

NASSAU HOTEL, 1414 COLLINS AVENUE, and
LESLIE HOTEL, 1244-1250 OCEAN DRIVE, MIAMI BEACH

Even in the midst of the national Depression of the 1930s, Miami Beach enjoyed a building boom that is today celebrated in the National Register Historic District, designated in 1979. Both the Nassau and Leslie Hotels are products of that boom, and they have much in common. Both were designed by architect Albert Anis (see Architect Bio following) for the same owner, Ed Singer. Both are in the Art Deco style, and are Contributing buildings in the National Register and locally-designated Historic Districts, and both served as barracks for U.S. Army-Air Forces trainees during World War II.

On July 13, 1936, a building permit was issued to Edward J. Singer, who did business as the Edwards Corporation and the Edsinger Corporation, for the three-story, 50-room **Nassau Hotel** at 1414 Collins Avenue, costing \$60,000. Anis' original plans were found on microfilm #8468 from the Miami Beach Building Department, comprising the front elevation, two floor plans, and structural elements, but no side elevations. Another rendering of the front elevation comes from a 1936 postcard (Curt Teich Co., #6A-H2906) but no archival photographs of the Nassau, either interior or exterior, have yet been found.

The front façade seen in these images remains largely intact today. This three-story building is divided vertically into thirds by two ribbed stucco pilasters.

The interplay of geometric forms is seen in most of Anis' designs. Here there is a circular theme, with porthole windows and a complementary raised bulls-eye design. The sign obscuring the view of the bulls-eye is a later addition....The recessed corner windows, appearing almost cantilevered, were another innovation of the time.¹

Other original features seen in the plans and/or postcard include the scalloped-edge eyebrow extending over and around the front porch; casement windows;

¹ Richard & Valerie Beaulieu, Discovering South Beach Deco; Domani Press, 2004, p. 94.

decorative incised lines at the porthole windows; the stepped-up front parapet; and grouped perforations in the side parapet walls, giving a lacy effect. The fin sign on the building front was probably added in 1946, when a permit was issued for an electric sign, and replaced in 1975.

The original floor plan of the **Nassau lobby** is not very legible, but shows the curved stair at the northwest corner that is still present, and the elevator and reception desk on the west wall flanking a stepped-up hallway to the first floor guest rooms. The lobby floor is a pattern of square and oblong clay tiles in red and tan that is probably original, as is the shallow coved ceiling, although the hanging lights are new. The present reception desk is a recent construction of dark wood and white marble. On the south wall is a fireplace and built-in mirror of ribbed masonry that is not apparent in the original plans.

The reverse of the 1936 postcard includes advertising for the Nassau that may have been printed at a later date. It describes, among other things, a patio, a rooftop solarium, and a coffee shop. The patio may have been on the adjoining lot to the south, as seen in the postcard image; this lot has been vacant since at least 1935. The coffee shop and kitchen were built into the basement level in November 1937, according to the Building Card. Other **later additions** to the Nassau were a “card room, recreation room, etc.” in 1946, and enclosure of a stairway in 1970.

In the first eight months of 1937, Miami Beach issued over \$8 million in building permits, counting 18 hotels, 57 apartment houses, and about 200 residences.² In the midst of this boom, Singer sold the Nassau Hotel on August 15, 1937, for \$115,000 to Rubin Feinberg, who had sold his Harriet Court Apartments on Pennsylvania Avenue for “over \$100,000” just ten days before.³ Three days after selling the Nassau, Singer bought the vacant lot at 1244 Ocean

² *Miami Herald*, Aug. 29, 1937; p. B-1.

³ *Miami Herald*, August 15, 1937.

Drive,⁴ and within ten days, on August 27, 1937, he was issued a building permit for another three-story, 50-room hotel at this site, costing \$75,000, that is the present-day **Leslie**. Things were moving quickly, and “flipping” was a popular activity.

For his new hotel on Ocean Drive, which he named the Edsinger, Singer again hired architect Albert Anis, who had designed the Nassau. Anis’ original plans for the Edsinger were found on microfilm #10225 in the Miami Beach Building Department. The exterior is classic Art Deco style, with a symmetrical facade, strong vertical and horizontal elements, corner eyebrows, and a ziggurat roofline. It is most striking for its boxy right-angles, lacking any of the curves or rounded contours of streamlining, although the windows in the central bay are slightly bowed. A notation on the plans calls for the “entire east elevation and 32’ 6” of the north & south elev. to be white cement & sand finish. Combed surface.” This combing is still evident on the eyebrows. The plans also show that the cast stone railing of the front porch is still the original design, with alternating square and round posts. The original windows were casements.

