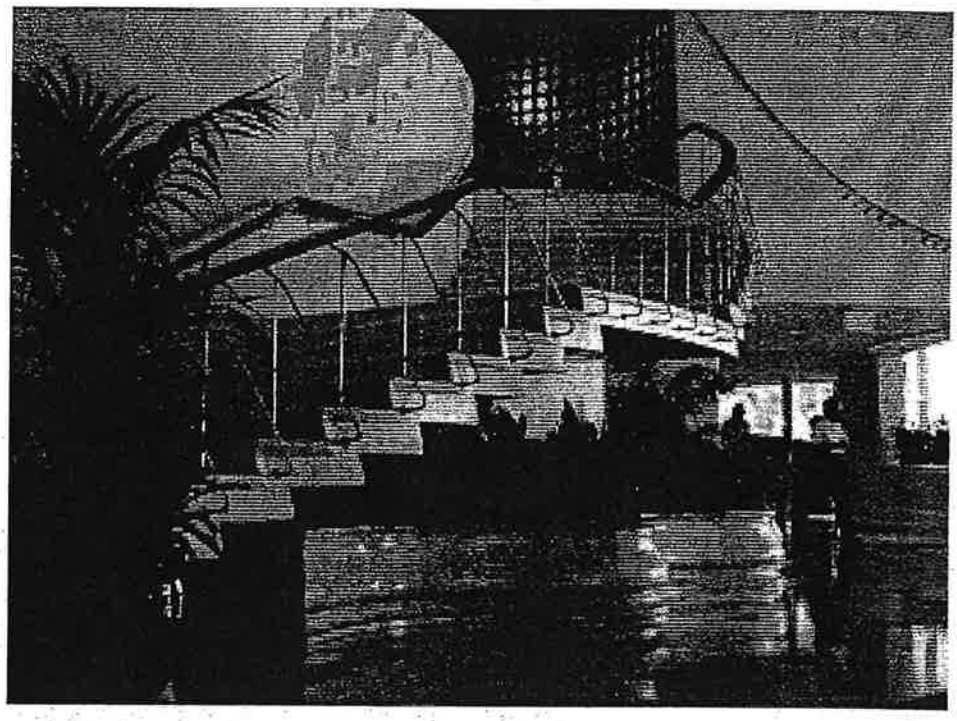
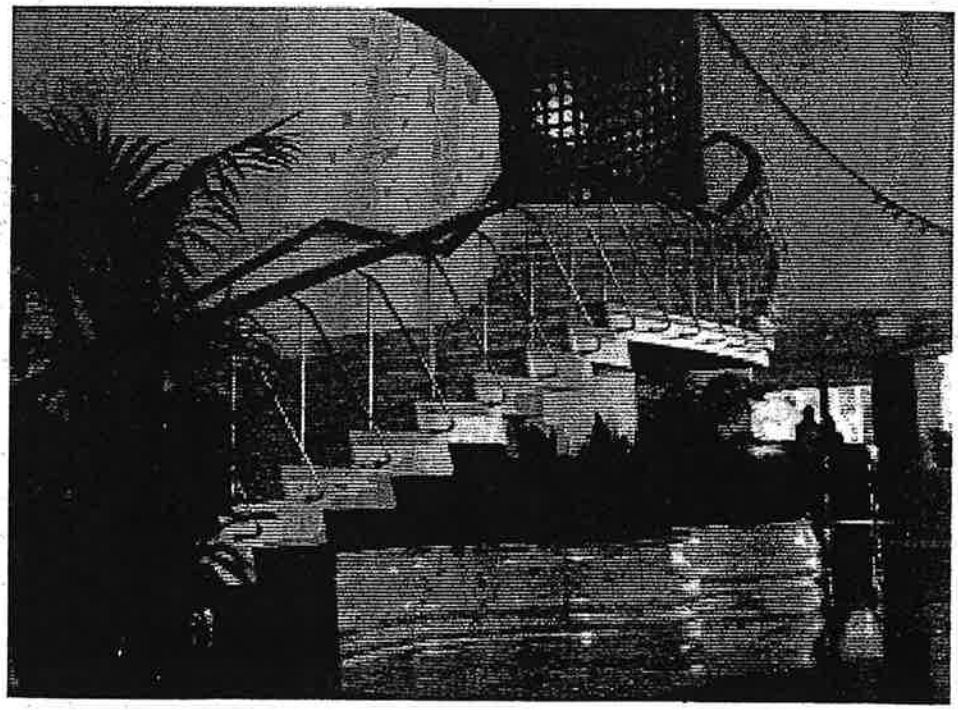


Lobby, View toward Stairs
CIM photo 2005

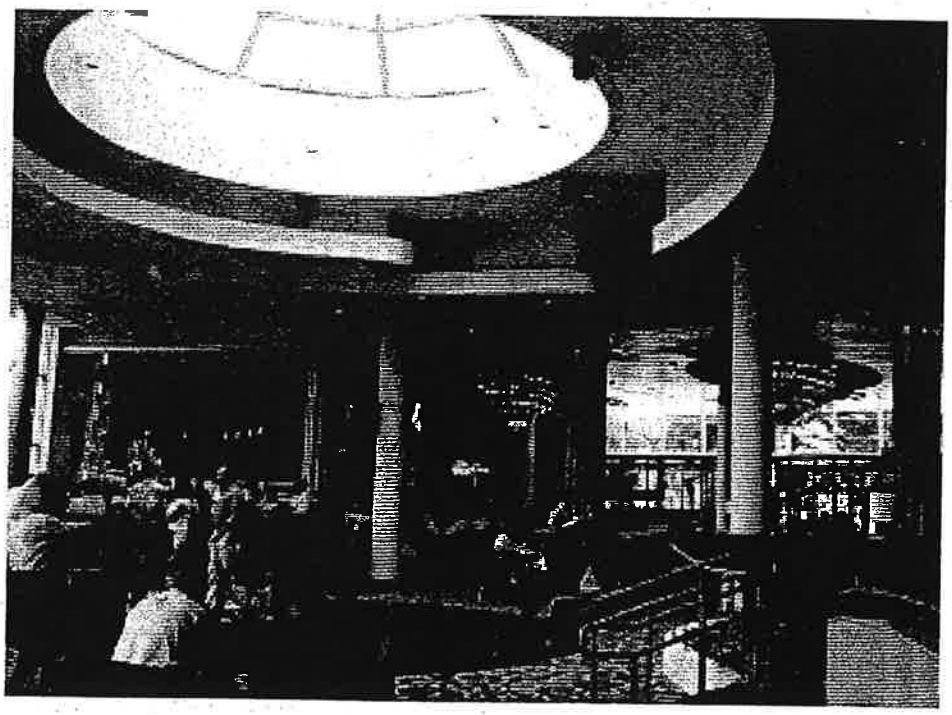


Lobby Stairs
CIM photo 2005

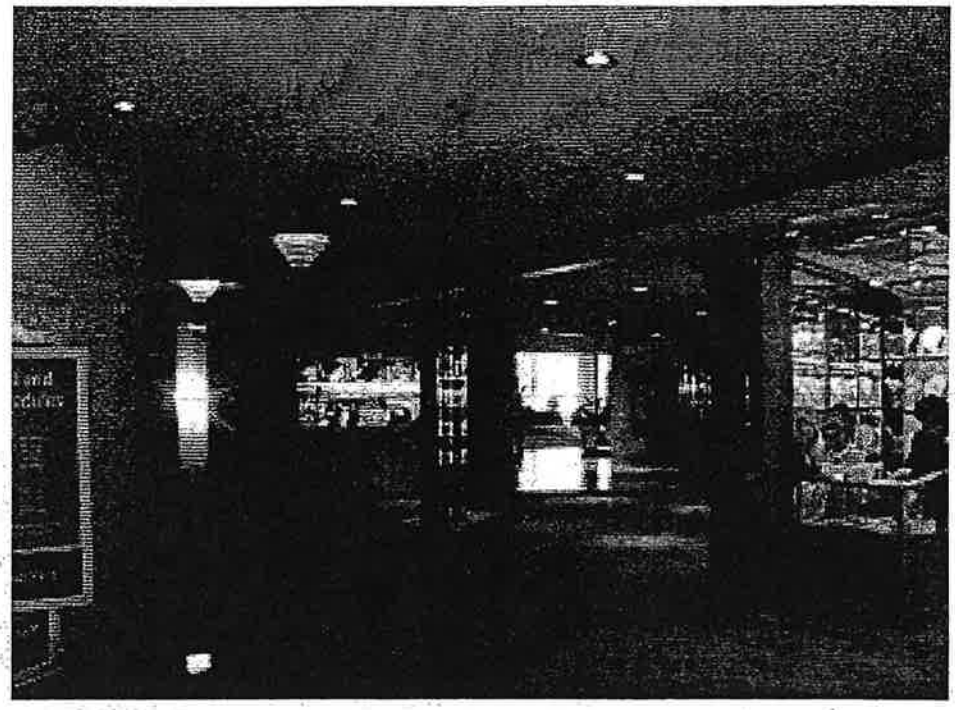


Lobby Stairs
CIM photo 2005

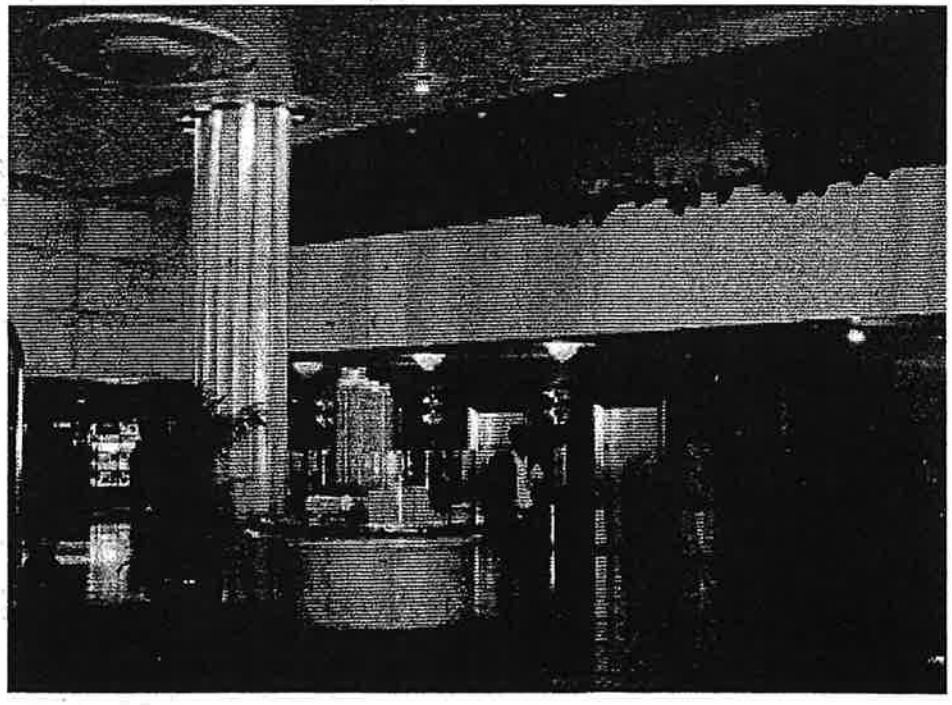
Garden Lobby
CIM photo 2005



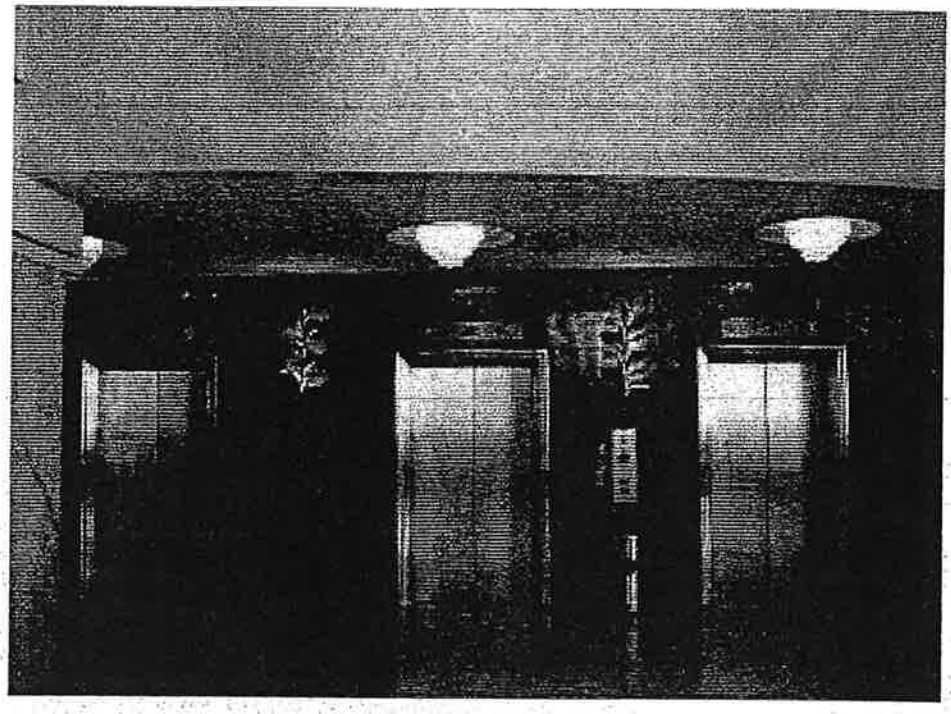
Garden Bar
ATS photo 2005



View of Lobby stores
CIM photo 2005



View towards Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005



Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005

Elevator Lobby
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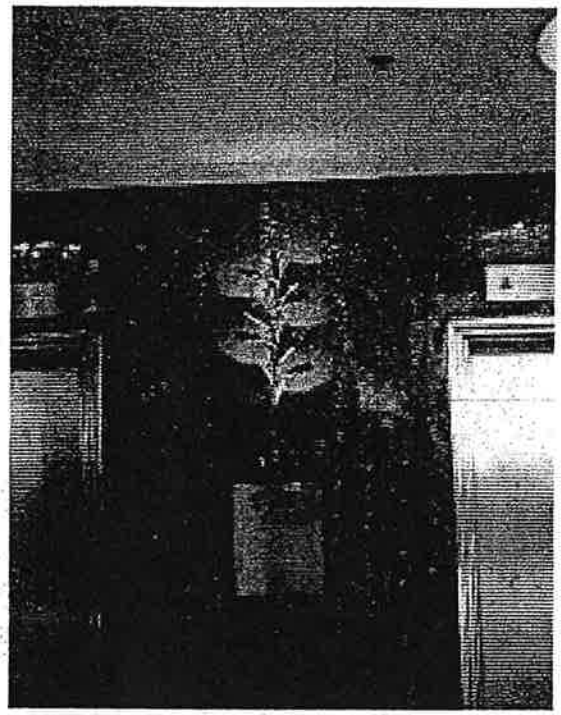
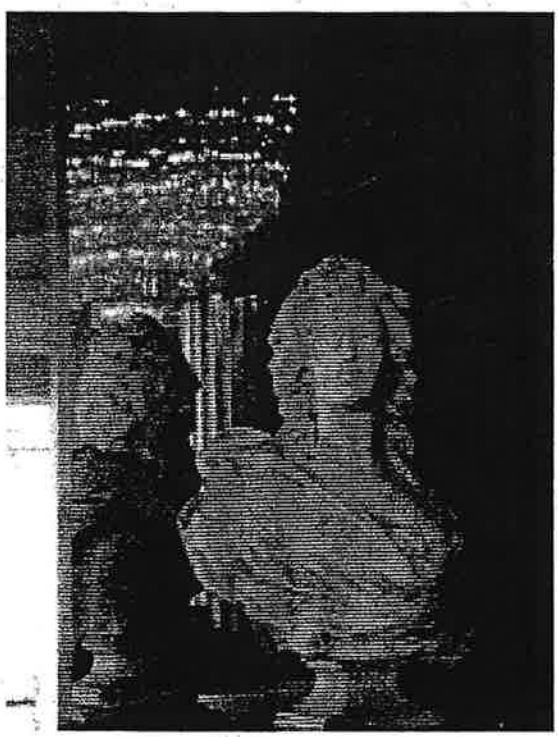


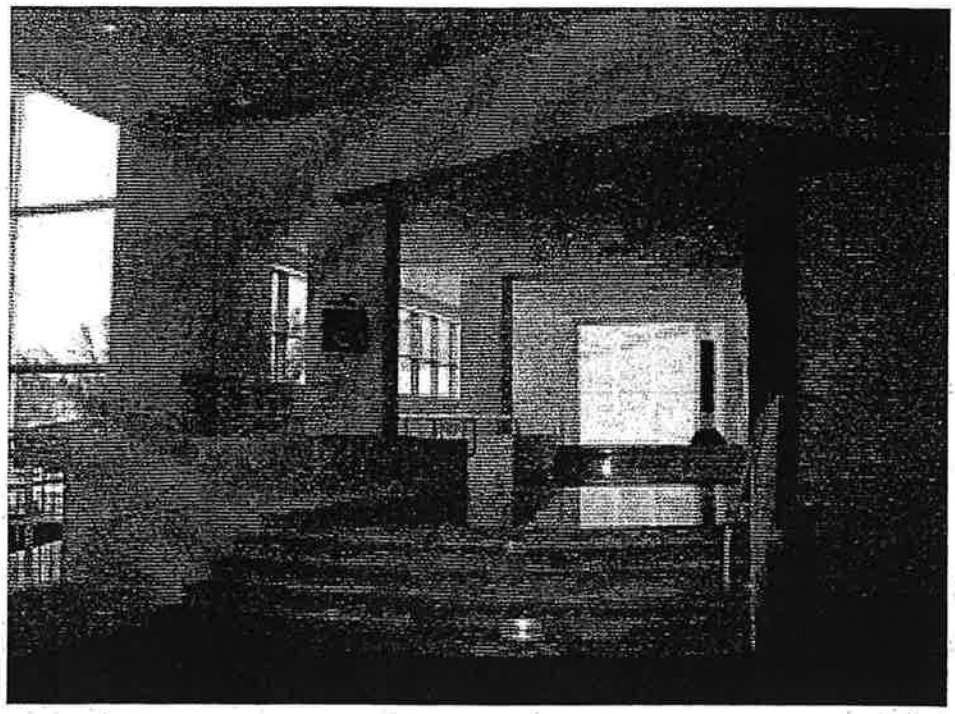
Wall Sconce in Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005

Wall Sconce in Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005

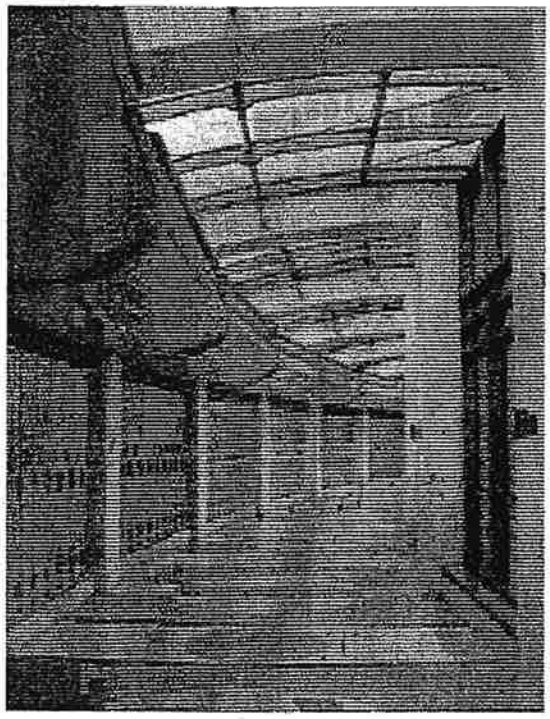
Statue located in Elevator Lobby
CIM photo 2005



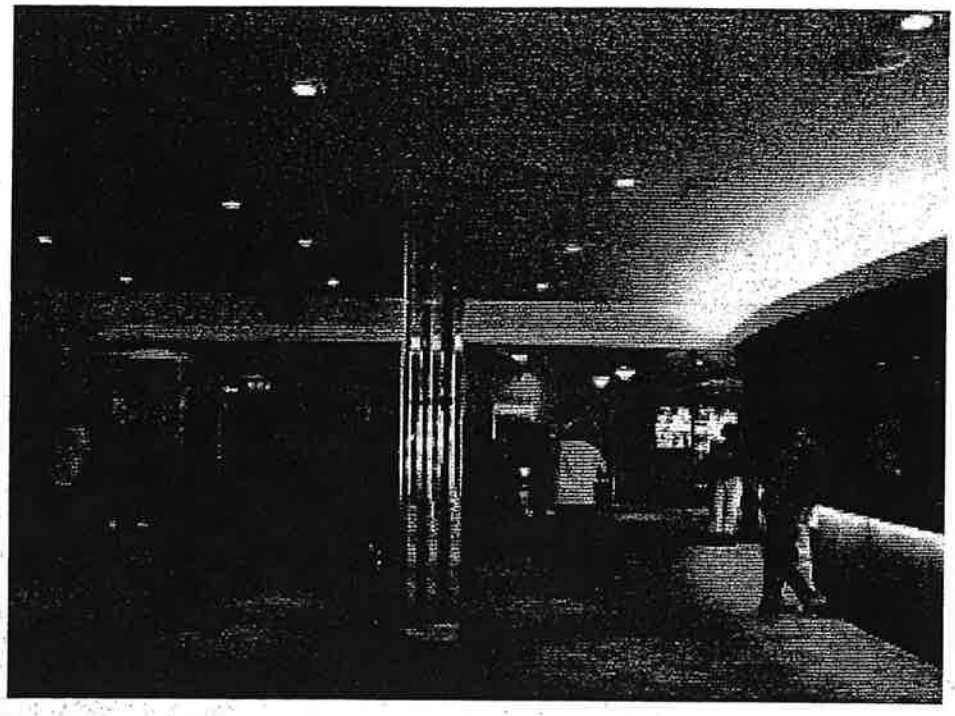
Statue located in Lobby Entrance
CIM photo 2005



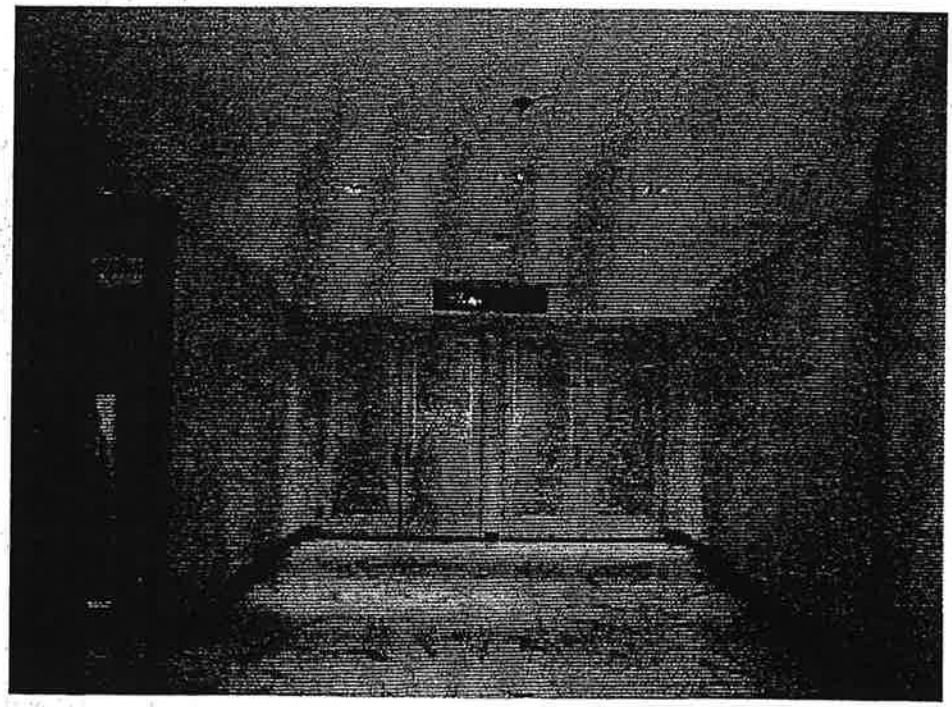
Stair to Spine Connecting to Fontainebleau II
CIM photo 2005



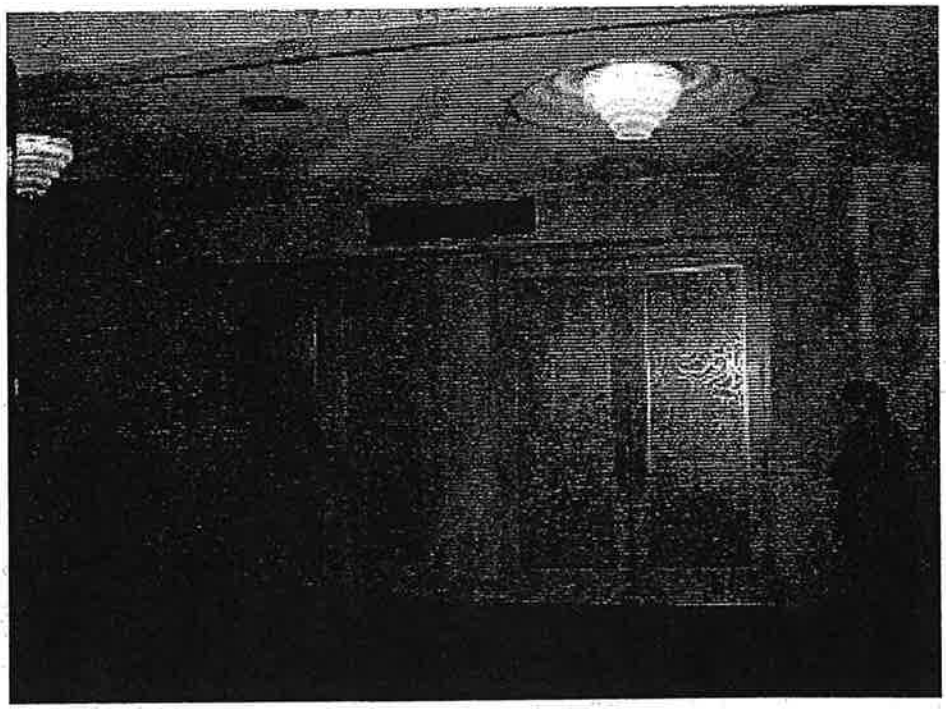
Connector Spine
ATS photo 2005



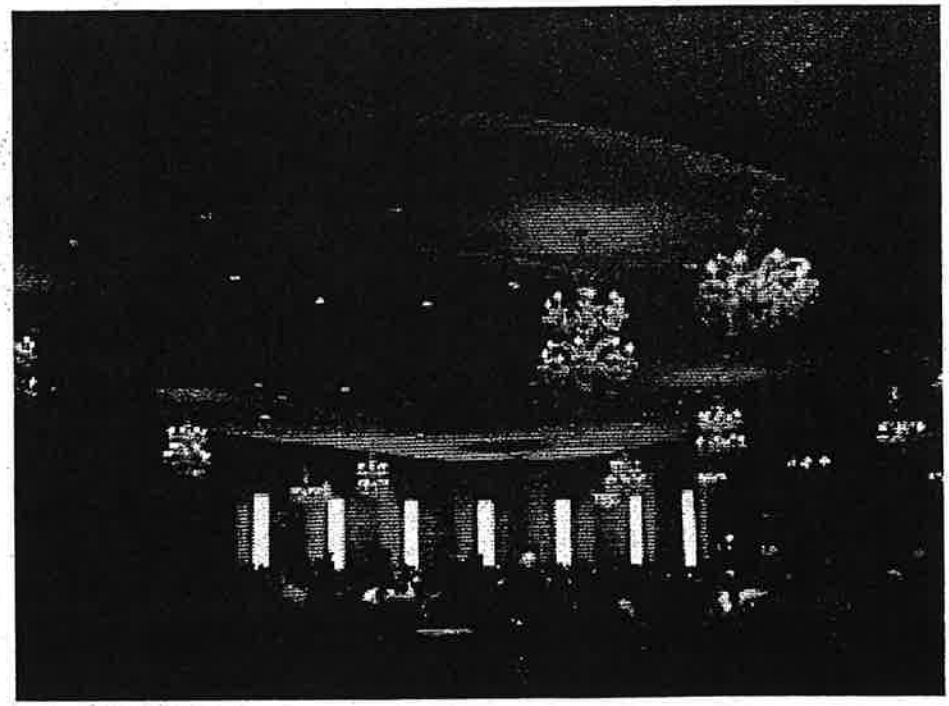
Entry to Fontaine & Fleur de Lis
CIM photo 2005



