# VERSAILLES HOTEL 3425 COLLINS AVENUE, MIAMI BEACH

## I. Contextual History

The stretch of oceanfront property from 21st to 44th Streets in Miami Beach was first platted in 1916 by the Collins/Pancoast family. Zoned for hotels and apartments, this area was only sparsely developed until the 1930s when, within a decade, Chicago architect Roy F. France (1888-1972) designed over a dozen buildings that virtually created the mid-beach skyline. These included the Whitman, Ocean Grande, and Shoremede Hotels (all now demolished), the Patrician, the Sovereign, and three "skyscrapers": the Sea Isle (now Palms Hotel), the Cadillac, and the Versailles. His Saxony and Sans Souci hotels were added in the Postwar years. All of these are now included as "Contributing" buildings in the Collins Waterfront Historic District, designated by the City in 2000.

## II. Specific History

The Versailles property occupies the entire oceanfront block between 34<sup>th</sup> and 35<sup>th</sup> Streets. The hotel as it was first designed in 1940 consisted of the 16-story (including cupola) Art Deco-style tower at the northwest corner of the property, with a one-story lounge and dining room extending to the east, and a (salt-water) swimming pool deck on the south. Due to a curve in Collins Avenue at this point, the tower was, and still remains, a prominent visual landmark. This construction, containing 141 hotel rooms and one apartment, originally cost \$300,000. The hotel opened in January 1941 for seasonal occupancy, from December to April. Within a year of its opening, the U.S. entered World War II, and while hundreds of Miami Beach buildings were leased for military use at that time, no record as been found that the Versailles was one of these.

In 1955, Roy F. France & Son designed an eight-story addition to the Versailles, containing 132 more hotel rooms, for then-owner Daniel Lifter, president of the Liflans Corporation. This addition, built during the Beach's

Postwar Boom, was designed in Postwar Modern style and cost \$700,000. An L-shaped structure at the southwest corner of the property, it obliterated a section of cabanas and what was originally an open yard, and partly blocked the view of the tower from the south, but the original building and swimming pool remained intact. In the 1950s, hotels in Miami Beach were becoming all-inclusive resorts, and the Versailles followed this trend by putting retail space and a nightclub in this addition.

### III. Architecture

As one of France's three landmark "skyscraper" hotels, all built in 1940, the original Versailles closely resembles the other two: the Sea Isle (Palms) and the Cadillac. All three have a soaring vertical shaft that has a lozenge-shaped footprint:, and on the east and west elevations, the center portion is symmetrically flanked by three setbacks on each side. In the Versailles, the setbacks on the Collins Avenue elevation alternate between round and square edges, while in the rear all the setbacks are square-edged. This arrangement of setbacks allowed the Versailles to advertise "floor on floor of spacious, sunflooded rooms...90% with corner windows," which literally doubled the chance of catching a night breeze in that era before air-conditioning. Early photographs show the rooms' windows were awning type.

Unlike the Sea Isle or Cadillac, the Versailles is topped with a copper-domed open cupola that strongly resembles the one on France's National Hotel at 17<sup>th</sup> Street, built the previous year. The bottom two floors on the west elevation are faced in stone, and the entry was originally quite plain, with no porte-cochere. Two plain square pillars supported an overhang above a narrow porch, then a flight of steps interspersed with planter bins led down to the driveway. Channel-letter neon signage was mounted two stories up over the front door.

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<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>1</sup> Advertisement, circa 1940.

Roy France's 1940 plans for the Versailles were found on Microfilm #14269 in the Miami Beach Building Department; in addition, a brochure produced in 1941² includes a plot plan, two floor plans, and several interior and exterior photographs. One of these views shows the original one-story rear extension fronting the beach. Adjacent to the vertical tower, first a plain, square cocktail lounge projects to the south; next is a plain, square corner of the lobby lounge; and lastly there is a rounded end of the dining room projecting eastward. Wrapped around all of these in the 1941 photograph is an expansive, sloped, apparently canvas awning. This area is labeled on the floor plan as a "dining terrace." The Building Permit Card (#17141) documents architect Albert Anis "enclosing dining room terrace" in 1945. This project, costing \$13,000, is borne out in later postcard images that show this area enclosed and without the awnings.

The same 1941 brochure shows that the original lobby merged into an open lounge area at the rear, providing entering guests an immediate view all the way through to the ocean. From the front door, the reception desk was set into the wall to the right, and the elevators were to the left. The eastern walls of both the lobby-lounge and adjoining dining room are lined with floor-to-ceiling windows, embodying Roy France's design philosophy: "Let in the air and sun. That's what people come to Florida for." Nonetheless, the Versailles took advantage of technical progress and added an "air cooling unit" in 1947, and air-conditioned the cocktail lounge in 1948.

The 1955 Postwar Modern style addition, designed by France when he was in partnership with his son, is clearly of another time. Plain and recti-linear, its distinguishing feature is the way the bottom two floors telescope out toward Collins Avenue, where a boxed-in mosaic art mural wraps around the southwest

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>2</sup> Curt Teich Postcard Archive, Lake County Museum, Wauconda, Illinois.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>3</sup> Obituary, *Miami Herald*, Feb. 17, 1972.

corner of the second story. The mural is signed "Stewart Studios N.Y.C. 1955;" no further information about it has so far been found, but it appears to be an abstract depiction of the sun god with his horse-drawn chariot and attendant figures. (It may be a play on a plaster bas-relief of the Sun King applied to the east façade of the Fontainebleau Hotel in 1954, that has been replicated and slightly relocated on the recently-remodeled Fontainebleau.)

Plans for the 1955 addition to the Versailles were found on Microfilm #47326. These document that the porte-cochere was added at that time; it still survives in an altered state, tapering out over the driveway, with convex edges, but it was originally supported by a V-shaped pylon, and its underside was studded with down-lights, as seen in a 1950s photograph.

Some changes were made to the hotel lobby at this time as well; since the new addition adjoined the lobby at the site of the original reception desk, the desk was moved to the west wall, on the south side of the front door. A "plant bin" was also installed in the middle of the lobby floor.

In place of the original reception desk were put two stairways; the first led down to a "lower lobby" in the addition that extended along a windowed wall on Collins Avenue. Set in the interior was retail space for a coffee shop, beauty parlor, florist, drugstore, gift shop, and stores for jewelry, sportswear, shoes, and men's and women's apparel. The other stair curved up to an "upper lobby" that overlooked the swimming pool to the east, and another set of steps to the west led up to the windowless area behind the mural wall. This area contained a cocktail lounge with dance floor, an amoeba-shaped bar, and a television room where guests, without in-room TVs, could enjoy black-and-white entertainment.

#### IV. Architect Biography

**Roy F. France** (1888-1972)was born in Hawley, Minnesota, worked as a draftsman in Chicago as a young man,<sup>4</sup> and studied at the Armour Institute of Technology (1905-6) and the Chicago Technical School.<sup>5</sup> Several buildings from his early career, some in Tudor and Gothic styles, are preserved in Chicago's historic districts.

