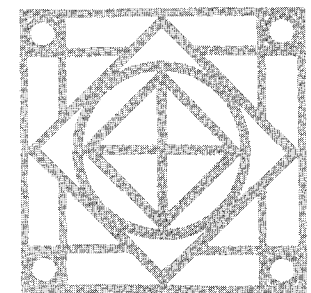
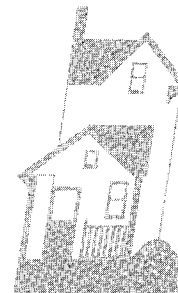
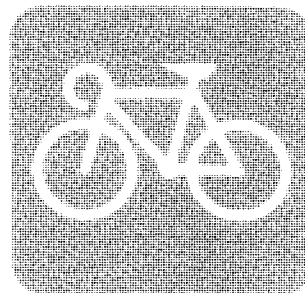
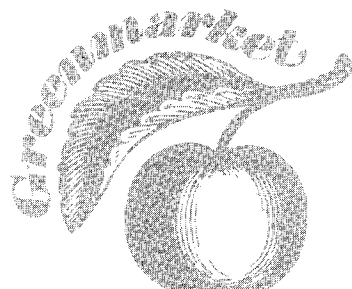
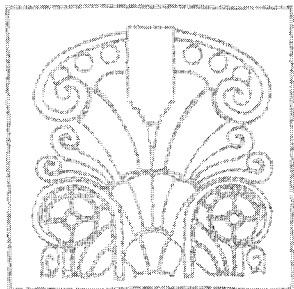


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# CONNECTIONS: CREATING URBAN EXCELLENCE

Jay Farbstein and Richard Wener



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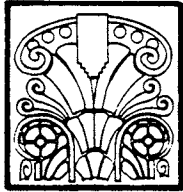
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## OCEAN DRIVE IMPROVEMENT PROJECT Miami Beach, Florida

### INITIAL SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

#### Initial Reasons For Including Ocean Drive as a Finalist

- Mixed use of housing (hotels), retail and commercial.
- Good sense of integration of street, buildings, and park.
- Good sense of neighborhood.
- Good ratio of effort to effect; relatively inexpensive.
- Authentically pretty; not phony; simple and straightforward.
- The neighborhood claims a legitimate part of their history.
- The original folks are still there and support the plan/changes.

#### Selection Committee Concerns and Questions

- Who uses the area? Were the original inhabitants pushed out? Do they support the changes?



*Colony Hotel.*

- What is the interaction between the streetscape or street life and the Art Deco buildings?
- Why was the sidewalk widened? Who decided? How does it work?
- Is it a real, vital neighborhood?

- Has traffic increased and, if so, what is the effect?

## THE PROJECT AT A GLANCE

### What It Is

- **Project:** Preservation and revitalization of a 15 block, 26 acre ocean front historic district of Art Deco hotels and apartments.
- **Activities:** Planning study, zoning and historic preservation regulations, bond financing drive, physical improvements to street and park, and ongoing promotion and management.

### Who Made Submission

- City of Miami Beach, Office of Historic Preservation and Urban Design

### Major Goals

- Encourage preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic buildings.
- Attract attention, new private investment, and new life to a deteriorating neighborhood.
- Enhance pedestrian activity and use of recreational and other public open space.
- Encourage citizen involvement in planning and design.