The plans for the **Leslie lobby** show that the reception desk was originally at the southwest corner; a double door flanked by two windows comprised the south wall; and a fireplace flanked by two windows stood on the north wall. The most striking discovery is that the lower lobby walls were paneled in wood. A notation on the elevation of the reception desk, although not entirely legible, appears to say “walnut panels.”

These exterior and interior details are confirmed by three photographs of the Edsinger, dated January 11, 1938, in the Romer archive of the Miami Public Library (#A489-L, M and N), and by several postcard images, although these are drawings. The Romer photograph of the exterior shows that a prominent vertical sign originally rose from the third-floor eyebrow to above the parapet at the center

⁴ Miami-Dade County Deed Records.

of the front facade. The lobby photographs show the original wood paneling, fireplace (with mirror above), “coffee shoppe,” and reception desk. The ceiling-cove contours still survive, but a metal lighting trough originally ran down the center and is no longer present. A decorative metal grille is barely visible on the double door on the south wall. The “pie-chart” design that still exists in the lobby terrazzo is also seen in the photograph, but the checkerboard sections on either side were covered by oriental rugs.

A few days after these Romer photographs were taken, the building card notes that on January 14, 1938, a permit was issued for a \$500 dining room addition to the Edsinger, also designed by Albert Anis. No plans for this project were found on microfilm. Perhaps it was a remodeling of the coffee shop.

A year after the Edsinger was constructed, on August 22, 1938, Singer’s Edwards Corporation bought the two adjoining lots on Ocean Drive at the corner of 13th Street.⁵ In 1941 Singer leased this land to Harry W. Lehman, president of the Concord Realty Corporation, who built the Carlyle Hotel on it.⁶ At that time, Ed Singer and his wife Reba were resident managers of the Edsinger Hotel.⁷

Beginning in 1942, the Nassau, the Edsinger and the Carlyle were among approximately 300 buildings in Miami Beach that were leased by the U.S. Army-Air Forces Technical Training Command as the nation entered World War II. Miami Beach became the training ground for over 500,000 troops between 1942 and 1945. Hotels such as these served as barracks; restaurants became mess halls; the nearby golf courses and beaches were drill fields. Miami Beach’s availability as a training center at that time is credited with shortening the war effort by six to eight months and saving the government \$6 million in building

⁵ Miami-Dade County Deeds Records.

⁶ “\$125,000 Hotel to be Started,” *Miami Daily News*, Sept. 7, 1941.

⁷ Polk’s City Directory, 1941.

costs.⁸ According to their Building Permit Cards, the Edsinger was returned to civilian use on June 14, 1944, and the Nassau on July 10, 1944.

The Singers sold their hotel in 1944 to new managers Harry M. Kaplan and David Koch. Obviously the name Edsinger had to go, and at this time the hotel was renamed the Leslie,⁹ but the source of this name is unknown. The name “Leslie” was put into the terrazzo floor on the front porch at about this time. A 1950 photograph shows that the large vertical sign on the front facade remained intact, with the new name in place of the old. In the meantime, adding to the confusion, the Singers took the proceeds from this sale and bought the Bon Air Hotel, on the corner of Ocean Drive and 11th Street, and briefly named it the Edsinger.

Several **later alterations** to the Leslie are noted on the Building Permit Card. Architect A. Herbert Mathes did some work on it in 1949, including replacing two lobby windows, but no plans survive to document this. In 1958, pairs of adjoining hotel rooms were combined to form one-bedroom apartments (with two bathrooms), a common practice. Twenty-six rooms in the Leslie were made into thirteen apartments at that time. In more recent years, the Leslie was owned by record producer Chris Blackwell as part of his Island Outpost chain.

--- Carolyn Klepser, researcher
October 20, 2009

⁸ “Army Life on Beach in Second Year,” *Miami Herald*, Feb. 19, 1943.

⁹ Polk’s City Directory, 1945-6.

