
WOLPERT APARTMENTS

2500–2512 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PRESERVATION OFFICER
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE
WOLPERT APARTMENTS
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Passed and
Adopted on _____ 9/16/2003

Resolution No. _____ HEPB-2003-51

Appealed to
City Commission
And Modified on _____ 2/26/2004

Resolution No. _____ R-2004-121

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Names:

Wolpert Apartments

Current Name:

None

Location:

2500–2512 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

J & J Florida Properties
9340 SW 103rd Street
Miami, FL 33176-3056

Present Use:

Commercial/Residential

Zoning District:

C-1, with an SD-20 Overlay

Tax Folio Number:

01-3230-023-0120

Boundary Description:

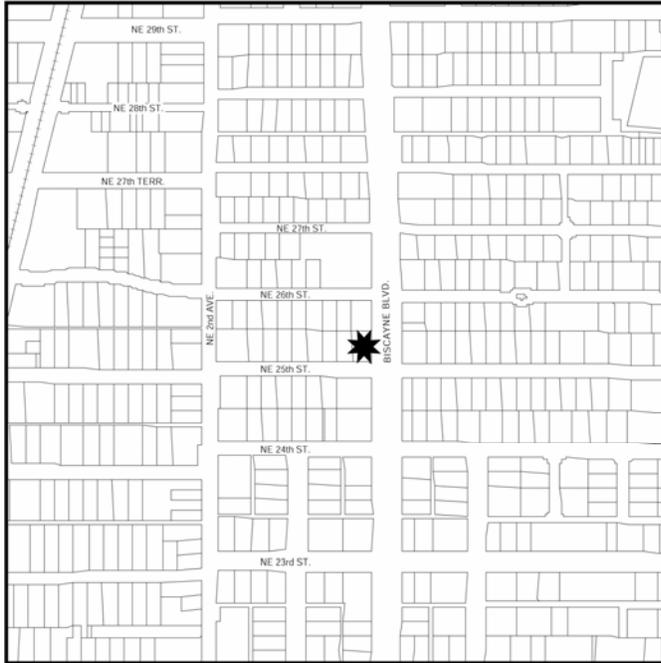
A portion of the westerly 15 feet of Lot 1 and all of Lot 2 of Block 2 of the plat of BIRD'S SUBDIVISION, as recorded in Plat Book 4, at Page 82, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida, further described as the 1927 portion of the building, as shown as the shaded portion on the attached map entitled "Wolpert Apartments – Site Plan."

Classification:

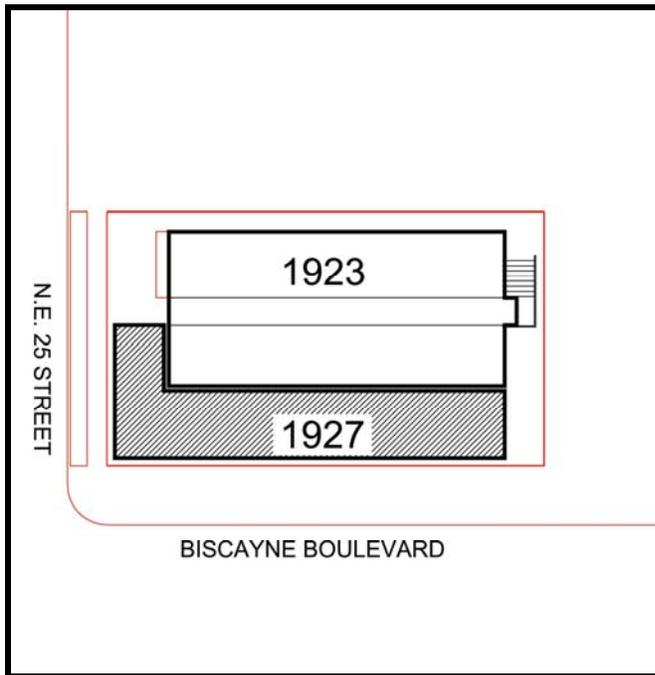
Historic Site

WOLPERT APARTMENTS

2500-2512 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD




location




site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

Original Building - 1924
Addition - 1927

Architects:

Original Building - Unknown
Addition - C. C. Weber and Alexander D. Lewis

Builder/Contractor:

Harrison Construction Company

Statement of Significance:

The Wolpert Apartments is significant for its historical associations with the early efforts of the Biscayne Boulevard Company to establish a world-class shopping district in the heart of Miami during a time of nationwide depression. The building is architecturally significant as a fine example of Mediterranean Revival design applied to a mixed-use building. The Wolpert Apartments is further distinguished because of its innovative siting characteristics and mix of residential and commercial uses. The addition to the building just three years after its construction reflects the progressive concepts of the Biscayne Boulevard Company, who created not only a shopping area, but a residential center as well. This mixed-use concept is today a major component for urban revitalization plans. Further, architects Weber and Lewis, who were responsible for creating the initial architectural theme for Biscayne Boulevard, designed the addition to the building.

When the great stock market crash occurred in 1929, South Florida already was experiencing the punishing financial losses that affected so many households and businesses. Still, some major infrastructure improvements were accomplished despite the overall bleakness of the economy. One of those accomplishments was the creation of a major north-south thoroughfare, named "Biscayne Boulevard" for its proximity to Biscayne Bay.

Florida's Land Boom reached its zenith in 1925 and created new cities across South Florida. Infrastructure improvements, and particularly roadways, could barely keep up with demand. In Miami, there was no adequate stretch of pavement that would lead commuters from Downtown to new cities like Miami Shores to the north.

The developers of Miami Shores, Hugh Anderson and Roy C. Wright, were instrumental in the creation of Biscayne Boulevard. They organized the Shoreland Company and, in December 1924, began selling lots in Miami Shores. The building of the roadway was a monumental task as its course ran through both improved and unimproved sections of the city, and required millions of dollars to complete. During the boulevard's construction, 85 buildings were demolished, at least 12 houses were moved to new locations, and several houses were cut in half, or had their front porches removed.

Unfortunately, the Shoreland Company was unable to complete the work and, in 1926, was bought out by Henry Phipps of the U.S. Steel Corporation. The Phipps family formed the Biscayne Boulevard Company, later known as Bessemer Properties, and completed construction of the boulevard. They also purchased most of the property fronting on Biscayne Boulevard between NE 13th Street and NE 40th Street, with the intention of making it the premier shopping area in Miami. Biscayne Boulevard was opened to automobile traffic in March 1927. When the Company deeded the right-of-way to the City of Miami, the property was said to be worth \$3.6 million.

Biscayne Boulevard was touted as "the Fifth Avenue of the South," and by 1930 major retailers built significant stores there between NE 13th Street and NE 16th Street. They included Burdines Department Store, the Sears, Roebuck Building and the Shrine Building.

The Wolpert Apartments was built before the Biscayne Boulevard Company formulated its master plan to create an impressive boulevard. Before Biscayne Boulevard was cut through, the street to the east of the building was called NE 3rd Avenue and was 60 feet in width. When Biscayne Boulevard was completed, the width was increased to 100 feet. The Wolpert Apartments was allowed to remain, as it was entirely consistent with and complimentary to the exotic Mediterranean Revival style architectural character that the Biscayne Boulevard Company wished to convey. What the building lacked, however, was a commercial component. The major addition made to the apartments installed that essential retail element, adding another mixed-use building to the boulevard. After the retail space was added, the building housed the Handy Andy hardware store and an All States Grocery store.