### Accomplishments (since 1985)

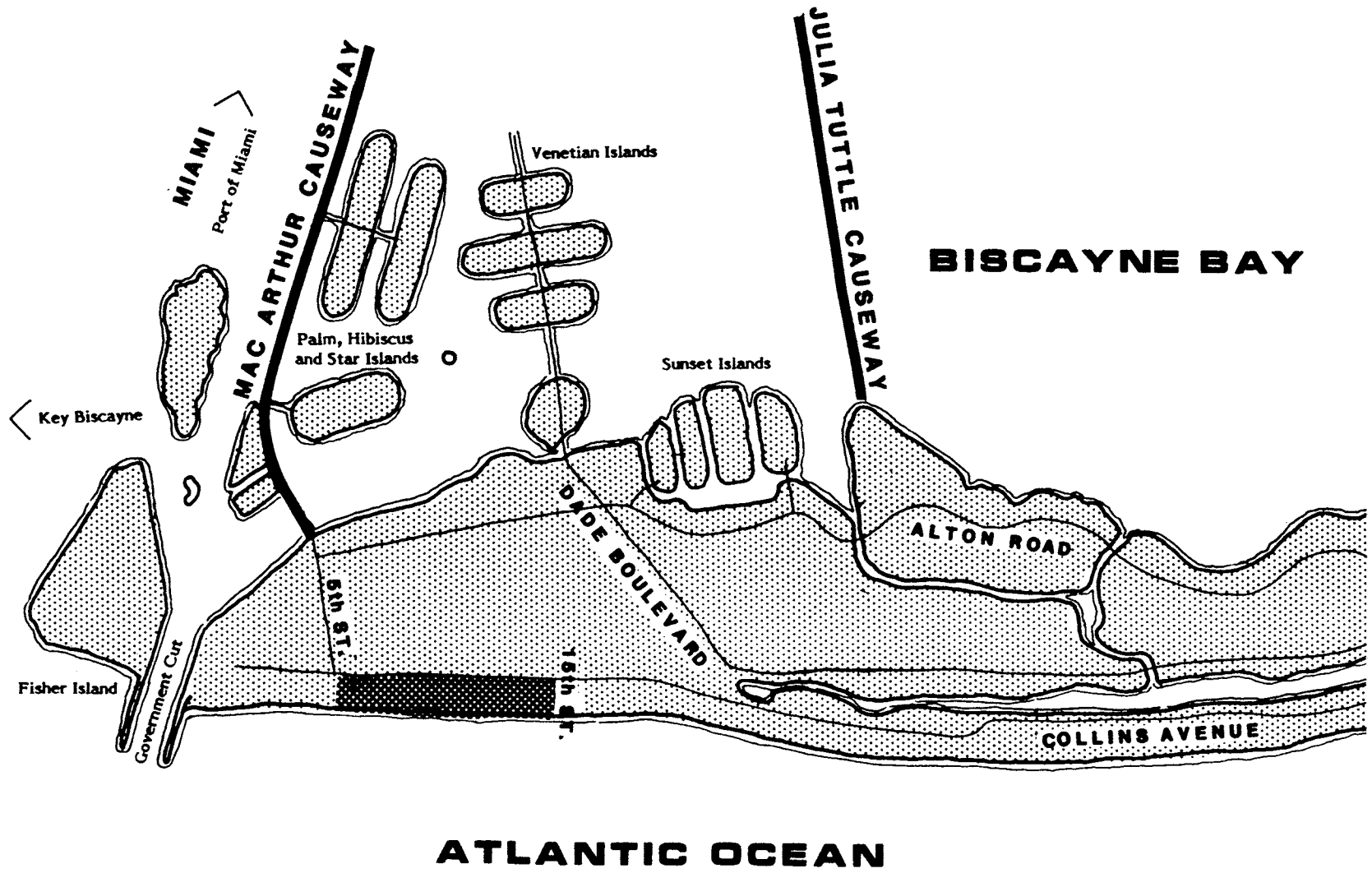
- At least **28 historic buildings have been substantially rehabilitated** and many more have had cosmetic

improvements. The area has been designated as a **historic preservation district** (it was already listed by the National Trust).

- About **50 new restaurants**, cafes, bars and stores have opened on Ocean Drive.
- Over **\$4 million of public money was raised**, including a \$3 million bond issue. An unknown (but probably quite large) amount of private investment has been made and considerable new tax revenue is flowing to the city; new jobs have been created.
- Bond money paid for **improvement** of the street, sidewalks, and the ocean front park.
- Ocean Drive has become a **vital entertainment and tourist center**, attracting people from the region, nationally and internationally. It has become a center of the fashion photography industry, which has gotten photos of the area into the worldwide press, contributing to its current trendiness.

### Issues That Could Affect Its Selection as Winner

- Does it have **social merit** or does it just benefit the city, owners, entrepreneurs, fashion industry, et al., possibly to the detriment of some groups?
- Is it a **unique** setting and process or are there **model** features which could be applied elsewhere?
- Are they coping with **problems** of traffic, noise, etc.?
- Is it successfully **preserving** and reusing the historic buildings or are they being compromised?