ARCHITECT BIO

Albert Anis (1889-1964) was born in Chicago and attended the Armour Institute of Technology there, 1908-1910¹⁰. He worked in Miami Beach from the mid-1930s to the mid-'50s, designing dozens of exemplary buildings in the Art Deco, Streamline, and Postwar Modern styles. Besides the Nassau and the Leslie, his work includes the Barnett Bank Building at 420 Lincoln Road, and the following hotels:

Waldorf Towers	860 Ocean Dr.	(1937)
Clevelander	1020 Ocean Dr.	(1938)
Winter Haven	1400 Ocean Dr.	(1939)
Traymore	2445 Collins Ave.	(1939)
Berkeley Shore	1610 Collins Ave.	(1940)
Promenade	1465 Collins Ave.	(1948)
Biltmore Terrace	8701 Collins Ave.	(1951)

¹⁰ Keith Root, Miami Beach Art Deco Guide, Miami Design Preservation League, 1987, p.32.

SAAPTTTC
Returned to
Owner 7-10
1944

USAFTTC (4/11/42)

Owner Edsinger Corporation Mailing Address Permit No. 2468 Cost \$ 60,000:

Lot 6 Block 26 Subdivision Ocean Beach 2 Address 1414 Collins Avenue

General Contractor Owner builds -A. Anis, supt. Bond No. 1 Otis Elevator::

Architect Albert Anis

Zoning Regulations: Use RE Area 28 Lot Size 50 X 140

Building Size: Front 40' Depth 135' Height 42'4 Stories 3

Certificate of Occupancy No. 523 Use HOTEL 50 Rooms

#3... Type of Construction GBS Foundation Reinforced concrete Roof Flat Date July 13, 1936

Plumbing Contractor Markowitz # 9225 1... Sewer Connection Date July 27, 1936

Temporary Closet... Date July 27, 1936

Plumbing Contractor Markowitz # 9225 .. 163 Fixtures... 9 GAS.... Date July 27, 1936

Water Closets Bath Tubs Floor Drain

Lavatories (12785.. Showers 2, Nov. 29, 1939) Grease

Urinals (Schweitzer Sinks Drinking Fountain

Gas Stoves Gas Heaters Rough Approved

Gas Radiators Gas Turn On Approved

Septic Tank Contractor Tank Size Date

Oil Burner Contractor #8890 (Bldg) 1..... Tank Size 270 gals \$ 500:: Date Oct. 20, 1936

Sprinkler System

Electrical Contractor #6913 Austin Address Date Aug. 1, 1936

Switch Range Motors 5, Fans (Temporary Service July 21, 1936)

OUTLETS Light 550. HEATERS Water Space (#6868 - Austin. 2 outlets

Receptacles Centers of Distribution 1 receptacle

Neon Transformers 3, Refrigerators

Irons Sign Outlets

No. FIXTURES 197... Electrical Contractor #7717 Ace Electric Co: Date Nov. 28, 1936

FINAL APPROVED BY Date of Service November 28th, 1936

Nov. 16, 1936

BLDG

Building Permits: # 10134 - ... Aug. 2, 1951
 # 10636 Remodeling ... for kitchen and coffee shop: Nov. 23, 1957
 # 13686 Painting ... after Army occupation... day labor July 17, 1944
 # 22622 Blocking ... walls (owner builds) June 17, 1944
 # 22789 Erecting ... Recreation Room, etc. Day Labor July 16, 1944
 # 27722 Painting ... - \$ 500... July 6, 1945
 # 42658 Painting ... Painters: \$ 450: Sept 14, 1953

6215 L.L. Gray ... \$ 200.00 10/7/59

6215 L.L. Gray ... \$ 200.00 10/7/59

6215 L.L. Gray ... \$ 200.00 10/7/59

73691 Jesus Vigor: Exterior pressure cleaning & painting - \$500 - 2/6/68 OK 7/14/68

73685 - Owner - Enclose stairs as required by fire prevention department \$320.00 12/29/70

7717 Don Jalbert-Exterior of building same color off white paint trim-\$1850-1 8-4-75

7718 ABC Neon-Newon Metal protection sign, replace existing sign-\$1000-8-14-75

79358 Owner-Exterior and interior painting-\$600-10-8-76

PLUMBING PERMITS: # 17456 Owner-Concrete slab 24' inside property line and wall 47 x 30-\$300-1-31-80

60484-Pitsch Plumbing- 1 heater-replace, 1 gas piping-2-23-77

Electrical Permits: # 18517 Griffin & Bauer : Correction of violations for USAAFTTC: June 2, 1942