The Wolpert Apartments displays many of the essential characteristics of the Mediterranean Revival architectural style, and while the ornament is more restrained, it is a fine example of the style. The term "Mediterranean Revival" is today the widely accepted description for the combination of elements inspired by Spanish, Italian and North African prototypes. The hallmarks of the style include masonry construction with broad areas of uninterrupted surfaces covered with stucco that is frequently textured; cast stone or concrete ornament typically reserved for the embellishment of windows and doorways; a combination of roof slopes including flat, gabled and sometimes hipped; the use of arcades, loggias, and colonnades to provide sheltering, yet open areas; the juxtaposition of one

and multiple stories; the use of towers, particularly at the corners; clay barrel tile roofing; wrought iron accent grilles or gates; cast concrete applied ornament; and plan shapes that create courtyard spaces.

The Wolpert Apartments also represents an approach to urban living that is emulated today for its success in energizing previously decaying areas in center cities. The mixed-use approach, which provides for living, working and shopping all in the same area, is not a new concept. For Biscayne Boulevard, however, it was realized on a grand scale and with great attention to harmony of style, landscape and pedestrian amenities.

In another insightful planning principal, the Biscayne Boulevard buildings were to have their parking areas located in the rear. The result was a pleasing and continuous row of distinguished building elevations, and allowed for landscaping and seating areas that embellished the street and made walking a pleasant experience.

In a promotional brochure published in 1930, the Biscayne Boulevard Company said this:

Biscayne Boulevard Shopping Center is NEW. The street itself is new.... Built according to the standards of the new merchandising age...an impressive group of new buildings house the many firms which today, are changing the habits of thousands of shoppers...influencing them to dodge the narrow one-way streets and inadequate parking facilities of the old business section and to enjoy the comforts afforded by the completion of this magnificent new street. It is the one location that can furnish the convenience of proper and adequate parking space due to the provision by the Biscayne Boulevard Company for parking in the rear of the Boulevard buildings.

The architects for the addition to the Wolpert Apartments were charged by the Biscayne Boulevard Company with creating the initial architectural theme for the boulevard. Those architects, C. C. Weber and Alexander Lewis, were responsible for the design of many of the Biscayne Boulevard buildings between 1926 and 1928. Weber and Lewis were particularly adept at Mediterranean Revival design, the prominent theme until 1930, when Art Deco became the preferred style.

Alexander Lewis' office was located in Buena Vista. He designed such important buildings as the Firestone Tire and Rubber Company on Flagler Street and the Sterling Building on Lincoln Road in Miami Beach.

For Biscayne Boulevard, the team designed the Nolan-Peeler Motors Building at 2044 Biscayne Boulevard in 1928 (demolished), the Algonquin Apartments (by attribution) at 1819-1825 Biscayne Boulevard in 1924 (demolished), the 1927 addition to the Priscilla Apartments at 1845 Biscayne Boulevard (demolished) and the Gold Coast Pharmacy at 2419 Biscayne Boulevard in 1926.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Wolpert Apartments has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City of Miami; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economical, or social trends of the community.

The Wolpert Apartments reflects the historical, cultural, economical and social development trends of Miami. The building remains as one of the few surviving buildings that illustrate the grand plans once envisioned for Biscayne Boulevard. They are particularly important as they represent a building that actually pre-dated the master plan for the boulevard, but was retained because it was consistent with the overall architectural theme. The Wolpert Apartments was further adapted to the grand plan when an addition, consisting of commercial storefronts and additional apartments, was added in 1927.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The Wolpert Apartments is a fine example of Mediterranean Revival design applied to a mixed-use building. Mediterranean Revival design is an eclectic derivation of architectural prototypes in countries bordering the Mediterranean Sea. In this case, the designers favor a more restrained treatment that is reminiscent of ancient classical influences in Italy.

6. Is the outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

Prominent architects C. C. Weber and Alexander D. Lewis designed the 1927 addition to the Wolpert Apartments. The team set the tone for the architectural design of Biscayne Boulevard from its very beginnings, and is responsible for the comprehensive approach that once characterized Biscayne Boulevard. The Wolpert Apartments is an outstanding example of their adaptation of existing buildings to their architectural design scheme.