 **OCEAN DRIVE STUDY AREA**

*Geographic location*

## PROCESS

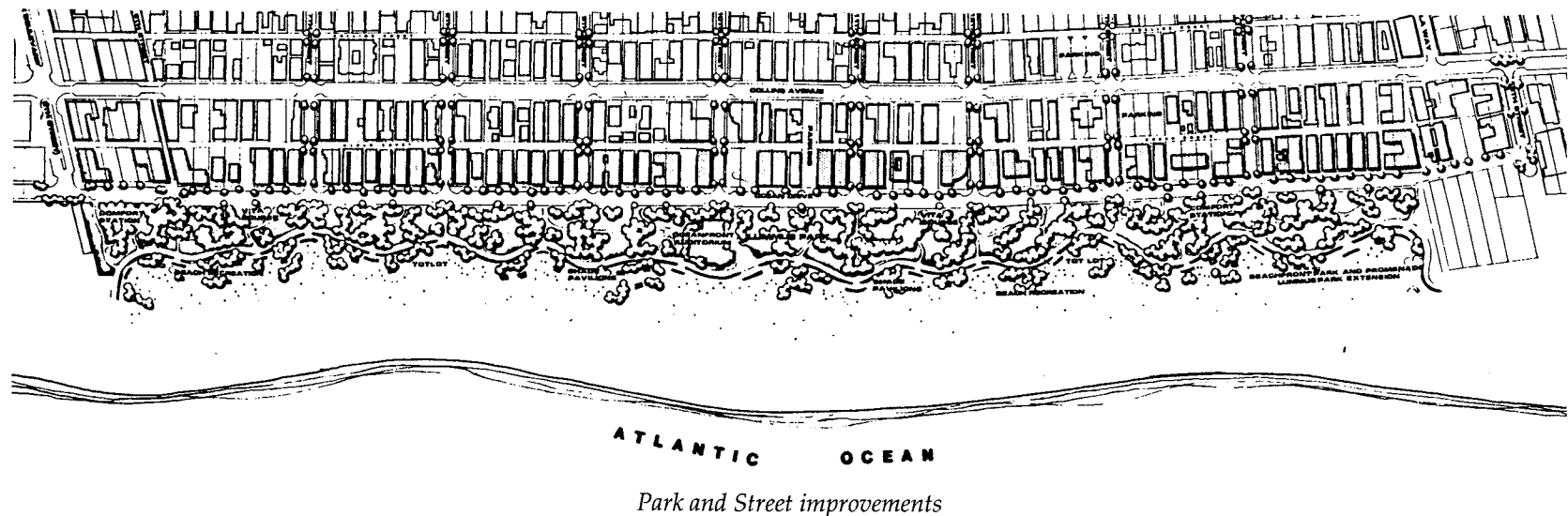
### Chronology

- 1976: Barbara Capitman **study of the Art Deco** structures and campaign for preservation.
- 1979: **Designation** as first 20th century historic district on the National Register of Historic Places.
- 1980: Arrival of **Marielitos**; acceleration of decline.
- 1981: Anderson, Notter, Fiengold **preservation and development study**.
- 1984: Formation of **Ocean Drive Task Force** and Ocean Drive Property Owners Association (now the Ocean Drive Association).
- 1985: City **adopts Ocean Drive Plan**.
- 1986: City adopts the MXE mixed use/entertainment **zoning** amendments which require renovation of the entire building in order to be allowed to operate a bar or restaurant on the ground floor. City **designation** of the Ocean Drive/Collins Avenue Historic District. Area placed under Design Review Board jurisdiction. Ocean Drive **bond issue** passes for improvements to street, sidewalk and park.
- 1988: Completion of phase one of **park** improvements.
- 1989: Completion of **street** improvements.
- 1990: Completion of phase two of **park** improvements.

## Process

There were **four phases** to the project:

1. The initial planning study.
  2. The development of regulatory mechanisms (zoning, review).
  3. The bond drive and subsequent physical improvement.
  4. Ongoing promotion and maintenance.
- At this time, the plan is **fully implemented** (though not all buildings are yet rehabilitated).
  - The process involved considerable work and **coordination** between key players: the city, the property owners, the preservation league and the local development corporation. Participation by organized groups was encouraged; participation by other residents was limited.
  - There was much self-described **contention** and consensus was sometimes difficult to achieve. When the owners had strong feelings about such features as a raised stage (which was felt would block ocean views) or the design and placement of street lighting (to retain the ambiance), they seem to have held fast and prevailed. (The decisions seem like good ones.)
  - The **relationships** among parties have evolved over the years, with the owners (as represented by the Ocean Drive Association) now, appropriately, playing a larger role in the ongoing management of the area. The city does work closely with them (and attends their meetings). Some earlier key players (the Preservation League and the Miami Beach Development Corporation) appear to feel a bit left out at this point.



