

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..

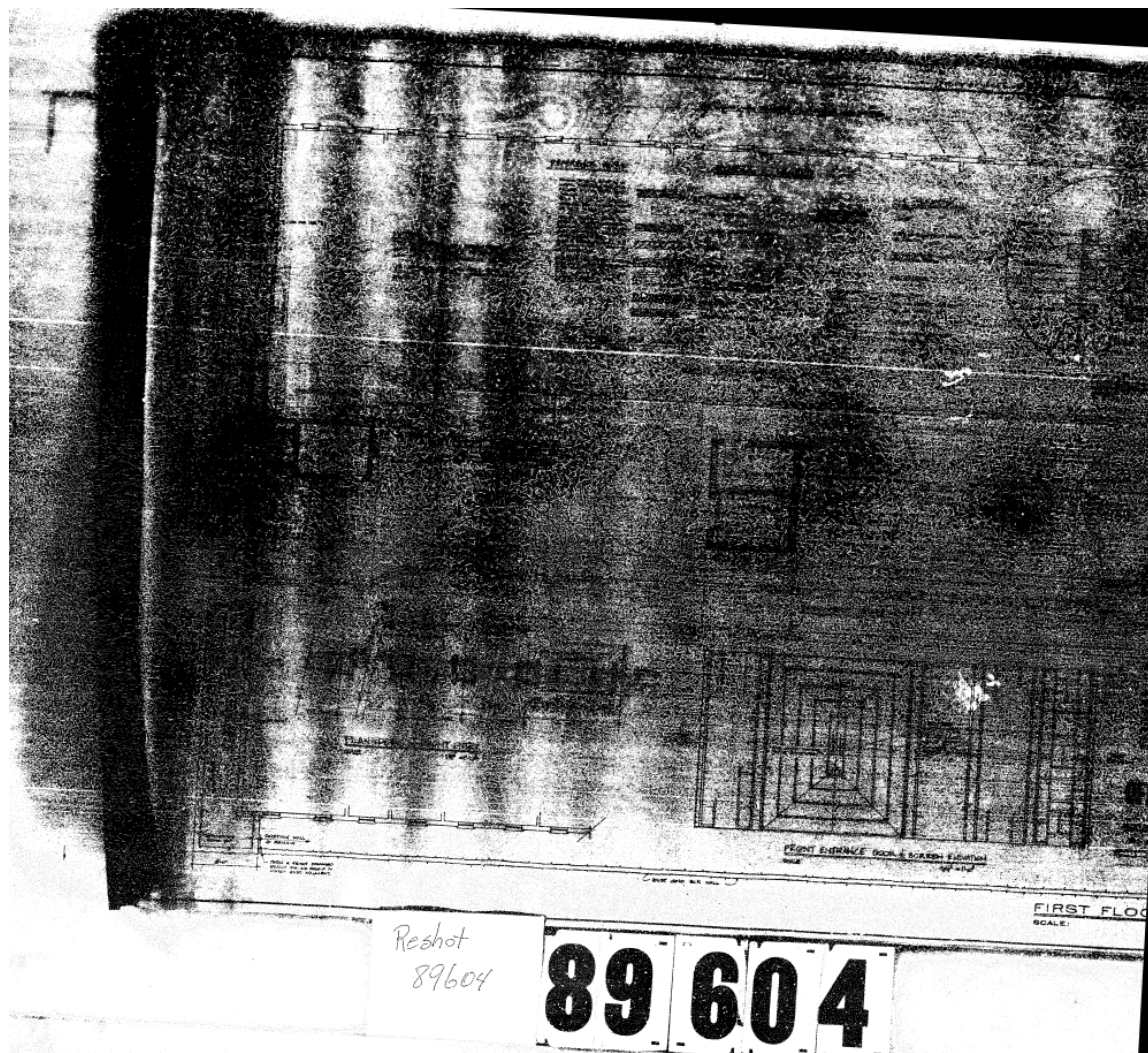
Most of Fein’s comfortably livable buildings are unassuming and not prominent landmarks, but some of the better-known are:

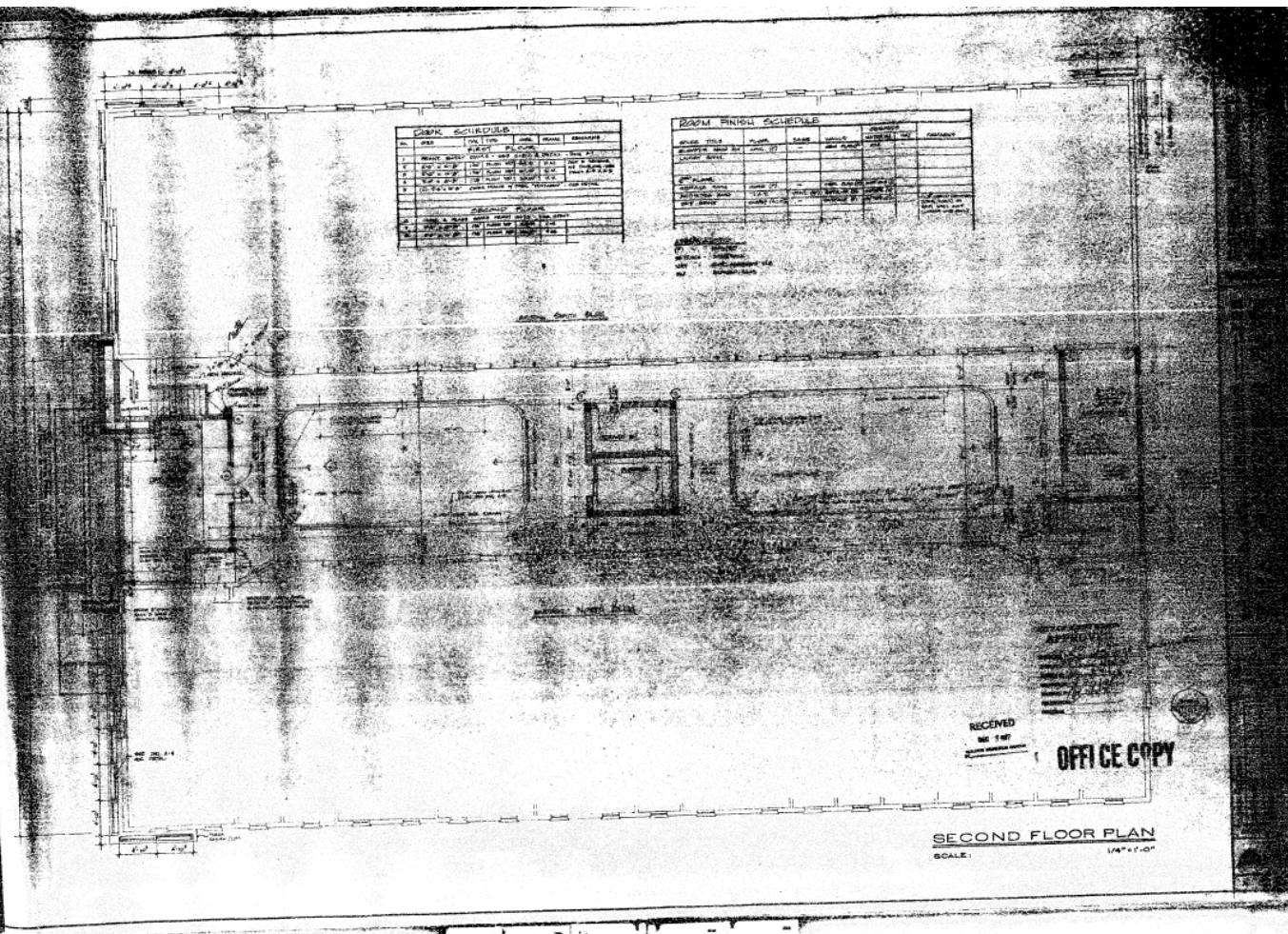
Starlite Hotel	750 Ocean Drive
News Cafe	800 Ocean Drive
Tuxedo Park	1900 Liberty Avenue
Lake View Apartments	4780 Pinetree Drive
Park Isle Club	780 73rd Street