7. Contains elements of design, detail, materials, or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The combination of residential and commercial uses in an urban area was an innovative concept for Miami at the time the Wolpert Apartments was constructed.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The Wolpert Apartments faces east onto Biscayne Boulevard and is located at the northwest corner of NE 25th Street and Biscayne Boulevard. The building occupies 111 feet of frontage on Biscayne Boulevard and has a zero-foot setback. There is no dedicated parking lot; residents park on Biscayne Boulevard.

A contemporary commercial building is located immediately to the north of the Wolpert Apartments.

There are no landscape features on the property.

Original 1924 Building:

The original building was designed solely for apartment use, and was oriented towards NE 25th Street. The building featured an asymmetrical composition with the southeast corner bay most prominent. Here the building featured a one-story, two-bay arcade, above which was a two-story, projecting bay that functioned as a tower and terminated the design. The ornament was classically inspired and included a flush cornice with roundel decorative details, quoining on the corners and spandrels that contained swags and cartouches. The regular placement of French doors leading to shallow balconies conveyed a restrained, dignified building type.

The 1927 Addition:

The addition fronts onto Biscayne Boulevard and was built to accommodate the major retail portions of the building. Its L-shaped plan extends from the southeast corner of the apartment building and is three stories in height. The first story projects eastward and is sufficiently deep enough to house a retail establishment. Five broad arches containing the storefronts extend across the façade. These bays have been infilled with brick and a variety of window types and treatments for each of the individual storefronts.

The residential apartments are entered through a doorway on the south elevation. Access to the retail establishments is through doorways in the east elevation. The fenestration throughout the building consists of wooden, double-hung sash windows that are made more prominent by the use of a cast concrete rectangular window surround that features a label mold for the lintel. The north and south elevations feature French doors that open onto narrow balconies.

Quoins are used at each of the corners of the two- and three-story elements. Rectangular panels that contain a cast concrete swag motif are placed within the spandrels between the second and third stories on the east elevation. The cornice is embellished with a series of vents grouped either horizontally or as a rectangle, and a raised relief circular ornament appears at regular intervals across all four elevations.

