



900 OCEAN DRIVE

HISTORICAL REPORT

BEILINSON
GOMEZ

ARCHITECTS *pa*



March 15, 2021

Re: 900 Ocean Drive
Miami Beach, FL 33139

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Historical Report prepared by Carolyn Klepser, January 2017

Building Cards for Lots 7 & 8 | 900 & 910 Ocean Drive

Copies of Microfilm

HISTORY OF 900 OCEAN DRIVE, MIAMI BEACH

Today, the well-known restaurant/bar and open-air dance hall called Mango's occupies Lots 7 and 8 of Block 14 in the Ocean Beach Addition 2 Subdivision of Miami Beach. But early City Atlas maps show an earlier structure on the site. It is first listed in the 1922 Polk's City Directory as the residence of William R. Hodges (1859-1934). According to his obituary,¹ he was a real estate and insurance broker from Washington DC who retired and moved to South Florida around 1919. He may have built his house as early as that, but the earliest surviving record in the Miami Beach Building Department is a permit for the addition of a frame-stucco "servant's quarters and screened porch" in 1923. In 1926, "apartments" were added on a "new foundation." The 1935 City Atlas shows the residence on Lot 8, at the corner of Ocean Drive and 9th Street, and two outbuildings behind it occupying part of Lot 7 as well. The 1932 City Directory lists William Hodges and James H. Peter at 900 Ocean Drive, and one tenant at the "rear." James H. Peter was married to Hodges' sister Mary.² William Hodges died in 1934 while visiting her in Bethesda, Maryland, and apparently he left his Miami Beach property to her.

Building Permit records show that all these early buildings were demolished in August 1951. The City Atlas published the following year (Plate 3) shows Lots 7 and 8 as completely vacant and being used as a "Parking Area" at that time. In August 1952, permits were issued for the construction of the two buildings remaining here today. They were built as two-story CBS apartment buildings, each with 20 efficiency units and costing \$71,000, and the architect for both was Gilbert M. Fein (see Biography following).

The buildings have separate permit cards in the Building Department records. On Lot 8, at 900 Ocean Drive, the original owner is given as the Abraham Realty Corporation, while the owner of 910 Ocean Drive, on Lot 7, was the Martha Realty Corporation, but there was probably unity of title from the start. The managers of both buildings, according to the 1955 City Directory, were Morris and Martha Wolin, and Abraham and Ida Bush, probably the sources of the names. 900 Ocean Drive is listed as the Park Sea Hotel Apartments (referring to Lummus Park across the street), and the 910 building as the Surf Sea Hotel, but the buildings were obviously designed as a pair, facing each other as mirror images across a central courtyard.

¹ *Miami Herald*, Sept. 7, 1934, p. 9.

² *Ibid.*

Fein's 1952 plans of the buildings were not found on microfilm in the Miami Beach Building Department, but their original appearance is seen in a black-and-white postcard from the 1950s, found online in the Florida Photographic Collection at the website "Florida Memory."³ As built, they were an excellent example of the local Postwar Modern architectural style: the symmetry and eyebrows of Art Deco are absent. Raised bands of stucco outline the front facades and the window panels; an off-center vertical panel of corrugated stucco extends almost all the way down each front facade, and smaller corrugated-stucco elements are interspersed between the windows. The windows had horizontal panes, of either awning or jalousie type. The apartments on both floors faced the courtyard along exterior catwalks accessed by open stairways, typical of the Postwar style. Perforated "breeze block," another characteristic of the style, screened the stairways on the front, and also formed a low wall running along Ocean Drive. On the smooth stucco between the first and second story windows, "Park Sea" is seen painted on the front of the south building, and "Surf Sea" on the north.

In 1952, when these buildings were constructed, Miami Beach was prospering in the Postwar Boom. Soon, luxury hotels such as the Fontainebleau, Eden Roc and Deauville would appear, progressively farther north. South Beach was left behind, and by 1979, even though it was placed on the National Register of Historic Places, the neighborhood was widely known as "God's waiting room," with the elderly, most of them Jewish New Yorkers, filling the dilapidated buildings.

The 1977 City Directory lists the Park Sea Surf Sea Apartments, with managers Ian B. and Fay (or Florence) Wallack. In 1978, son David Wallack, a lawyer who had studied Eastern philosophy with Indian gurus,⁴ converted the *de facto* retirement home into an enlightened facility called the Eastern Sun. As Gerald Posner relates in his book Miami Babylon:

In law school, Wallack [sic] has stumbled across a new government program --- Adult Congregated Living Facilities (ACLF) --- which gave large tax incentives and government funding to anyone who converted a building into a retirement home. ...[Wallack] decided to transform his father's traditional retirement home at Ninth and Ocean into an entirely new concept.... He wanted a place where the standard of care was unmatched and residents could live out their remaining days in dignity.⁵

In May 1978, a permit was issued for building alterations by the Carlson Construction

3 Florida State Archive, image N045106, "Park Sea Surf Sea Apartments, Miami Beach, Florida"

4 Gerald Posner, Miami Babylon. Simon & Schuster, New York, 2009, p. 73.

5 *Ibid.*, pp. 134, 136.