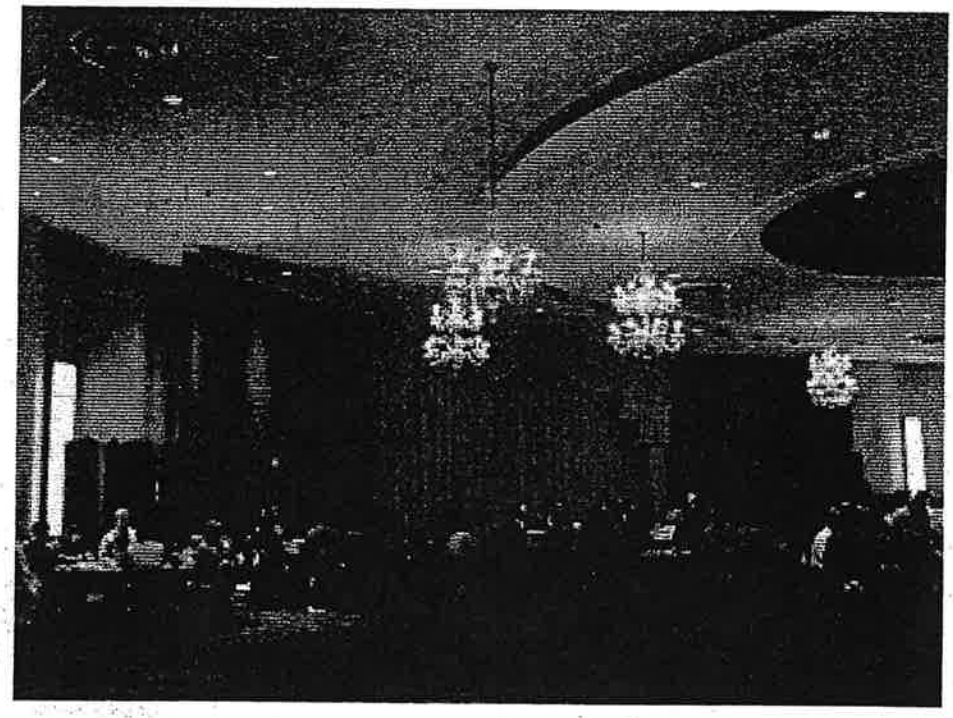
Entry to Fleur de Lis Room
CIM photo 2005



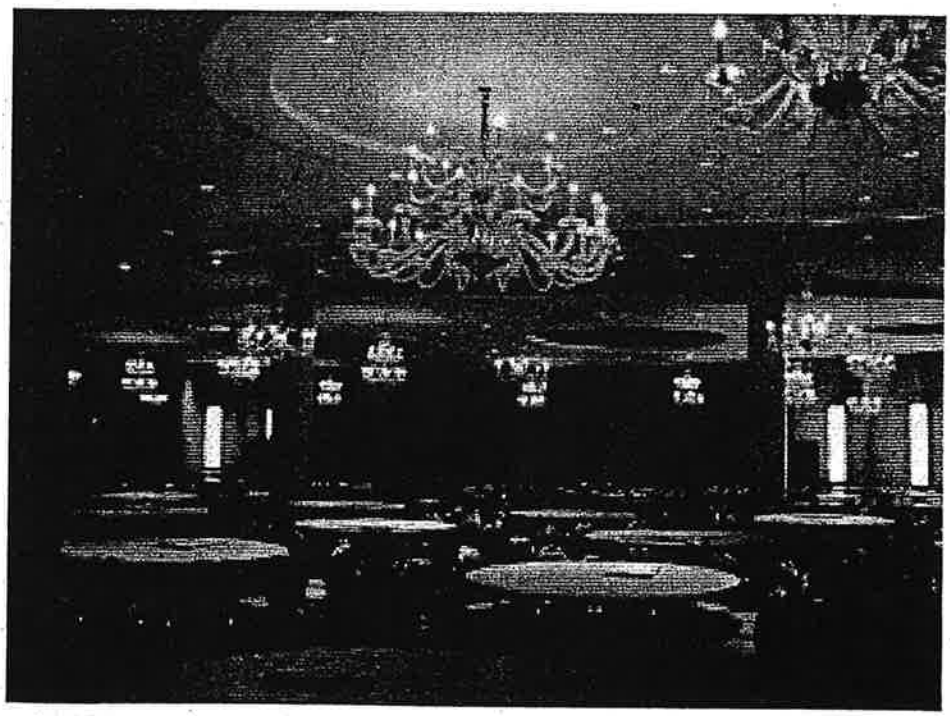
Entry to Fontaine Room
CIM photo 2005



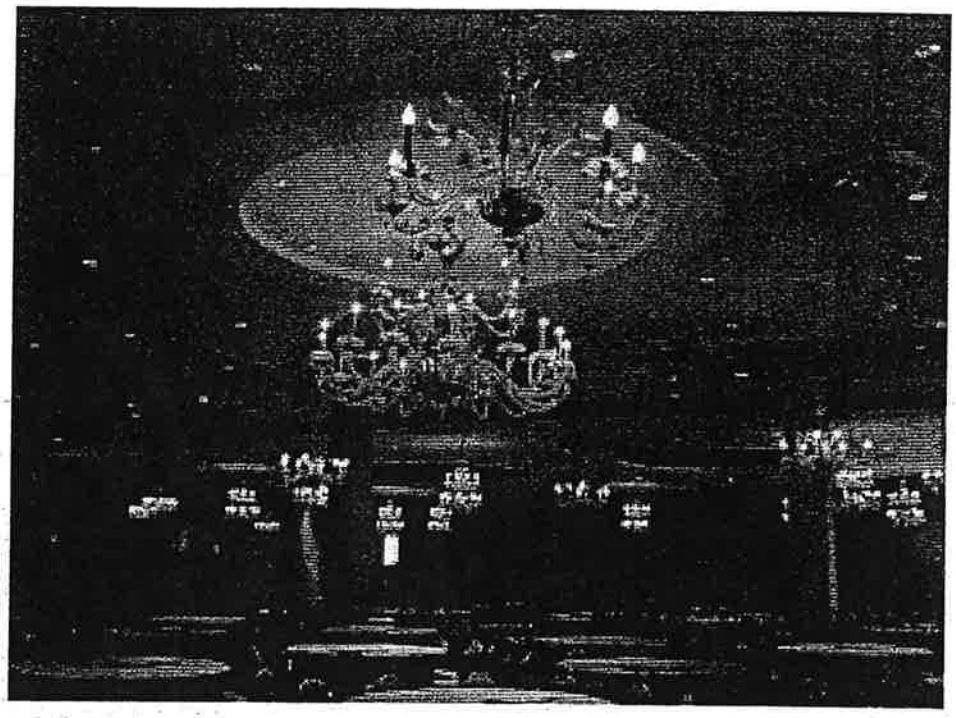
Fontaine Room
CIM photo 2005



Fontaine Room
CIM photo 2005



Fontaine & Fleur de Lis Room
CIM photo 2005



Fontaine & Fleur de Lis Room
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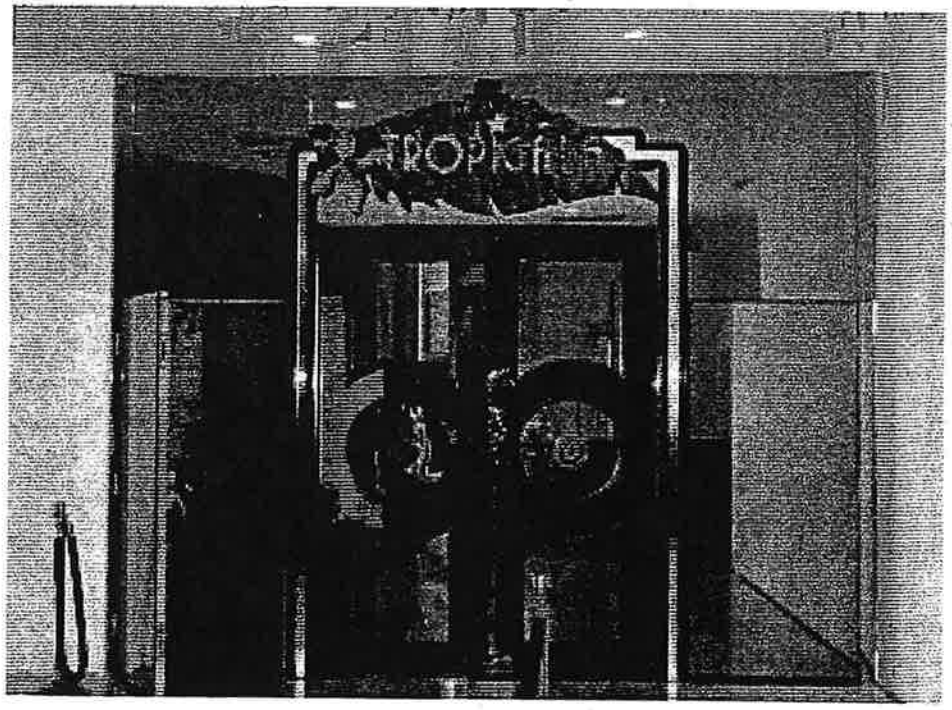
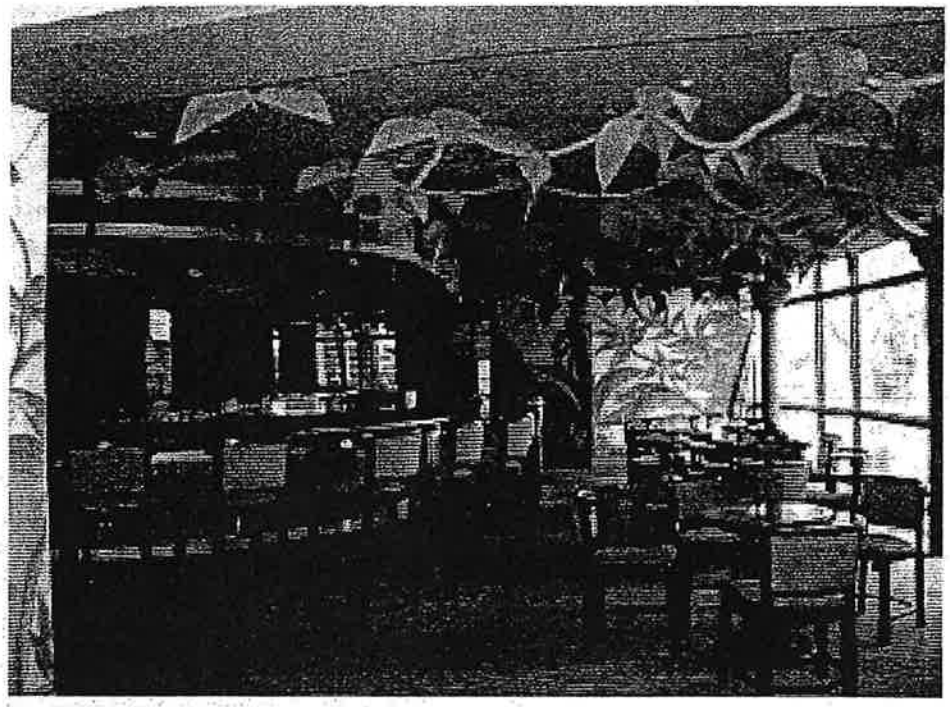
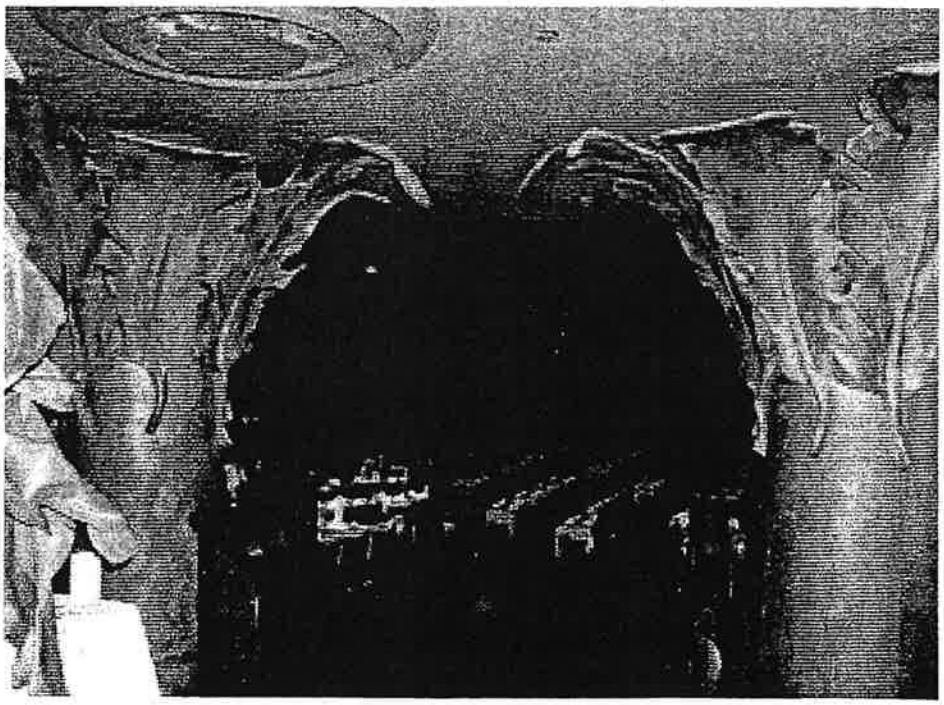


Tropigala Entrance
CIM photo 2005



Tropigala Bar
CIM photo 2005



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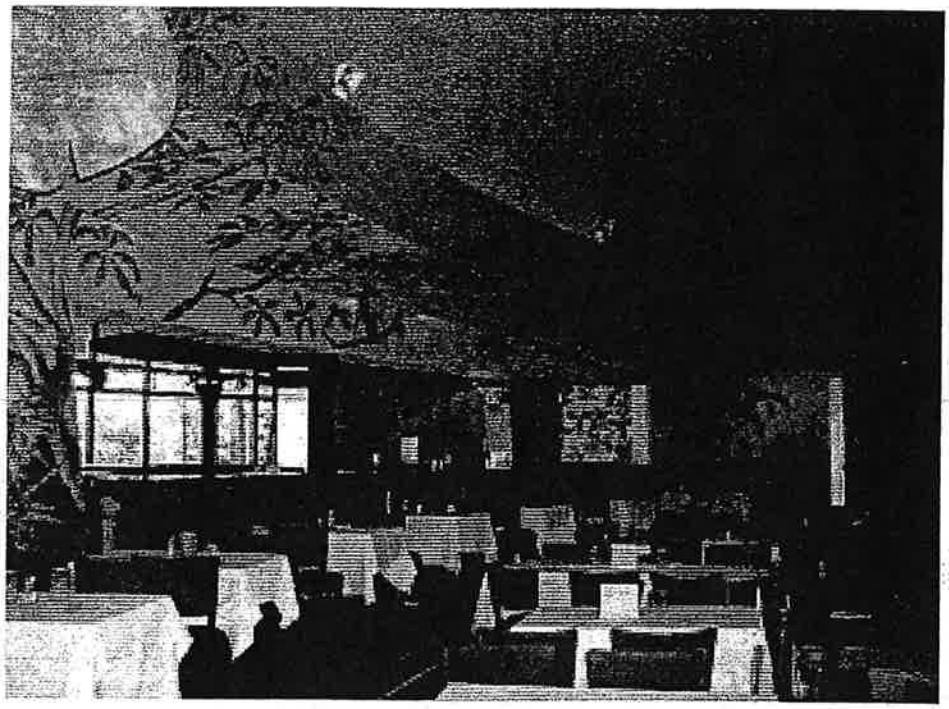

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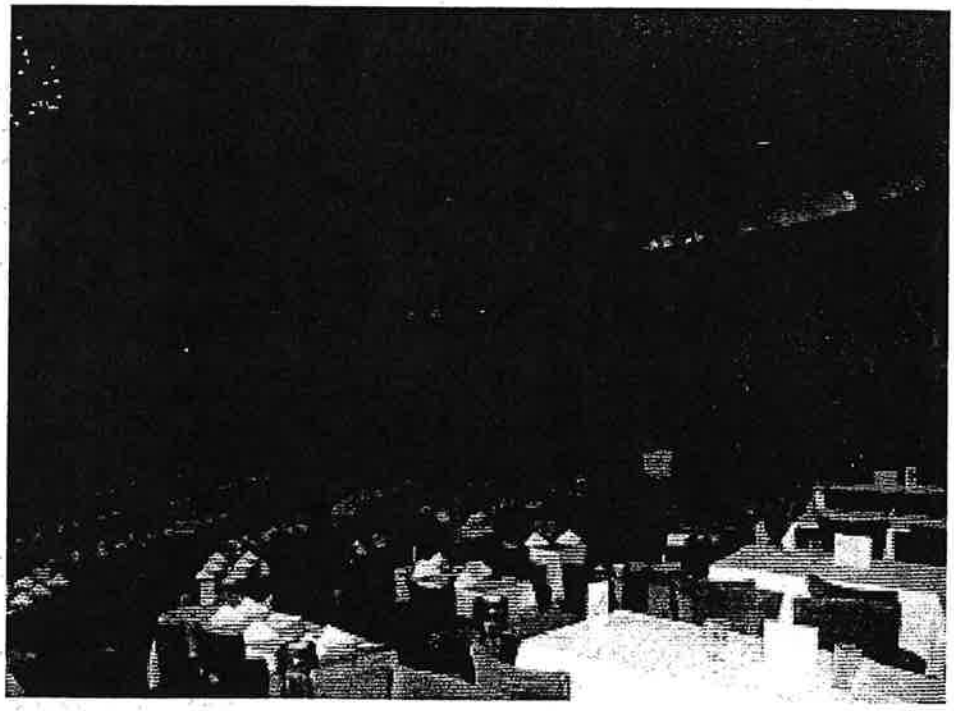

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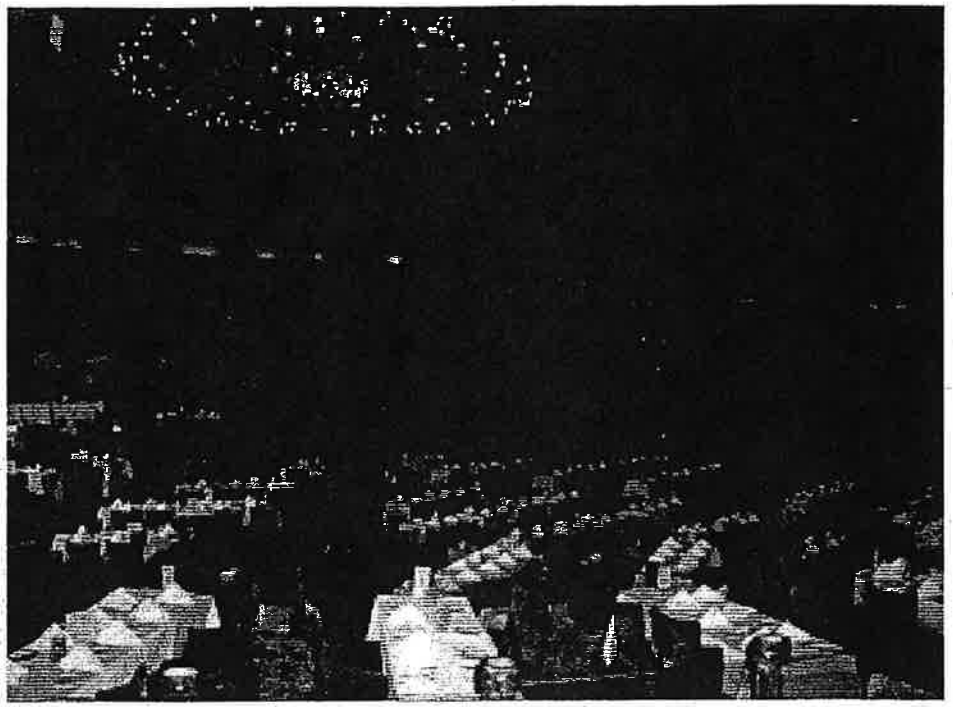

Tropigala
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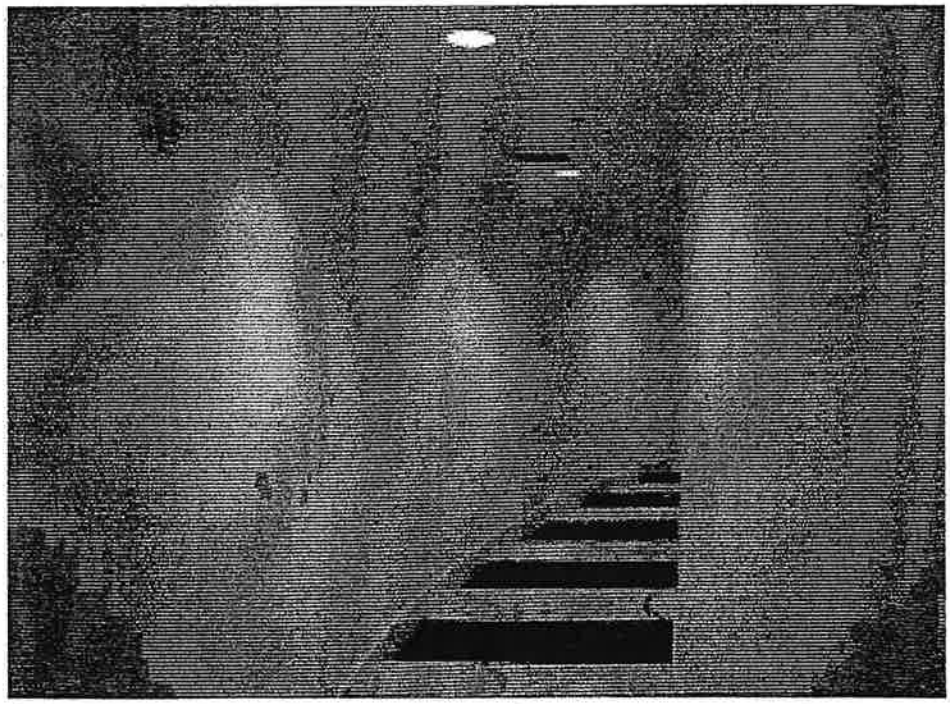
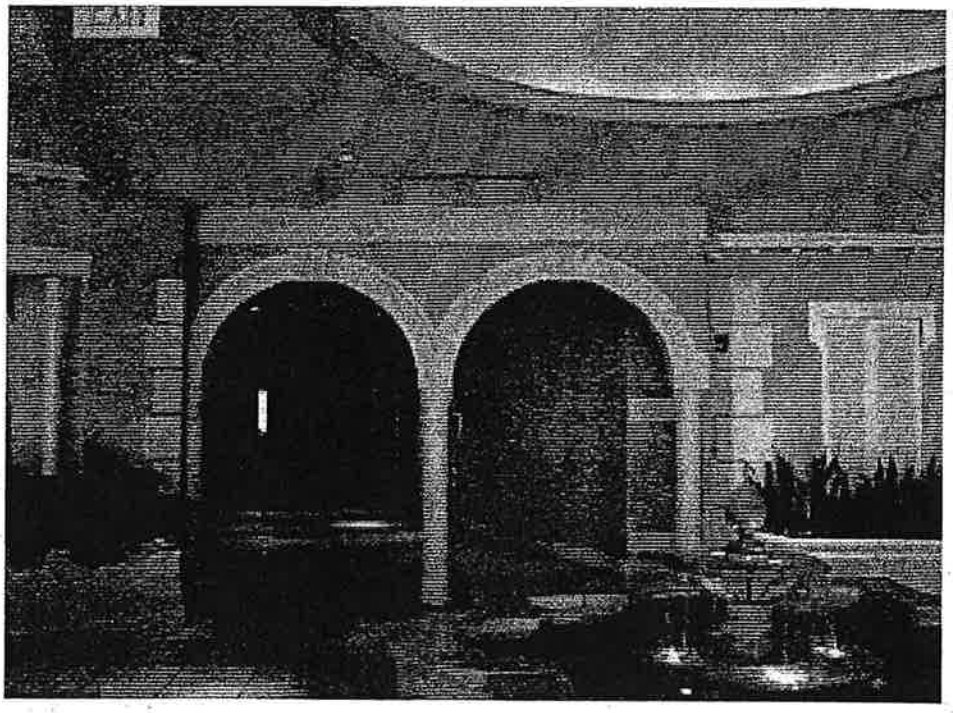
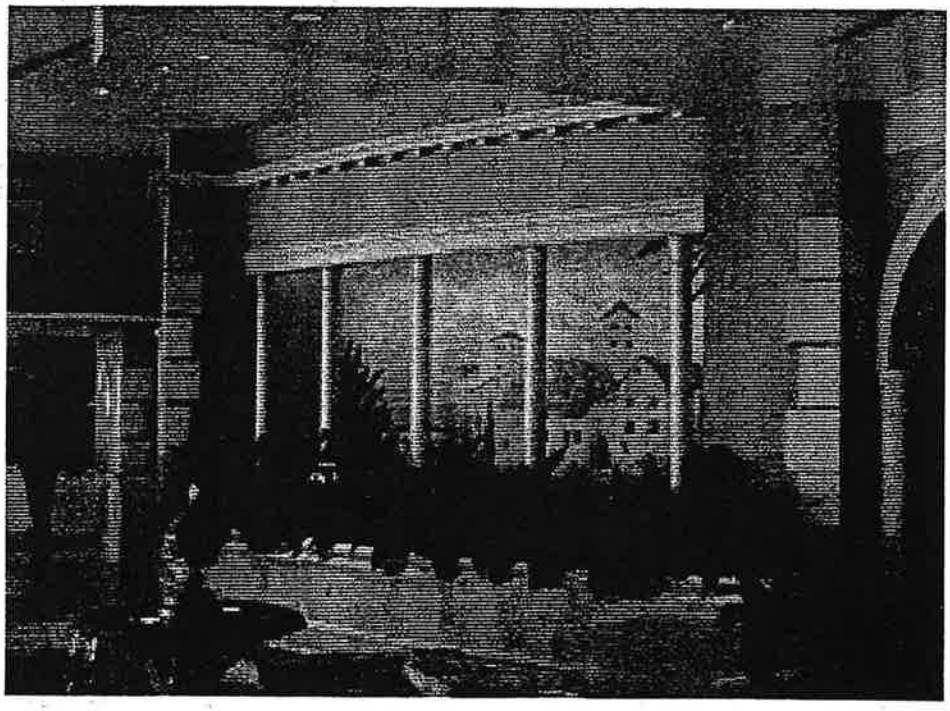