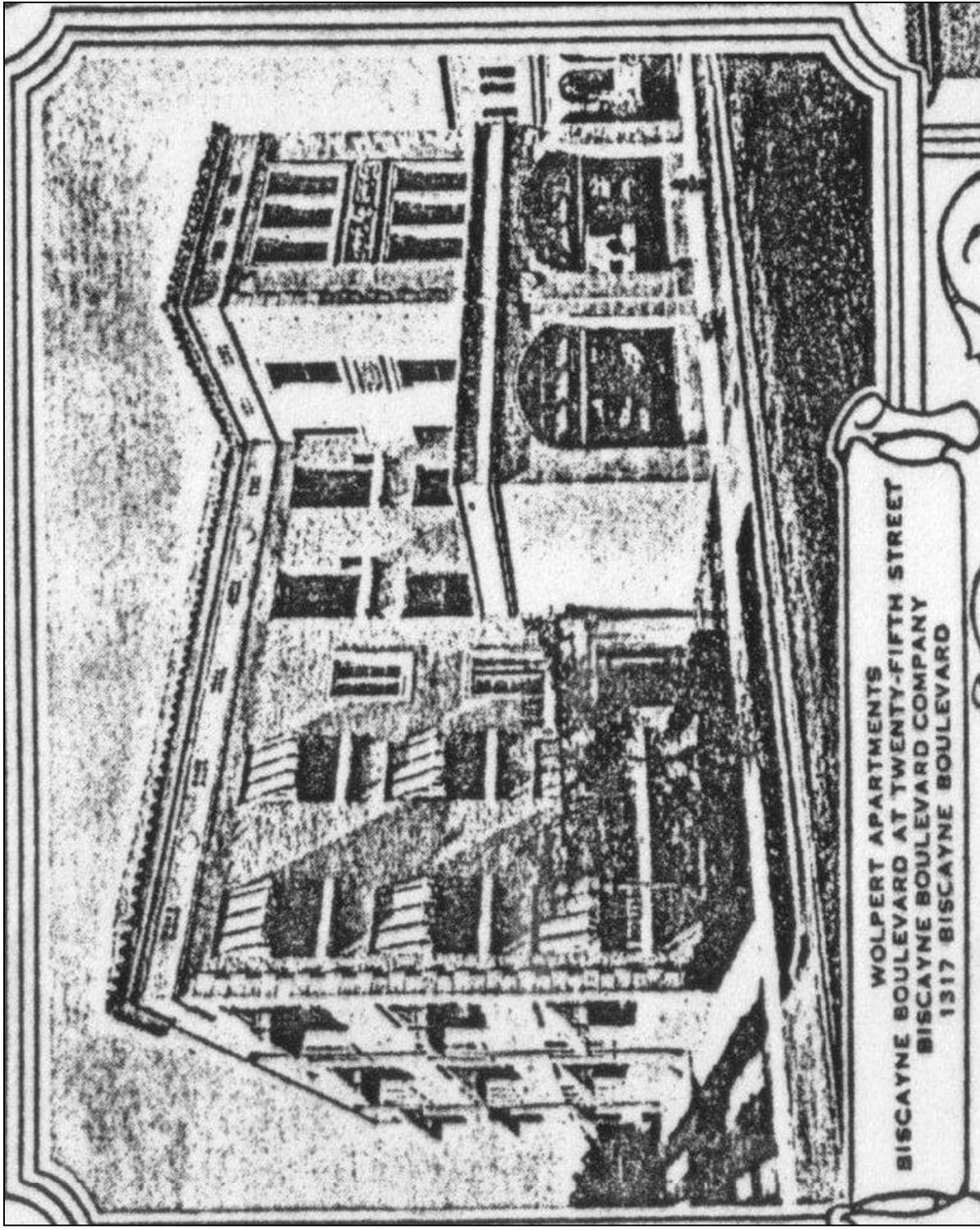
A hipped roof tower terminates the building at the southeast corner. Originally the tower was roofed with clay Mission tiles. They have since been replaced with asphalt shingles.

Contributing Structures and Landscape Features:

The contributing structure within the site is the Wolpert Apartments, as described above. The designation is limited the 1927 portion of the building, pursuant to City Commission Resolution 2003-190, adopted February 26, 2004. There are no contributing landscape features on the site.



Wolpert Apartments
2500–2512 Biscayne Boulevard
South and west façades
2002



Wolpert Apartments
2500-2512 Biscayne Boulevard
South and west façades
Illustration from a Promotional Pamphlet entitled "City of Miami: Miami by the Sea"

c. 1927

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Both the retail and residential parts of the Wolpert Apartments building are occupied. However, the storefronts along Biscayne Boulevard have been visually altered by the infilling of the bays. The infill is different for each bay, and none of them are sensitive to maintaining the character of the original building. The infill is the result of security concerns, but there are other less visually obtrusive methods to deter theft. In many respects, this building is remarkable as it does retain much of its original decorative ornament. Further, many of the original wooden windows have been retained.

Preservation Incentives:

The infilling of the commercial storefronts is, relatively, an easily reversible alteration. Likewise, the window air-conditioning units could be easily removed and the walls repaired in the event a central air-conditioning system was installed. Because the Wolpert Apartments is a distinctive reminder of the history of the city, and the building is architecturally distinguished, the market for the apartments in a rehabilitated condition would be strong.

With the construction of the new Performing Arts Center at NE 13th Street and Biscayne Boulevard well underway, the area should see increasing vitality in the future. Should the owners wish to invest in an upgrade, the increased property tax resulting from a higher assessed value could be deferred for a period of 10 years under the Miami-Dade County ad valorem tax incentive ordinance.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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