18542.. USAAFTTC.. 1 Master Meter .. June 6, 1942.. Final OK Inman 6/8/1942

20267 USAAFTTC Restoration of metering May 24, 1944

20678 Biscayne Electric... 2 Receptacles... Nov. 16, 1944

23342 Astor Electric: 1 Sign outlet, Nov. 14, 1946

72223-Ocean Electric- Fire alarm system 8 pulls, 7 sounding devices, 1 master-5-7-75

72494-ABC Neon- 1 neon transformers-8-14-75

72418-Courtesy Electric- 50 receptacles; 800 amps service; 50 a/c window-9-1-76

72418-Courtesy Electric- 50 receptacles; 800 amps service; 50 a/c window-9-1-76

72418-Courtesy Electric- 50 receptacles; 800 amps service; 50 a/c window-9-1-76

7256
LOT: 6 BLOCK 26 SUBDIVISION: OB #2 ADDRESS: 1414 Collins Ave

ALTERATIONS & ADDITIONS

BUILDING PERMITS

#25778 4/15/85 Tropical Painters painting of exterior \$3,500.

PLUMBING PERMITS

ELECTRICAL PERMITS

NASSAU HOTEL

MIAMI BEACH, FLORIDA



SURF BATHING FROM YOUR ROOM

6A-H29C

H. Browarnik's
NASSAU HOTEL
Collins Ave. at 14th St.
MIAMI BEACH

Ideal Location—One Block from Ocean—All outside
rooms with Private Bath and Shower—Telephone in
every room—Automatic Elevator Service—Spacious
Lobby—Patio—Roof Solarium—Surf bathing from your
room—European Plan—Coffee Shop—

"C.T. PHOTO-COLORIT" REG. U.S. PAT. OFF. MADE ONLY BY CURT TEICH & CO., INC., CHICAGO

POST CARD

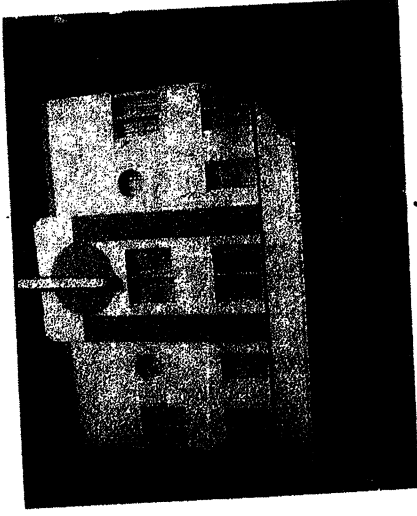
"C. T. PHOTO"
MADE IN 6.000. 12
CURT TEICH & CO.

► Leaving the Beach Plaza's porch, turn right to go north on Collins Avenue.

2 The **Nassau Hotel**, designed by Albert Anis in 1936, is a few doors up and across Collins Avenue at number 1414.

Art Deco buildings are generally characterized as having three-part (A-B-A) symmetrical form. The central mass, which includes the main entry, is prominent, sometimes projecting forward a bit, and set off from the wings by vertical division. Miami Beach architects embellished their façades with stylized parapets and ornamentation in keeping with the free-wheeling resort atmosphere.

The Nassau is a relatively unadorned building with a classic Art Deco façade. The central section is flanked by two fluted pilasters rising to a stepped parapet.



The interplay of geometric forms is seen in most of Anis' designs. Here there is a circular theme, with port-hole windows and a complementary raised bulls-eye design. The sign obscuring the view of the bulls-eye is a later addition, as is the awning over the porch. Try to make the awning disappear in your mind to visualize the effect of the wonderfully scalloped eyebrow/canopy.

The recessed corner windows, appearing almost cantilevered, were another innovation of the time.

The Nassau was designed as a 50-room hotel. It now contains about 20 large studios and one-bedroom units, a typical result of restoration. South Beach hotel rooms are notoriously small by today's American standards. The original idea was to spend most of one's time outdoors in the sun. Why would a visitor need more than a simple room?

3 At 1420 Collins Avenue, the quirky and often overlooked **Dolores Guesthouse** presents some beguiling details.

The Dolores was originally a hotel, constructed during the frenzied building boom of the early 1920s. This is one of the oldest remaining buildings in the district, designed by E. G. Cobelli in 1923.