To Restrooms
CIM photo 2005



Lobby Passageway
CIM photo 2005



Lobby Passageway
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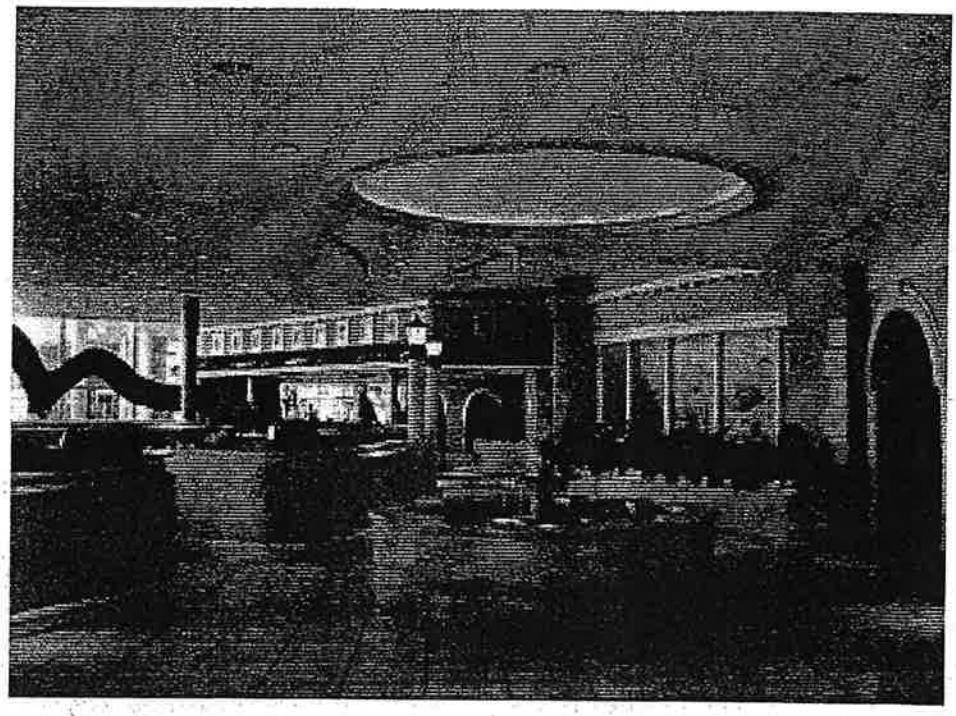

Lobby Passageway
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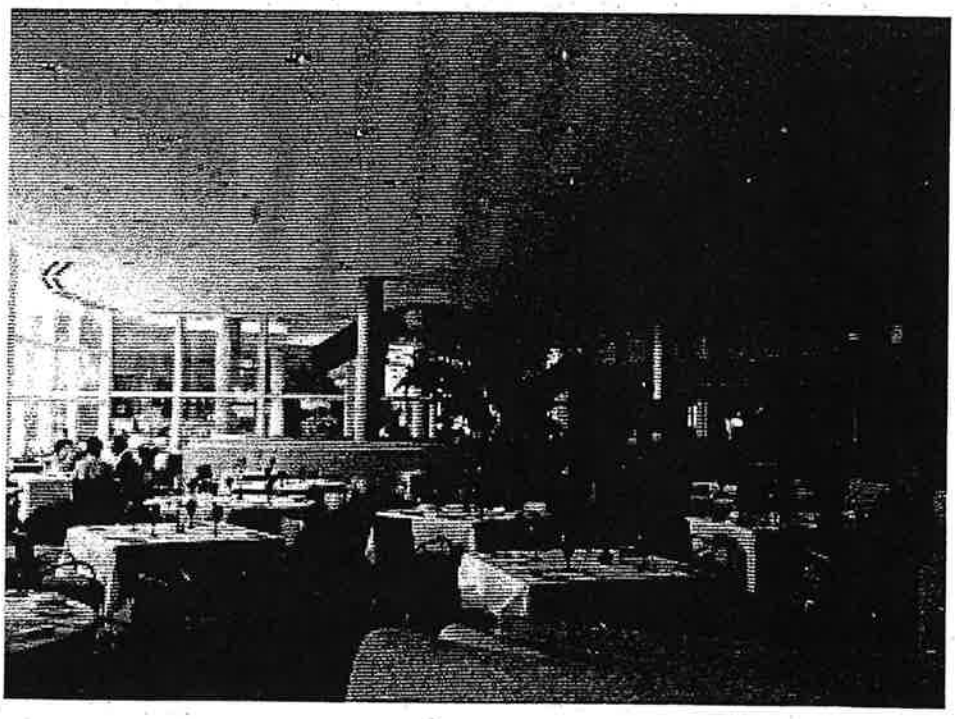
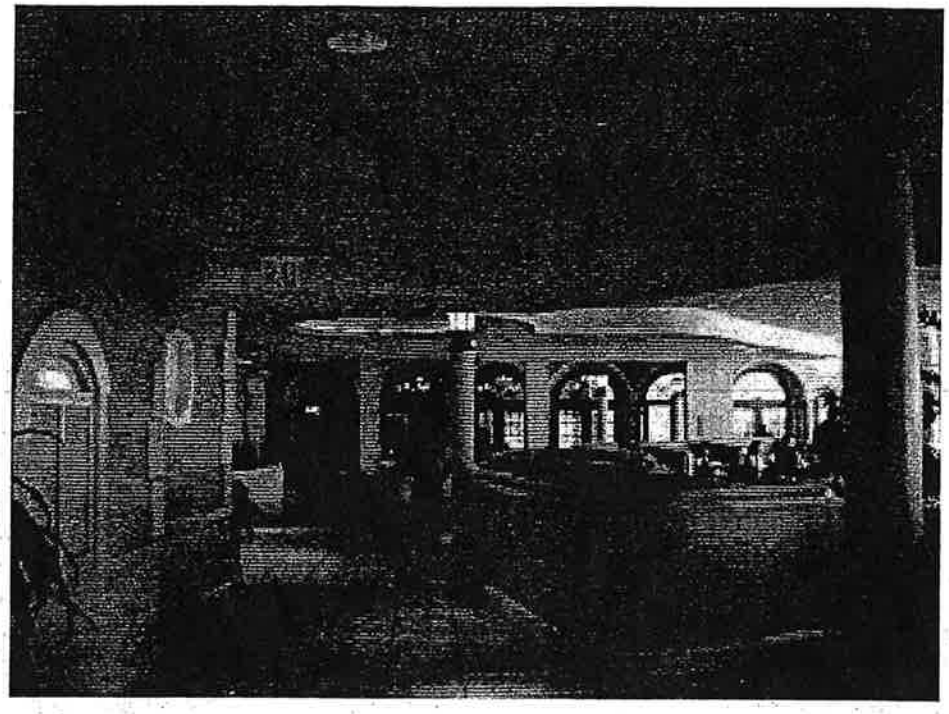


Breakfast Room
ATS photo 2005



Lobby Passageway
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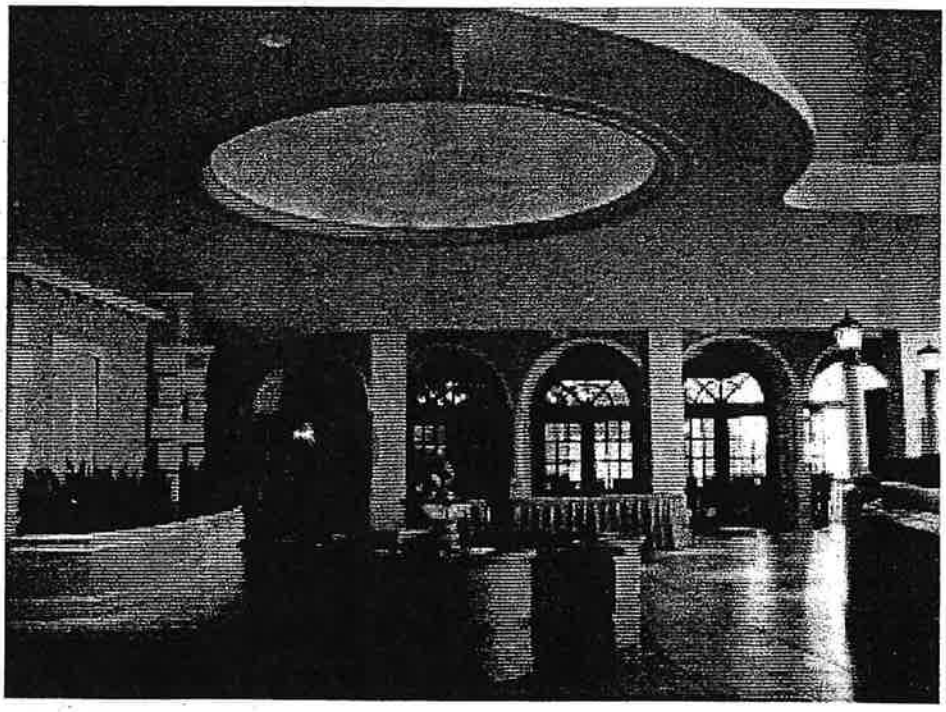

Lobby Passageway
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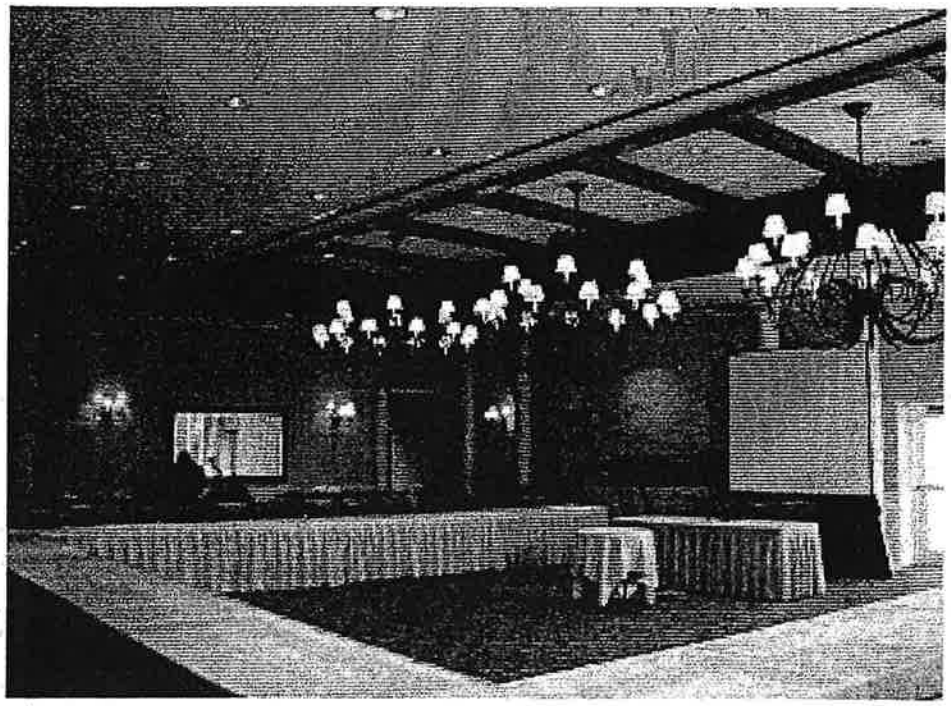
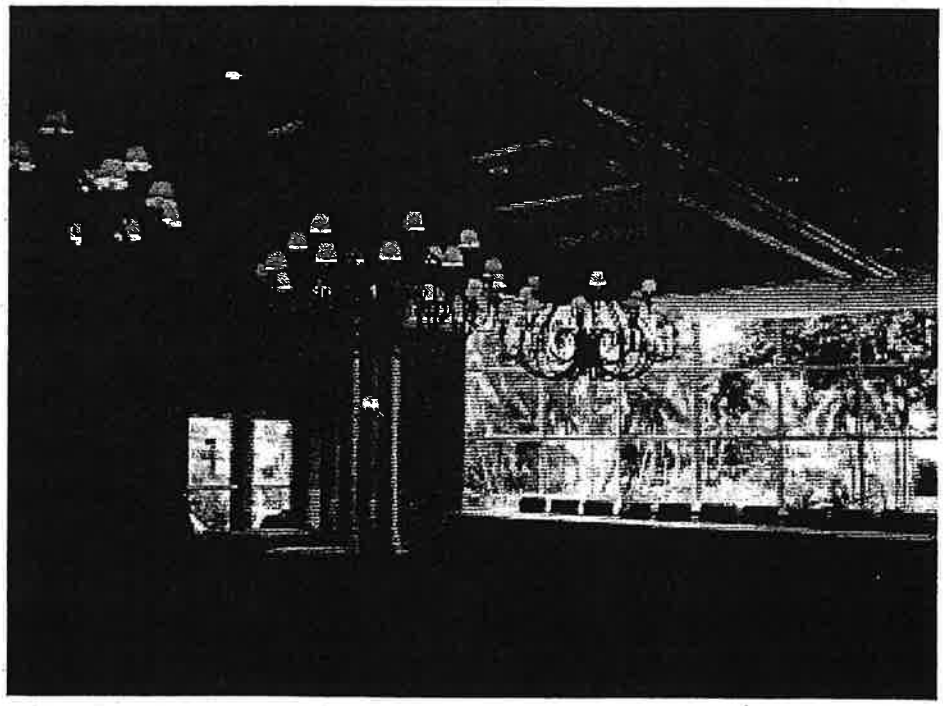


Lobby Dining Room
CIM photo 2005



Lobby Dining Room
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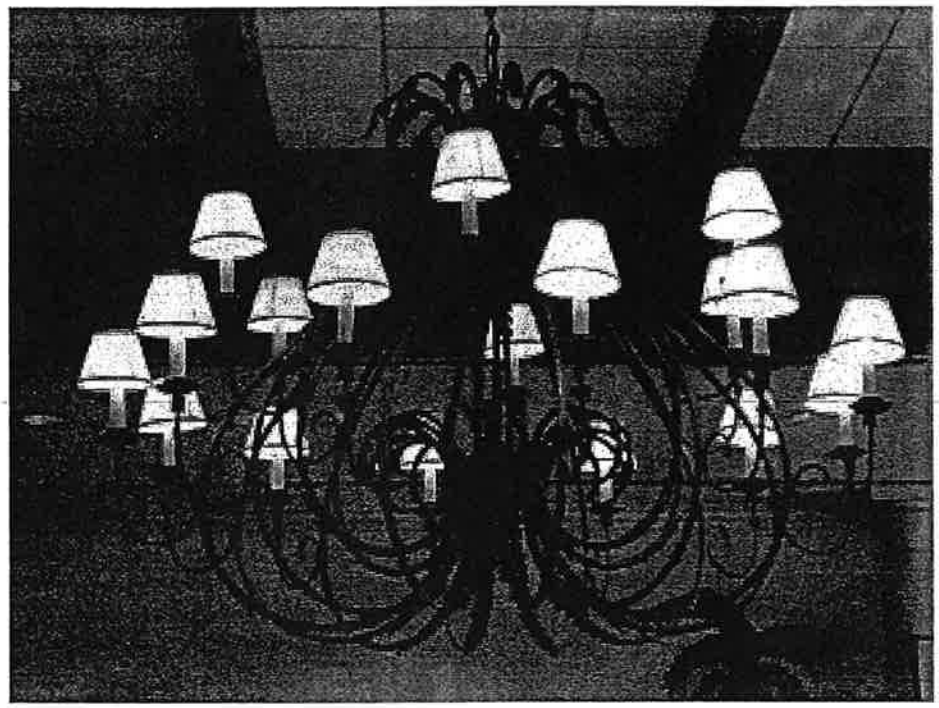
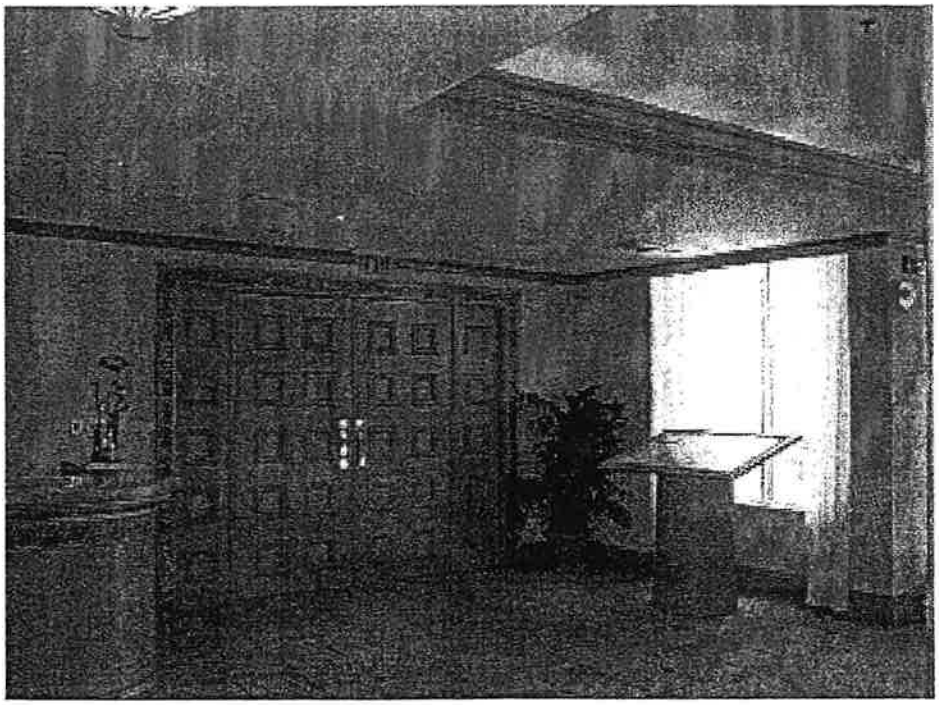
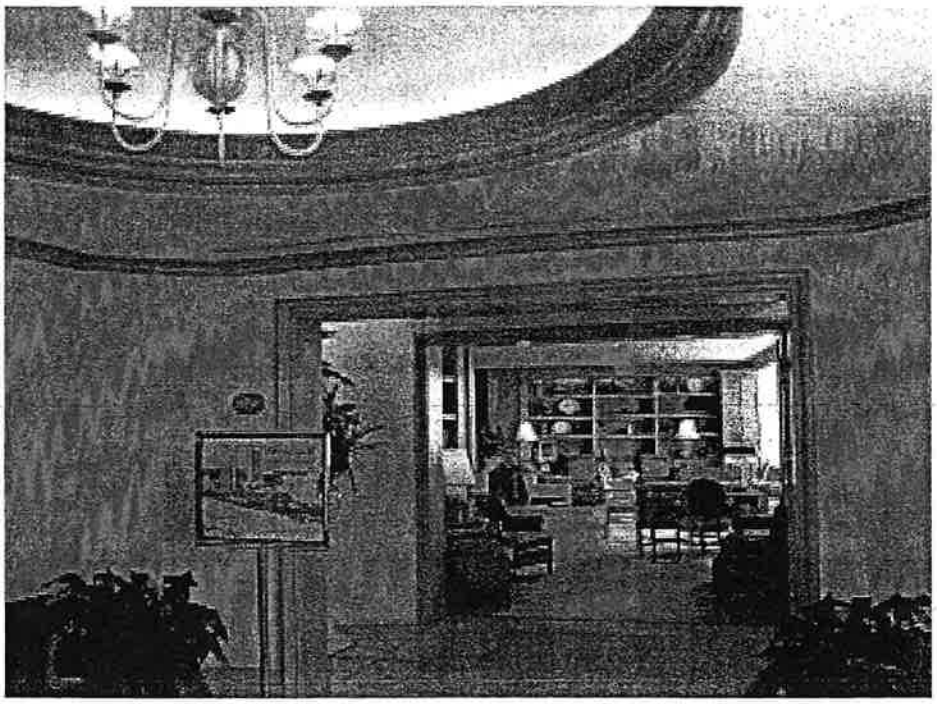


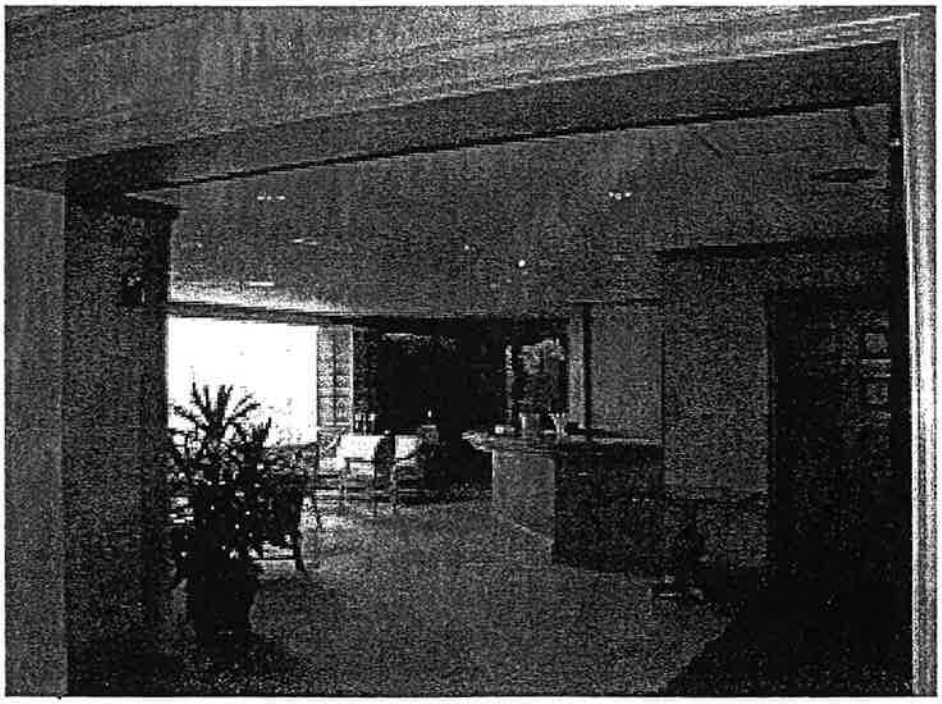
Lobby Dining Room Chandelier
CIM photo 2005



Entrance to Tower Lounge
CIM photo 2005



Tower Lounge
CIM photo 2005



Tower Lounge
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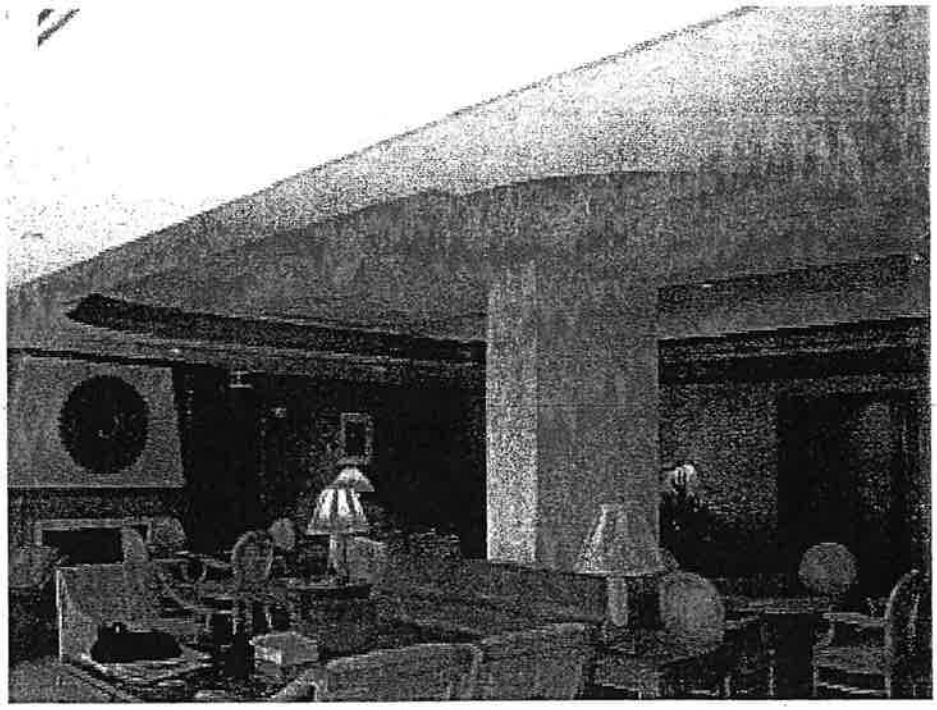

Tower Lounge
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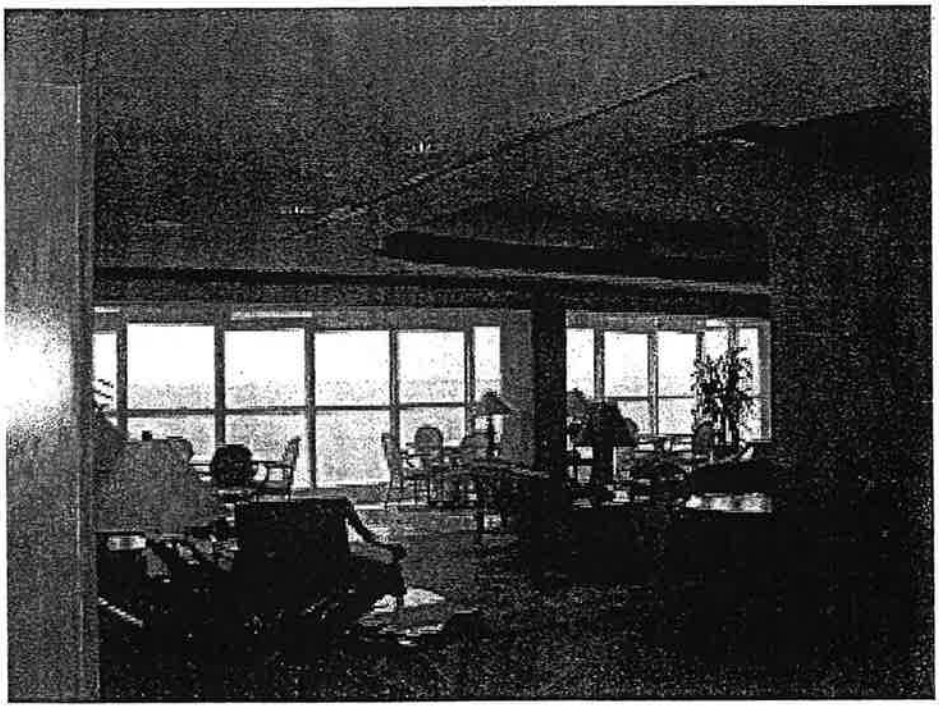