Company, valued at \$90,000. Plans for this project, labeled “Eastern Sun,” were found on microfilm #89604 in the Miami Beach Building Department. They proposed an elaborate front facade of stone facing, rustic cedar planking, new windows, and new two-story structures spanning the courtyard that linked the buildings together in a U-shape and also included an elevator. But most of these very ambitious plans were not realized, probably for financial reasons. “The banks had given up on South Beach,” Posner quotes Wallack as saying; “No one was making loans. They all said it wouldn't work, it was too expensive. I had no money, and my father did not have enough to finance it. So I went to Jefferson Bank and pleaded. I virtually camped out there, and they finally gave me a loan of 50% of the building's value.”⁶ A more modest \$10,000 renovation by John Carlson got a permit in August 1978. Posner continues:

The Eastern Sun was the first full renovation of a South Beach building, finished even before the Cardozo. Wallach [sic] worked with his new residents and took the time to learn about their lives before they ended up at the Eastern Sun. He broke all the rules of a normal retirement home. There were no set menus....He took [residents] on outings to the dog track at First Street and on most summer days, they would sit near the ocean. 'And some of them were in wheelchairs,' he recalls, 'and I'd roll them one by one to the beach. No one was left out.'”⁷

The Eastern Sun and the last of its residents survived for about a decade, but could not survive the explosive development of Ocean Drive. Posner continues: “One day while swimming in the ocean, [Wallack] had a vision of what he was going to do with his Eastern Sun retirement home: convert it into 'a place called Mango's, a tropical cafe filled with parrots and tiki huts and women dressed in teeny leopard-skin spandex outfits. Mango's was going to be a party in my house,' he said.”⁸

The conversion of the Eastern Sun into Mango's in 1991 left much of the original facade intact, above a double layer of projecting awnings, but beneath these awnings, the bottom portion of the corrugated stucco panels has been lost. Two plate-glass storefronts now flank the entrance, and all the breeze-block has disappeared. There is a tent-like roof over the courtyard, with a projecting awning at the front parapet, but traces of the Park Sea / Surf Sea still remain, an example of the Postwar Modern style placed between the Venetian Gothic Locust building and the Art Deco Waldorf Towers.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*, p.170.

ARCHITECT BIOGRAPHY

Gilbert Fein (1920-2003)

Fein was from New York City, and studied architecture at New York University. He served in the Army Corps of Engineers during World War II and settled in Miami Beach after honeymooning there in 1947. He designed hundreds of residential and commercial buildings in South Florida in the new Postwar style, becoming “one of the masters of Modernism.”⁹ He was consulting architect to Congress Inn Motel Group and the Ramada Inn Corporation, and he made major design contributions to the Miami Beach Convention Center. A great number of his apartment buildings are in Normandy Isle and elsewhere in North Beach. In his honor, the Miami Beach City Commission declared Gilbert Fein Day on February 5, 2003, just a month before his death, and the Gilbert Fein Conservation District was designated on the Bayfront just south of Lincoln Road..