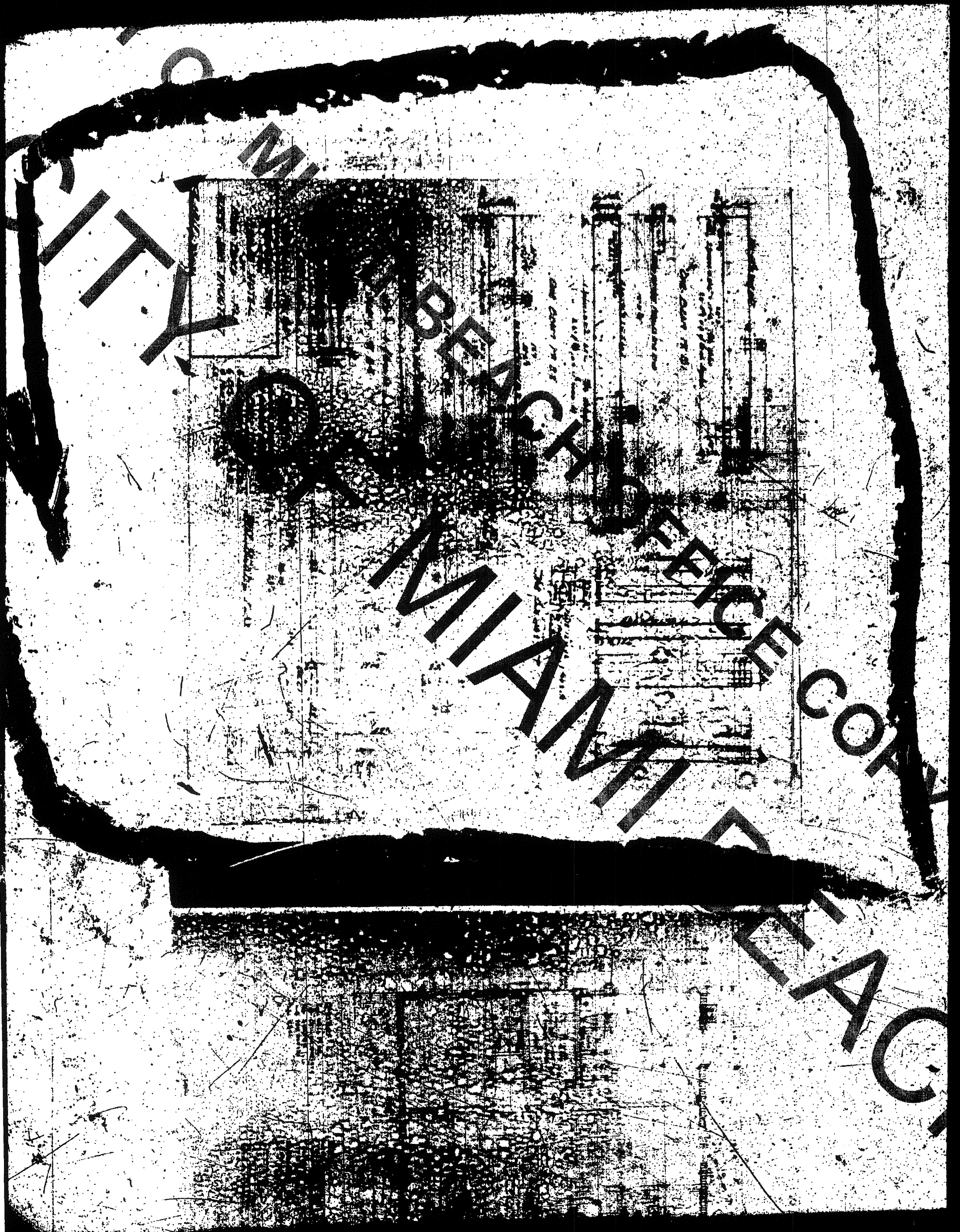
The Dolores is one of the few examples of small-scale early resort style architecture in the Historic District. The most compelling aspect of the building, though, is its very forward-looking design.

CITY OF MIAMI
OFFICE COPY

#846,
Nassau
Hotel
1440 NW
Ave
Aqua,
1936

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE
FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION
WASHINGTON, D. C. 20535

#8468
Norton
Hartel
2nd & 3rd
10th pl
Cpl
A. Amis
1936



#8468
Mason
Hotel
A. H. W.
1936
Structure
Steel