Tower Lounge
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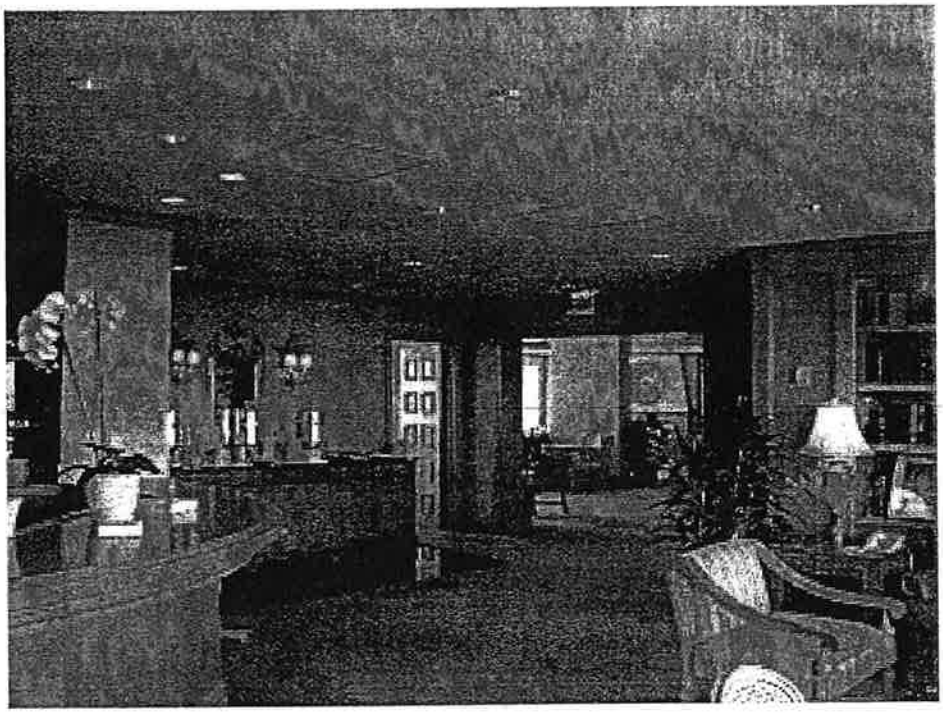

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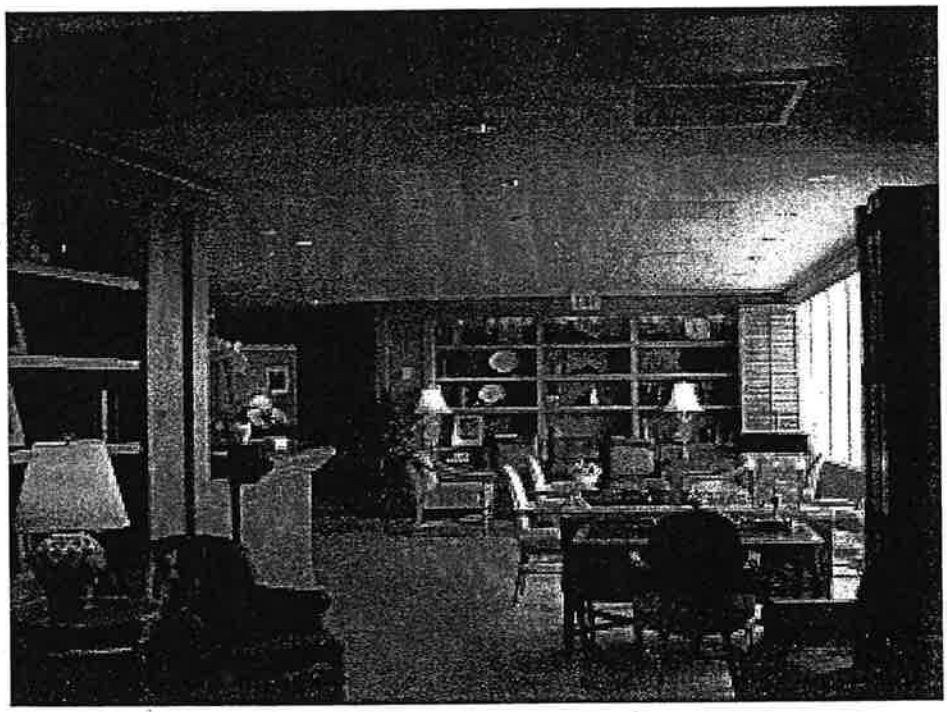

Tower Lounge
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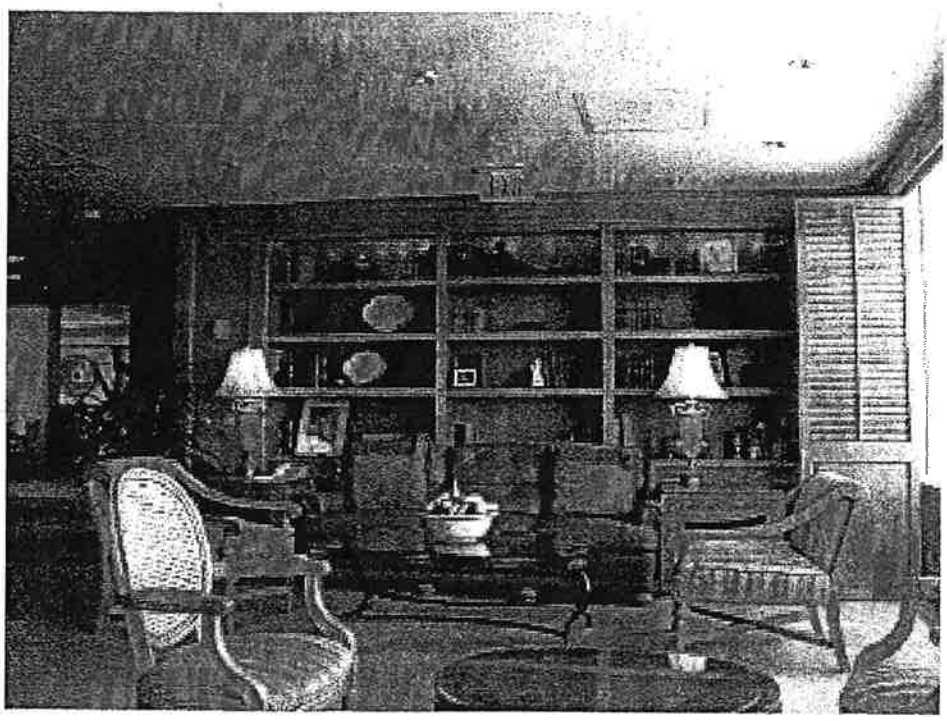

Tower Lounge
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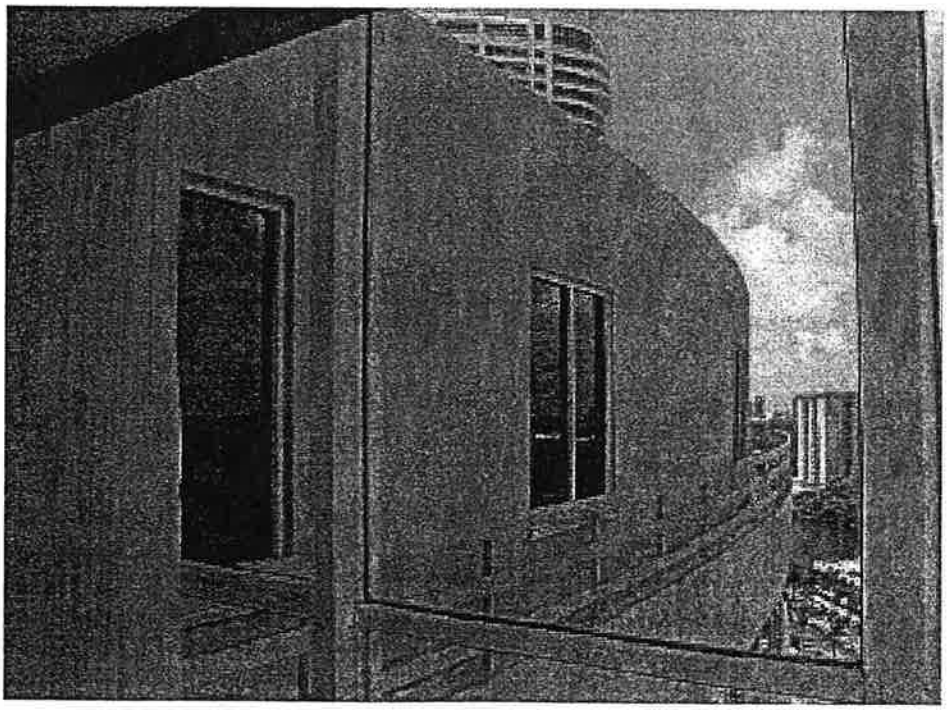
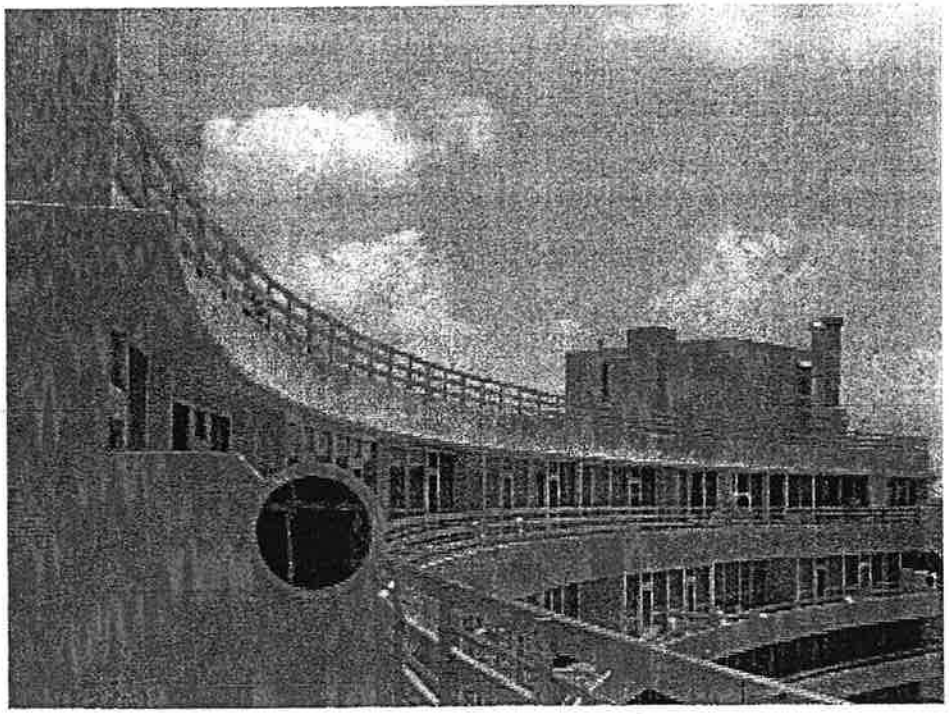


View from Tower Lounge
CIM photo 2005



Tower Lounge
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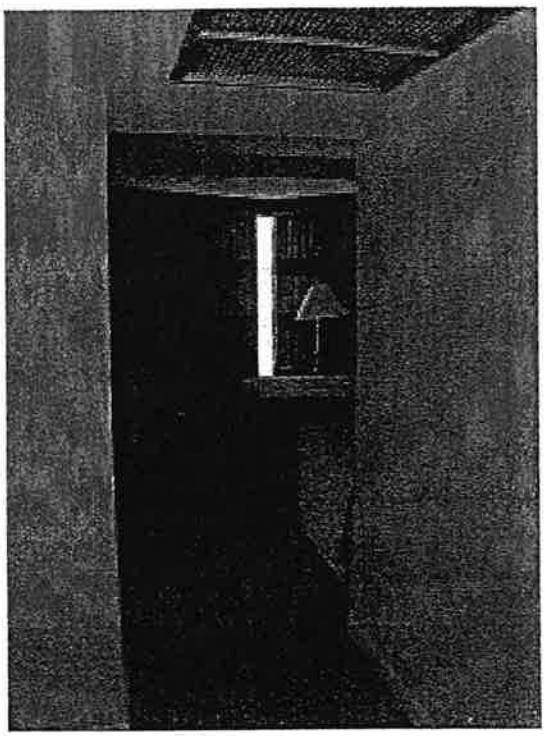
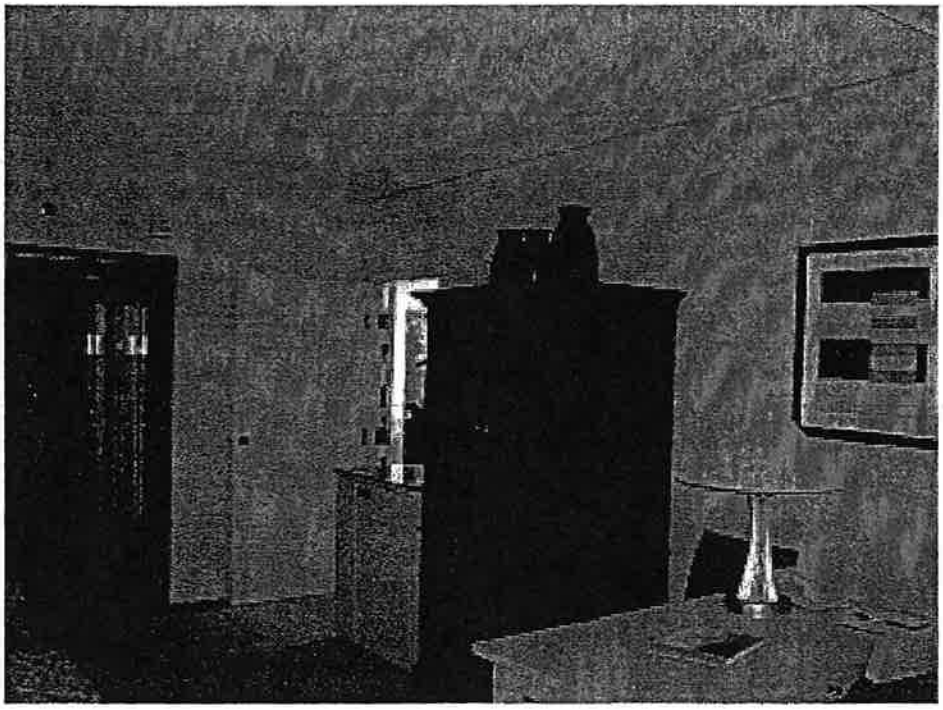


Chateau Tower Suite
CIM photo 2005



Chateau Tower Suite
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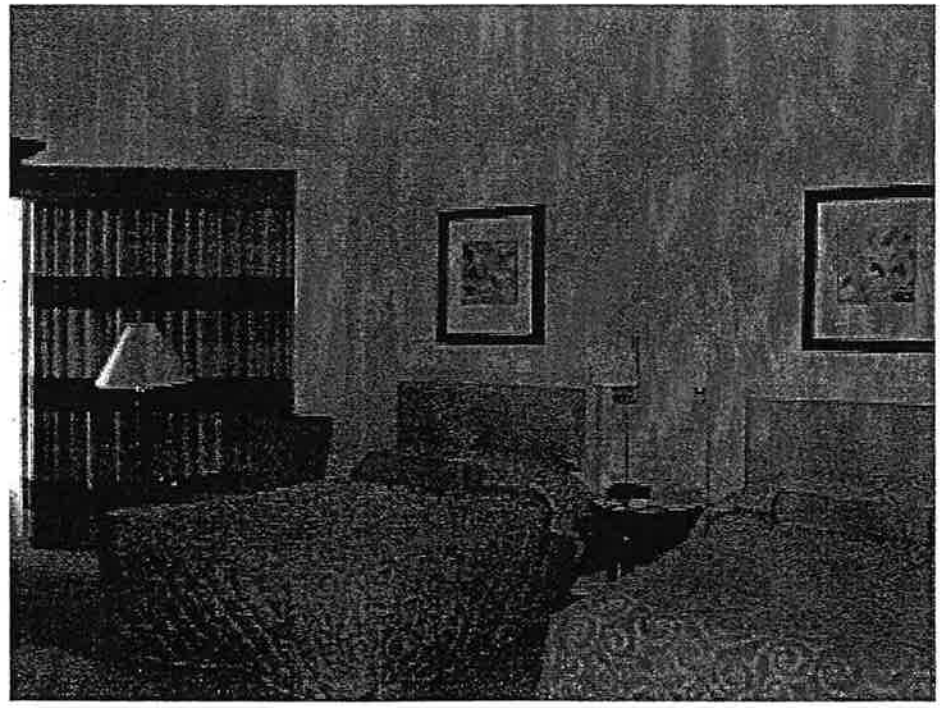

Chateau Tower Suite
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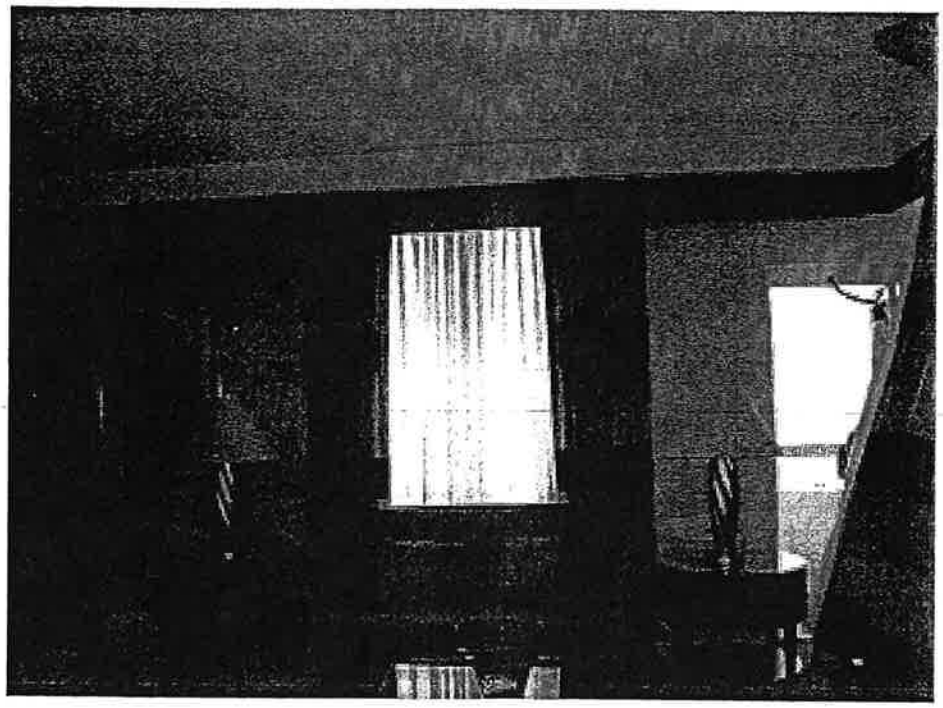

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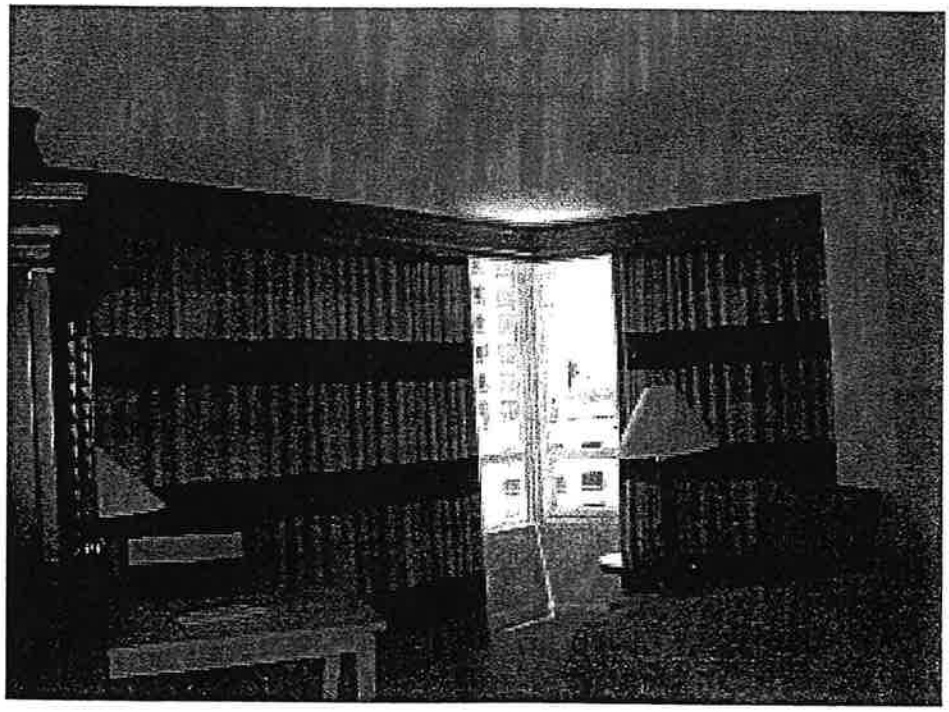

Chateau Tower Suite
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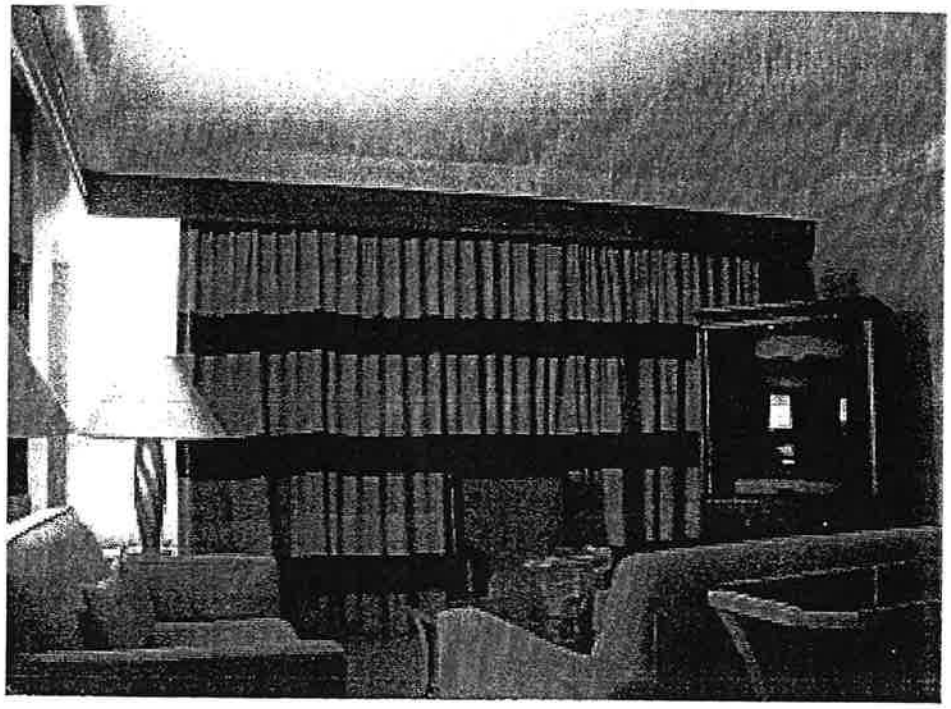
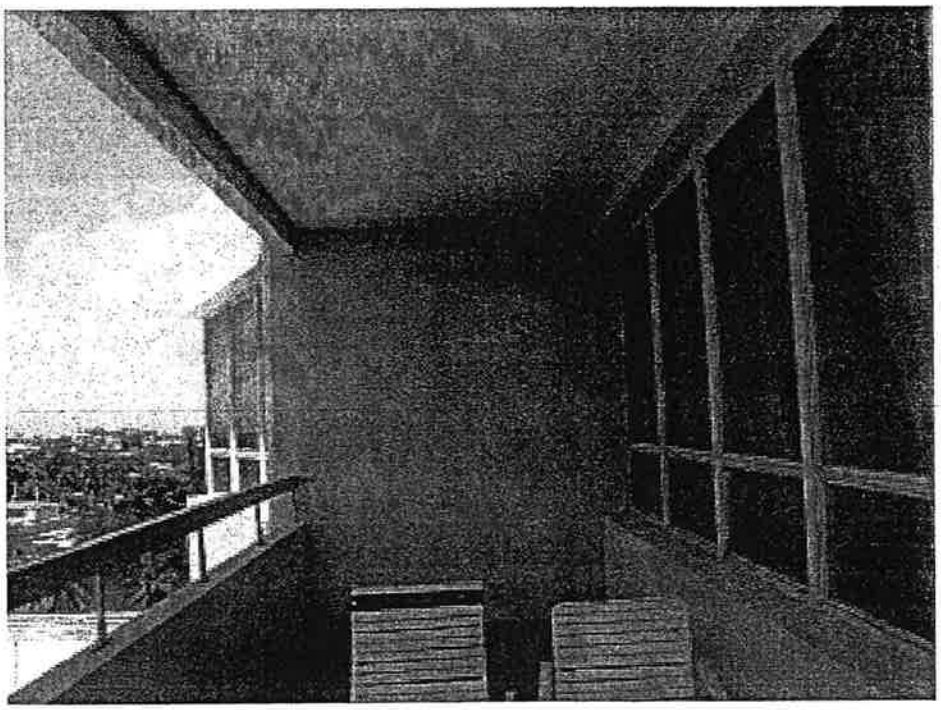


Chateau Tower Suite
CIM photo 2005

Chateau Tower Suite Terrace
CIM photo 2005



Chateau Tower Suite Terrace
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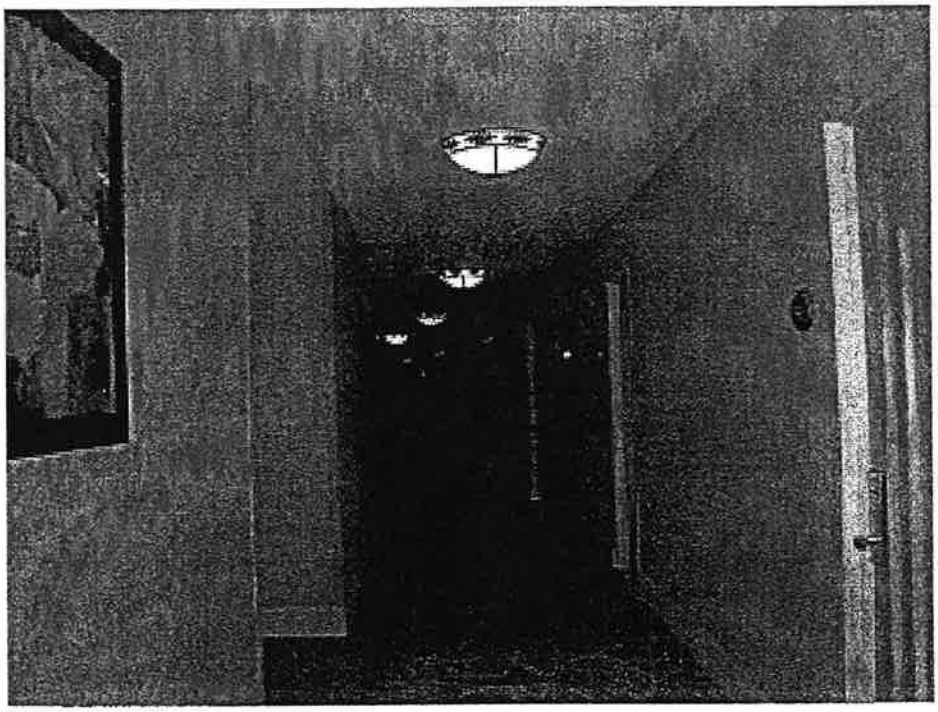