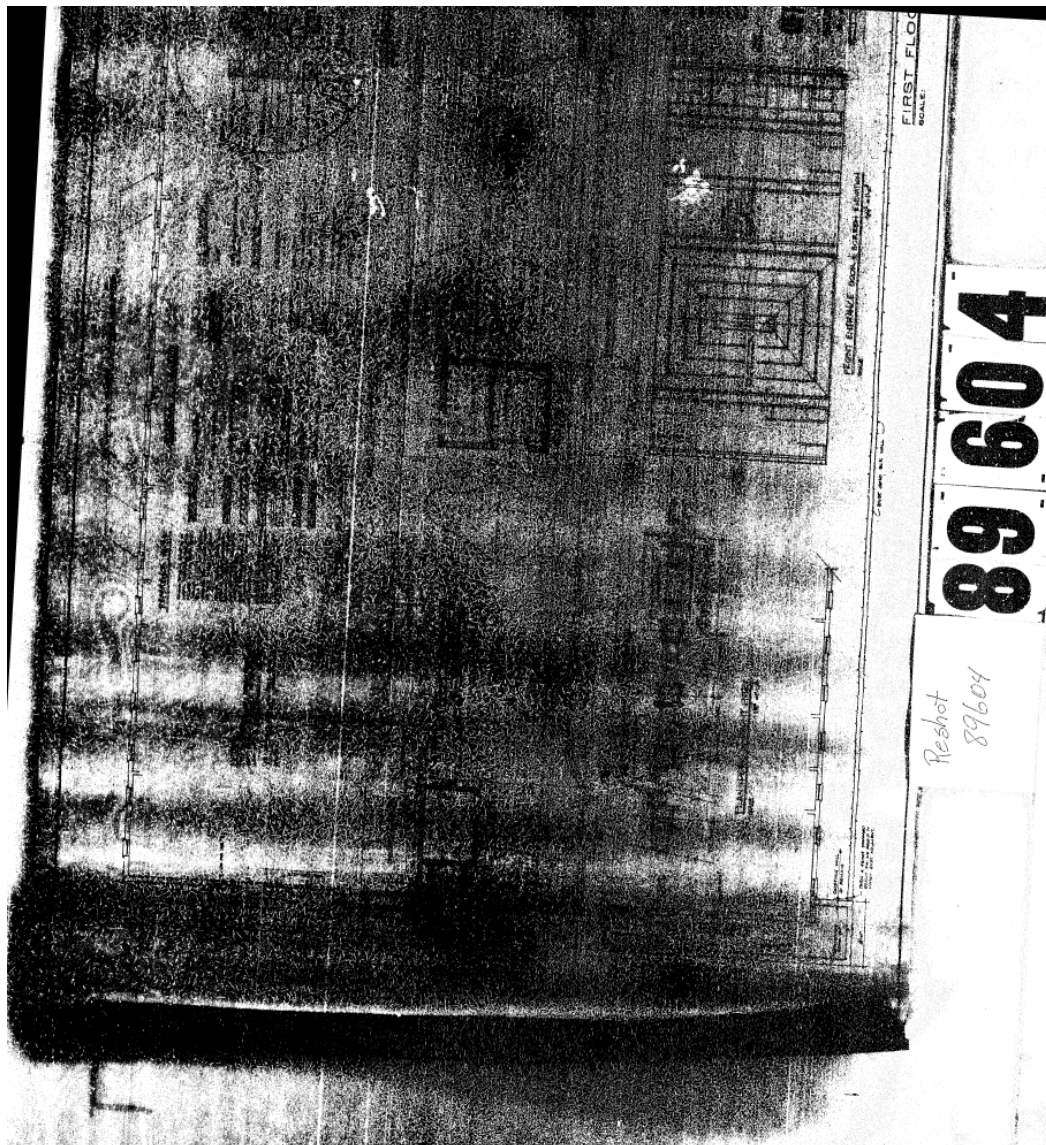
Most of Fein’s comfortably livable buildings are unassuming and not prominent landmarks, but some of the better-known are:

Starlite Hotel	750 Ocean Drive
News Cafe	800 Ocean Drive
Tuxedo Park	1900 Liberty Avenue
Lake View Apartments	4780 Pinetree Drive
Park Isle Club	780 73rd Street

--- Carolyn Klepser, researcher

January 10, 2017

⁹ Obituary, *Miami Herald*: March 11, 2003, p.4-B.



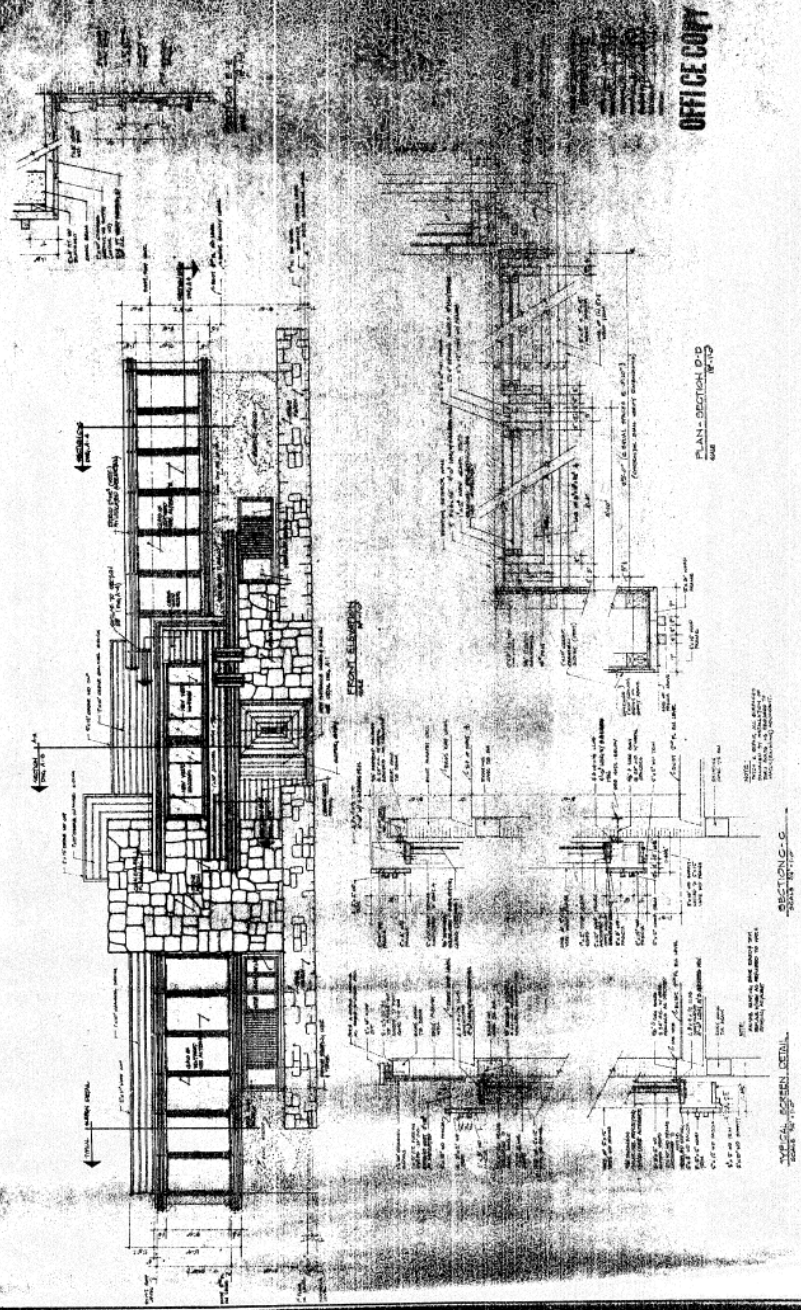
FIRST FLOOR
SCALE:

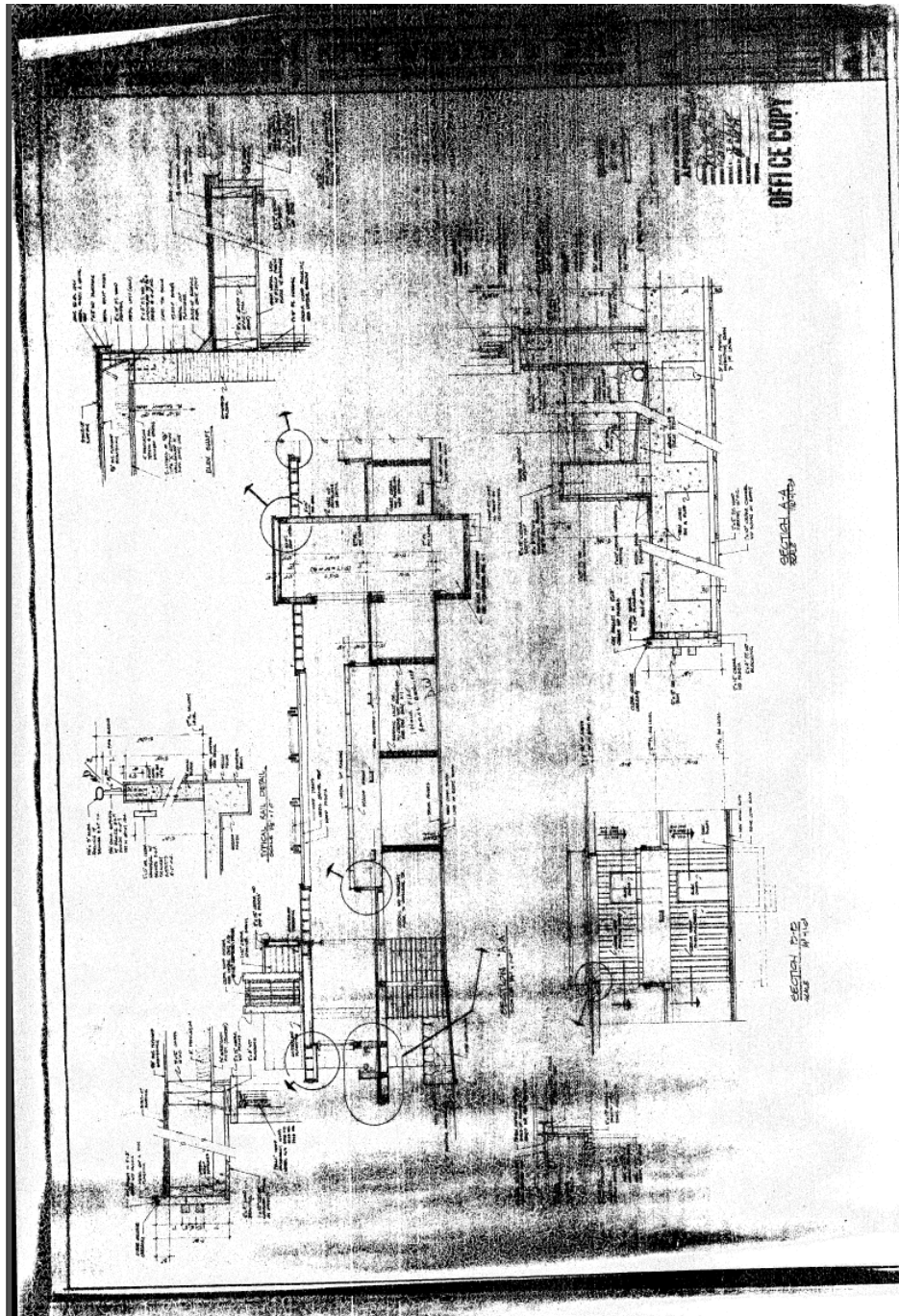
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