
SHRINE BUILDING
1401-1417 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
SHRINE BUILDING
AS A HISTORIC SITE

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Passed and
Adopted on _____ 10/21/03

Resolution No. _____ HEPB-2003-64

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Shrine Building

Current Name:

Boulevard Shops

Location:

1401-1417 Biscayne Boulevard
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Richwood Inc.
One Herald Plaza, 6th Floor
Miami, FL 33132

Present Use:

Commercial

Zoning District:

SD-6

Tax Folio Number:

01-3231-012-0050

Boundary Description:

Lot 11 (less street) and Lot 12 of Block 1 of the plat of PERSHING COURT, as recorded in Plat Book 4 at Page 147 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

Historic Site

SHRINE BUILDING

1401-1417 BISCAYNE BOULEVARD



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1930

Architect:

Robert Law Weed

Builder/Contractor:

Harrison Construction Company

Statement of Significance:

The Shrine Building is a remarkable legacy of the vision once held for Biscayne Boulevard as a high-end shopping district dubbed the "Fifth Avenue of the South." The Biscayne Boulevard Company designed the Boulevard as a self-sufficient shopping experience where the consumer could fulfill every need. The major buildings constructed by 1930 included the Shrine Building, Burdines Department Store and Sears, Roebuck and Company. Together, they were a striking ensemble of "modern" buildings that were designed in the then-popular Art Deco style. The Shrine Building, designed by well-known architect Robert Law Weed, is a particularly fine example of the style.

When the great stock market crash occurred in 1929, South Florida had already begun 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.

As Florida's Land Boom created new cities across South Florida, roadway improvements could barely keep up with the demand. In particular, there was no adequate stretch of pavement that would lead commuters from Downtown Miami to new cities like Miami Shores on the north and Coral Gables on the south.

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 their front porches were 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.

In organizing a unifying theme to the Boulevard, the merchants who formed the Biscayne Boulevard Association in 1926 recognized the need for the regulation of signage, and a design scheme for light standards and traffic control devices. After an international design competition, the New York firm of S. Grillo, who offered design solutions using classically inspired motifs, was selected. Landscaping was another important consideration, and royal palm trees lined the street, becoming a signature element of Biscayne Boulevard.

Biscayne Boulevard was touted as “the Fifth Avenue of the South,” and by 1930 the company had built a group of buildings between NE 13th Street and NE 16th Street on Biscayne Boulevard. They included Burdines Department Store, the Sears, Roebuck Building and the Shrine Building. All were designed in the new architectural style that had recently been adopted by the Biscayne Boulevard Company—Art Deco.

The earliest tenants of the building at 1401 Biscayne Boulevard included the Mahi Shrine Temple, Ancient Arabic Order Nobles of the Mystic Shrine (AAONMS). The Shrine occupied the second floor from 1930–1943. The long-term association earned the building its commonly used name, the Shrine Building.

Tenants on the first floor included the Piggly-Wiggly grocery store, Biscayne-Page Electric Company, and the John Turner Piano Store. Other tenants in 1930 were the Home Drug Store and the Burroughs Adding Machine Company.

The Shrine Building is an outstanding example of Art Deco style architecture, which in 1930 was the prevailing style nationwide, although it had just recently been introduced into South Florida. The quality of the design is particularly noteworthy in its interpretation by Robert Law Weed. While the ornamentation in the spandrels commonly occurs elsewhere, the use of a coral rock veneer and the inclusion of the sculpted Seminole Indians are allusions to a specific place, South Florida. Another adaptation for Miami is to employ a setback between the second and third stories to create a full-length outdoor balcony, where tenants could enjoy the glorious Miami weather. While Weed conveys the sleekness of the Art Deco style in the emphasis on its horizontal and vertical planes, he included details, such as the corbelled balconet and Seminole Indian busts on the corner, which depart from the modern flavor of the building.

Architect Robert Law Weed (1896–1961) was born in Pennsylvania and studied at Carnegie Tech in Pittsburgh. Weed came to Miami in 1919 and was soon in demand for the design of both residential and commercial structures. In 1925, along with architects John and Coulton Skinner and R. F. Ware, Weed was selected to design the Italian Village in George Merrick’s Coral Gables.

During the 1930s, Weed designed the Miami Shores Elementary School (1930), the Florida Tropical Home for the “Century of Progress” Exhibition at the Chicago World’s Fair (1933) and the General Electric Model Home in Miami Beach (1935). Weed continued to enjoy success in later life, and was the designer of the Master Plan for the University of Miami in Coral Gables, Burdines on Miami Beach, and the Dadeland Mall in Miami.