Chateau Tower Hallway
CIM photo 2005

Chateau Tower Elevator Lobby
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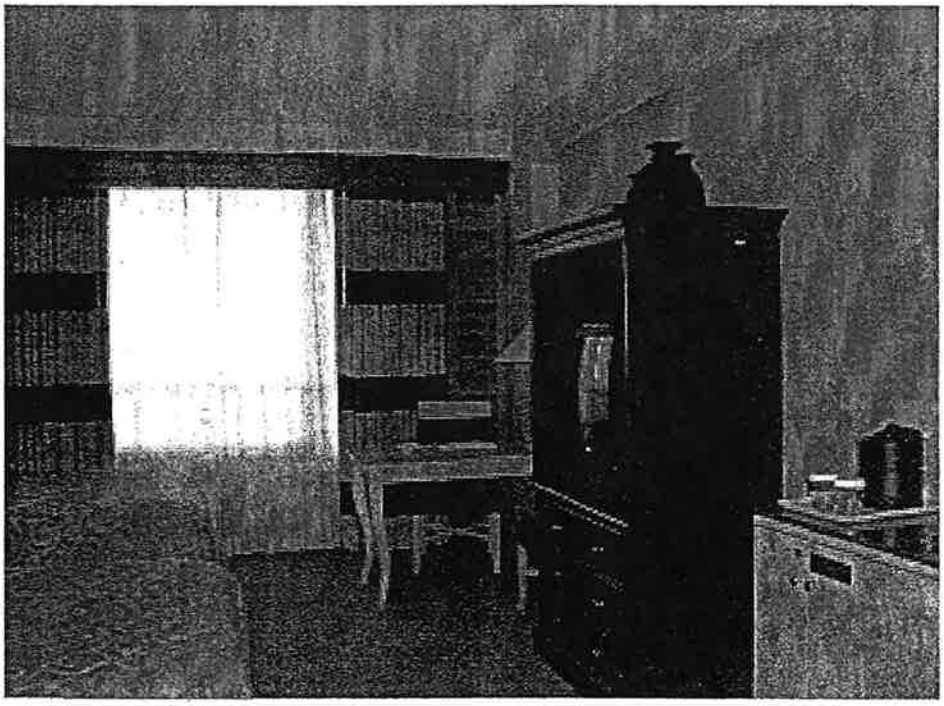
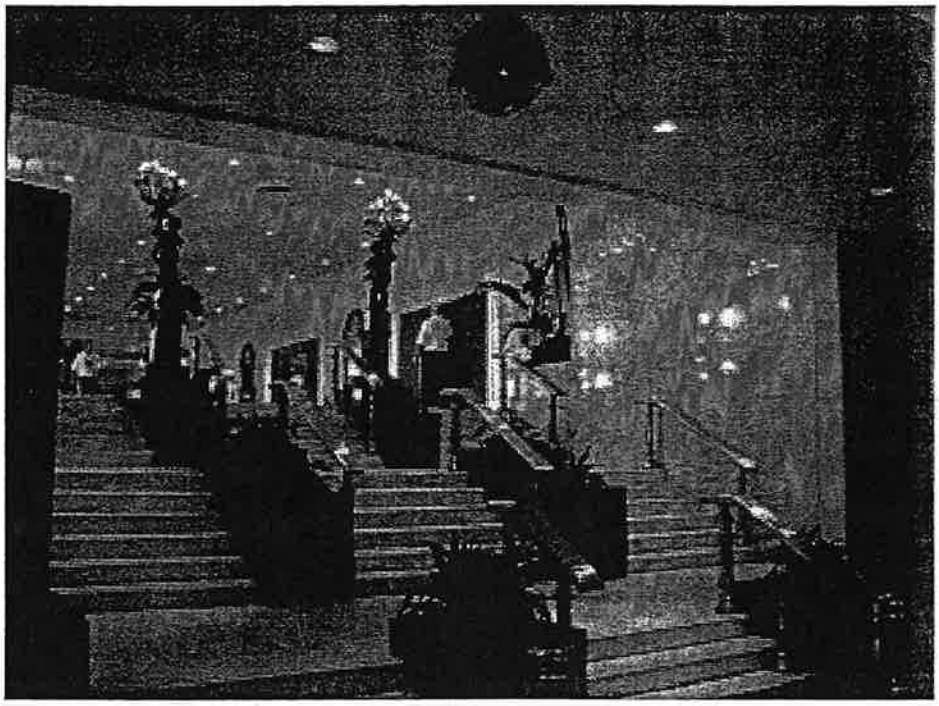


Room 839
CIM photo 2005

Versailles Building:

Ballrooms, Meeting Rooms, and Tower

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



Grand Gallerie Stairs
CIM photo 2005

Grand Gallerie Stairs
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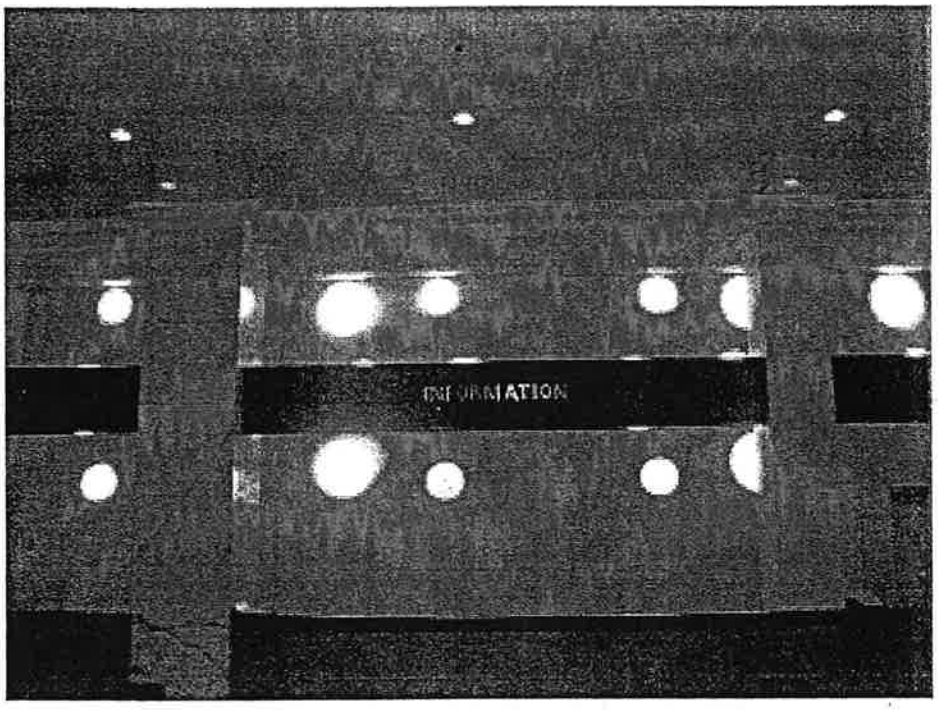

Grand Gallerie
CIM photo 2005

Grand Gallerie
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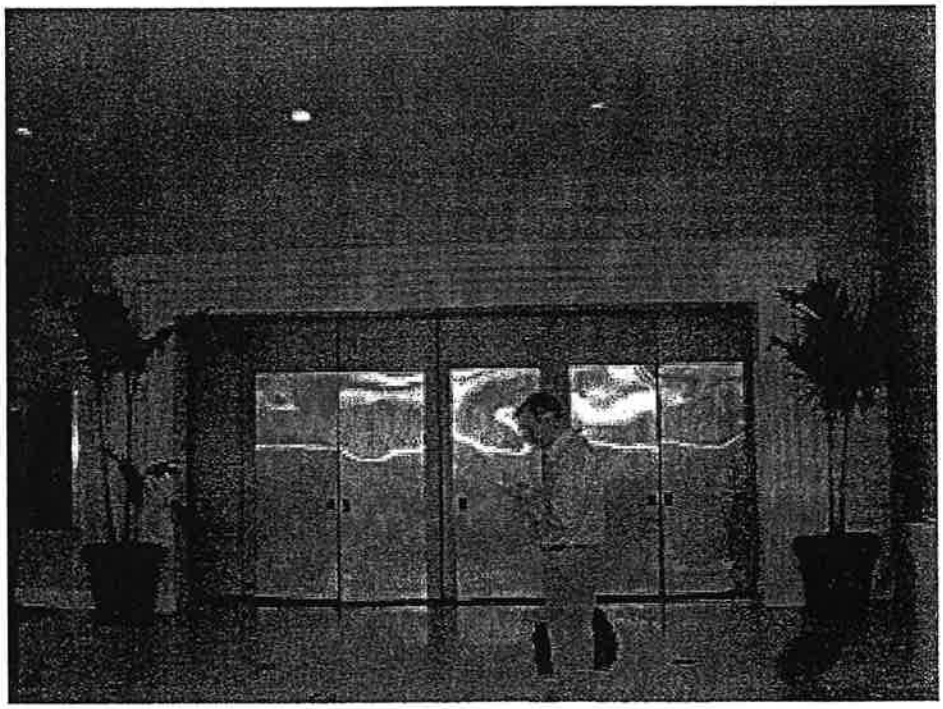

Grand Gallerie
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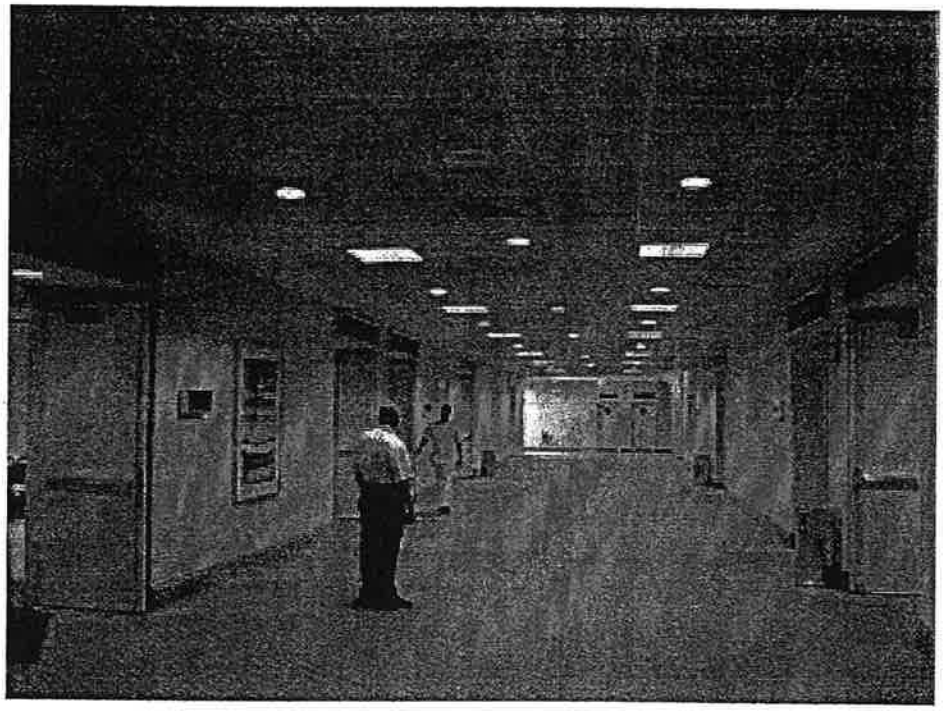
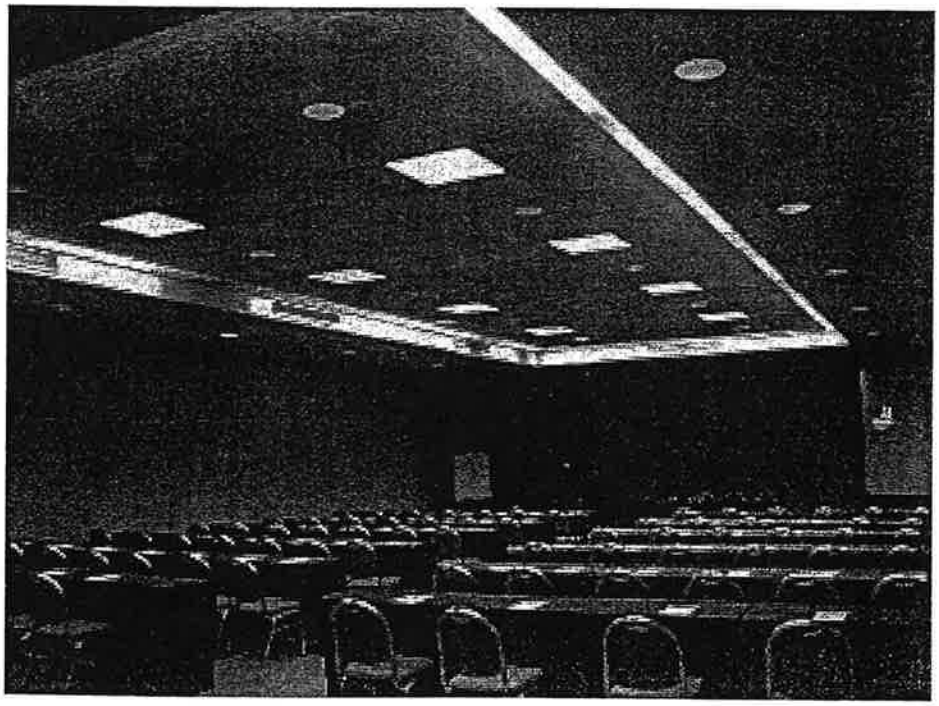
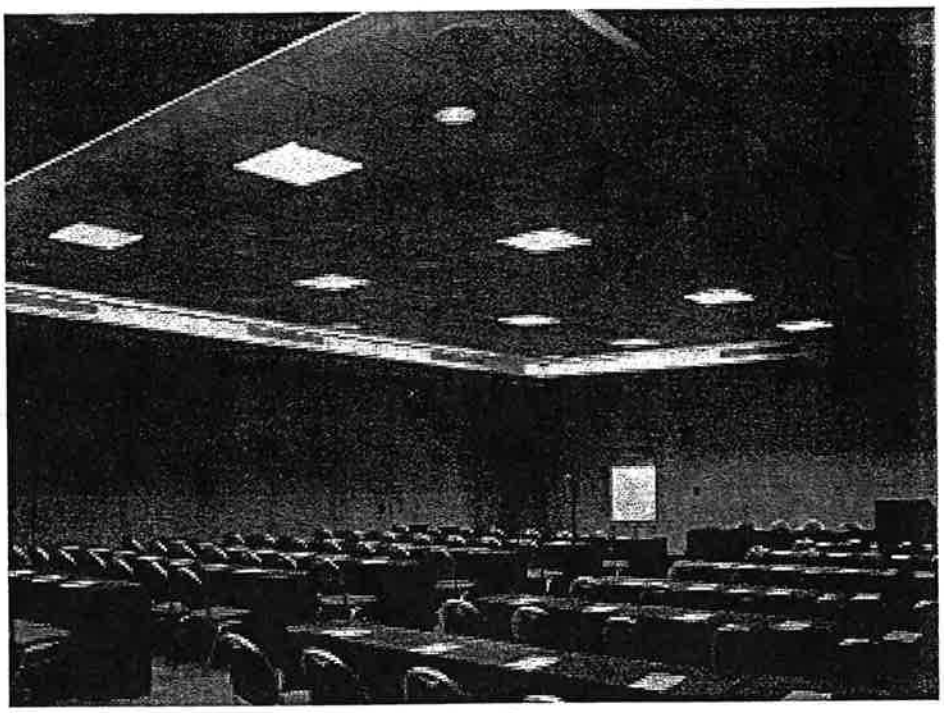


Level I Corridor
CIM photo 2005

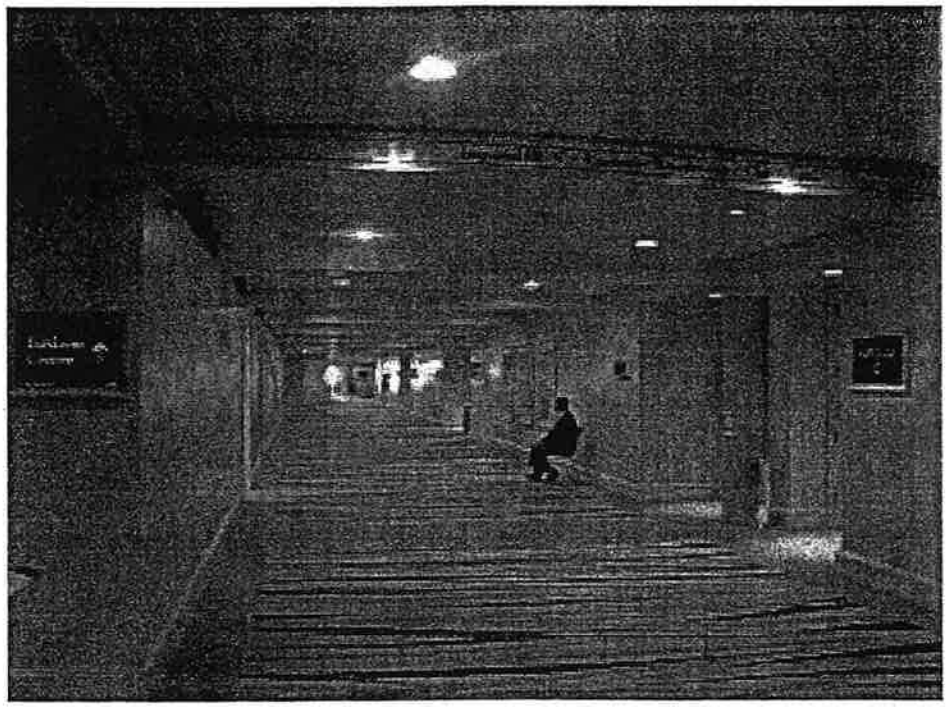


Le Mans Room
CIM photo 2005

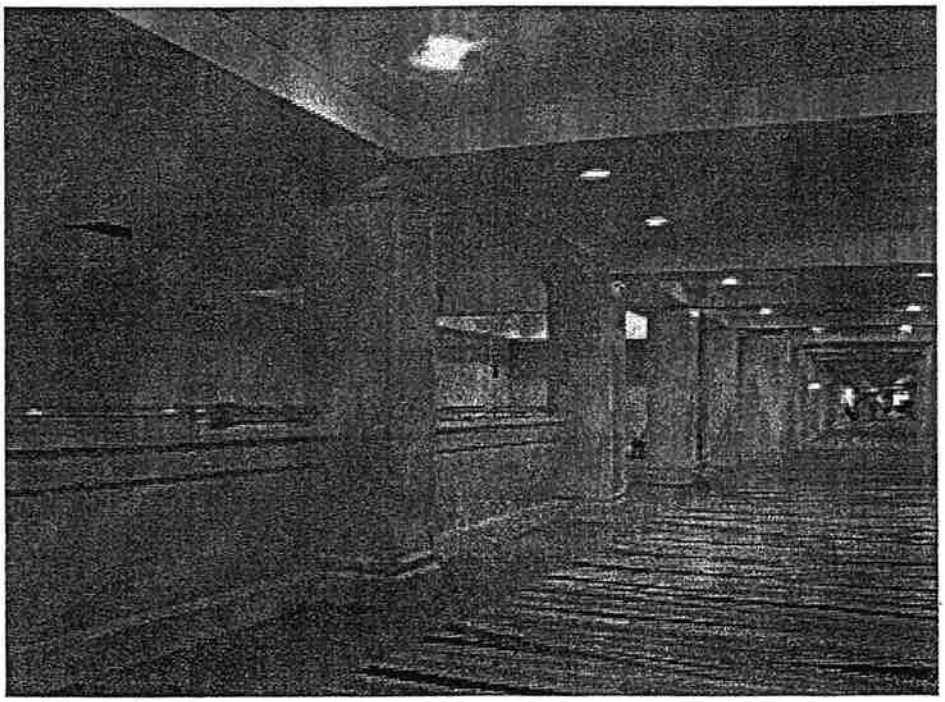


Brittany Room
CIM photo 2005

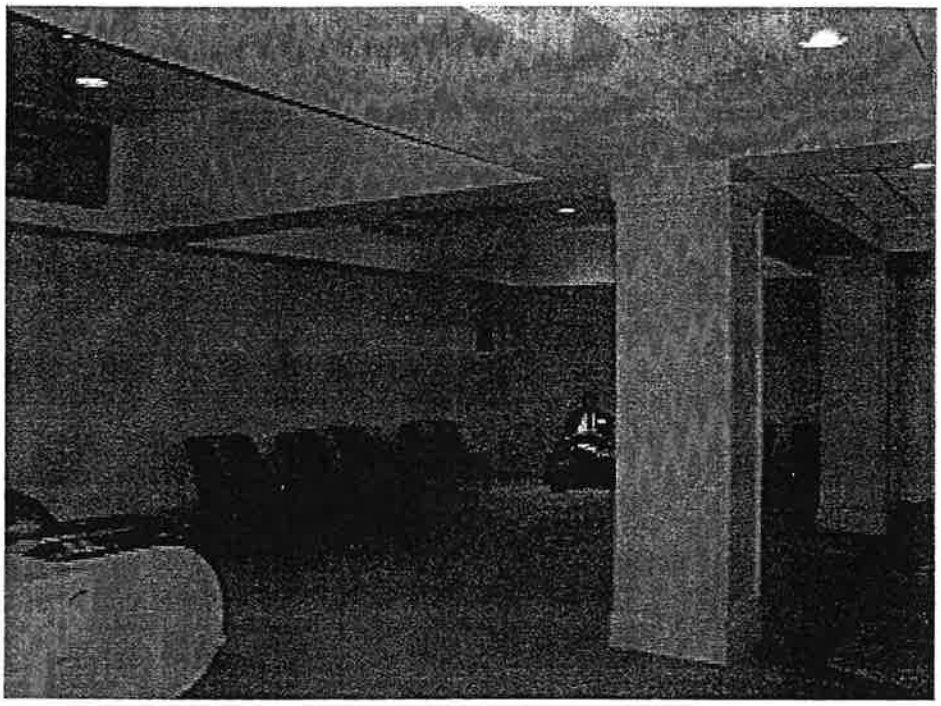
Bordeaux Room
CIM photo 2005



Level IV Corridor
CIM photo 2005



Level IV Corridor
CIM photo 2005



Level IV Corridor
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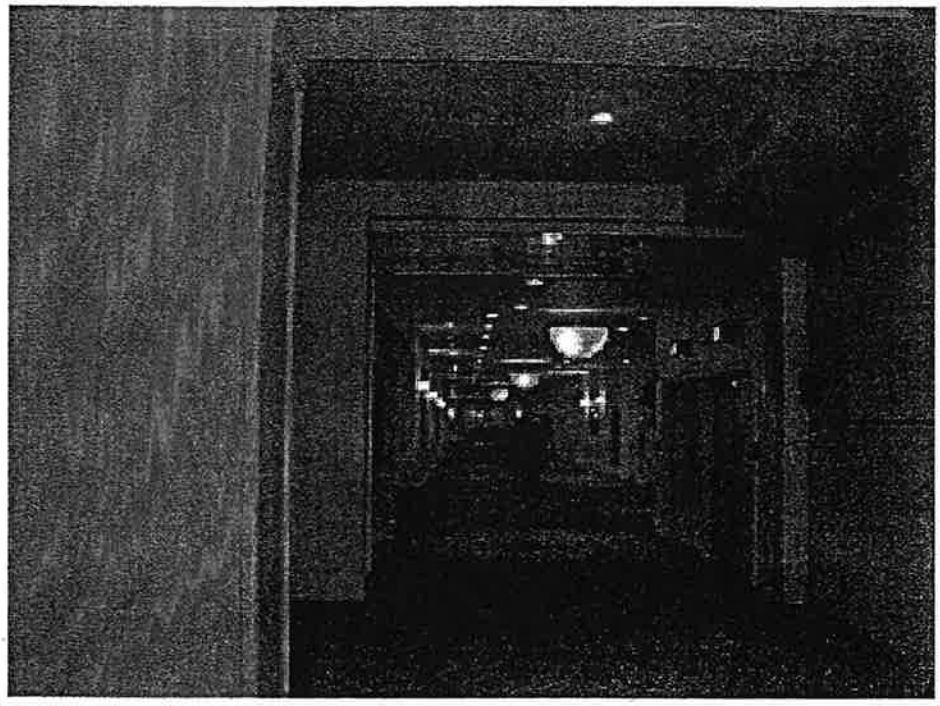
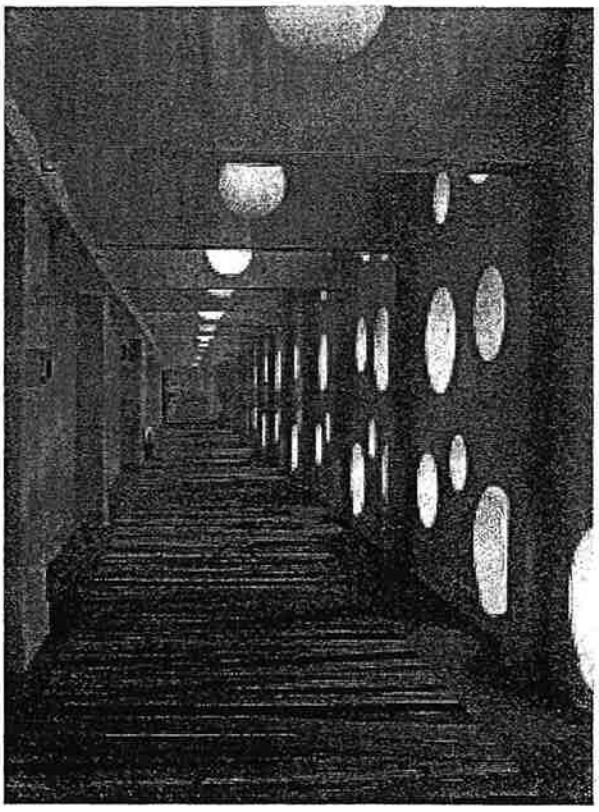
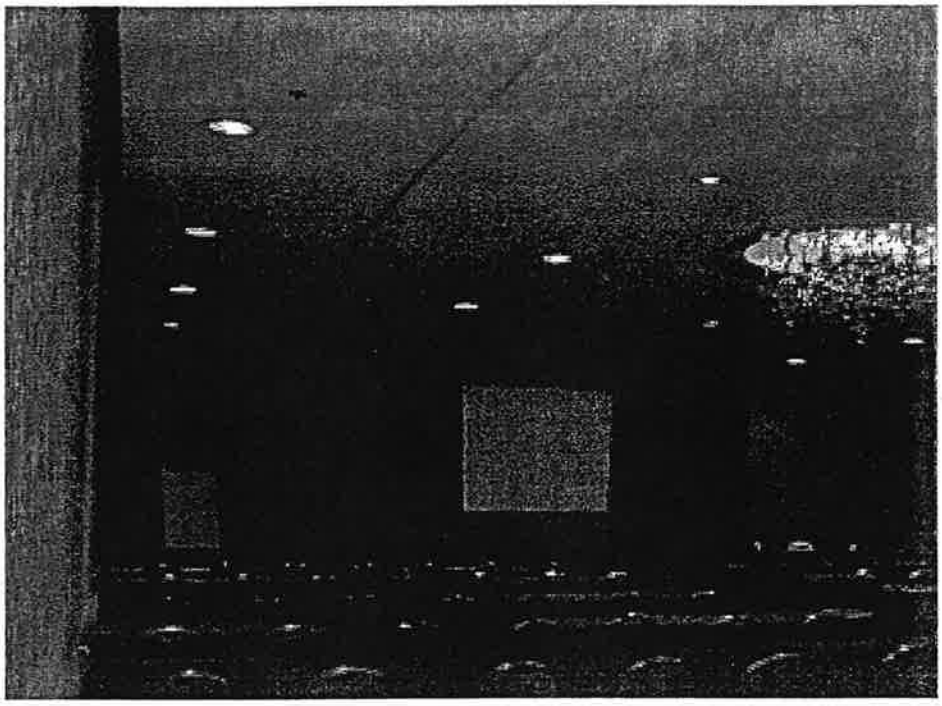