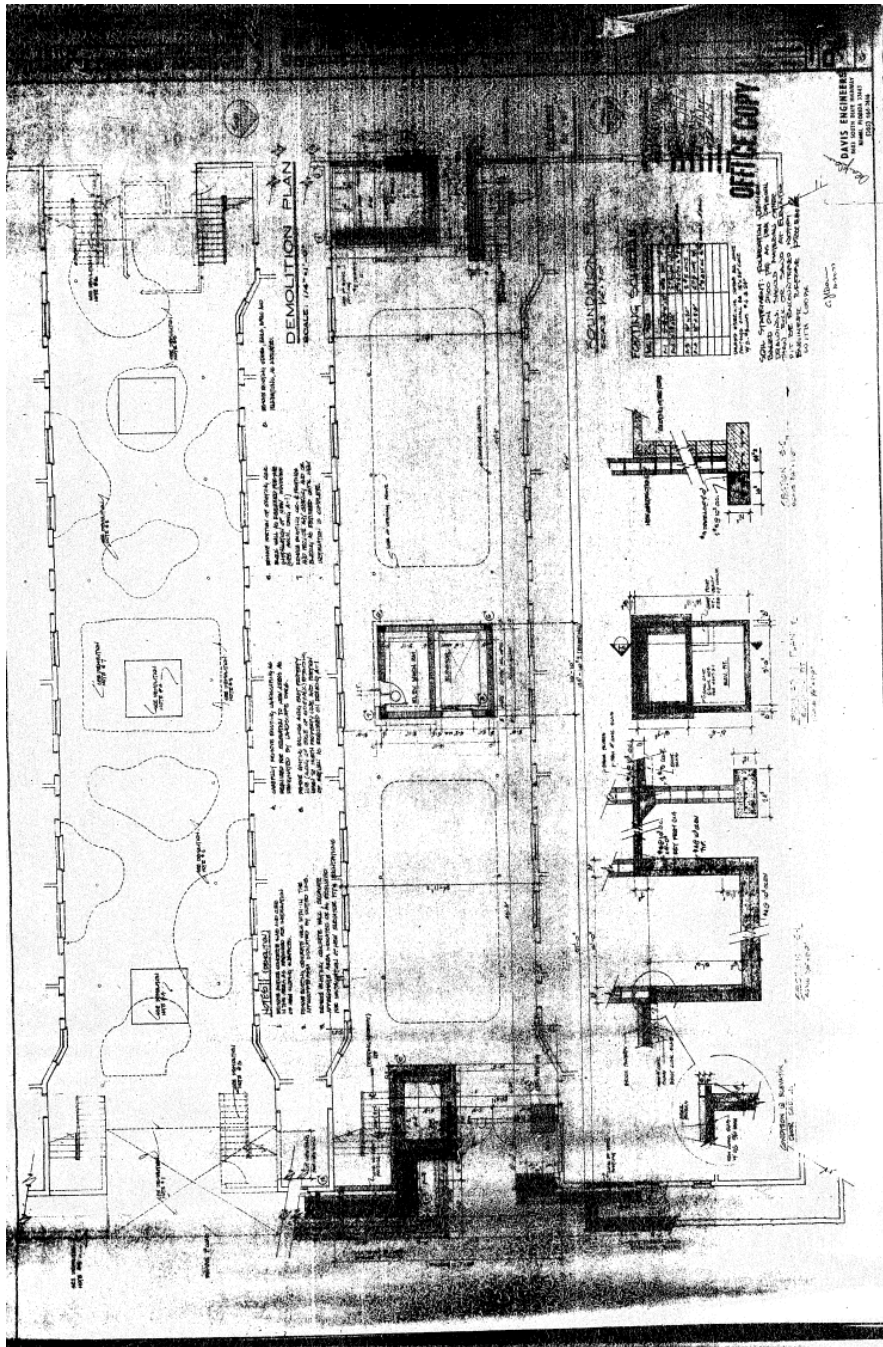
OFFICE COPY