After France and his wife took a train trip to Florida in 1931, they moved permanently to Miami Beach where, inspired by the sunlight and sea air, France's design style changed drastically. Here he first worked for Chicago publisher William F. Whitman, who had an oceanfront home at 32<sup>nd</sup> Street and invested in local real estate.<sup>6</sup> France's Indian Creek Apartments and Whitman Hotel (both now demolished) across Collins Avenue from each other at 33<sup>rd</sup> Street were followed by dozens of hotels and apartments throughout the City, in Med-Deco Transitional, Art Deco, and Postwar Modern styles. His son, Roy France Jr., worked as his partner for several years but died in 1957.

Many of France's Miami Beach buildings have been demolished but twenty still remain between 24th and 44th Streets, in the Collins Waterfront Historic District. His surviving buildings include:

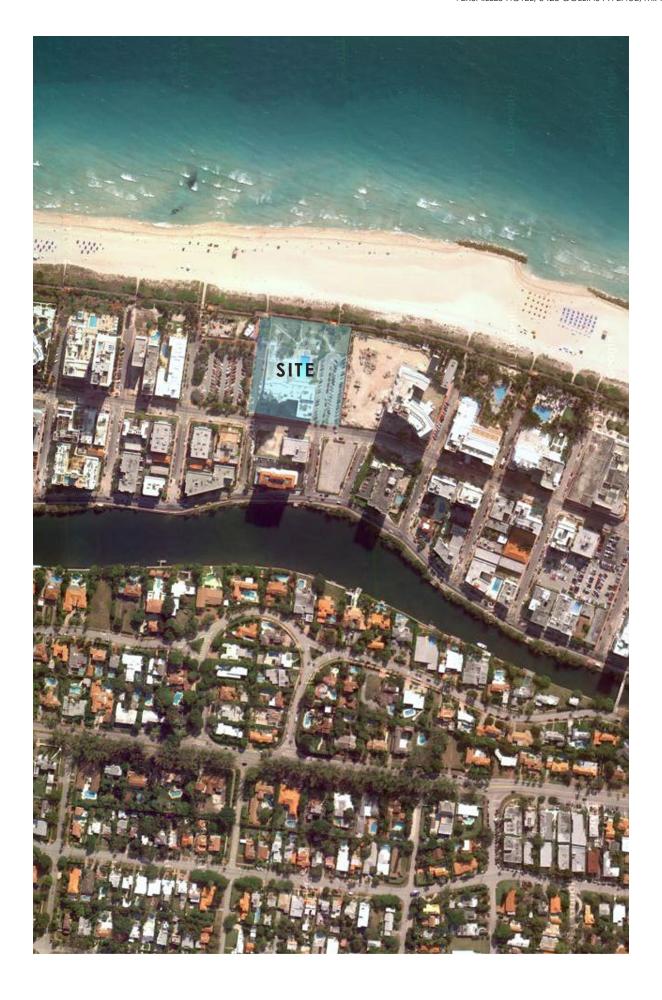
National Hotel	1677 Collins Ave.
Cavalier "	1320 Ocean Drive
Pines & Palms Apts.	2463 Pine Tree Dr.
Sea Isle Hotel	3025 Collins Ave.
Saxony "	3201 Collins Ave.
Cadillac "	3925 Collins Ave.
Sovereign "	4385 Collins Ave.
Casablanca "	6345 Collins Ave.

---Carolyn Klepser, researcher August 9, 2011 amended Aug. 15, 2014

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>4</sup> Obituary, Miami Herald, Feb. 17,1972.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>5</sup> Keith Root, Miami Beach Art Deco Guide; MDPL, 1987, p.32.

<sup>&</sup>lt;sup>6</sup> Interview with Whitman's son Dudley, 1998.



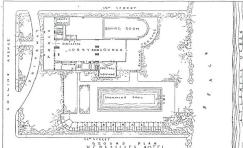
UR Garden Patio is a popular rendezvous.

Bordering our private salt water swimming pool, featuring our own special filtering and cooling plant for your protection and enjoyment. Parasol shaded tables make it an ideal spot for our guests to lounge while enjoying a cocktail or you may enjoy having your breakfast or luncheon served in this delightful atmosphere. Private cabanas if you desire.











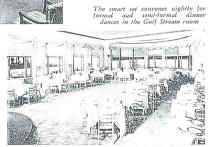
This cool and inviting lobby greets

RACING the edge of the sea, this magnificent, lofty and fireproof structure of 150 sunfit de luxe bedrooms, each with pastel tiled tub-shower bath, commands an ever-interesting view of this beautiful island resort. Novel architectural designing enables one to see the ocean from nearly every spacious room. Every conceivable facility and convenience anticipates the comfort of Versailles guests—each room having steam heat, running ice water, radio, tropical doors and windows, and generous closets. In addition to surf bathing directly from guests' rooms, there is a large ever-changing pool of sea water. Cabanas are available by the week or month. The cuisine is continental French under the personal supervision of a chef trained in Europe, supplemented by our own private wine cellar.

A LOBBY the size of the building extends from the entrance right to the water, where a wide terrace sweeps the high tide mark. There is a cozy cocktail lounge off the lobby, and opposite it the now-famous Gulfstream room, where both table d'hote and a la catte service are available until midnight. During dinner, dancing to a well-known orchestra is augmented by appearances of leading



The lounge is really an extension of the lobby and looks out over the breakers





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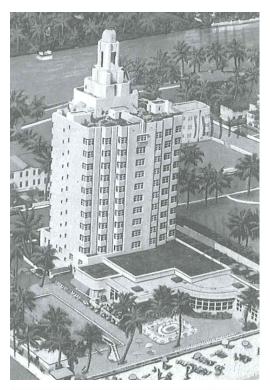
Typical bedroom floor

Luxurious and comfortable appointments rich in color and design make each sound-proof sleeping room as spacious and appealing as a living room

THE VERSAILLES opens in mid-December and operates with full service until April 15th. It is a new building (completed in January, 1941) and its sixteen stories contain an appealing variety of quiet and pleasant room arrangements, each looking out upon an ever-interesting and colorful panorama of ocean, bay, and the island of Miami Beach.

The management of the Versailles is again under the direction of Fred L. Abel who has, since 1926, played host to this country's foremost families win-





This late 1940s postcard shows the back of the Versailles Hotel, which faces the ocean. The symmetrical rows of curved windows graduate towards the center of the building, resulting in smooth vertical lines. (Published by Curt Teich.)



This current photo shows the front of the same building as it appears today. The effective use of color emphasizes the long vertical rows of curved windows. The ultramodern tower on







Miami Beach





#### AT MIAMI BEACH

The new Versailles Hotel . . . on the Ocean in the tropic island of Miami Beach . . . has the atmosphere of a smart French watering place. Distinguished French chef and cuisine . . imported vintage wines and liquors served in the Ocean front dining room and terrace. Continental verve and gayety centering around the Cabana Club, swimming pool, and private beach. Water carnivals, dancing, special entertainments. Floor on floor of spacious, sun-flooded rooms . . singly or en suite . . . 90% with corner windows. Radio, steam heat, running ice water in every room and soundproofed walls and floors. Sports Room and Solaria on the roof of the hotel.