Level IV Corridor
CIM photo 2005

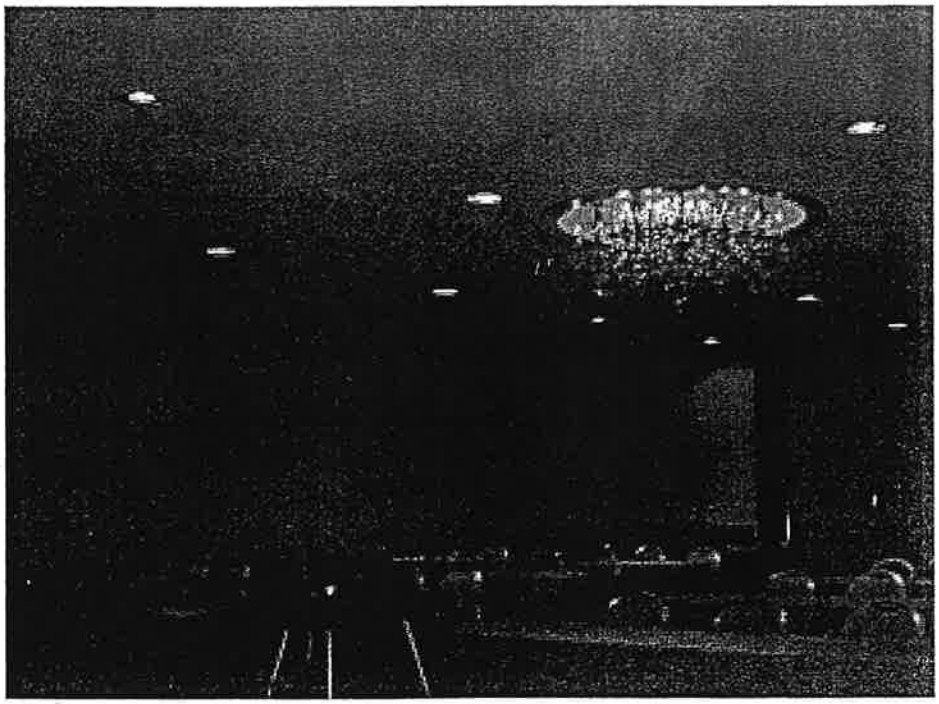
Level IV Corridor
CIM photo 2005



Cheese Wall, Level IV
CIM photo 2005



Pasteur Room
CIM photo 2005



Pasteur Room
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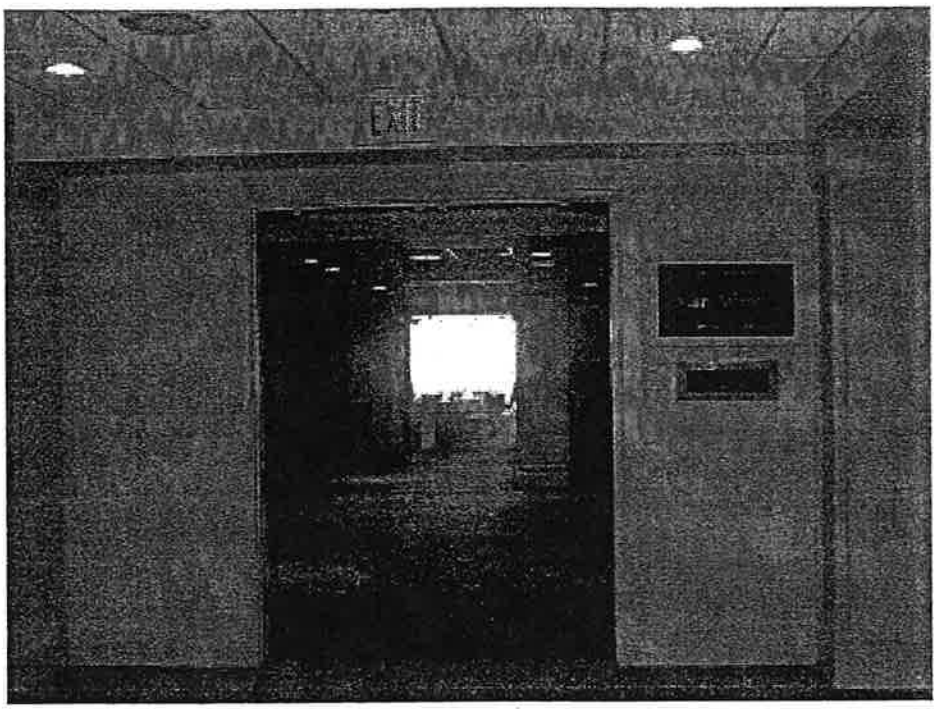
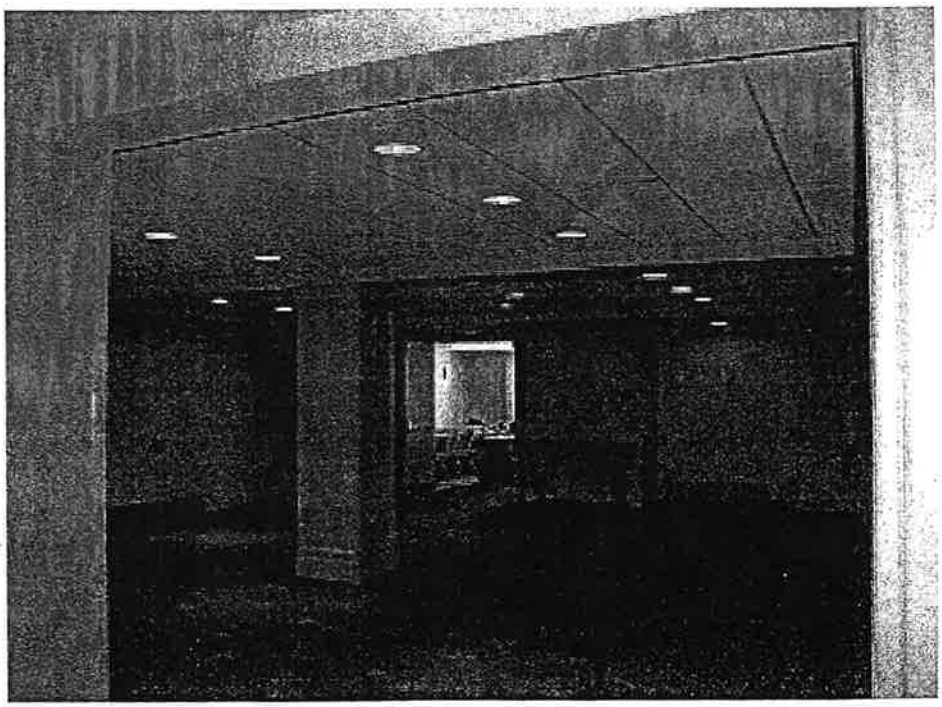
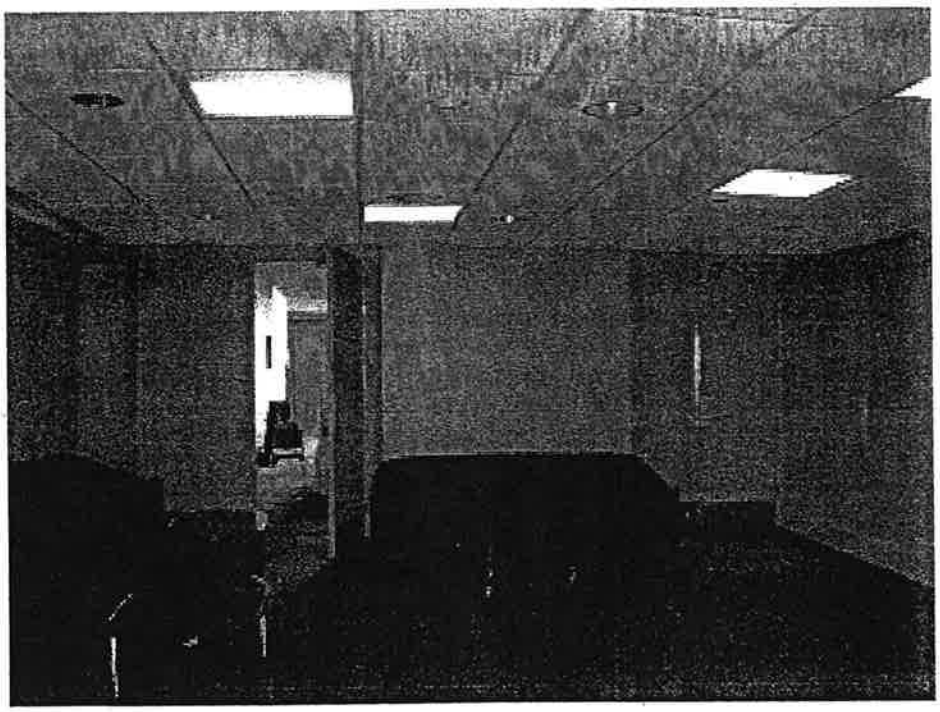


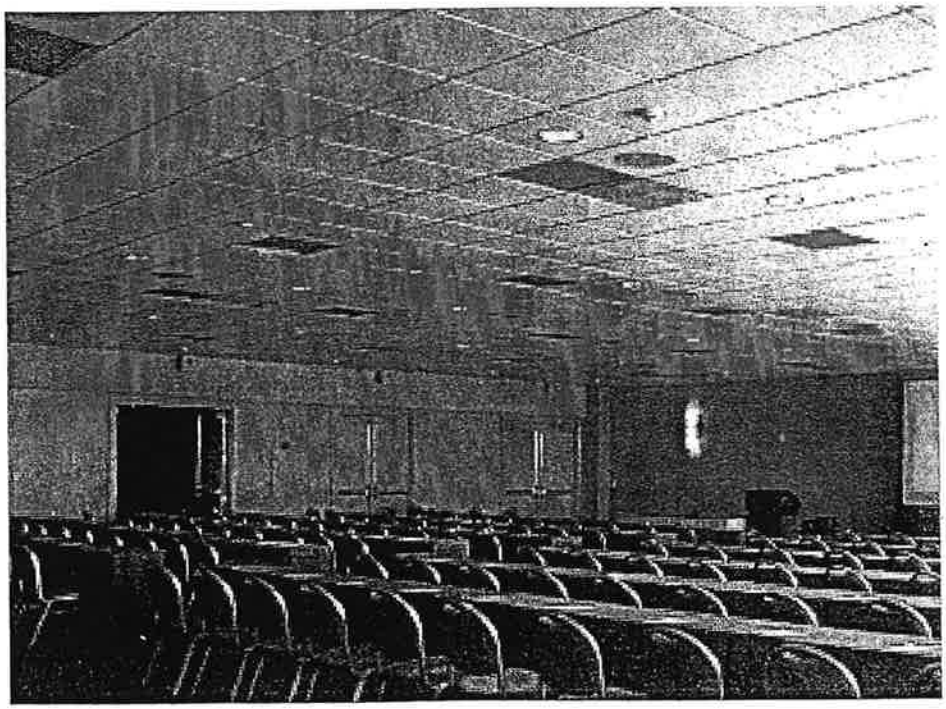
Club Atlantic Entrance
CIM photo 2005



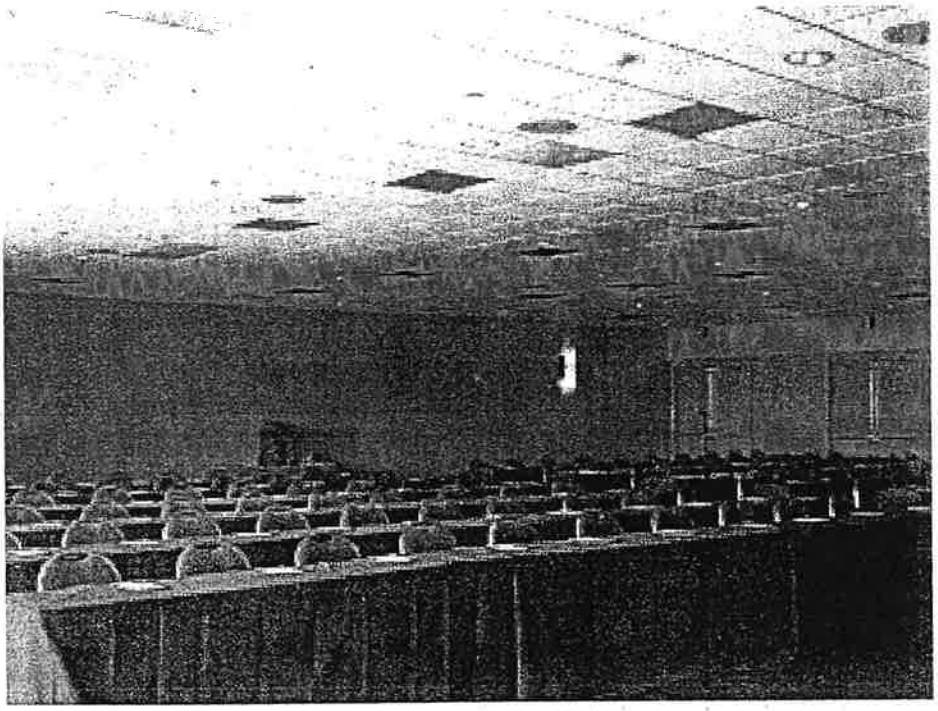
Club Atlantic Reception
CIM photo 2005



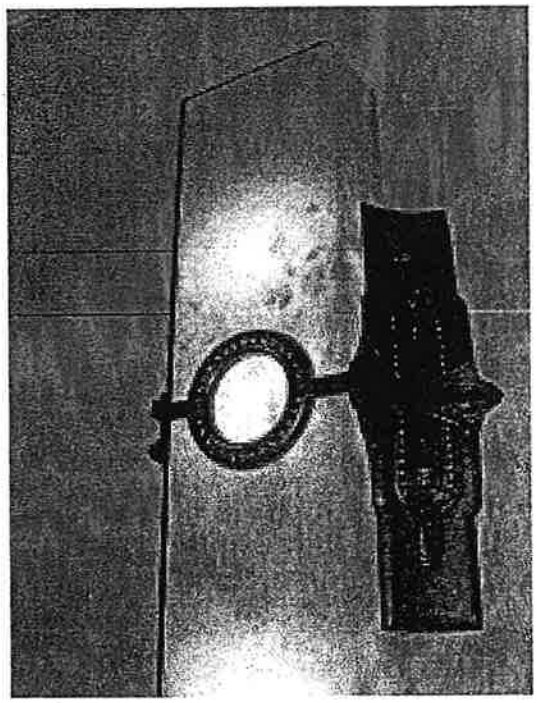
Club Atlantic Green Room
CIM photo 2005



Club Atlantic Room
CIM photo 2005

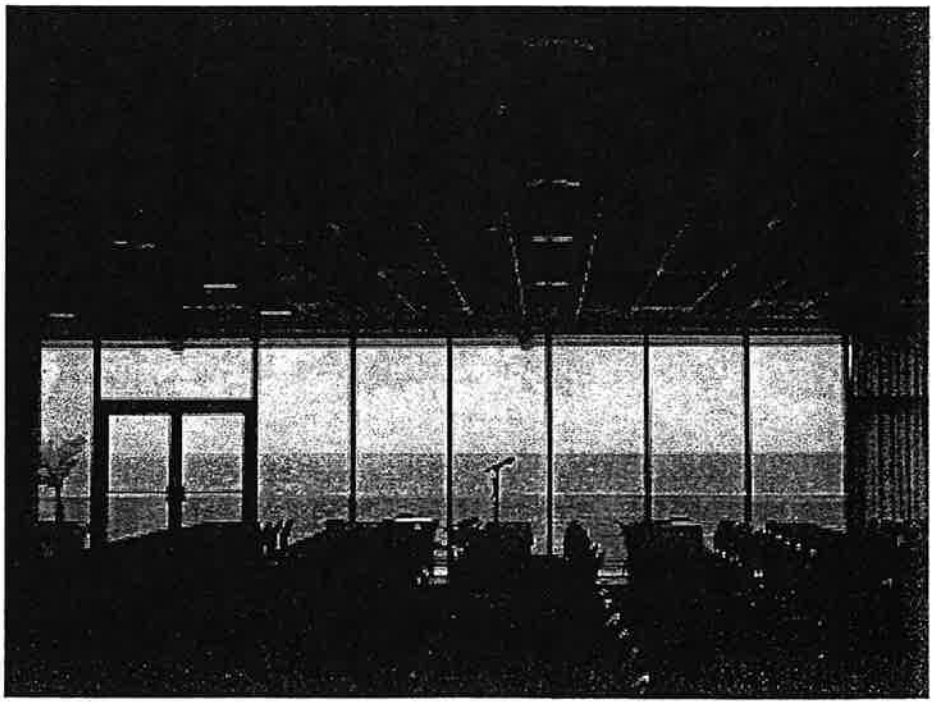


Club Atlantic Room
CIM photo 2005

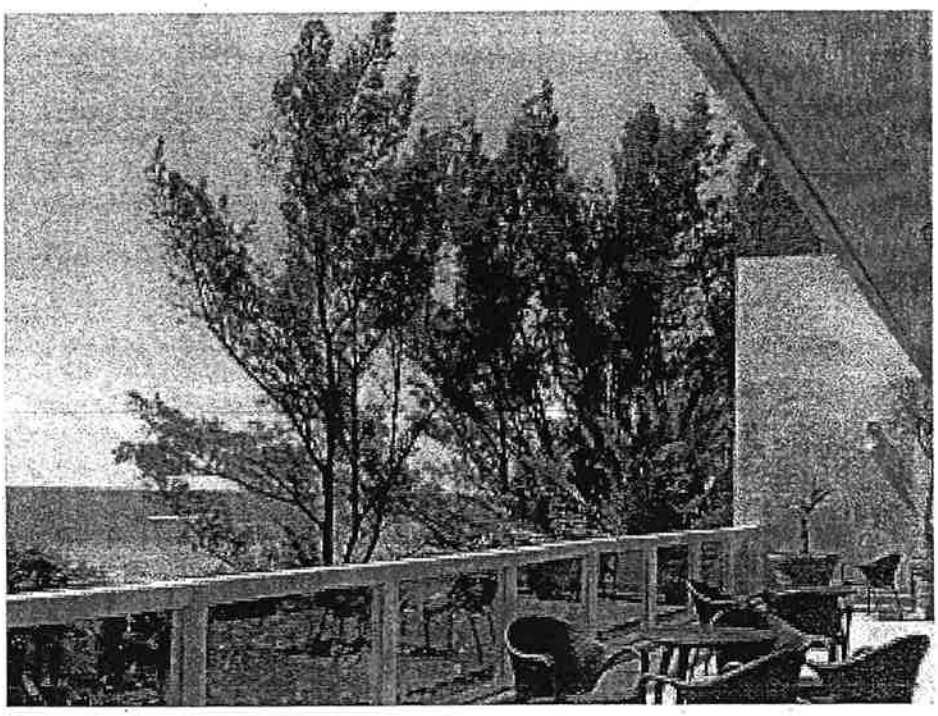


Club Atlantic Sconce Detail
CIM photo 2005

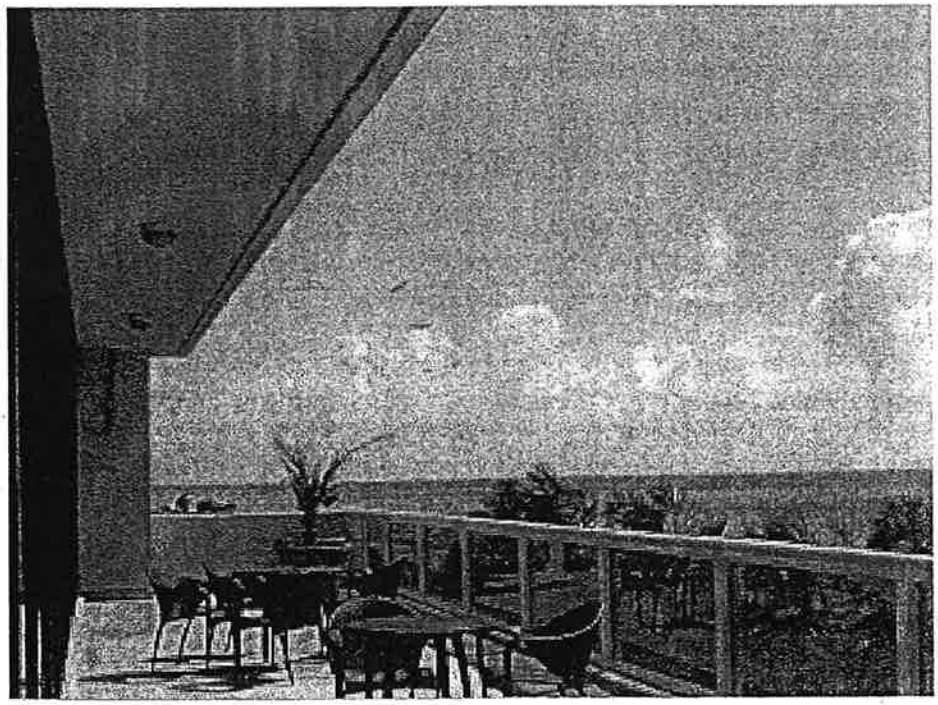
Club Atlantic Room
CIM photo 2005



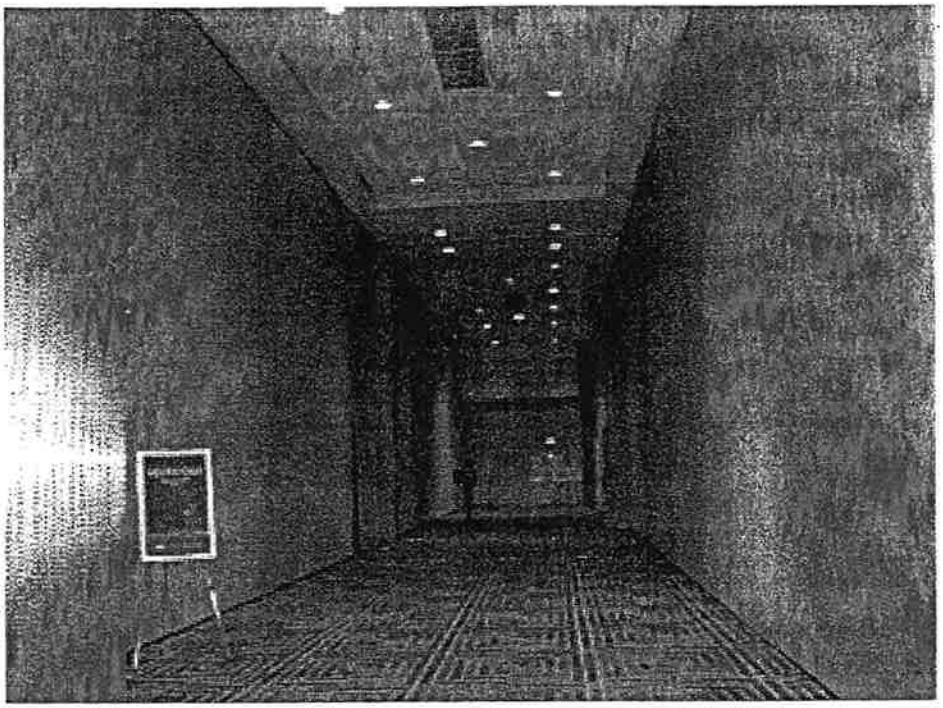
Club Atlantic Room, View to Terrace
CIM photo 2005



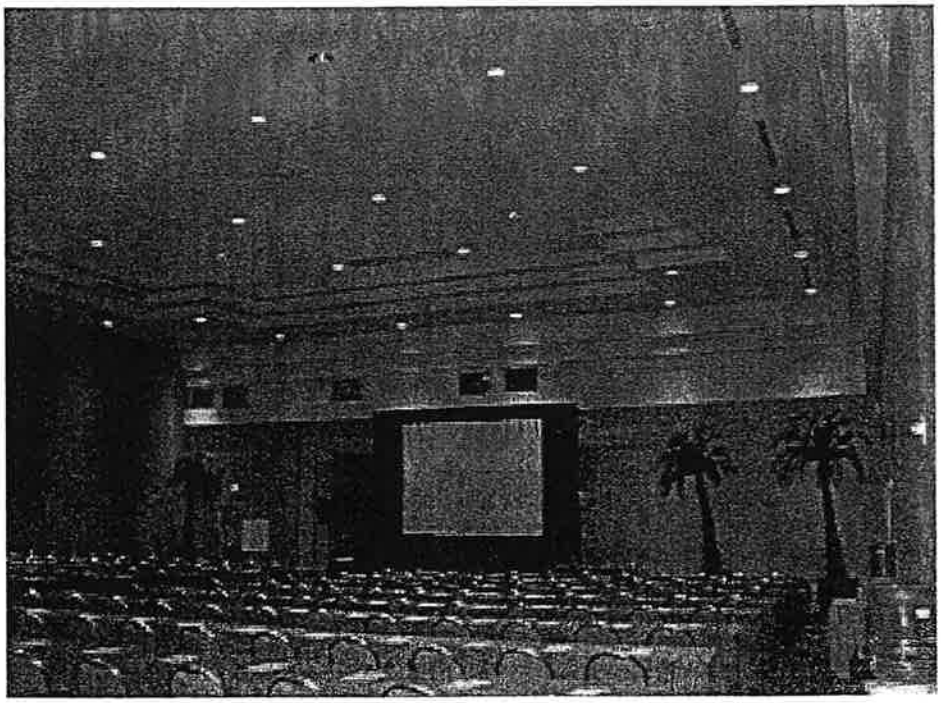
Club Atlantic Terrace
CIM photo 2005



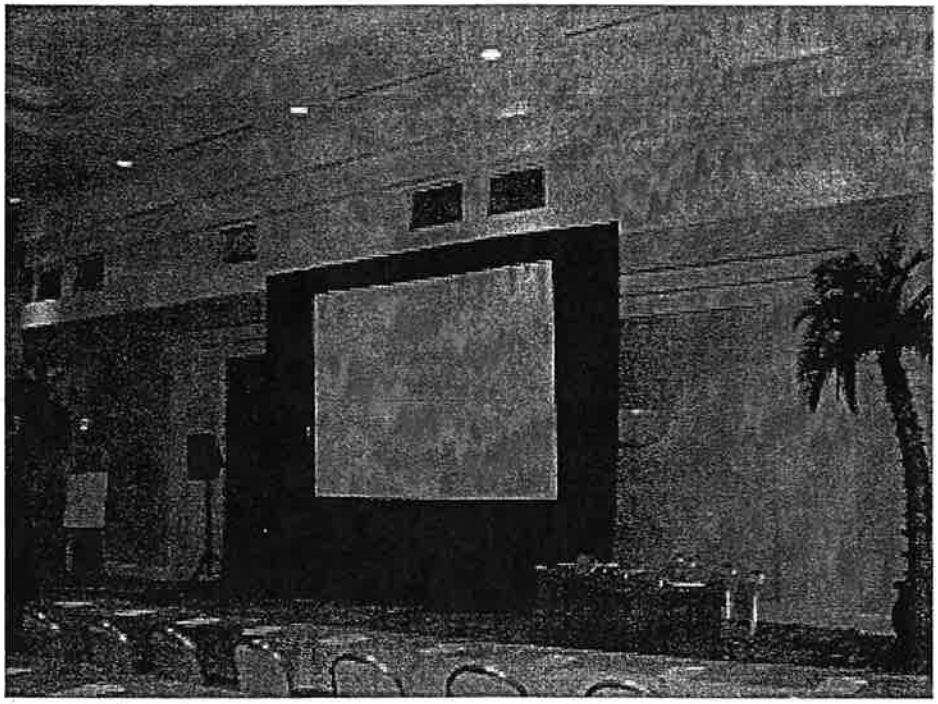
Club Atlantic Terrace
CIM photo 2005



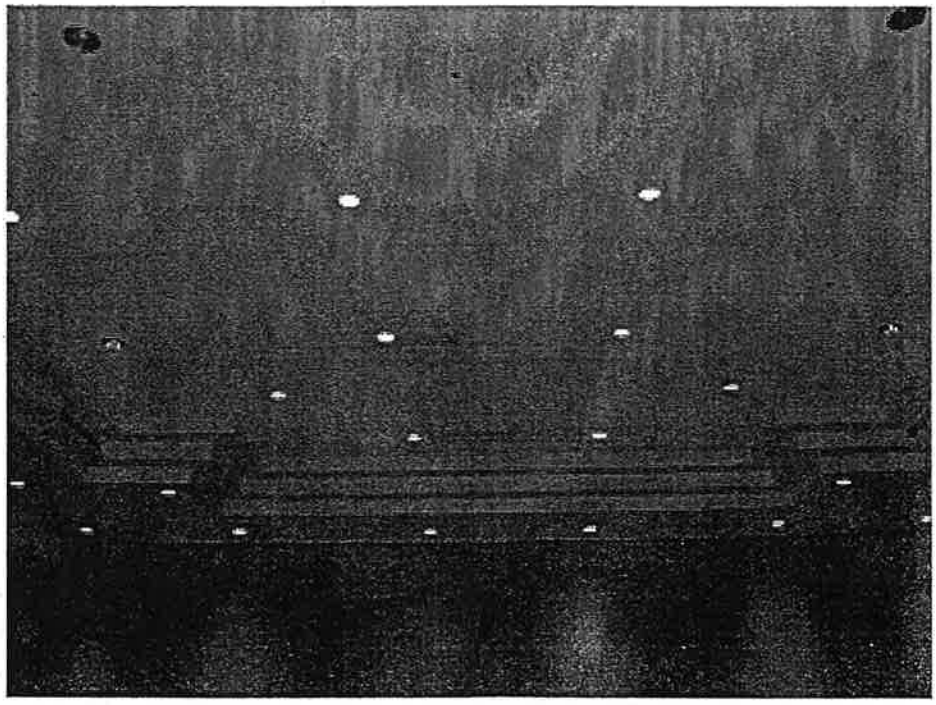
Fontainebleau Ballroom Transverse Corridor
CIM photo 2005