### Key Participants

- Miami Beach Planning Department (lead city agency in developing plan for the area).
- Miami Beach Public Works Department (agency responsible for developing public improvements: street, sidewalk, park).
- Miami Beach City Commission (elected officials with jurisdiction).
- Miami Beach Planning Board (appointed review body for plan and for subsequent improvement project proposals).
- Miami Beach Community and Economic Development Department (support agency which assisted with economic and market analyses of area).
- Miami Design Preservation League (private group which sponsored first preservation studies of area, lobbies for preservation, conducts walks, etc.).
- Miami Beach Development Corporation (private non-profit community development corporation which lobbied for bond issue for improvement and runs or funds commercial and residential redevelopment projects on and near Ocean Drive).
- Ocean Drive Association (represents property and business owners; City staffs the association). Note that the present group of owners which is participating in the area's management is by and large not the same as the original one which worked on the plan, in that new entrepreneurs have taken over. Tony Goldman is an example of the current owners; he is a New York developer/ restauranteur who was early (1985) investor in the area.
- Kunde, Sprecher, Yaskin, and Assoc. (engineers for street improvements). William Rosenberg (landscape architect for street improvements). Post Buckley Schuh and



*Ocean Drive before renovations.*



*Ocean Drive after renovations.*

Jernigan (landscape architect for Lummus Park)

- Jewish Family Services of Florida and Dade County Community Action Agency (not participants, but sources of information to RBA about social impacts of project).

## PROJECT DESCRIPTION

### Context and History

Miami Beach is a city of about 90,000 which was dominated by elderly, retired, mostly Jewish, northeasterners. It has huge 1950s hotels (e.g., the Fontainebleu) at the north end of the city; they separate the beach from the street. At the south end are much more modest hotels which were built for lower middle class Jews who came for an extended holiday and rented for the season.

The quality of the architecture and the significance of the area

as having a large concentration of intact structures was recognized by Barbara Capitman, a local preservationist. She formed the Miami Beach Design Preservation League and began a campaign in about 1976 that resulted in the district being designated as the first 20th century historic district on the National Register in 1979.

The historical significance was recognized as being in the fabric and collectivity of the area, not in individual buildings. Early on, there was a lack of local comprehension or recognition of the area's historical value. There was also resistance to the designation by developers who felt (correctly, in a way) that it would limit their developments and by others who wanted to see new buildings, not old ones.

### Conditions Before the Plan

In the early 1980s, the Cuban Marielitos (boat lift people) moved into the area. Attracted by its low rents, their



problems exacerbated the area's decline and lowered property values even further. Paradoxically, this contributed to the eventual turnaround by stimulating a code enforcement campaign and making the properties even cheaper to buy for renovation. In some ways, the properties survived through neglect. If the area had been more attractive, they probably would have been torn down and replaced before they could have been rehabilitated. The area was redlined and no loans were available locally. The first money for rehabilitation was said to have come from New York.

### The Plan

Prior to the plan for Ocean Drive (in the early 1980s), there was an overall preservation and development study of the district by Anderson, Notter, Fiengold and a more specific plan for a commercial section of Washington Avenue (2 streets from Ocean Drive) by Venturi Rauch. Done under the auspices of the Design Preservation League, these experiences exposed Miami Beach to the issues of revitalization and preservation, as well as to a complex, participatory process.

The plan identified the development strategy as "establishing Ocean Drive as a marketable, tropical historic resort area which attracts tourists, day visitors and residents." It also laid out a clear implementation program, including financing.

Zoning protection and design review were essential to actually protect the structures and encourage rehabilitation. It was also essential that the law not require that a majority of owners agree to establishment of the district (the 1981 law required 100% agreement; later lowered to a still very high 51%). The preservation league and its attorney assisted in drafting the new zoning law which eliminated owner consent.

The city defined Ocean Drive as a hotel and entertainment zone, and resisted conversion to retail or offices. These latter are allowed only in buildings that are too small to support a

hotel. The incentives for preservation are described in a section below.

### The Bond Issue

The plan identified \$3 million in needed public improvements. The city launched a campaign under the slogan "Our Drive/Ocean Drive", with the strong support of the Miami Beach Development Corporation who lead the drive. The bond drive was a key event in bringing together the diverse interests in the neighborhood. The bond issue passed comfortably.

### Historic Preservation and Adaptive Reuse

The first renovations were done about 6 years ago; now most buildings on the main streets are done. While there are still many un-rehabilitated structures, it is remarkable how many



*Beacon Hotel.*

structures have been upgraded in such a short time. Incentives (especially on the main commercial and entertainment streets) are encouraging rapid rehabilitation. Few historical buildings were lost (and no more are being or will be lost). Historical designations and zoning ordinances are working well, though the Preservation League feels that they could be stronger and include other areas.