Weed is among the few architects whose body of work makes a successful transition from the Mediterranean Revival style preferred in the Boom period, through the Art Deco/Moderne period to the International Style.

In 1969, the Castro Convertible furniture merchants purchased the Shrine Building. The company remained as the major tenant of the building until it was sold in November 1979 to Biscayne Properties. Architect Andres Fabregas was hired to remodel the building for a series of approximately 20 shops to form a *galleria*. At the same time, a one-story addition was made to the northeast corner of the building. In 1989, Knight-Ridder Inc., owners of the nearby *Miami Herald* newspaper, purchased the building.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As described above, the Shrine Building 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 Shrine Building reflects the historical, cultural, economical and social development trends of Miami during the later 1920s and early 1930s. The Shrine Building was one of many stores built by the Biscayne Boulevard Company in an effort to establish a new shopping area for Greater Miami. This type of business development, which called for a complete shopping area, carefully designed for beauty and comfort, and away from the downtown, was the forerunner of the modern shopping center.

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

The Shrine Building is one of the finest examples of Art Deco style commercial architecture in Miami. The building is particularly noteworthy for its massing and application of stylized decoration.

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

The Shrine Building was designed by Robert Law Weed, a prominent local architect, and is one of his finest examples of Art Deco style architecture.

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 Shrine Building displays a wealth of detail and texture resulting from the use of the coral rock cladding, the relief panels and the decorative figures at the corners of the building's principal elevation. The building also features an outdoor balcony, which is an adaptation to the warm climate of South Florida.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The Shrine Building faces west onto Biscayne Boulevard and is located at the northeast corner of Biscayne Boulevard and NE 14th Street. The building has a zero-foot setback on Biscayne Boulevard. Behind it to the east and the north is a surface parking lot, under different ownership.

West (Front) Elevation:

The Shrine Building is arranged with a rectangular central block flanked by two smaller building blocks that recede from the plane established by the first story, and extend from the plane established by the second and third stories. The northern and southernmost ends contain an entry portal on the first floor and a corbelled balconet above, which define the central bay. The central block rises to a three-story height, but the actual interior space contained within incorporates that double volume for a meeting hall.

The plane of the building steps back at the second and third stories, creating an ample balcony that stretches across the entire width of the center bay. The first floor contains a series of storefronts that, while altered, still convey the sense of openness found in the original. The third floor features a series of evenly placed rectangular windows that function like a clerestory, separated by a series of fluted pilasters. The second floor repeats the third story fenestration.

The two-story blocks that terminate the building on the north and south ends of the west elevation are richly ornamented. The block is divided into three bays by means of three evenly spaced rectangular windows on the second story that are separated by fluted pilasters which extend to the first floor. The spandrels between the first and second stories feature stylized vegetation and fans in relief.

Sculpted three-quarter-length figures of Seminole Indians, featuring a wealth of detail, terminate the corners of the end bays, and are almost freestanding.

The windows of the second floor have been replaced; however because the mullions give the appearance of a multi-paned window, they have a minimal impact on the building's integrity.

North and South (Side) Elevations:

The geometry established in the main elevation continues around to the sides of the Shrine Building. Fluted pilasters that convey a strong vertical element separate

windows on the second and third stories. Spandrels between the first and second stories feature the intricate relief ornamentation of the main elevation.

The windows are recessed and feature a substantial projecting sill. The effect of this treatment is to give further dimension to the building, as the windows allow for the play of light and shadow.

South (Rear) Elevation:

As expected, the rear of the building is less articulated than its public elevations. In the Shrine Building, the central block of the building still reads much like the principal elevation. The windows of the second and third stories are identical to the north elevation, and feature the same separation by a decorative pilaster. Further, the expansive balcony between the second and third stories is continued on this side.

The two flanking blocks on the north and south side are unarticulated and are surfaced with stucco. The first story contains a series of doorways leading into the building.

One-Story Addition to Northeast Corner:

When the building was purchased by Castro Convertible in November 1979, newspaper accounts relate that the new owners planned to build "...a sidewalk café." The addition is sited well back from the plane of the main building and heavily landscaped in front, so the addition itself is not prominent. The design of the building, which features large expanses of glass block, is a contemporary solution that does not relate to the Shrine Building.