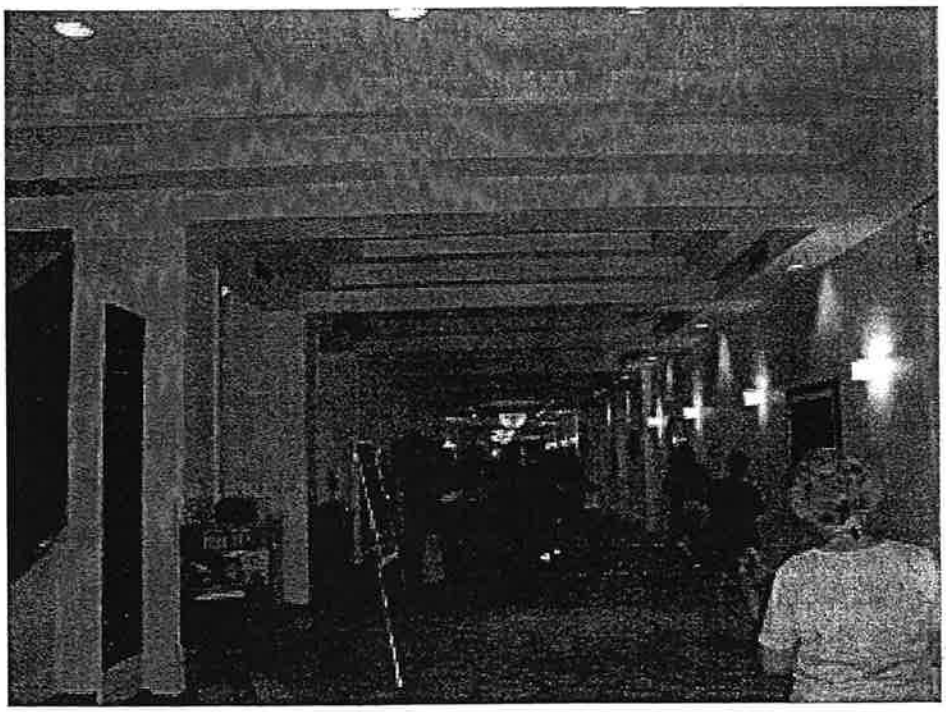
Fontainebleau Ballroom, Section D
CIM photo 2005



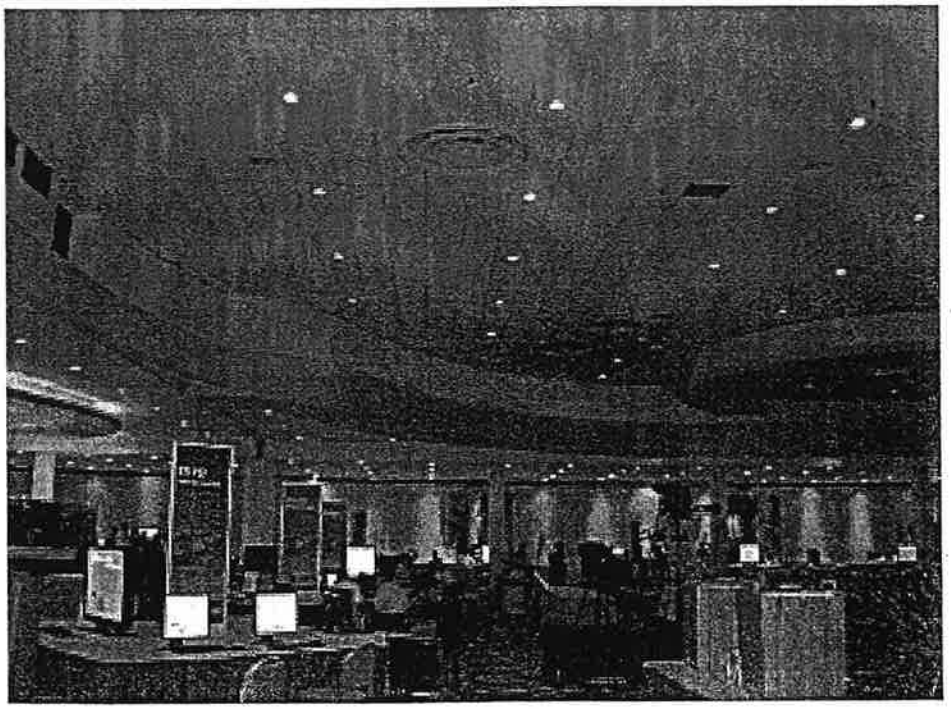
Fontainebleau Ballroom, Section D
CIM photo 2005



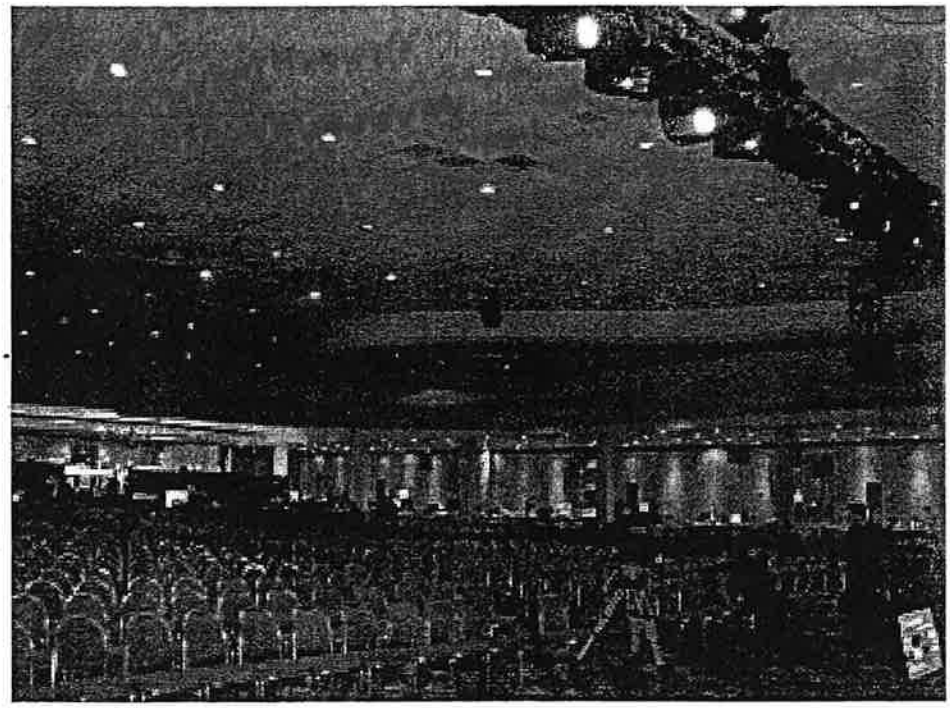
Fontainebleau Ballroom, Section D
CIM photo 2005



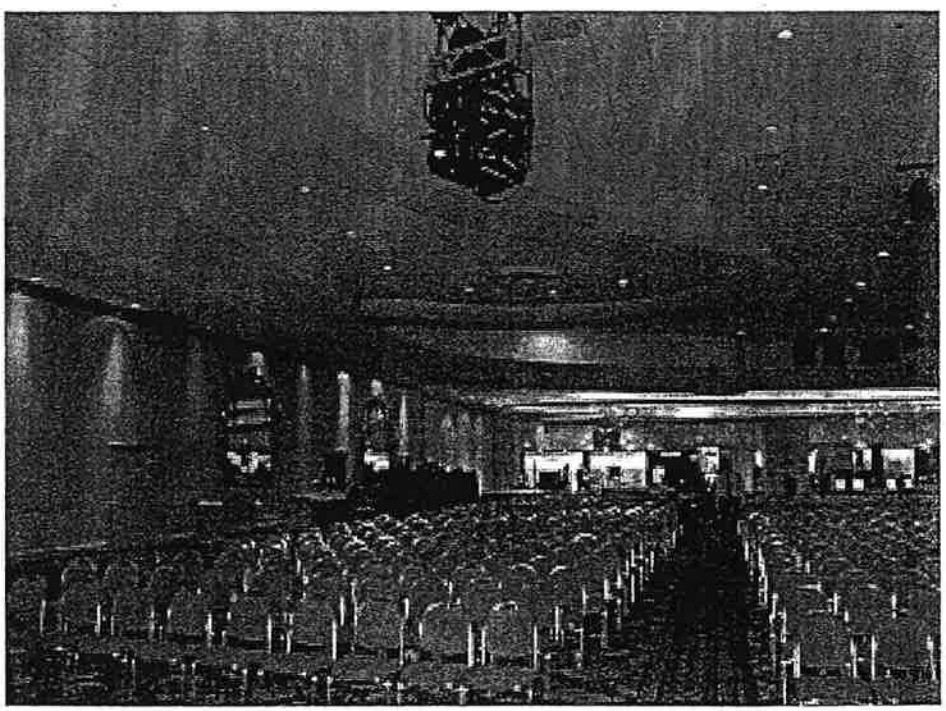
Jade Promenade, Level II
ATS photo 2005



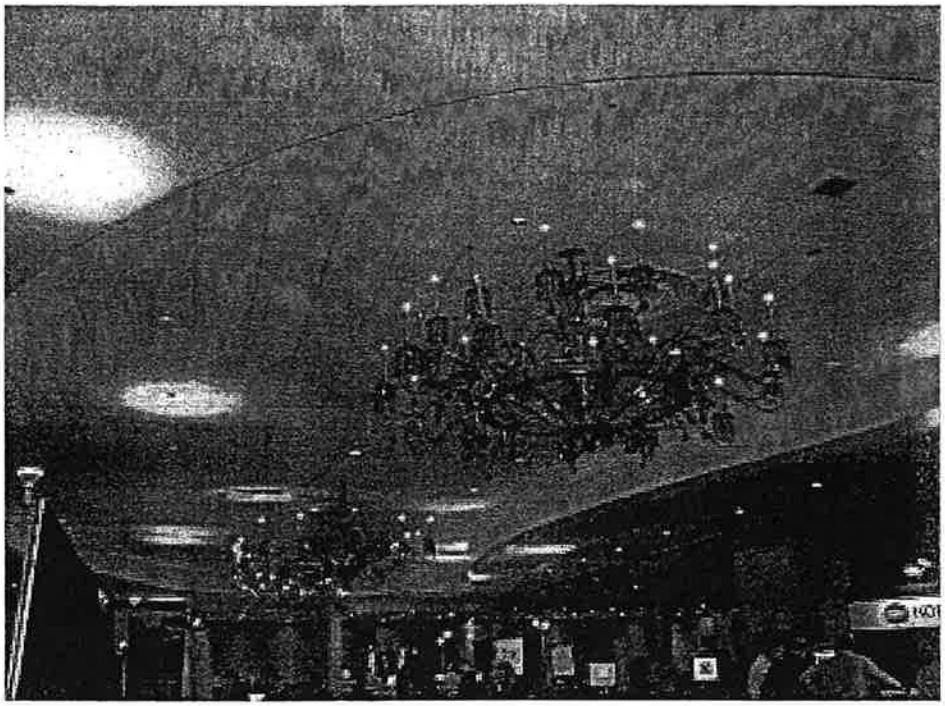
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



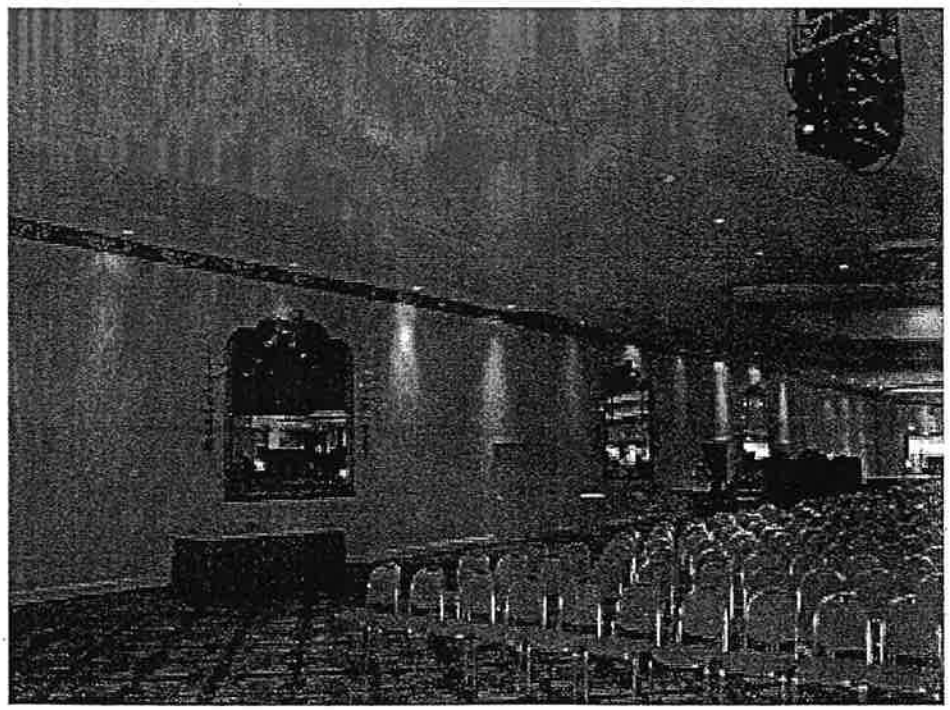
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



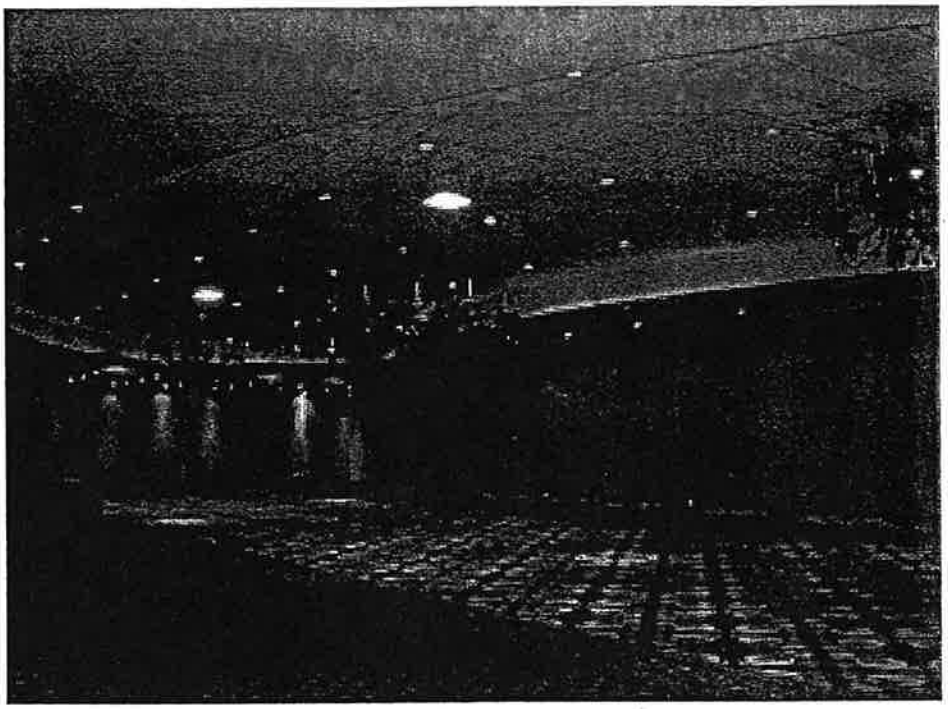
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



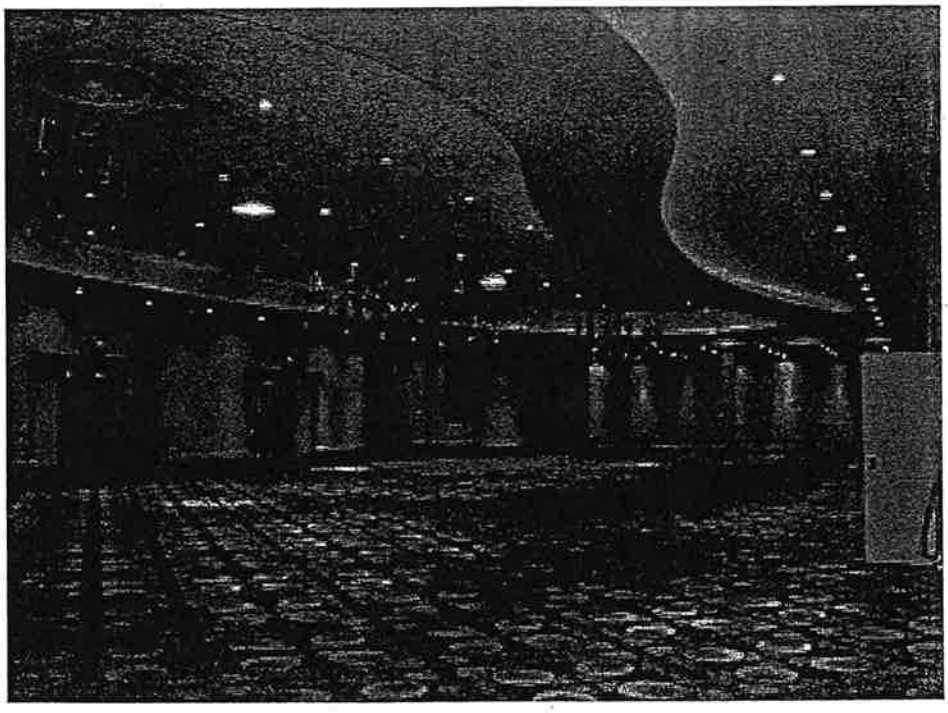
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



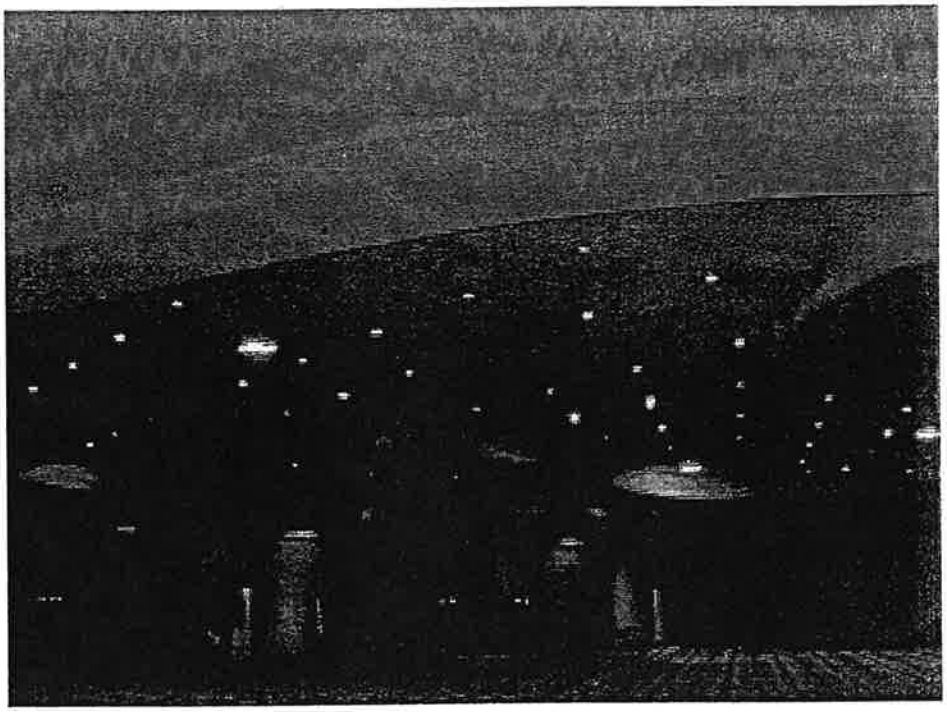
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



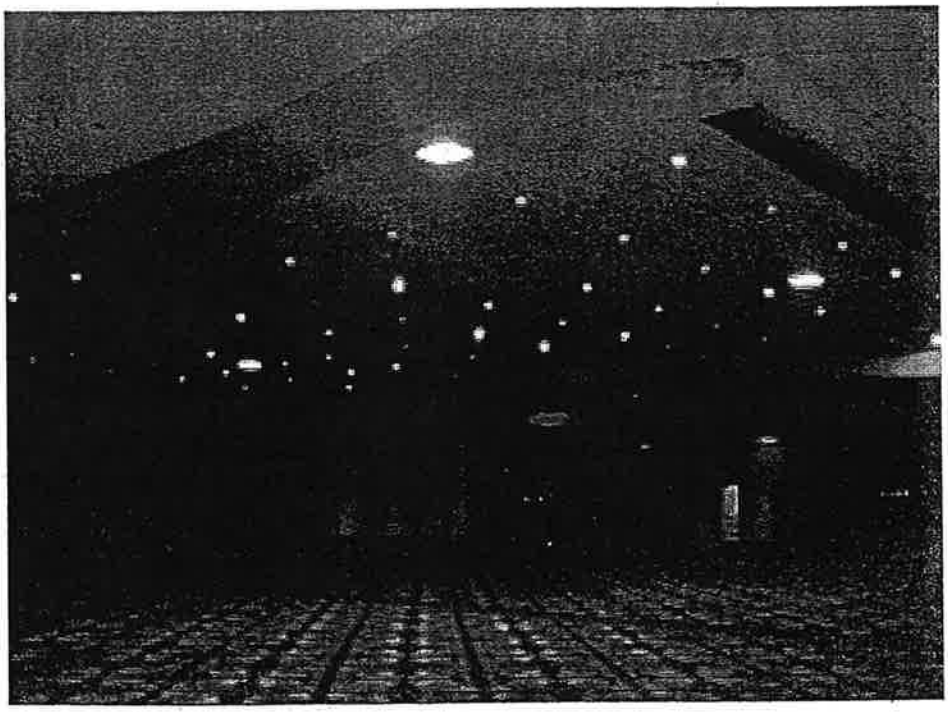
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



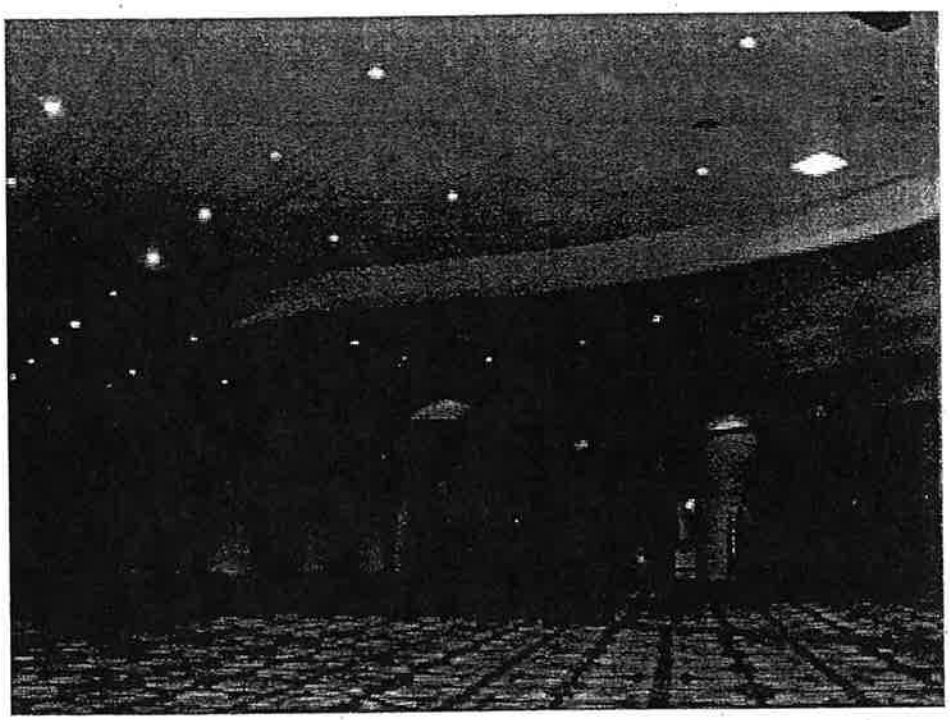
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