--- Carolyn Klepser, researcher

January 10, 2017

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





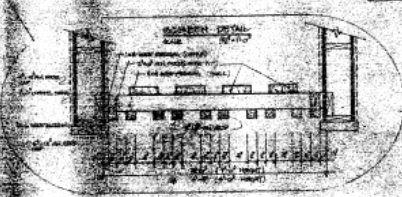
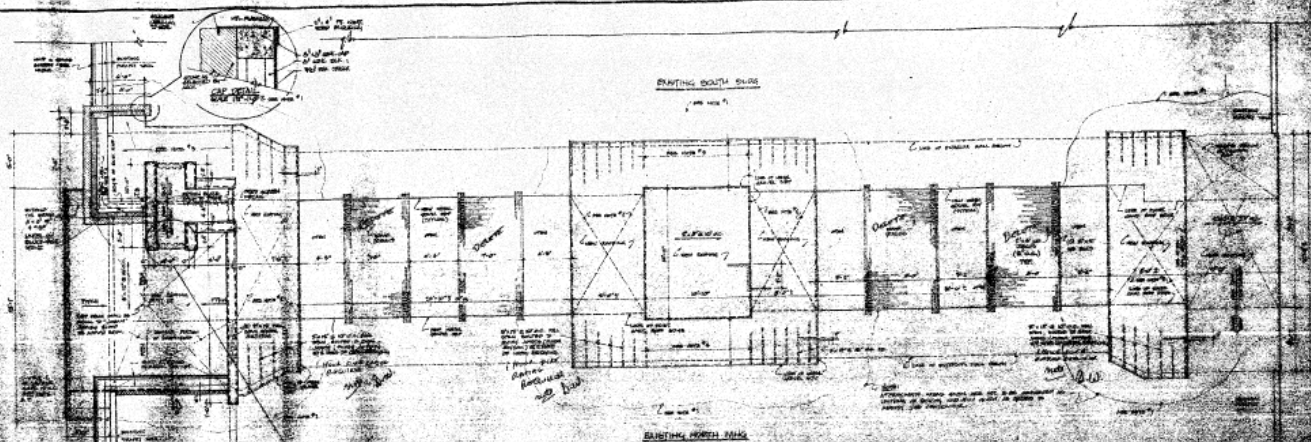
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RECEIVED
NOV 1954

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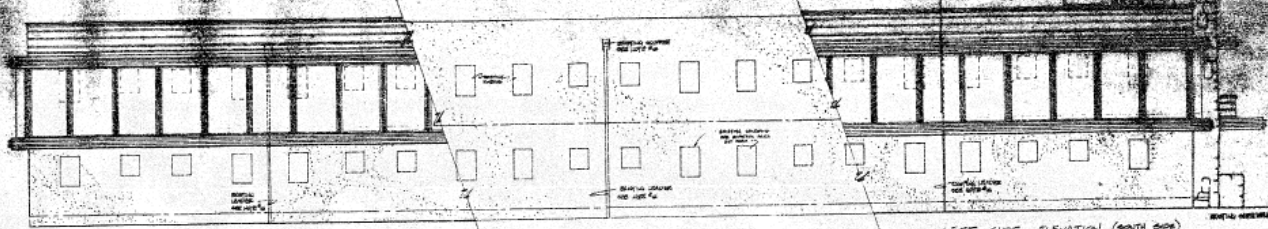
SECOND FLOOR PLAN
SCALE: 1/4" = 1'-0"