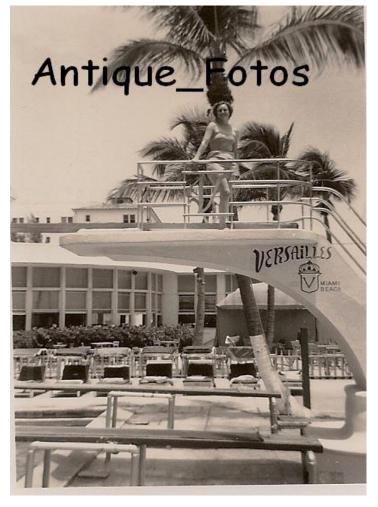
For reservations and information write to Versailles Hotel, Miami Beach or in New York, Call our office 610 5th Ave. Circle 7-3038

RESTRICTED CLIENTELE



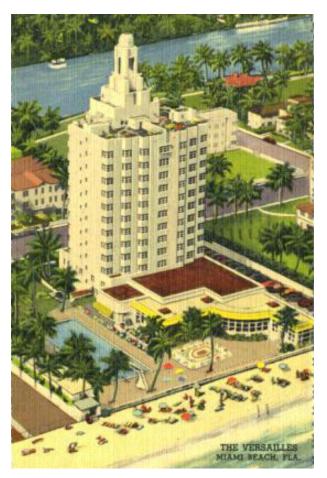
ON THE OCEAN AT THIRTY-FIFTH STREET





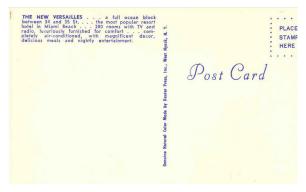




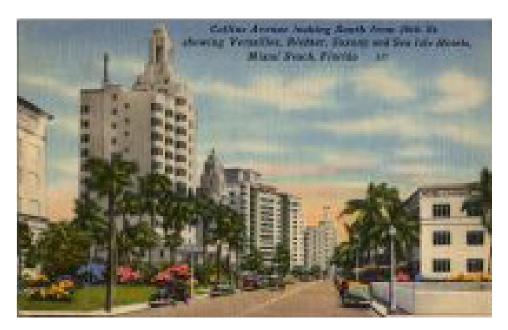






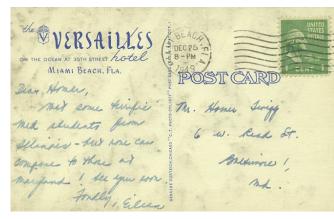


THE NEW VERSALLES ... a full ocean block bord in Mism Bach. ... 280 room with Tried and addition made and algorithment decor, and a significant means and algorithment. I have a superior of the state of the state of the superior of the state of the superior of the superi