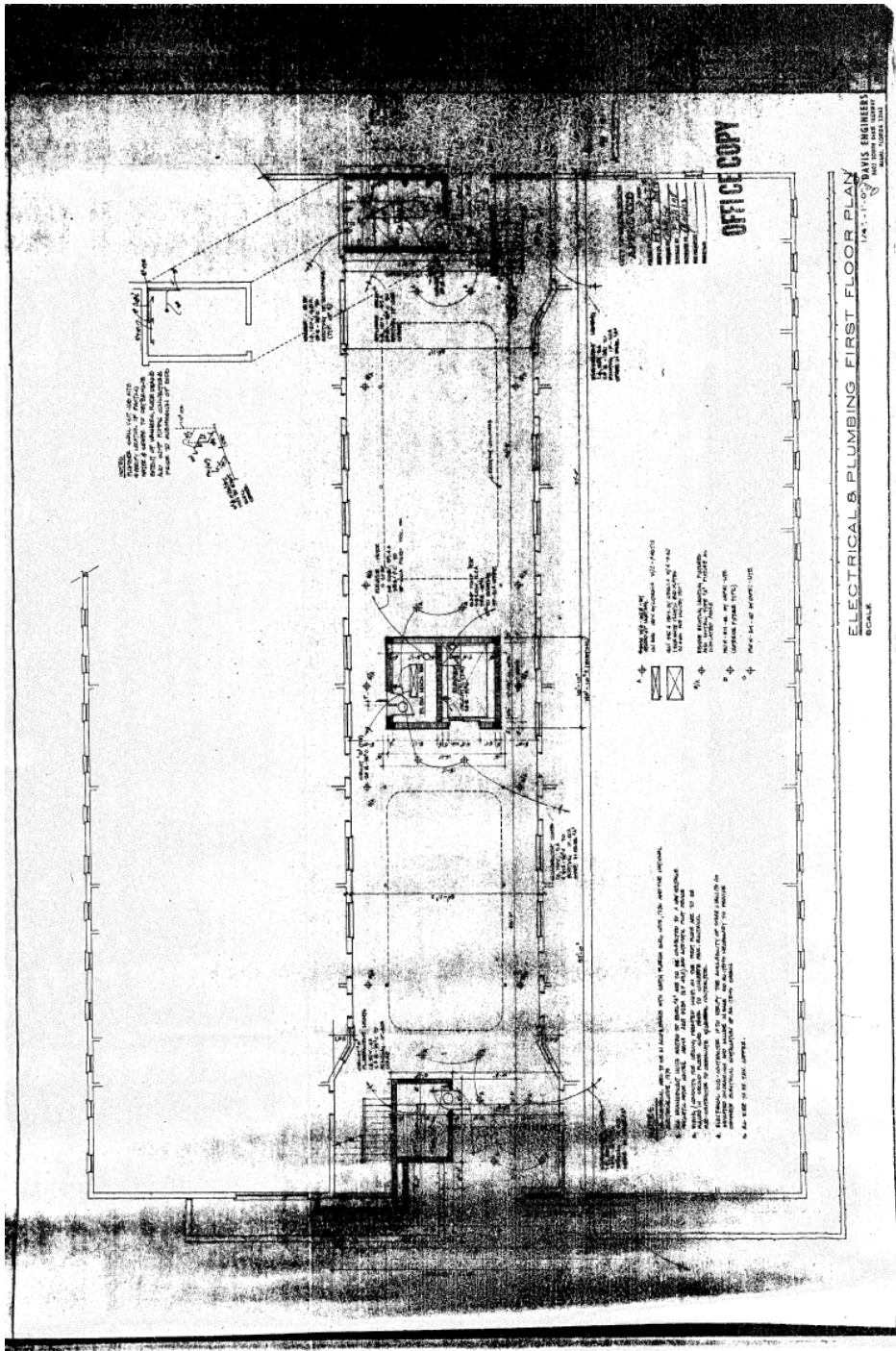
PLAN - SECTION D-D





OFFICE COPY





OFFICE COPY

ELECTRICAL & PLUMBING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SCALE

DAVIS ENGINEERS
AND ARCHITECTS
INCORPORATED
1000 LEXINGTON AVENUE
NEW YORK 17, N.Y.

- 1. ELECTRICAL SYMBOLS: (SEE PAGE 102)
2. PLUMBING SYMBOLS: (SEE PAGE 103)
3. LIGHTING SYMBOLS: (SEE PAGE 104)
4. HEATING SYMBOLS: (SEE PAGE 105)
5. AIR CONDITIONING SYMBOLS: (SEE PAGE 106)

NOTES:
1. ALL ELECTRICAL WORK TO BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NATIONAL ELECTRICAL CODE, 1955 EDITION.
2. ALL PLUMBING WORK TO BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE PLUMBING CODE, 1955 EDITION.
3. ALL LIGHTING FIXTURES TO BE OF THE TYPE SPECIFIED ON THE SCHEDULE.
4. ALL HEATING EQUIPMENT TO BE OF THE TYPE SPECIFIED ON THE SCHEDULE.
5. ALL AIR CONDITIONING EQUIPMENT TO BE OF THE TYPE SPECIFIED ON THE SCHEDULE.

[illegible][illegible][illegible]

Park Sea Hotel - ?
Owner: MARTHA REALTY CORP.