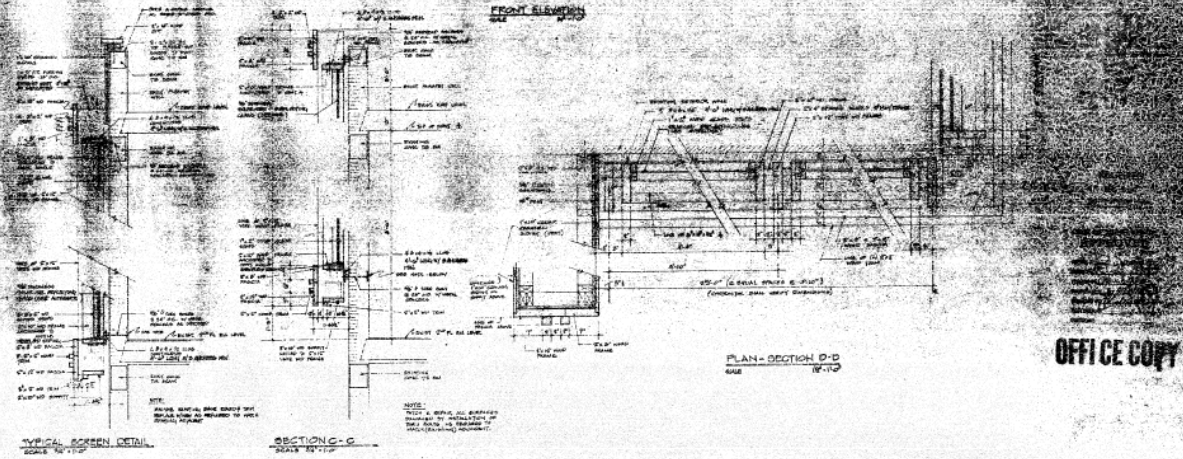
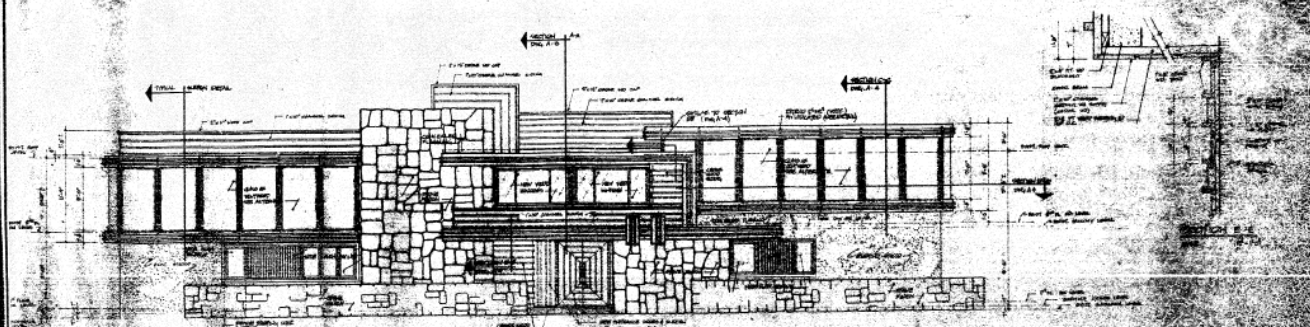
- NOTES**
1. GENERAL: Building of concrete, masonry, and steel. To be erected on foundation of concrete. Building to be erected on foundation of concrete. Building to be erected on foundation of concrete.
 2. FOUNDATION: Foundation to be of concrete. Foundation to be of concrete. Foundation to be of concrete.
 3. STRUCTURE: Structure to be of concrete, masonry, and steel. Structure to be of concrete, masonry, and steel. Structure to be of concrete, masonry, and steel.
 4. INTERIORS: Interiors to be of concrete, masonry, and steel. Interiors to be of concrete, masonry, and steel. Interiors to be of concrete, masonry, and steel.