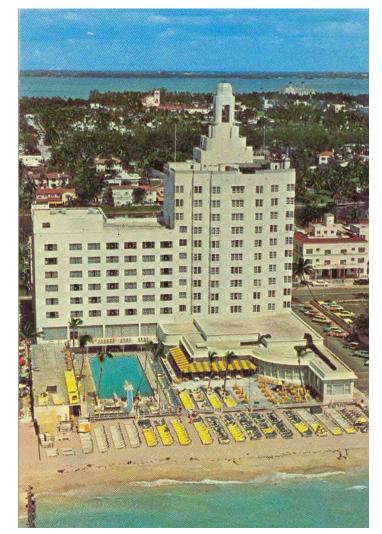








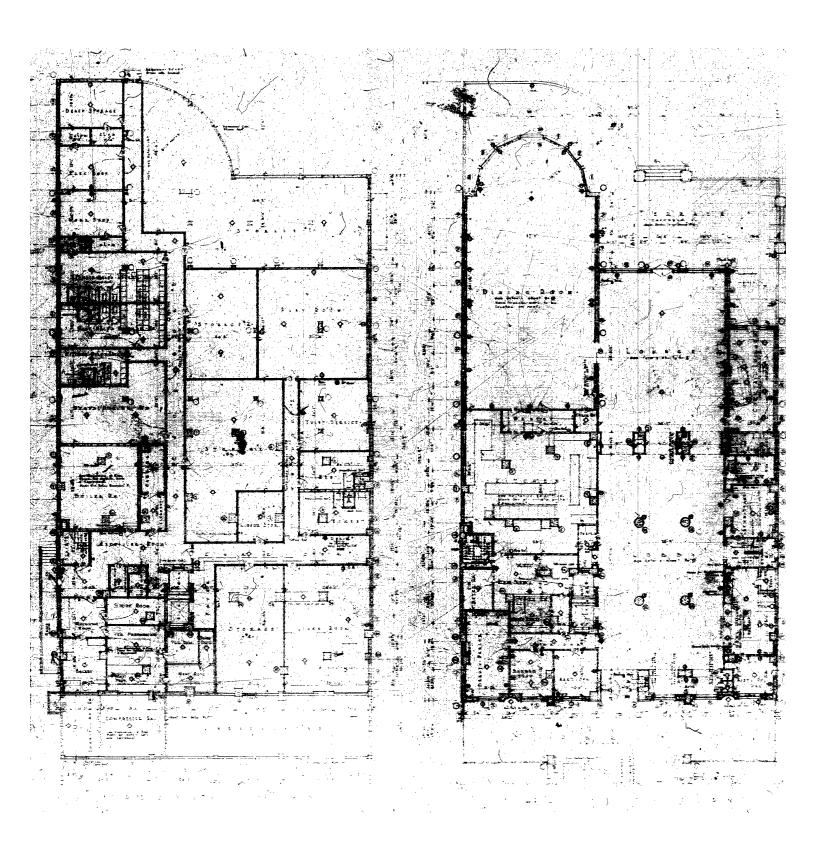


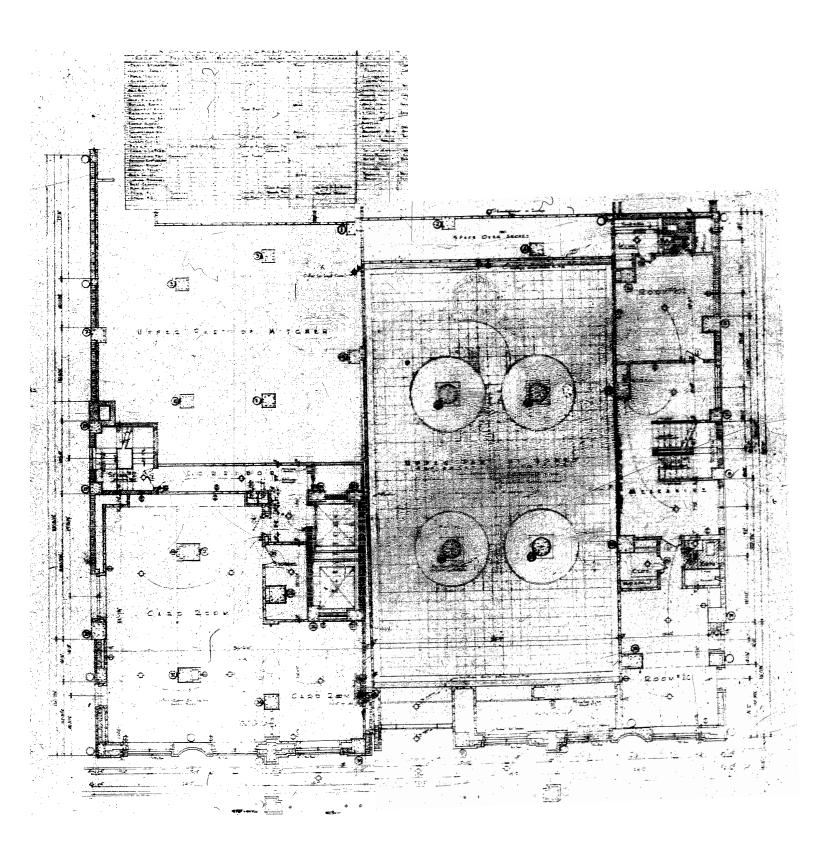


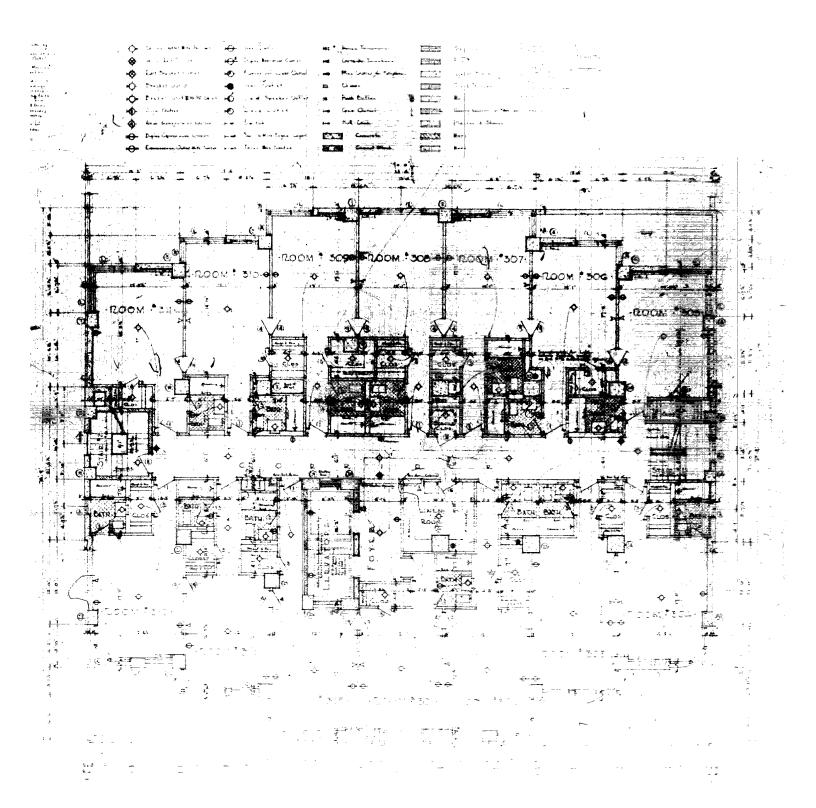


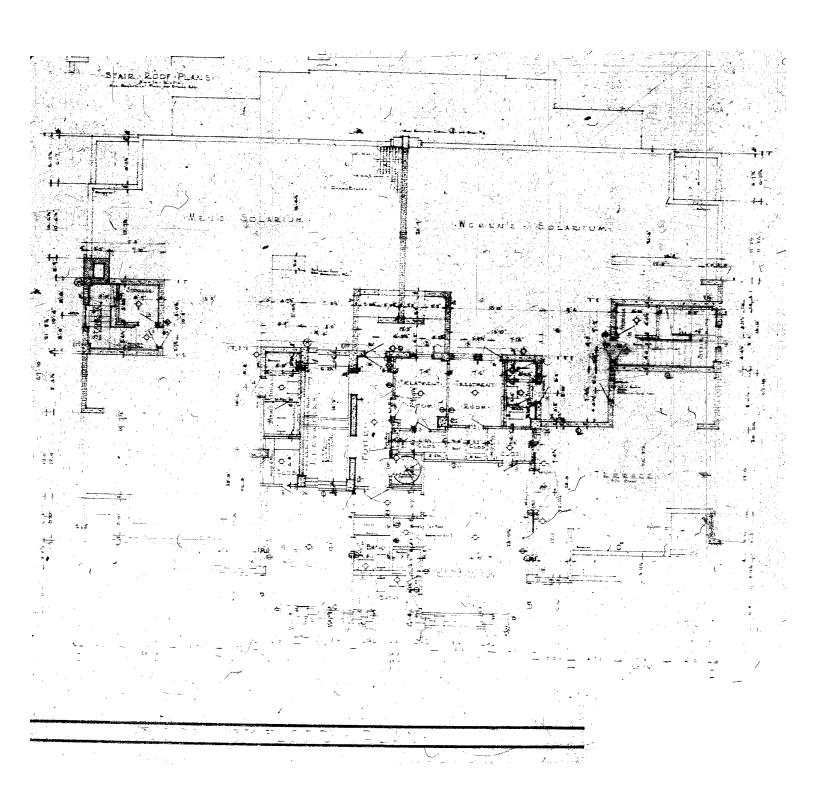


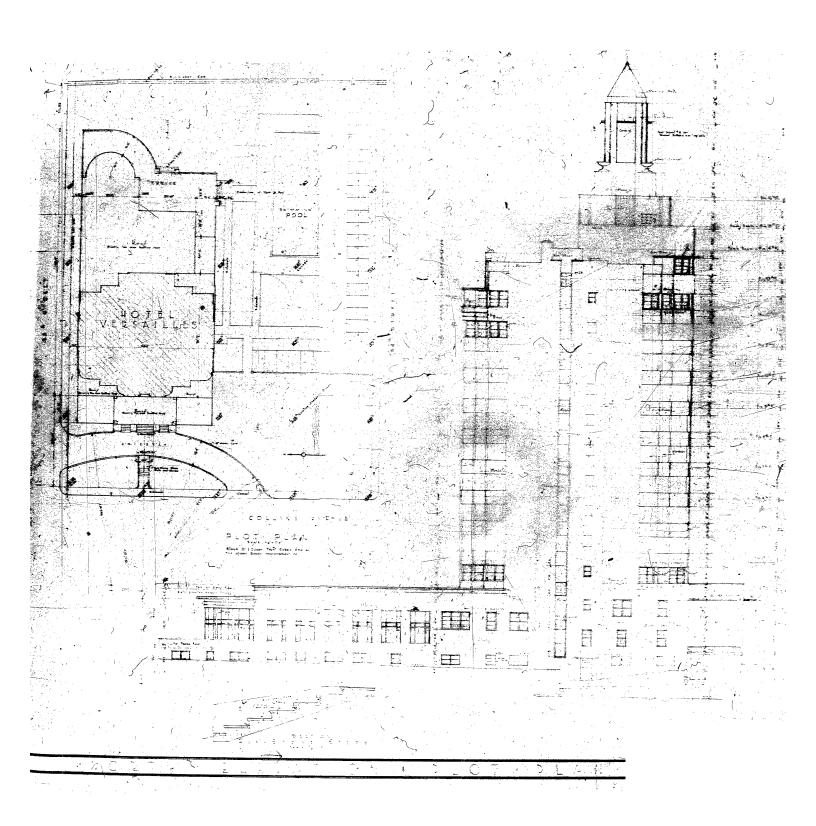
# 1940's MICROFILM

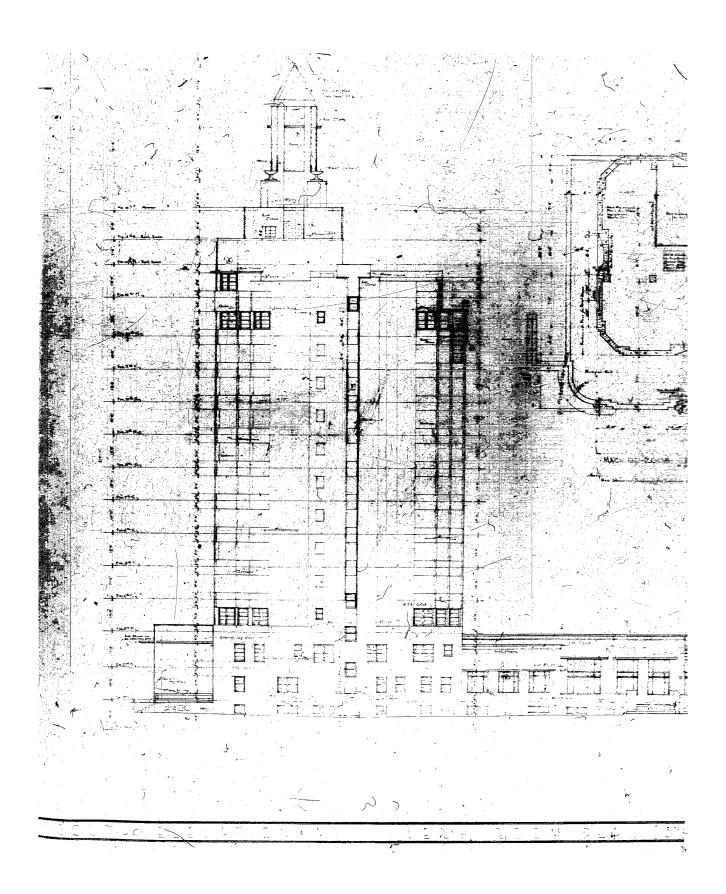


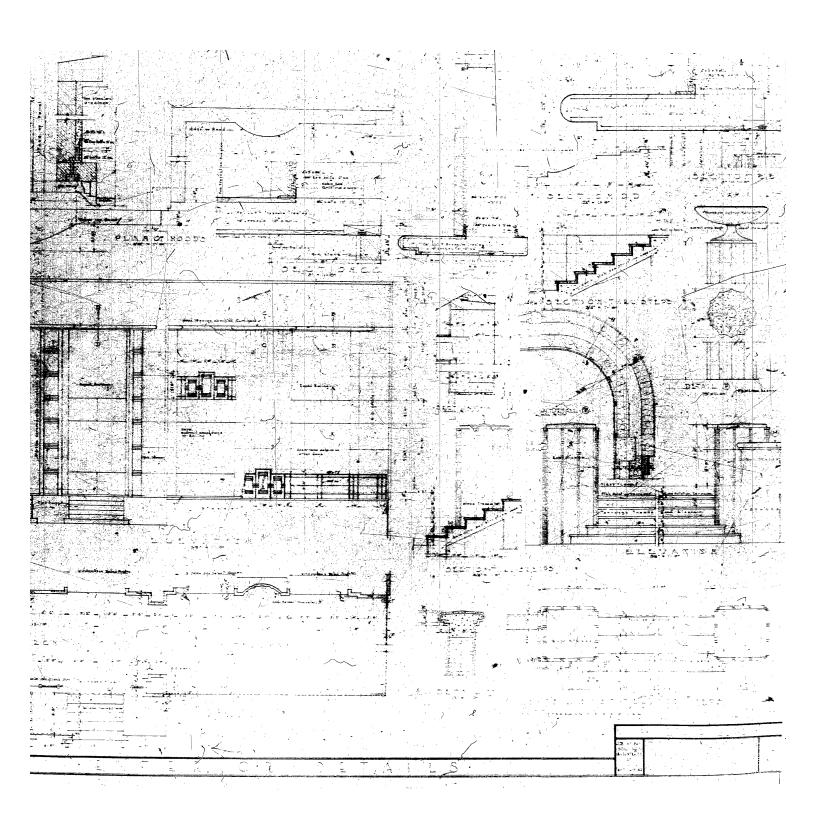


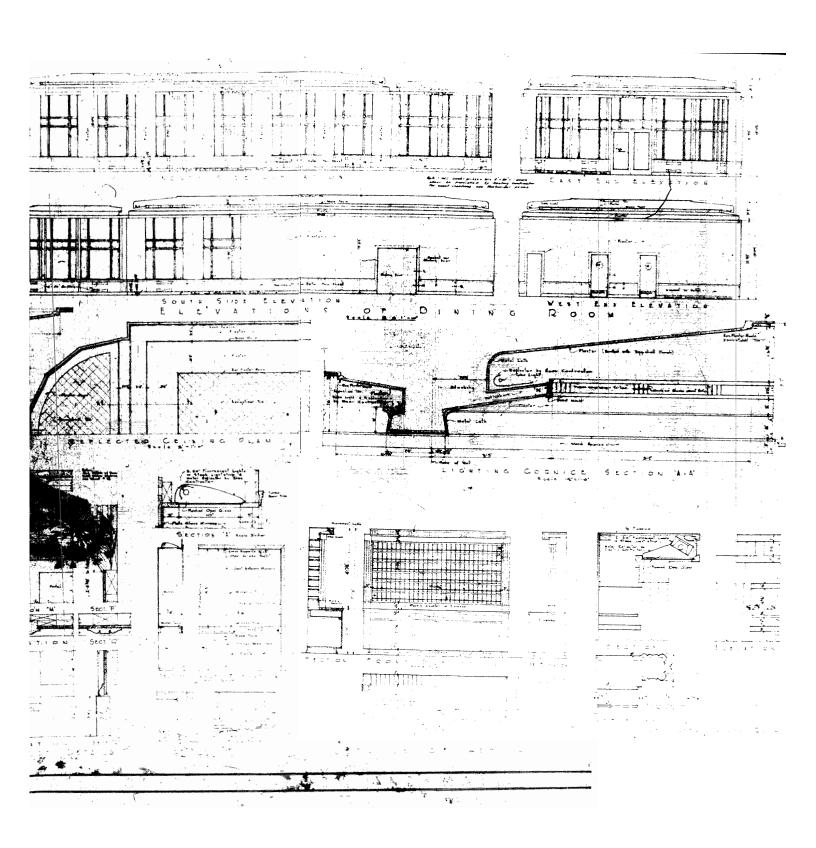


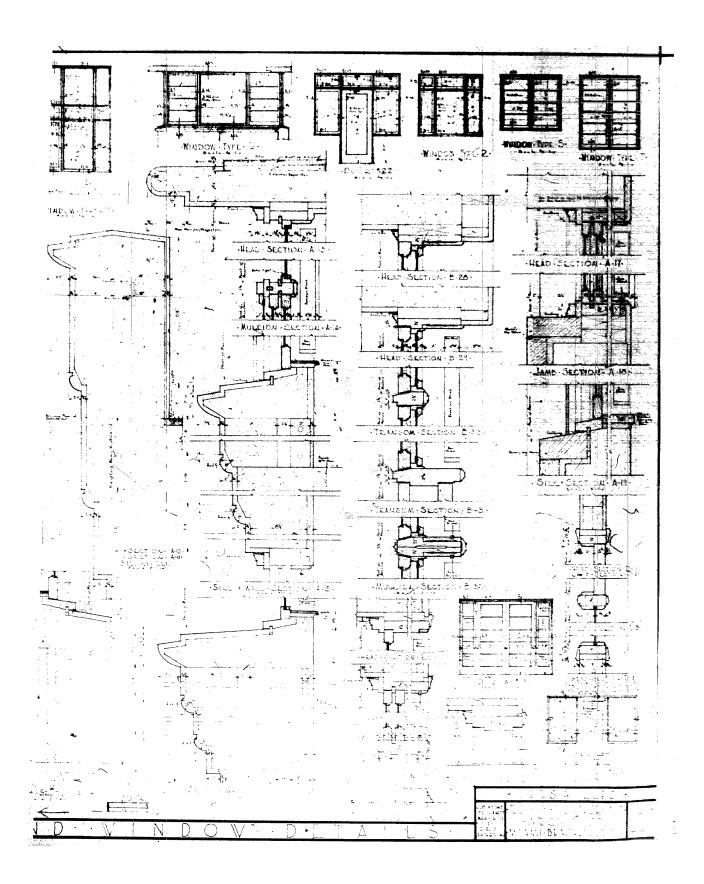




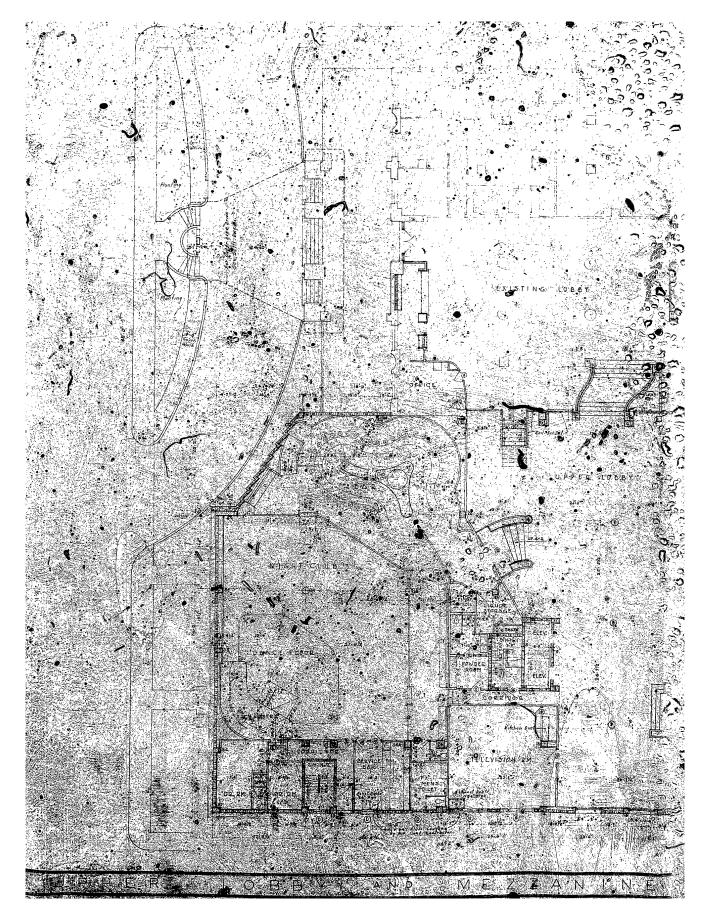


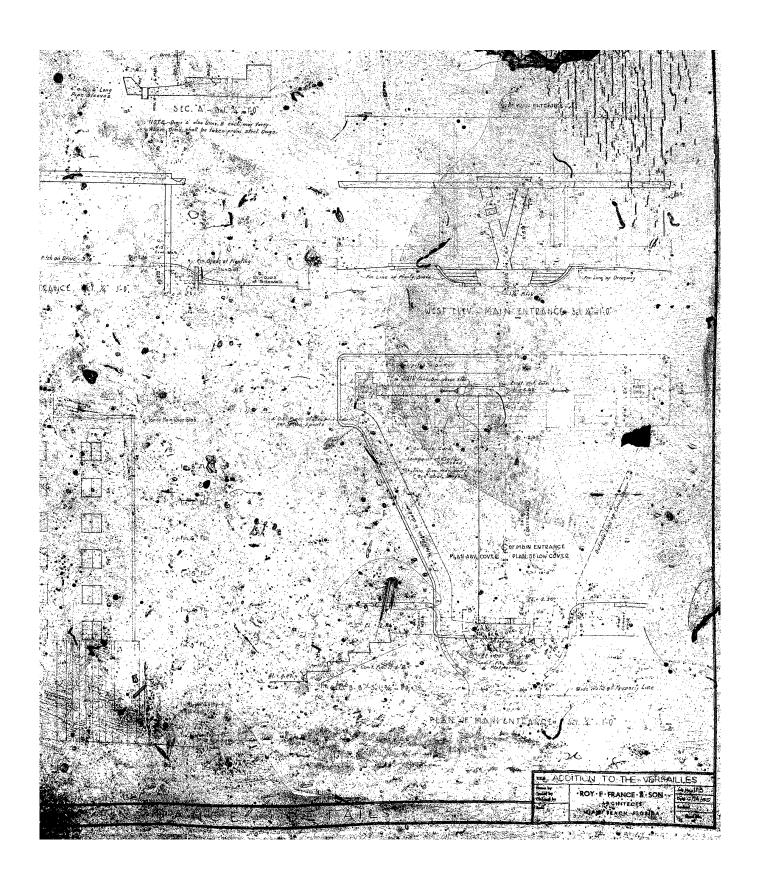


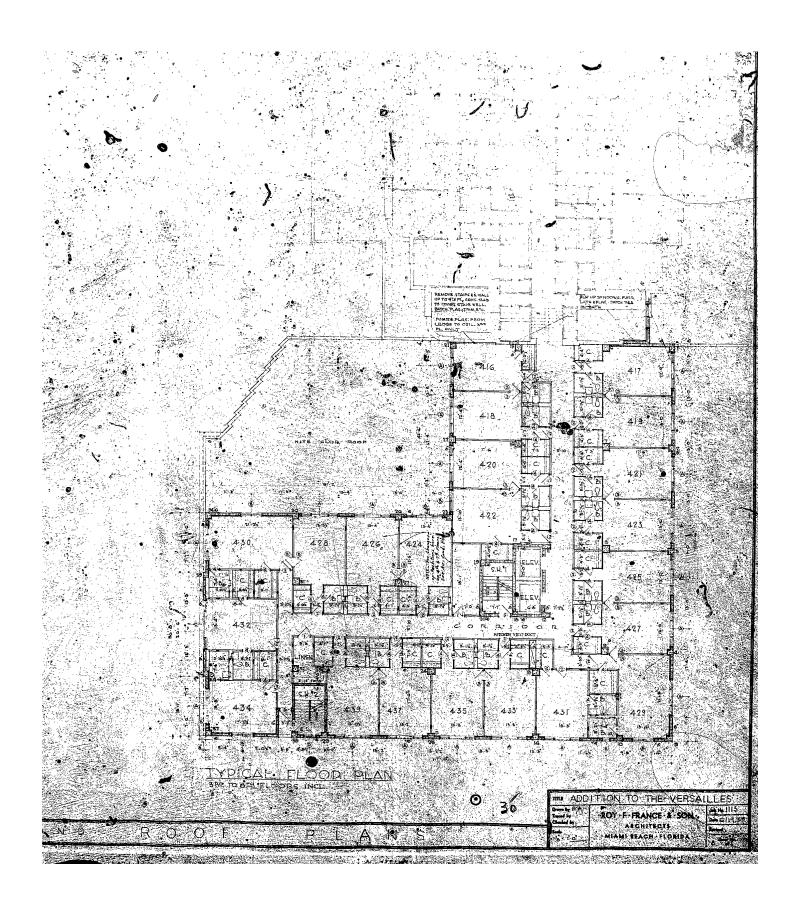


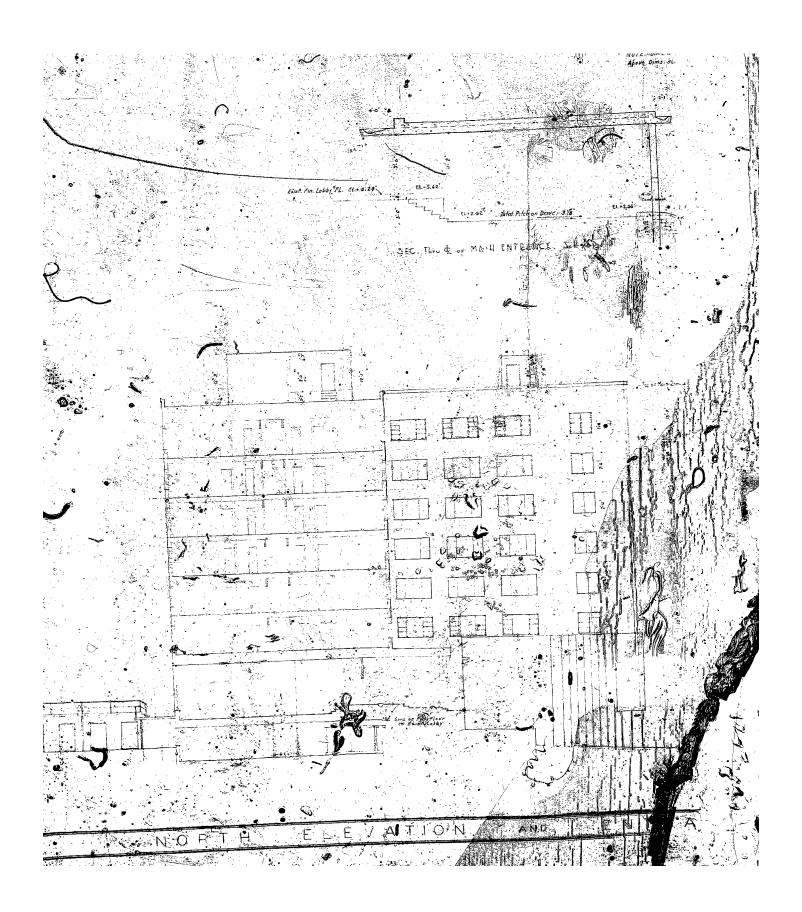


# 1950's MICROFILM









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Mailing Address J.M.PhillipsPermit No 14269 all plans Cost $ 300,000...
Owner VERSAILLE HOTEL
Lot all Block 21
                              SubdivisionM:B.Impr.Co.O.F.Address 3425 Collins Avenue
General Contractor Peter Nordyke
                                                        Bond No. 2441
Architect Roy F. France
                                                        Engineer Jorgensen & Schreffler
                                                       Lot Size 3 Loov POOL --below --
Zoning Regulations:
                                        Area 15
                     Use RE