**The Neighborhood and the People**

In the early 1980s, at least partly as a result of the influx of the Marielitos, the area was socially disadvantaged and crime ridden. (The international aspects of the problems also attracted federal money.) As the area was improved and the demographics have changed, crime has decreased significantly, such that visitors are attracted to the area without fear, and residents feel safer.

The neighborhood has remained ethnically and economically diverse. It is now about half Hispanic, has many Jews, Europeans, blacks, and others. The area supports an extremely lively street life, both for locals and tourists. The average age of residents has declined from 65 to 50 years. Older residents have moved or died and not been replaced.

For a number of years, new retirees have been going to different settings (such as retirement villages in places like Boca Raton). Some of the changes are “natural” (by attrition and other demographic forces), others are the result of redevelopment. However, as a result, there are fewer lower-middle income elderly Jews there for the winter and they are being forced to move a block or two away from the beach by higher rents and construction activity.

While it would be unfair to characterize the changes simply as gentrification, little attention was given to relocation and its social impacts in planning or administering the redevelopment programs.

Reports from social service agencies vary: some applaud the changes in the neighborhood as having contributed to safety, and brought jobs and other improvements. The neighborhood is described by them as being an ethnically complex melting pot with few conflicts.

One agency stated that the elderly no longer feel welcome on Ocean Drive and referred us to an individual who expressed some concern about the effect on elderly Jewish residents who have been dislocated. However, there is evidence that, by the time of redevelopment, there was excess capacity in the area,



in the form of boarded up, abandoned buildings. Other informants stated that the older Jews were driven off by the Marielitos and attendant decline. There are still social services in the area, such as community and counseling centers and a well attended elderly meals program that takes place in the Ocean Drive Auditorium within the district.

### Development as a Tourist and Entertainment Center

The Art Deco structures were correctly seen as a potential backdrop to attract younger, more affluent bar and restaurant patrons, European tourists, and fashion models and photographers (who make this seasonal or year round headquarters). The widened sidewalk promotes street life of strolling and sidewalk cafes (see below).

Economically, the hotels are accessory uses to the restaurants and bars. There are only about 200 renovated and operating hotel rooms in about 5 hotels, which may not be enough of a critical mass to succeed. Some hotels are doing joint marketing. If the hotels don't succeed, they may be converted to apartments (which is an allowable use).

### Ongoing Management

The Ocean Drive Association is a forum for local property owners and business operators. Staffed by the city and the development corporation, it deals with promotion and problems of management. We attended a meeting and were impressed with the agencies' apparent responsiveness to the owners' requests (it didn't seem staged for us). The Association was clever in moving the meetings onto their turf on Ocean Drive and out of City Hall. (Note that design review meetings were also moved from a hearing room to a less formal conference room to encourage a less confrontational and more cooperative "roll up the sleeves" working approach.)

Two current management problems are:

**Parking.** Attraction of people has exacerbated parking problems, as the area was planned and built for people without cars. Fashion photographers also have large RVs they use for changing rooms which take of two to three parking spaces each. Working with the Ocean Drive Association, the city has developed a multi-pronged program (added parking spaces, e.g., the Art Deco style garage; shuttles and trams to lessen traffic; and regulations such as the hotel parking zone). Further measures are needed to resolve this issue.