CAPITAL COST PLAN

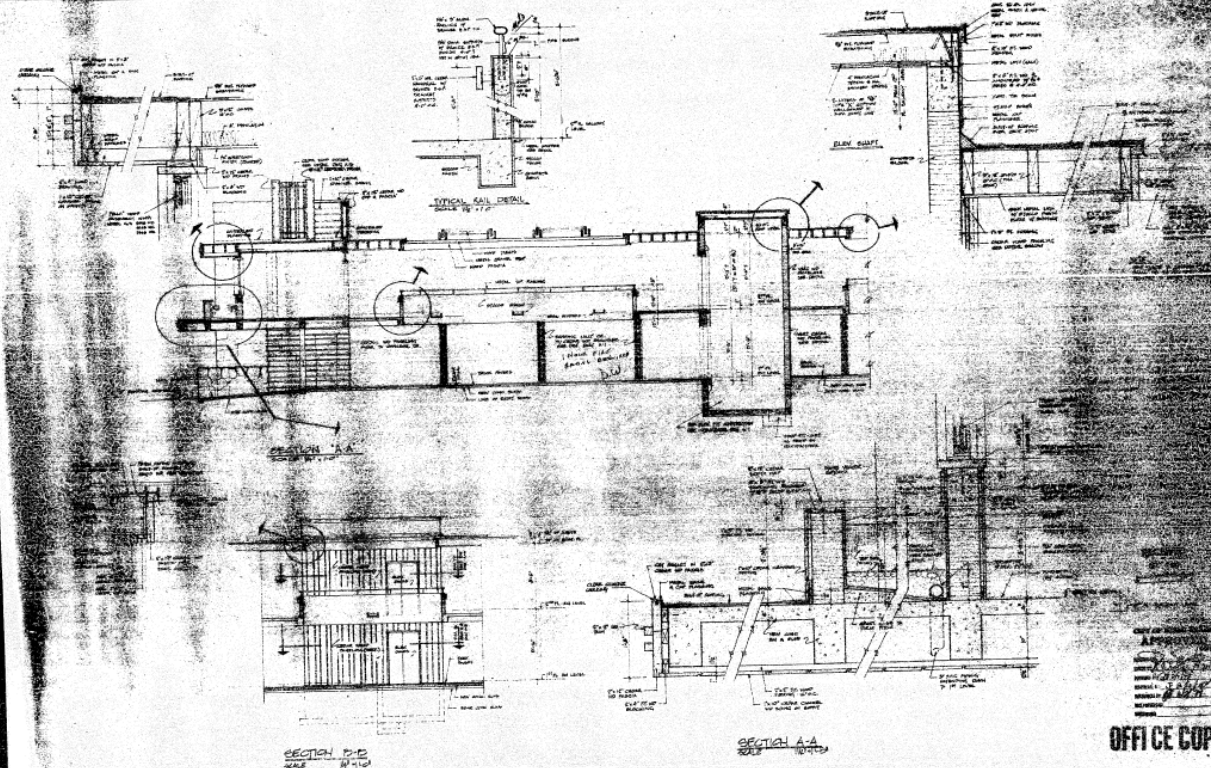
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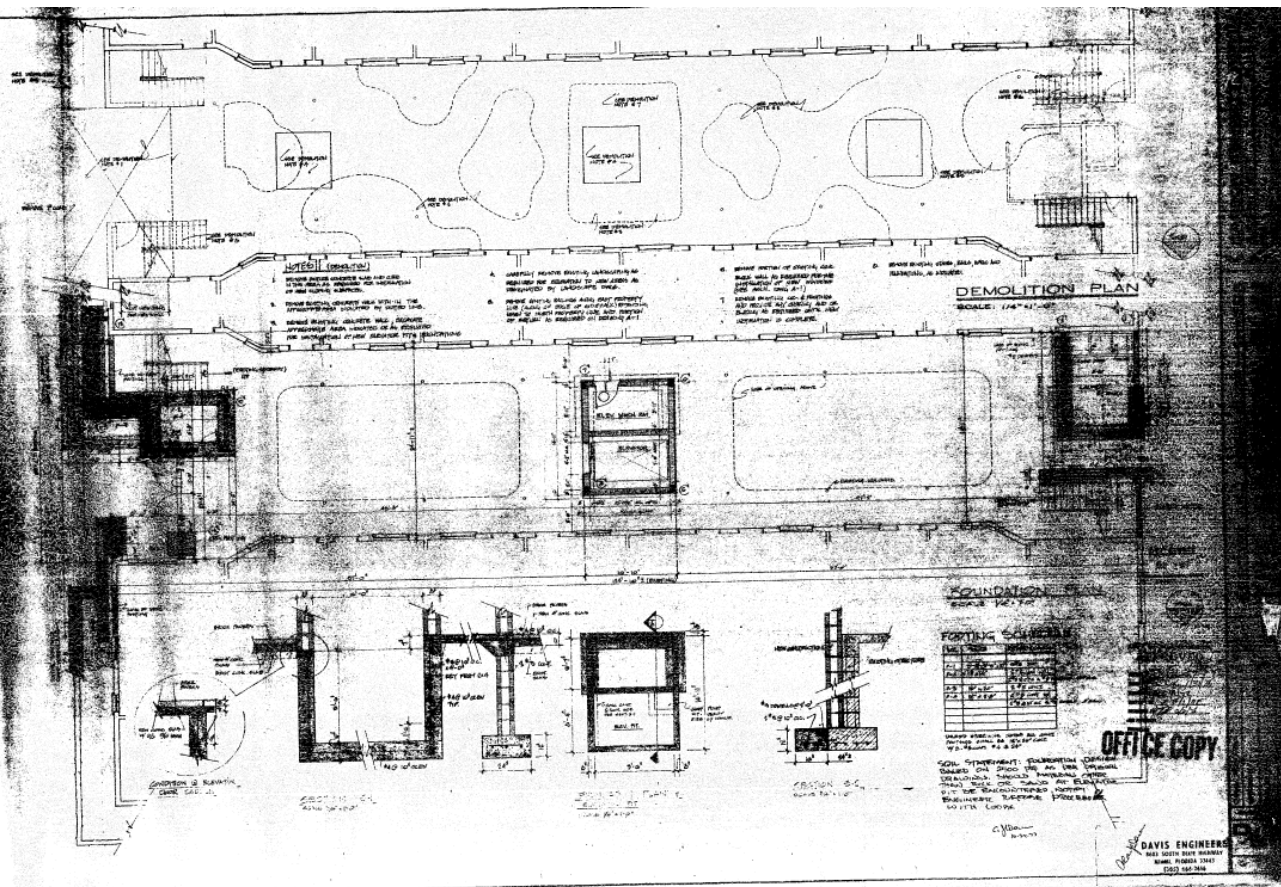