Lot 7 Block 14 Subdivision OCEAN BEACH
General Contractor Arkin Construction Co. 1175
Architect G. M. Fein

Permit No. 39155, Cost \$ 71,000...
Address 900 - Ocean Drive
Bond No. 5302
Engineer
Lot Size 50 X 130
Height 23' Stories 2

Use RE Area 28
Front 40' Depth 125'
Zoning Regulations:
Building Size:

Certificate of Occupancy No. 1972 - Dec. 23, 1952
Type of Construction #3 CBS Foundation Spread Footing 12 x 30 Roof Flat Date Aug. 8, 1952

PLUMBING Contractor #33758 Markowitz Brothers
#33862 Markowitz Brothers*

Water Closets 20 Swimming Pool Traps
Lavatories 20 Steam or Hot Water Boilers
Bath Tubs 20
Showers
Urinals
Sinks 20
Dish Washing Machine
Laundry Trays
Laundry Washing Machines
Drinking Fountains
Floor Drains
Grease Traps
Safe Wastes

Sewer Connection 1- 5" Date Aug. 12, 1952
Temporary Water Closet 2 Sept. 5, 1952
Down Spouts 3*
Wells

ROUGH APPROVAL L. Rothman, 9-8-52
FINAL APPROVAL OK, E. Cox, 12/12/52

GAS Contractor
Gas Ranges ----- 20*
Gas Water Heaters
Gas Space Heaters
Gas Refrigerators
Gas Steam Tables
Gas Broilers

Date
Gas Frylators
Gas Pressing Machine
Gas Vents for Stove

GAS Rough APPROVAL L. Rothman, 9-9-52
GAS FINAL APPROVAL

AIR CONDITIONING Contractor

SOLAR SEPTIC TANK Contractor # 34112 Southern Heater Supply: 2 Solar water heaters (315 gals each) 10/20/1952

OIL BURNER Contractor
SPRINKLER Contractor

ELECTRICAL Contractor # 37476 Gates Elec. Co. Inc. Date Sept. 9, 1952

OUTLETS
Switches 80
Lights 80
Receptacles 140

Temporary Service
Neon Transformers
Sign Outlets

Meter Change

HEATERS
Water 2
Space 20

Centers of Distributions 21
Service -Equipment 1
Violations

FIXTURES 80 Electrical Contractor

Date

By H. H. Rosser
FINAL APPROVAL
Date 12/12/52

ALTERATIONS & ADDITIONS

Building Permits: #39958

Vertical sign, 39 sq. ft. - Tropicalites - \$500.....10-31-52

910-916 Ocean Dr. #40470

Install 25 3/4-HP Wall Units: Paulson Eng: \$5,000..

Al Plaag, 1-14-53
Dec 24, 1952 OK,

900-10 Ocean Dr. #69293 Smiles Construction Co.: Exterior painting - \$400. - 5/7/63 (One perm. issued for Lots 7 & 8 for

a total of \$800 - half for this property)

#07719-Gordon Roofing-Repairs roof 10 sqs-\$600-8-5-75

#11443-Owner-Removal of bathroom, relocate, partitions, remodel-\$3000-6-2-77

#11601-Owner-Removal and relocation of partitions, remodel-\$1500-6-24-77

#13305-Owner-Interior remodeling-\$4900-6-21-78

#13723-John Carlson-Interior renovation, \$10,000-8-21-78

#13727-A W Roofing-Re-roof 190 sqs=\$10,000-8-21-78

M04254-Tropic A/C-58 1/2 tons central a/c-9-26-78

Plumbing Permits: #43638 Morgen Plumbing: 1 floor drains-sand traps - 1/28/63

#54893-Pitsch Plumbing-repipe sink drain-6-1-77

#56378-Pitsch Plumbing-1 sink, residence, 1 urinal, piping to water heater-8-23-78

#56448-Peoples Gas System- 1 meter set(gas)9-18-78

#56529-Pitsch Plumbing- 1 hot water piping-10-13-78

#56616-Pitsch Plumbing- 1 test gas piping-11-1-78

#56666-Marvin Markowitz-25 lavatory-11-17-78

Electrical Permits:

#37949

Tropicalites Co: 3 neon transformers, 1 flasher...11-3-52

#38820

Gates Electric Co: 1 Service Equipment: Feb 26, 1953 OK, H. Rosser, 3/2/53

OK Meginniss 6/29/56-- 47633

Jones Electric Service: one telephone booth June 4, 1956

#59332 C.J.Kay Elec: 6 wash. machine outlets, 1 cent. dist., 2 motors 0-1 HP 2/7/63 OK Scarborough 2/7/63

Owner ABRAHAM REALTY CORP.

Permit No. 39156

Cost \$ 71,000..

Lot 8 Block 14 Subdivision OCEAN BEACH
General Contractor Arkin Construction Co. Inc.

Architect G. M. Fein

Zoning Regulations:

Use RE

Area 28

Building Size:

Front 40'

Depth 125'

Lot Size

50 X 130

Height

23'

Stories

2

Certificate of Occupancy No. 1973 - Dec. 29, 1952

Use APARTMENT HOUSE - 20 efficiencies & 1 bath ea.