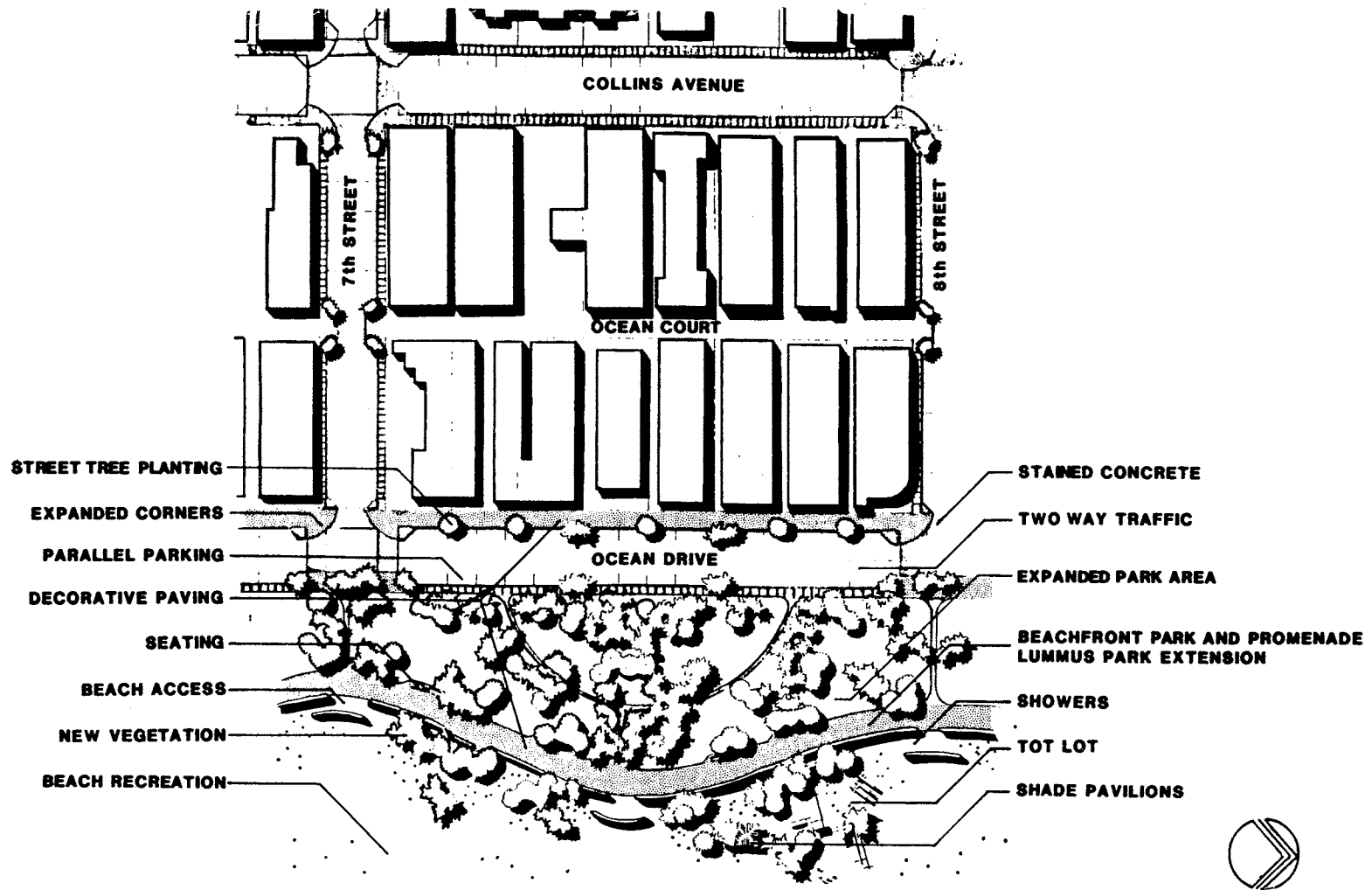
**Noise.** Clubs and traffic have brought late night noise. Ocean Drive Association, the city and the police are working on a more enforceable noise abatement ordinance. Again, the problem has yet to be resolved.

### Architecture

The historic buildings in Miami Beach are not "high" Art Deco (like the Chrysler Building). Rather, these buildings were originally constructed as simple and inexpensive boxes with decorated front facades (and sometimes lobbies). Their scale is rather small, with most occupying one or two 50' wide lots and having relatively few, small rooms.

Most of the hotels had slightly elevated terraces at the entry for sitting and watching the beach or street. These are now often used for cafes (where they are still hotels, the elderly residents still sit on them).

The buildings were originally finished in neutral and earth tones, painted to emphasize on their architectural details. One of the people who started the preservation movement (Leonard Horowitz) invented new color schemes of pastels often with rather extreme polychroming — "Miami Vice" style colors.



*Sidewalk improvements.*

### Street And Sidewalk Improvements

Before it was widened, the sidewalk was exceptionally narrow. Its approximate 5' width was encroached on by parking meters, street lights, traffic signs, and trees. It was

impossible for two people to walk abreast for even one block.

The sidewalk was widened to 15' and the corners were widened even more (into the parking lane). In order to obtain this added width while keeping two lanes of traffic and two

for parking, it was necessary to encroach slightly into the park (which has not harmed it). The logistics of constructing sidewalk and street improvements while the hotels stayed in operation were quite complex and involved much coordination between owners, designers, contractors and the city.

The widened sidewalk is an essential support for the new street life (strolling and sidewalk cafes). The city leases the part of the sidewalk closest to the buildings for the restaurants to place their outdoor tables. Widened street corners encourage people to stop and congregate there. Street lighting is sensitive, with uplighting on plants and borrowed light from the (often) neon lighting on buildings. During the design process, hotel owners suggested (or insisted) that the street lamps be moved to the other side of street, that is, into the park. Appropriate plantings were selected and were placed in consultation with hotel owners to avoid blocking views.