                                                        Height 219'10 Stories 16,
Building Size:
                     Front 901
                                        Depth 17419
                                                        Use HOTEL - 141 rooms, Dining Room, 1 Aptunit,
Cerificate of Occupancy No.
                                      Foundation Concrete Piles Roof Flat Date July 1,1940
Type of Construction Fireproof #1
Humbing Contractor #13699 Fixzit System:
                                                                                      Date July 5,1940
                                                        Sewer Connection 1,
                                                        Temporary Closet 1,
Plumbing Contractor #13960 Fixzit System
Water Closets 153,
                             Bath Tubs 140.
                                                        Floor Drains
Lavatories 157,
                              Showers 9,
                                                        Grease Trans
Urinals 2,
                              Sinks 12,
                                                        Drinking Fountains
Gas Stoves 6,
                              Gas Heater
                                                        Rough Approved T.J. Bell
                                                                                      Date Noy . 8, 1940
Gas Radiators
                             Gas Turn On Approved
, Septic Tank Contractor
                                                        Tank Size
                                                                                      Date
Oil Burner Contractor #13842 Florida Fuel Oil Co. (burner Tank Size 1,000 gals
                                                                                      DateAug 1,1940
Sprinkler System
Electrical Contractor #15387 F. C. Ast
                                                                                     Date July 17,1940
                                                        Address
Switch 478
OUTLETS Light 781
                                                        Fans
                                                                     Temporary Service
                              Range
                                          Motors 19.
                              HEATERS Water
                                                        Centers of Distribution 36, #15262- AST: 7-17-194 150 outlets
          Receptacles 591
                                        Space
#15117-AST: June 19,1940
2 Fixtures, 1 motor, 4 center
1 Temporary
                             Refrigerators
                              Īrons 3,