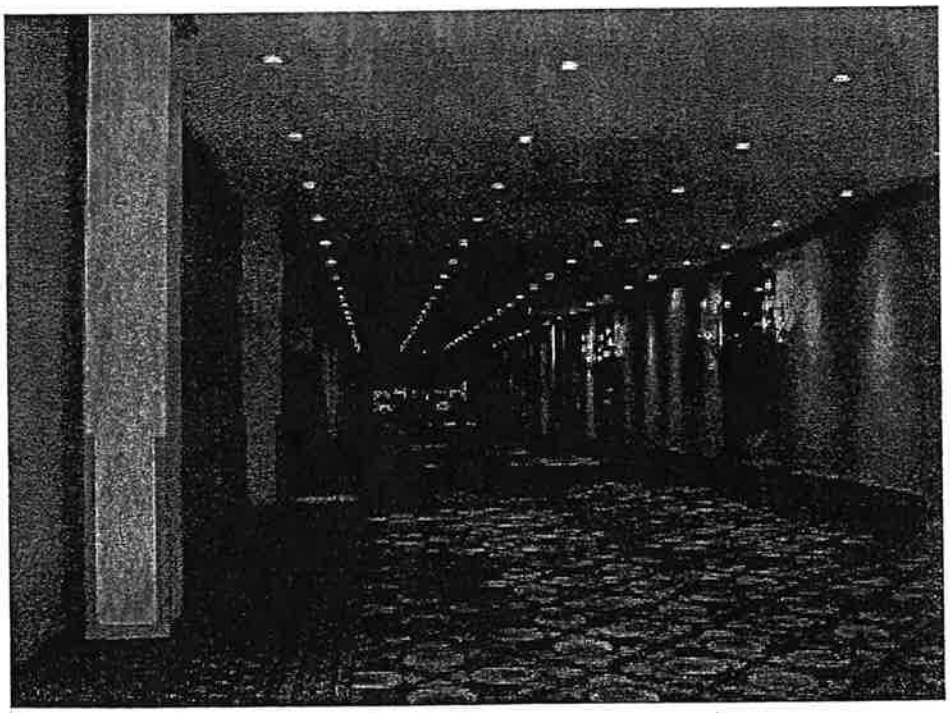
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



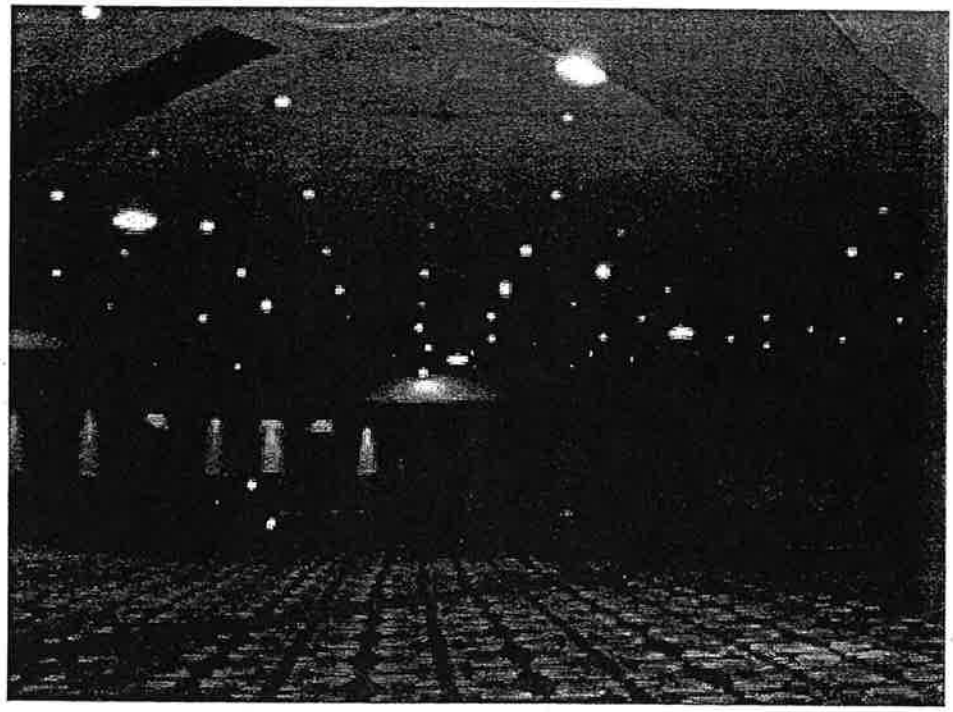
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



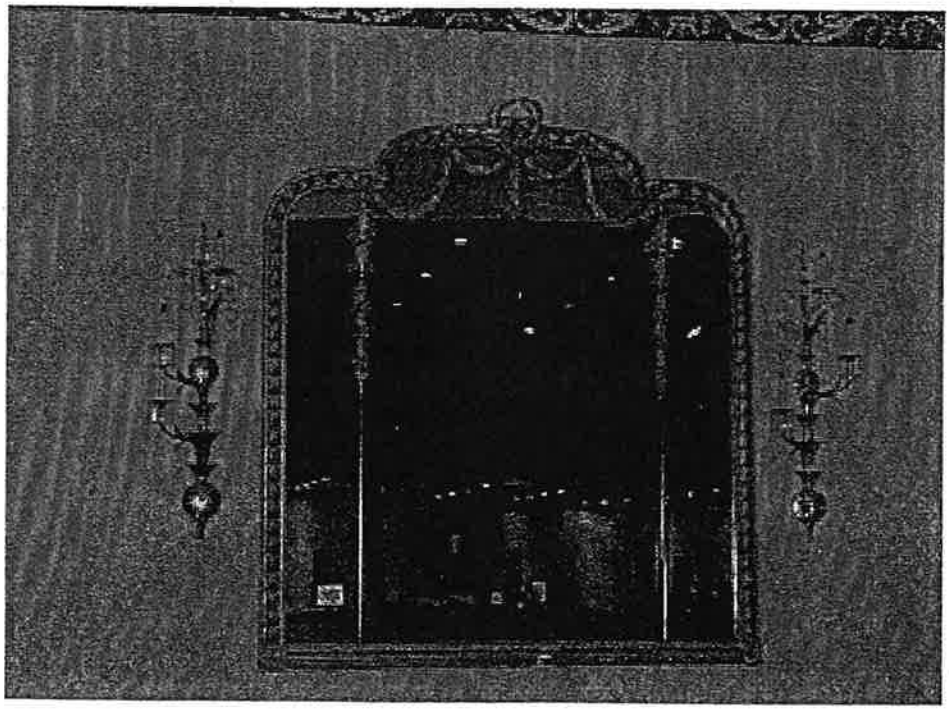
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



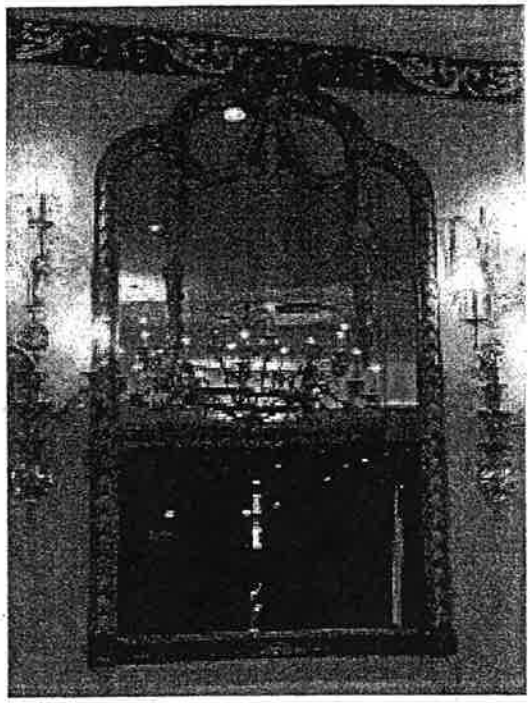
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



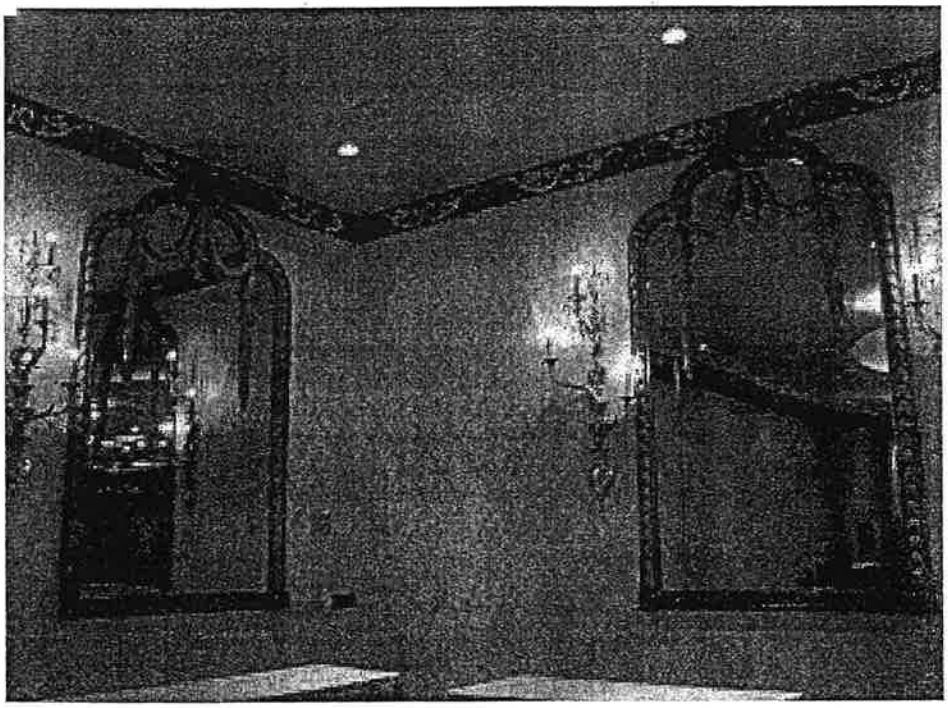
Grand Ballroom
ATS photo 2005



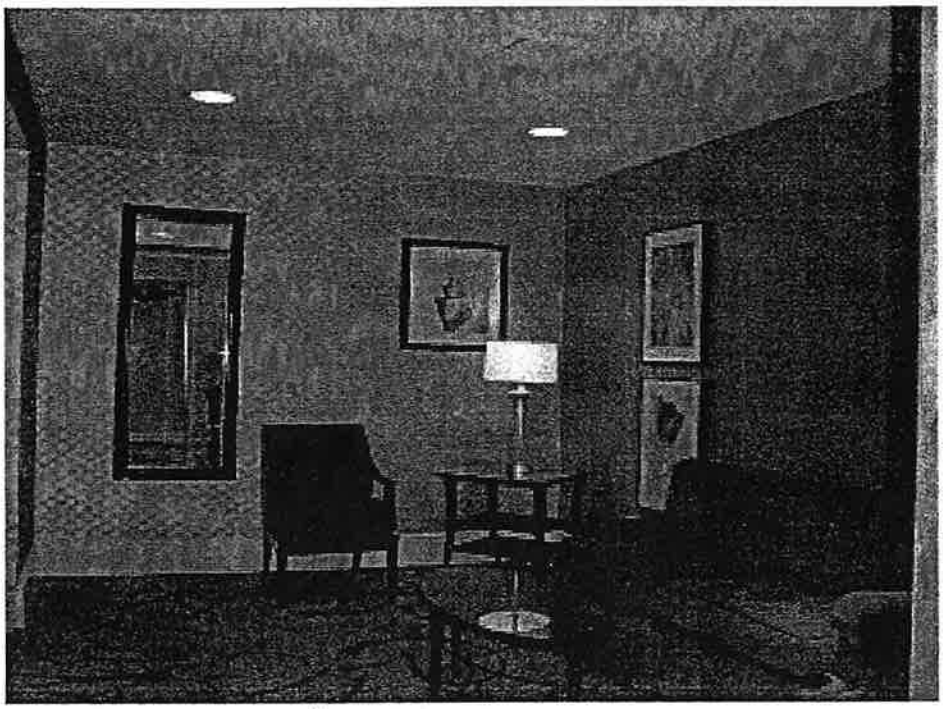
Grand Ballroom Mirror
ATS photo 2005



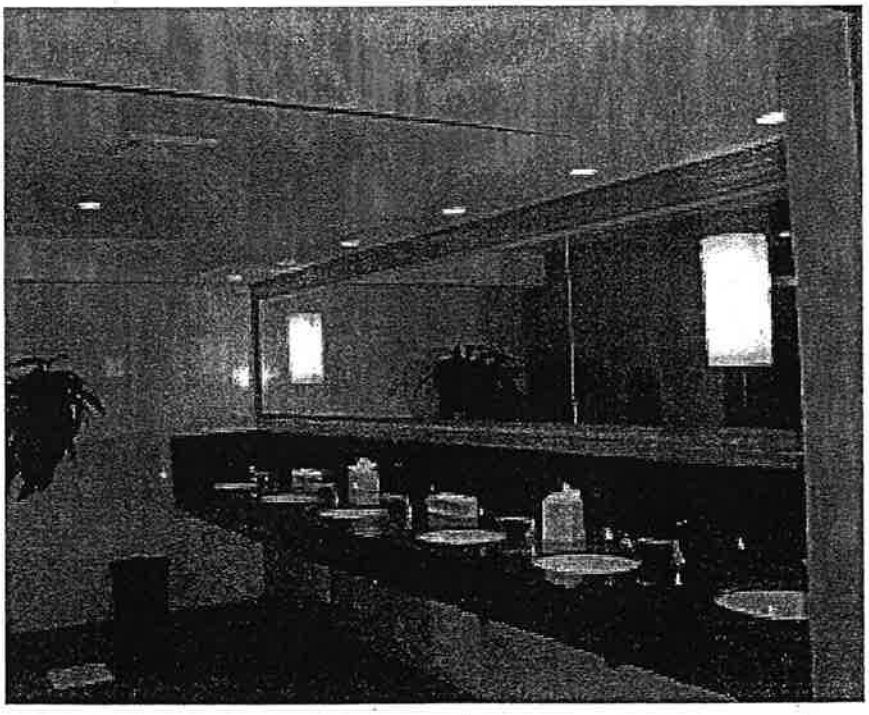
Grand Ballroom Mirror
ATS photo 2005



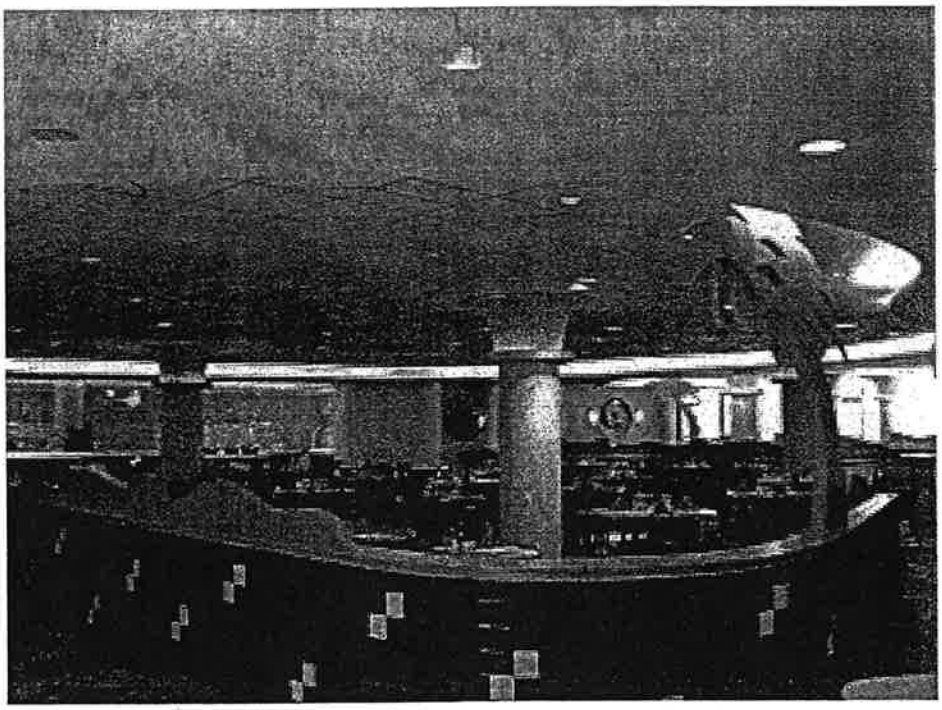
Grand Ballroom Mirror
ATS photo 2005



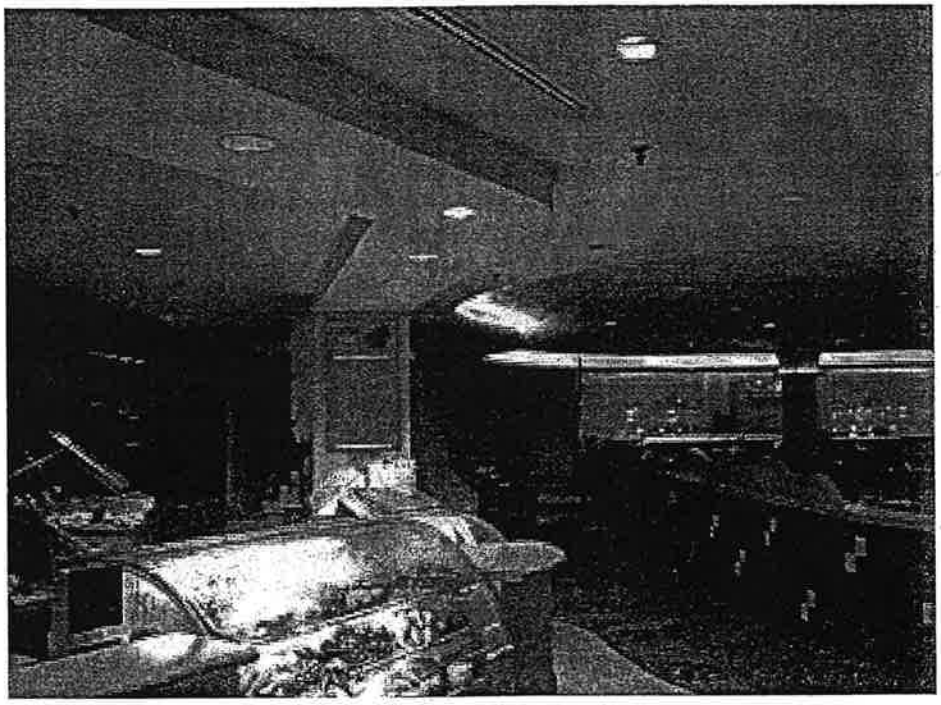
Restroom
ATS photo 2005



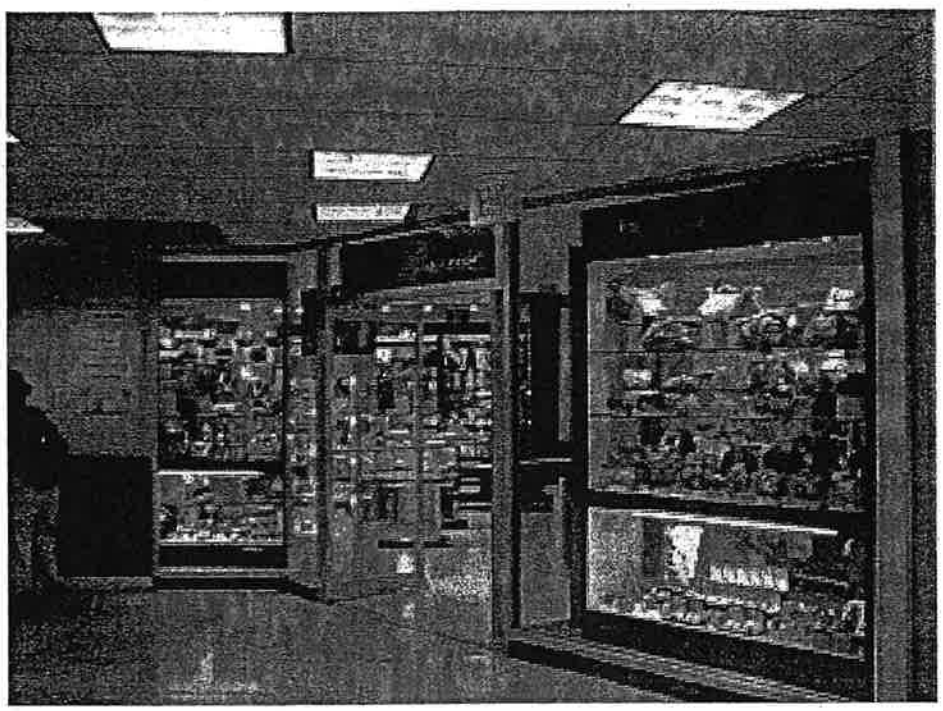
Restroom
ATS photo 2005



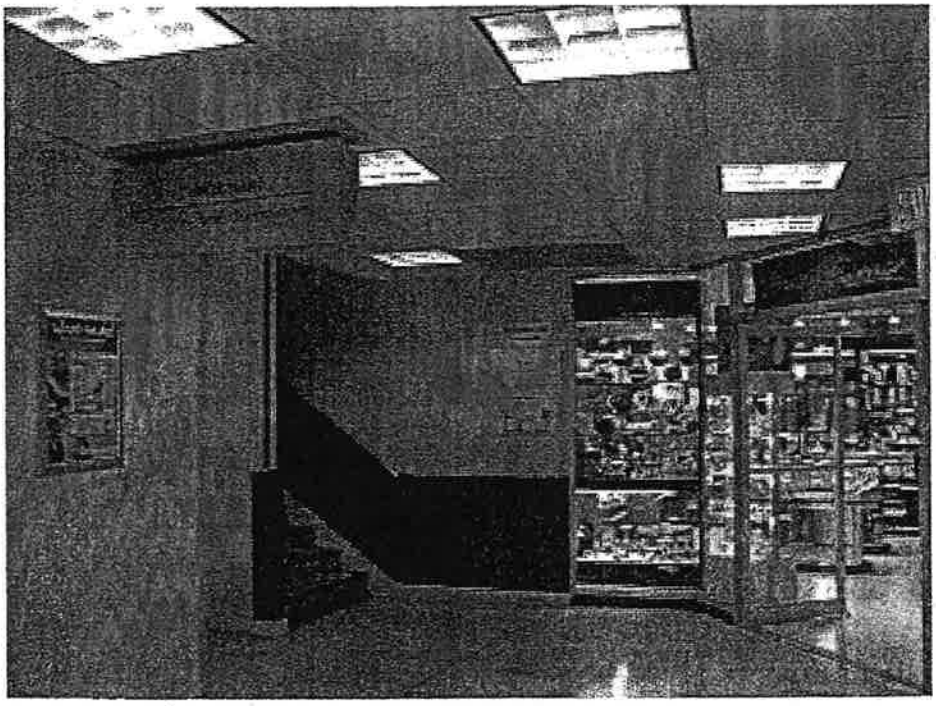
Lower Lobby Dining
CIM photo 2005



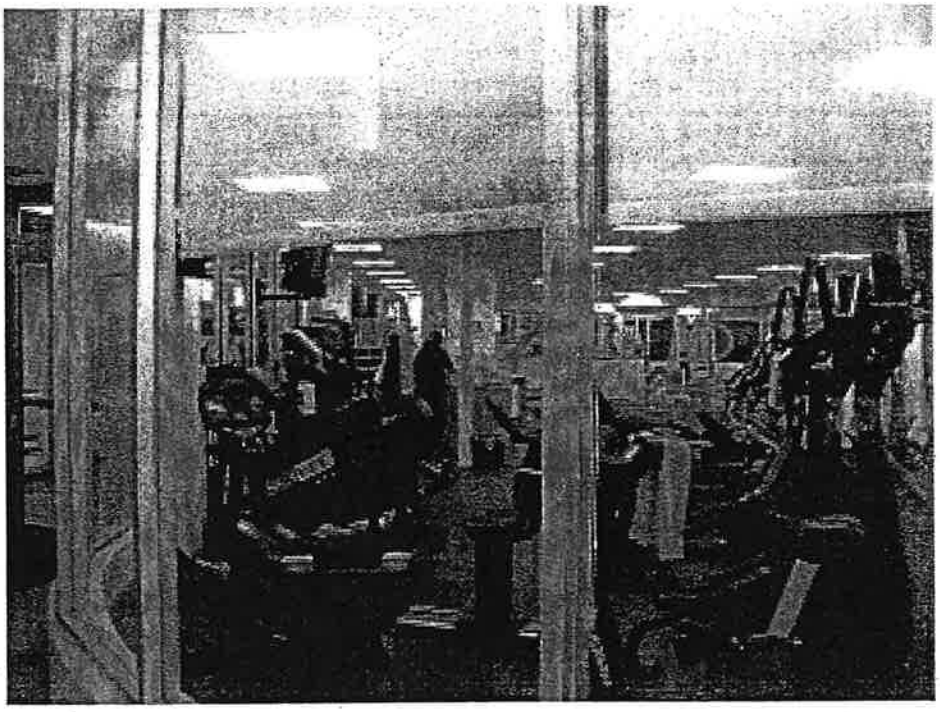
Lower Lobby Dining
CIM photo 2005



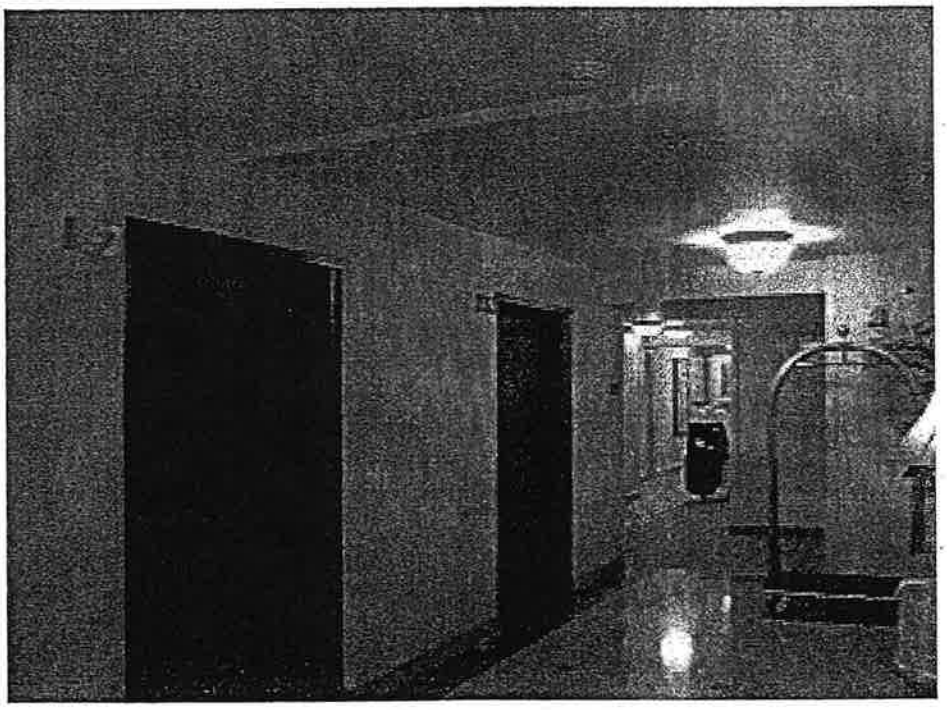
Lower Lobby Store
CIM photo 2005



Lower Lobby Store
CIM photo 2005



Lower Lobby Fitness Room
CIM photo 2005



Versailles Tower Elevators
CIM photo 2005