**The Park**

The park was rehabilitated and many new features were added. Design was based on observed patterns of use and a stated desire for more grass and less sand. It provides diverse settings for various user groups. For the elderly, there are seating groups, watching areas, shade. For children, there are play areas. For others, there is the serpentine walk for roller skating, cycling, strolling, etc.

Overall, the park’s design is characterized by many missed opportunities. While the design features appropriate planting selection (coconut palms, pandanus, sea grapes, etc.), it also demonstrates mediocre planting placement (spotted around, not naturalized in clumps). Street furniture varies in quality (lights are appropriate, but very rigid and unattractive seating was selected).

Paving details are poor (the finish is peeling or chipping off the serpentine walk, which should have been integrally colored and had better contrast to show its Deco “wave” pattern). There are stylistically inappropriate shade structures (which may have been there before).

**Economic and Financial Performance**

**Public Funds Invested**

\$3,200,000	Bond appropriations.
\$425,000	Community Development Block Grants.
\$200,000	Florida Recreation Development Assistance program.
\$140,000	Other State of Florida grants.
\$79,733	City of Miami Beach appropriations and salary savings.
<u>    \$37,500</u>	Miami Beach Visitor and Convention Authority.
\$4,082,233	Total

The federal tax credit for rehabilitation of historic structures also provides a significant incentive. The inventive “MXE” mixed entertainment zoning provided another powerful incentive to rehabilitate the hotels in order to be allowed to get a money making restaurant and bar on the ground floor.

A parking assessment area is providing significant revenues which will be available for construction of a second parking garage.

**Financial Impacts**

The city has very little data on the financial impacts of the improvement project, though clearly there has been a great deal of investment and many jobs have been created. One available measure is the number of new businesses started. In

1985 when the plan was initially adopted, there were 38 new business licenses granted (mostly for apartments) while in 1990 there were 93 (mostly restaurants, bars, offices, and service and retail establishments).

There has been tremendous turnover of property; only one property out of 55 on Ocean Drive is known to still be owned by the same person as before redevelopment started. Higher property values have resulted in a greatly increased tax base and revenue to the city. Greatly increased sales in food, entertainment and retail establishments also bring increased sales taxes. The city does not have estimates of these increases.

There has been relatively little protection or development of low income rental housing and there is a long wait to get into what little does exist. Increased rents have forced poorer residents (often seasonal) off the beach front to residence hotels and apartments on back streets.

### **ASSESSING PROJECT SUCCESS...**

#### **...By The Original Goals**

##### **Encourage preservation, rehabilitation, and adaptive reuse of historic buildings**

- Incentives (especially on the main commercial and entertainment streets) are encouraging rapid rehabilitation and the insertion of new uses. Few historical buildings were lost (and no more are being or will be lost). Historical designations and zoning ordinances are working well.

##### **Attract attention, new private investment, and new life to a deteriorating neighborhood.**

- The plan has been very successful in this respect. The

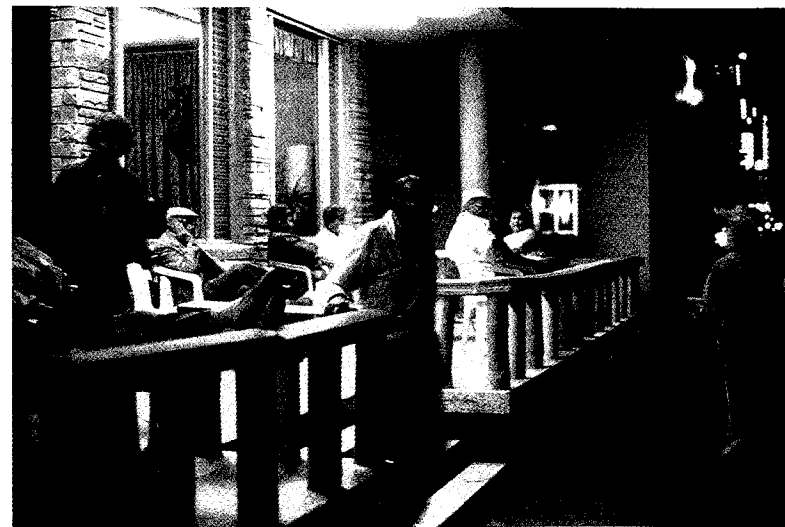
area has received a great deal of private investment, leveraged by limited public investment. It has also received a tremendous amount of publicity, including in the worldwide fashion press. The area remains a vital, ethnically mixed neighborhood, while at the same time supporting an active tourist and entertainment business.