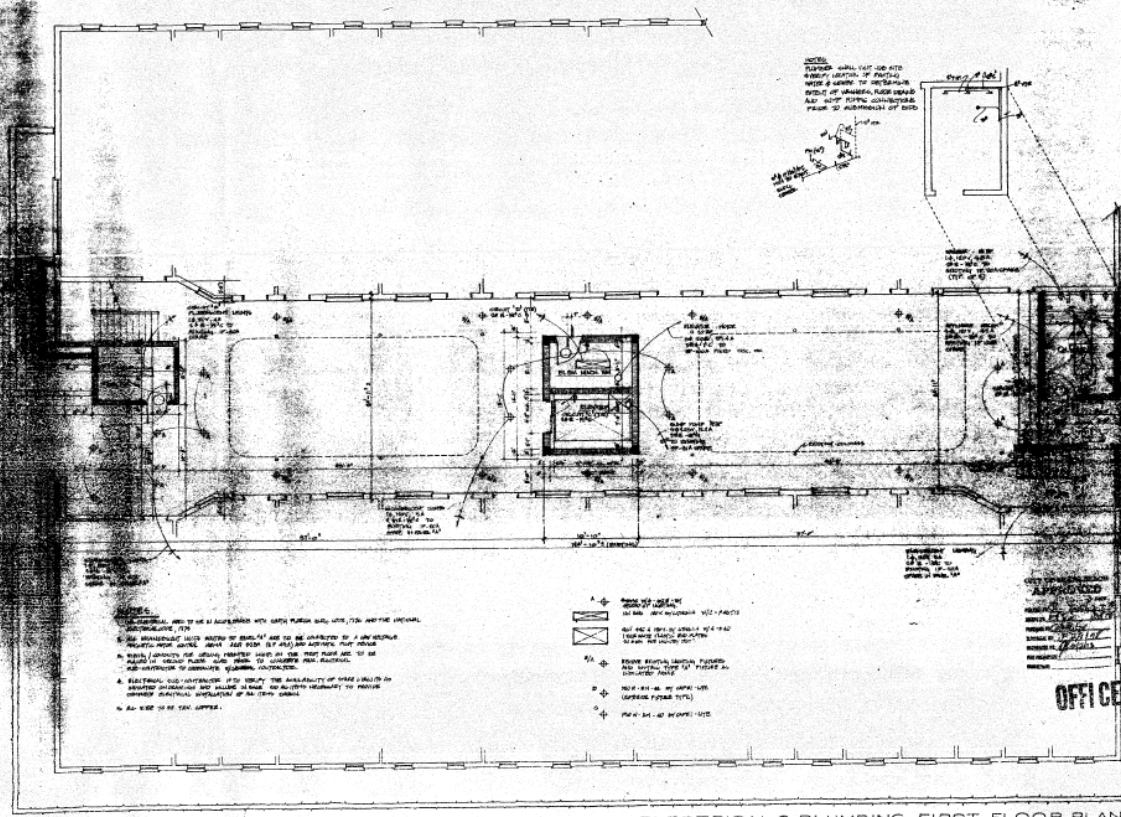
LEFT SIDE ELEVATION (SOUTH SIDE)
SCALE 1/4" = 1'-0"