                                                        Sign Outlets 14,
                                                                                      see below
No. FIXTURES 781,
                              Electrical Contractor
                                                                                      Date
FINAL APPROVED BY
                                          Date of Service
                                   ALTERATIONS OR REPAIRS
Building Permits:
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Building Permits:# 28666 Air Conditioning in Dining Roof (waste water not over 4
                                                                                                      * over 4 gallons per hour)-

* 12,500....Nov. 1, 1948

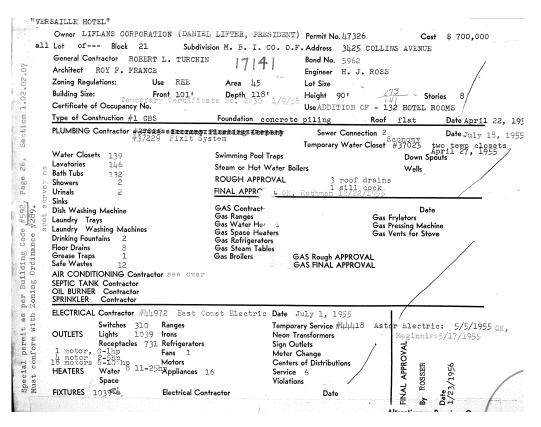
* 950.....Dec.18, 1950

* 1,650.....March 26, 1951
                                       Hill York Corporation-
Flat wall sign - Tropicalites
Painting - Lawrence Perrault, contr.
                            # 34658
                            # 37469 72--3/4 ton & 18--1/2 ton air conditioning units-Paulson Engr.Co.Inc., contr. $ 18,360...Nov. 16, 1951
# 39690 Addition to transformer vault- Florida Power & L.ghtCo. $ 500..ct. 7,1952
                                        #63201 Gars & Williford: Exterior Painting - $2000 - Oct. 12, 1960