##### **Enhance pedestrian activity and use of recreational and other public open space.**

- Ocean Drive supports intense strolling activity by tourists and visitors who check out the scene and "crawl" from one watering hole to the next. The park has a variety of uses, from passive (sitting and watching) to active (children's play, roller skating).

##### **Encourage citizen involvement in planning and design.**

- Involvement was strongest by owners and other



*Ocean Drive at night.*

organized interests (such as historic preservationists). The level of input from citizens in general (such as residents) appears to have been somewhat limited, although many presentations were made and formalized opportunities, such as public hearings, were available.

### ...By Selection Committee Concerns

#### Who uses the area? Were the original inhabitants pushed out? Do they support the changes?

- The neighborhood has remained ethnically and economically diverse. It is now about 50% Hispanic, has many Jews, Europeans, blacks, and others, and demonstrates a lively street life.
- However, there are fewer lower-middle income elderly Jews there for the winter and they are being forced to move a block or two away from the beach by higher rents and rehabs. Little attention was given to this issue in planning or administering the programs.
- Reports from social service agencies vary: some applaud the changes in the neighborhood as having contributed to safety, and brought jobs and other improvements. Others expressed some concerns about the effect on elderly Jewish residents who have been dislocated.

#### Develop As a Tourist and Entertainment Center

- The Art Deco structures were correctly seen as a potential backdrop to attract younger, more affluent, more fashionable bar and restaurant patrons, European tourists, and fashion models and photographers (who make this seasonal or year round headquarters).

#### What is the interaction between the streetscape or street life and the Art Deco buildings?

- There is a strong tie, with sidewalk cafes on the street and terraces in the Art Deco hotels providing an active transition zone. The architecture of the buildings provides the backdrop that sets the tone for the stylish people and activities of the district.

#### Why was the sidewalk widened? Who decided? How does it work?

- The original sidewalk was extremely narrow. The city proposed widening and it was supported by the property owners. The widened sidewalk promotes street life (strolling and sidewalk cafes) and is an essential ingredient to the success of the area.

#### Is it a real, vital neighborhood?

- Yes. It is ethnically and economically diverse. It offers a variety of housing choices and a balance of commercial, retail, tourist, and recreational opportunities. Several informants commented that "it's real; it doesn't look like a stage set." The street life on Ocean Drive, however, are from Miami and farther afield, rather than locals.

#### Has traffic increased and, if so, what is the effect?

- Traffic has increased, as has demand for parking. Ocean Drive is jammed in the later evening and parking is hard to find. The city has built a new Deco style parking garage and instituted other measures. Another garage and strategies to reduce demand are being considered.

### ...By Other Concerns

#### Will Success Fade If Art Deco or This Area Goes Out of Fashion?

- The area is extremely trendy and may have reached its peak before rehabilitation is complete. Since selection as a finalist, the area has been featured in *Newsweek*, the *New York Times* and the *Los Angeles Times*, among others.

#### Is it a Unique Setting or Can It Be a Model? Exemplary features include:

- **Innovative zoning** (mixed use entertainment) with incentives to renovate hotels. Miami Beach is now using this approach in several other areas.
- Clear commitment and workable mechanism for **ongoing management**, communications, promotion, and problem solving (through the Ocean Drive Association). Good cooperation among parties.
- A **public-private partnership**, with lots of private investment.
- **Unique features** include: having a significant concentration of art deco building, and having street access to the beach.

### SELECTION COMMITTEE COMMENTS

The Selection Committee felt that the Ocean Drive Improvement Program was very successful in providing a means of preserving, restoring and adaptively reusing its large stock of Art Deco buildings. The street improvements (sidewalks, lighting, parking) have also been successful in supporting the tremendous economic development of the

Ocean Drive area and the creation of a vibrant tourist and entertainment area.

The Selection Committee had some concerns, however, about both the breadth of focus of the planning process and the aesthetic quality of one part of the design work. In particular, they criticized the limited degree to which the planners involved and were sensitive to the needs of the least powerful community members — elderly Jewish and low income Hispanic residents. The planning process was quite participatory and democratic for those who were included — mostly building owners and restaurant or hotel operators. Renters and others from the neighborhood, however, appear to have been largely excluded. The Selection Committee was also critical of some aspects of the Lummus Park restoration (e.g., poor landscaping, prematurely deteriorating walks, “atrocious” benches).

The Selection Committee saw the Ocean Drive Improvement Project as a successful example of what they called a “first generation” historic preservation project, which focussed on saving and reusing historic buildings. They suggested that a “second generation” preservation program would have focussed more on broader issues of the viability of the neighborhood and its people.

#### For More Information...

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