Type of Construction

#3 CBS

Foundation

Spread Footing 12 x 30

Roof Flat

Date Aug. 8, 1952

PLUMBING Contractor

33759

Markowitz Bros.*

Sewer Connection

1 - 5"

Date Aug. 12, 1952

33863

Markowitz Bros.*

Temporary Water Closet

Sept. 5, 1952*

Water Closets 20

Lavatories 20

Bath Tubs 20

Showers

Urinals

Sinks 20

Dish Washing Machine

Laundry Trays

Laundry Washing Machines

Drinking Fountains

Floor Drains

Grease Traps

Safe Wastes

Swimming Pool Traps

Steam or Hot Water Boilers

ROUGH APPROVAL L. Rothman, 9-10-52

FINAL APPROVAL OK, E. Cox, 12-23-52

Down Spouts 3*

Wells

GAS Contractor

Gas Ranges ----- 20*

Gas Water Heaters

Gas Space Heaters

Gas Refrigerators

Gas Steam Tables

Gas Broilers

Gas Frylators

Gas Pressing Machine

Gas Vents for Stove

Date

GAS Rough APPROVAL E. Cox, 9-15-52

GAS FINAL APPROVAL OK, E. Cox, 12-23-52

AIR CONDITIONING Contractor

SOLAR TANK Contractor #34111

Southern Heater Supply

2 Solar water heater: 10/29/1952

2 Solar water heater: 10/29/1952

ELECTRICAL Contractor

#37478 Gates Elec. Co. Inc.

Date Sept. 9, 1952

Temporary Service #37437 Gates Electric Co. 9/2/52

Switches 80

Lights 80

Receptacles 140

Ranges 20

Irons 20

Refrigerators 20

Fans 20

Motors 20

Appliances

Water 2

Space 20

Electrical Contractor

Violations

Centers of Distributions 21

Service Equipment 1

Sign Outlets

Meter Change

Neon Transformers

Temporary Service #37437

Gates Electric Co. 9/2/52

HEATERS

Water 2

Space 20

Electrical Contractor

Violations

Centers of Distributions 21

Service Equipment 1

Sign Outlets

Meter Change

Neon Transformers

Temporary Service #37437

Gates Electric Co. 9/2/52

FIXTURES 80

Electrical Contractor

Date

By H. Rosser

Date 12-24-52

FINAL APPROVAL

Alterations or Damages

Quantities

ALTERATIONS & ADDITIONS

Building Permits: # 39959 Vertical Sign, 39 sq. ft., on Ocean side only - Tropicalites - \$500..10/31/77
 # 42350 Install three 3/4-ton Air Cond. Units: Paulson Engr:\$600:8/6/53
 #63158 Weatherproofing Products, Inc: Weatherproofing 2 exterior walls - \$495.00 - Oct. 7, 1960
 #68709 Amber Fuel Oil Co.: 1 - 275 fuel oil tank above ground walled in - Fire Dept. #7057 - \$300. - 1/16/63
 #69293 Smiles Constr. Co.: Exterior painting - \$400. - 5/7/63 (One perm. issued for Lots 7 & 8--two sep. cards--for a total of \$800 - half for this property)
 #73287 Gar Bin Precast Inc.: Five ft balcony rail, precast, ground floor only - \$1,000 - 12/23/64 OK Saperstein 1/27/65
 #08824-Seaview Industries-Remove existing windows and install doors for access to patip-\$250-3-26-76
 #89604-Carlson Constr=Alteration to existing building as per plans-\$90,000-5-24-78
 M04188-Miami Elevator Co. | elevator-7-12-78

Plumbing Permits: #43675 Peoples Gas Co.: 2 gas domestic driers - 2/21/63

#55088-Pitsch Plumbing- 1 greae trap, 2 lavaatory, 1 sink, residence, 1 urinal, 2 water closet-8-5-77
 #56231-A.L. Hildebrandt-1 floor drain, 1 lavatory, 3 clothes washer, 1 indirect wastes-6-28-78
 #56327-Pitsch Plumbing-1 heater-replace, 1 gas piping-8-3-78

Electrical Permits: #37950 Tropicalites Co: 3 neon transformers, 1 flasher...11-3-52.

#38821 Gates Electric Co: 1 Service Equipment: Feb 26, 1953 OK, Rosser, 4/17/53
 #74167-C J Kay Electric- 5 switch outlets, 5 light outlets, 10 receptacles-6-27-77
 #74227-C J Kay Electric- 2 service repair/meter change-7-27-77
 #74769-Tri Star Electric-4 switch outlets, 24 light outlets, 15 receptacles, 400 amps service, 1 motors 0-IHP,
 1 motor, over 10-25HP, 26 fixtures-5-31-78
 #74911-Cayamas Electric-90 switch outlets, 90 light outlets, 60 receptacles, 1 meter change, 1.5 30 a/c, 30 5KW strip
 heater, 1 repair receptacle=8-4-78