#75024 D.I.C. Constr. Co.: Repairs to windows, doors, pool deck and floors - $7500 - 10/19/65 OK Brown 2/23/66

#309 Airko Air Conditioning 1-75 Ton Cooling Tower 10/17/68
 #845 Airko Air Conditioning: 1 cooling tower 6900 (5 ton) 9/17/69
 #1068 - type 17141 - Airko A/C/ cooling towers 1-120 ton
                                                                                4/22/70
   #86576 - owner - enclose stairwell 4 landings with fire Goors to correct violations $400.00
                                                                                                                                4/28/71
   #1661 - Airko Air Cond. - cooling towers 2-50 tons
                                                                         6/22/71
 #04702-Owner-Painting and repairs-$5000-12-5-73
#2862-Airko A/C- 50 tons cooling towers; 2
                                                                    25 tons condenser-1-21-74-$7000
#06281-Denmark Stone-Installatkon of ranch rails and decor blocks-$3000-10-7-74
          Plumbing Permits: # 30587 Belcher Oil Company: One 4,000 gal. Oil Tank - October 10, 1950
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#47348 Peoples Gas Co. 2 Gas Water Heater 7/2/69



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Electrical Permits: # 15903 Florida Power & Light Co: 1 Transformer installation: October 16,1940
                                     F. C. Ast Electric: 1 Temporary service: October 25, 1940
F. C. Ast Electric: 1 Temporary Service, December 12, 1940
                                      F. C. Ast Electric: 1 Temporary Service, December 12, 1940

Claude Neon - 15 Neon transformers, January 1, 1941

Bankier Bros: 2 0-1-hp motors, January 6, 1941

Straw - 1 Service equipment (vault) March 24, 1944

Ace Electric: 1 motor, May 1, 1944

B. Haskell: 6 Switch outlets, 48 light outlets, 14 receptacles, 2 motors, 2 centers of distribution, September 25, 1945

Claude Neon: 16 Neon transformers, December 7, 1945

B. Haskell, 6 Switch outlets, 30 Fixtures, 2 motors, 2 centers, April 8, 1946

Little River Electric: 10 Light outlets, (partial permit) July 21, 1947

Tropicalites: 14 Fixtures, 1 neon, October 1, 1947

Flamingo Electric: 4 motors, 7 centers of distribution - Nov. 29, 1948

Frost Televison Center, Inc: 1 televison antenna - March 31, 1949

Astor Electric: 11 receptacles - June 28, 1949
                # 16631
               # 20165
# 20224
                    21334
                    22432
24528
                     24889
                    27761
                     28515
                      29050
                                        Astor Electric: 11 receptacles - June 28, 1949
Tropicalites: 4 neon transformers - Dec. 18, 1950
                      32936
                                        Astor Electric: 1 switch outlet & 1 sign outlet - Jan. 29, 1951 OK - Rosser 1/30
                 #
                      33225
                                       Emanuel Electric: 70 motors - June 25, 1951 OK, Rosser 5/3/1955
Astor Electric Co: 7 Center of Distribution, 5 Motors, May 19,1952 OK, Plaag, 3/4/53
                      311339
               # 36554
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# 14823 Addition of Swimming Pool & Cabanas: $ 20,000... Oct. 14, 194
National Swimming Pool Corp. will install mechanical equipment:
Jorgensen & Schreffler, engineers: Peter Nordyke, contractor:: Pool 35' x 105'
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  $ 20,000... Oct. 14, 1940
                                                           Jorgensen & Schreffler, engineers: Peter Nordyke, cont # 15278 SIGN - on cantilever: Claude Southern Corp: # 16246 Remodeling: Grover Hodge, contractor: # 17042 Removing storm gutter: H. Nicholson # 18152 Interior partitions in basement: Giller Contr.Co. # 18837 Painting, exterior: H. Nicholson, painter: # 19322 Remove paint & paint swimming pool: A. Petri, painter # 19464 Refrigeration: Norton R. Ganger # 19498 Painting (interior) H. Nicholson, painter # 19943 Wall - 5 ft high, 90 ft long, Giller Contracting Co: # 20115 Concrete block wall: 30 x 5 - Giller Contracting Co: # 20121 Painting & cleaning sash: Ludman Corp: # 20340 Enclosing dining room terrace: Albert Anis, architect:
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           200...Dec.29,1940

5,000...Oct.11,1941

500...Nov. 14, 1942

200...Mar.14,1944

2,975...Aug.22,1944

1,000...Nov. 13, 1944

4,800...Dec. 4th, 1944

200...April 23, 1945

100...May 21, 1945

175...May 22, 1945
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 $
                                                           # 20340 Enclosing dining room terrace: Albert Anis, architect:
Arkin-Prufert Constr.Co. - Richard A Belsham, engr
# 22861 Repairs to boiler room floor - Arkin
# 25016 Air Cooling Unit - Koldaire
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       13,000..July 6, 1945
2,000..July 31, 1946
3,200...July 24,1947
1,000...Oct. 27, 1947
309...Nov. 4, 1947
                                                                                               Air Cooling Unit - Koldaire
Painting - Louis Mitauer, painter
Sandblasting - Acarr Company -
                                                            # 25016
# 25806
# 25920
          Mario
                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              2,900... May 6, 1948
3,000...Sept. 9, 1948
500..Sept.16, 1948
1,200..Oct. 12, 1948
Jocktail Lounge# 27186
# 28195
                                                                                                Air Conditioning - Gibbs Engineering Company
Painting - outside - Sam Goddard
                                                                                               Sandblasting - Acarr Company
Re-roofing - Ever-Dur, Inc.
                                                            # 28262
# 28440
                                   Plumbing Permits:
                                                   # 14425
                                                                                            G. C. McCaughan: 20 Scum gutters, October 23, 1940
Fixzit System: 1 Sewer connection: November 12, 1940
         Pool
                                                    # 14527
                                                                                     Fixzit System: 1 Sewer connection: November 12, 1940

Alex.Orr, Jr. 2 Water closets, 2 Lavatories, 6 sinks, 2 urinals, 4 floor drains, 12 waste drains, 1 dish washer, October 27, 1941

Alex. Orr, Jr. 1 Steam presser, December 19, 1941

Alex. Orr, Jr. 1 water closet, 1 lavatory, August 3, 1943

Alex. Orr, Jr. 1 Gas water heater, October 20, 1943

Alex. Orr, Jr. 1 Gas water heater, March 28, 1944

Alex. Orr, Jr. 1 Laundry tray, 1 Sand Trap, May 15, 1944

Alex. Orr, Jr. 2 water closets, 2 lavatories, June 12, 1944

Alex. Orr, Jr. 1 Sink, 1 grease trap, 1 sand trap, 1 gas range, 2 bake ovens, 10-6-

Alex. Orr, Jr. 2 water closets, 2 lavatories, reset 3 sinks, 1 grease trap,

1 floor drain, 2 safe waste drains, October 26, 1944

Markowitz Bros: 1 water closet, 1 lavatory, November 23, 1945
                                                   # 16094
                                                  # 16440
# 17068
# 17159
# 17525
# 17613
# 17767
  Ace Valet
                                                    # 17804
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