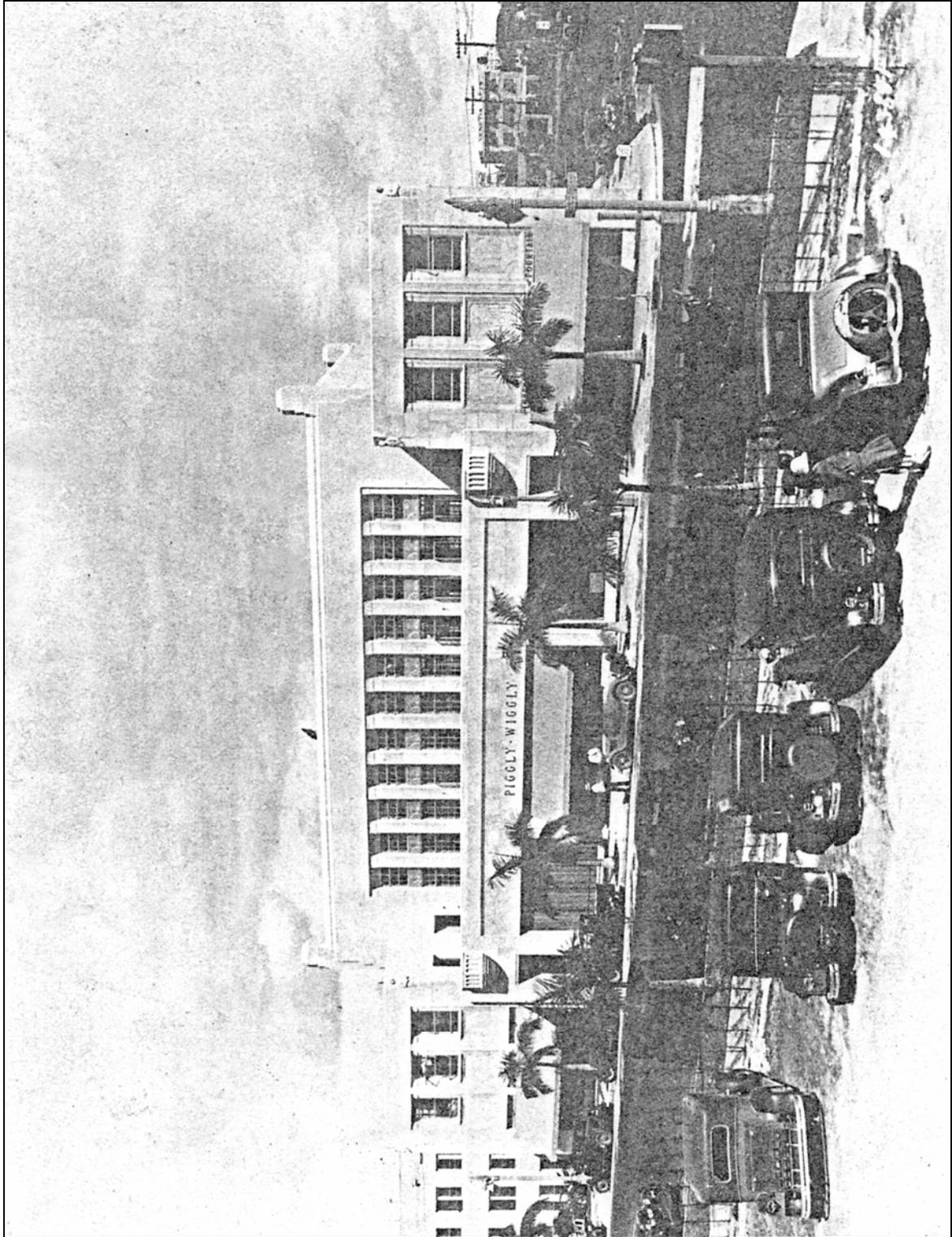
This addition is not within the boundary of the historic site, which includes only the property historically associated with the historic building.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The contributing structure within the site is the Shrine Building as described above.



Shrine Building
1401-1417 Biscayne Boulevard
West (front) and north façades
2002



Shrine Building
1401-1417 Biscayne Boulevard
West (front) façade
June 13, 1929

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

Presently, the Shrine Building is occupied and well maintained. It is in close proximity to Cesar Pelli's Performing Arts Center, now under construction. When completed, the Performing Arts Center will bring new vitality to Biscayne Boulevard, and the owners of the Shrine Building should see an increase in its value.

Preservation Incentives:

At present, there seems to be no need for major repairs or a change in the function of the building. After experiencing the effects of the Performing Arts Center's proximity, the owners may see a need to adapt the building for other uses. If so, any increase in value, as a result of improvements, could be exempted from the ad valorem portion of Miami-Dade County taxes.

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