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GENERAL AND TO BE IN ACCORDANCE WITH LOCAL PLUMBING, WIRE, AND THE NATIONAL ELECTRICAL CODE.

1. ALL WIRING SHALL BE DONE IN ACCORDANCE WITH THE NATIONAL ELECTRICAL CODE.

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APPROVED

DATE

BY

FOR

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ELECTRICAL & PLUMBING FIRST FLOOR PLAN

SCALE

DAVIS ENGINEERS

145 SOUTH BAY STREET

MIAMI, FLORIDA 33131



1/8" = 1'-0"

Davis

DAVIS ENGINEERS
8081 SOUTH DIXIE HIGHWAY
MIAMI, FLORIDA 33143
(305) 666-2816

47162

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION - BUILDING DIVISION

DATE: March 22, 1937

TO: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT - ENGINEERING DIVISION

LOCAL DESCRIPTION: 1000 S.W. 2nd St., Miami, Fla., Building

LOCAL ADDRESS: 1000 S.W. 2nd St., Miami, Fla.

TYPE OF BUILDING: Addition

A plan for this building has been submitted to this Division. Please list the modifications and return to Building Division.

CONVICT FACILITIES: In New Building Division

PROPERTY OWNER: J. H. Baker

STATE: Fla.

COUNTY OF FLORIDA: Dade

CITY OF MIAMI: Miami

ENGINEER: J. H. Baker

REMARKS: Building Division (should) require the work done on this property. Compliance measures of elements and code and return to be submitted and modified when necessary.

ALL THE WORKMAN SUBJECT TO THESE CONDITIONS.

Building Division: J. H. Baker

DATE: Jan 1, 1938

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REMARKS: Building Division (should) require the work done on this property. Compliance measures of elements and code and return to be submitted and modified when necessary.

ALL THE WORKMAN SUBJECT TO THESE CONDITIONS.

Building Division: J. H. Baker

DATE: December 10, 1937

FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION - BUILDING DIVISION

DATE: March 22, 1937

TO: PUBLIC WORKS DEPARTMENT - ENGINEERING DIVISION

LOCAL DESCRIPTION: 1000 S.W. 2nd St., Miami, Fla., Building

LOCAL ADDRESS: 1000 S.W. 2nd St., Miami, Fla.

TYPE OF BUILDING: Addition

A plan for this building has been submitted to this Division. Please list the modifications and return to Building Division.

CONVICT FACILITIES: In New Building Division

PROPERTY OWNER: J. H. Baker

STATE: Fla.

COUNTY OF FLORIDA: Dade

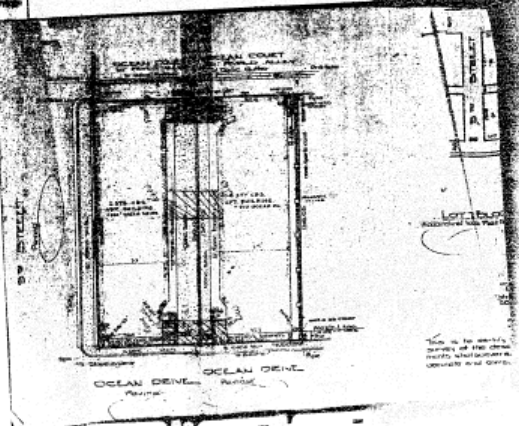
CITY OF MIAMI: Miami

ENGINEER: J. H. Baker

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Building Division: J. H. Baker





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Park Sea-Surf Sea Apartments - Miami Beach, Florida

