

## **North Shore Historic District**

The North Shore Historic District in Miami Beach, recently listed on the National Register of Historic Places, comprises one of the city's most intact and coherent concentrations of the Greater Miami area's characteristic brand of mid-20th century resort architecture. The district boundaries generally span from Harding Avenue and Ocean Terrace to the Tatum Waterway, and from 73rd Street to 87th Terrace at the City's northern limit. Within this area are 520 contributing buildings. The contributing buildings, constructed between 1935 and 1963, are mainly examples of small tourist hotels and apartment buildings, with varied commercial structures clustered along Collins Avenue between 73<sup>rd</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> Streets.

North Shore was founded on the pragmatic planning of the engineer's grid and its development as a coherent district owes much to the repetition of similar building types and styles within a compact space. North Shore, was largely built up after World War II, and its development was solidly calibrated to the garden-oriented planning, architectural vocabulary and representational motifs of mid-century America. Its mostly flat-roofed buildings, faced in field stone, slump brick, patterned stucco and perforated concrete screens, punctuated by idiosyncratic pylon forms, projecting concrete fins and decorative modern metal-works, and wrapped around intimate garden patios, convey an architectural sensibility characteristic of the middleclass, tropical resort that flourished in the North Beach area. This style has recently become known as "Miami Modernism" (MiMO).

North Shore was initially conceived as a district of homes. However, starting in the 1930's, its grid-based platting was more intensively developed with modern garden apartment building types that sponsored a corresponding urban culture in both the civic and commercial realm. Adapted to both the platting and local environment conditions with patios, surrounding gardens, porches, loggias and exterior staircases and catwalks, these small garden apartment buildings also illustrate a rich variety of popular architectural themes.

A number of significant geographical features also define the North Shore district. On the east side, North Shore Open Space Park provides a broad and natural park frontage. Further to the east is the Atlantic Ocean, whose beaches constitute one of the most important lures to the neighborhood. At the southeast corner of the district, the hotels and apartment buildings of Ocean Terrace in the Harding Townsite face directly to this coastal stretch. The west side of the district is formed by the Tatum Waterway, an inland channel whose two sides are lined with small contributing apartment buildings. The district's southern boundary is marked by North Shore Park, whose eastern terminus on the ocean is marked by the North Shore Bandshell at 7250 Collins Avenue (Norman M. Giller & Associates, 1961). The bandshell's streamlined proscenium, circular pylons, cantilevered canopies and embracing walls demarcate a theatrical, modern meeting space that is an emblem for the public architecture of mid-century North Beach.

The North Shore Historic District is significant at the local level in the areas of Community Planning and Development and Architecture. This is due to the distinctive layout of the residential and commercial neighborhood, which has been adapted to its artificial island setting and for the variety of its architectural styles that reflect the revival styles and modern movements in the decade immediately prior to World War II and the impact of a more dynamic modernism in architecture in the post-war era.

By 1925, Miami Beach's 'North Shore' area presented a nearly continuous grid of streets platted with 50-foot lots from 63<sup>rd</sup> Street to 87<sup>th</sup> Terrace. An exception was the swath of territory belonging to the United States Coast Guard (former site of the Biscayne House of Refuge). A large portion of the government tract was surplus by executive order of President Warren G. Harding just after Harding's January 1921 visit to Miami Beach. This surplus land between present day 73<sup>rd</sup> and 75<sup>th</sup> Streets was surveyed and platted by the U.S. Department of Interior, to be known as Harding Townsite. The remaining government tract between 72<sup>nd</sup> and 73<sup>rd</sup> Streets remained under the control of the Coast Guard until 1941 and became today's North Shore Park.<sup>1</sup> The platting of the northern and western fringes of the North Shore district was completed by 1946.

As the district urbanized, it developed an architectural character calibrated to its resort identity, its modest means and its speculative planning. Beginning in the late 1930's, the district was more intensively developed with modern garden apartment building types. Adapted to both the narrow lot structure of the city and local environment conditions with patios, surrounding gardens, porches, loggias, flat roofs with broad overhanging eaves and exterior staircases and catwalks, these small garden apartment buildings, hotels and motels also illustrate a rich variety of popular architectural themes, including Art Deco, Moderne, Post-War Modern and Classical Revival. These new types, multiplied in large numbers, produce a densely built environment where low-scale buildings allow landscaping to moderate the urban frontages. The scale of architecture in the district is largely consistent; a product of the fact that so much of the area was constructed in a short period of time by a relatively small group of architects whose prodigious production literally gave shape to the district. Young architects like Gerard Pitt, Gilbert Fein, Harry O. Nelson, Nathan A. Seiderman, Leonard Glasser, and Donald G. Smith dominated the new construction. Together, these architects defined a new direction of mid-century modern design in Miami Beach. Their buildings, conditioned to the environmental forces of a hot and humid climate as well as to the need to distinguish buildings within a competitive environment, led to a daring and unexpected expression of modern themes. While the vast majority of the district can be characterized as Postwar Modern, this style nonetheless demonstrates a high degree of continuity with earlier architectural trends, including vernacular, Mediterranean and Moderne style buildings.

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<sup>1</sup> The House of Refuge site was, "by authority of Congress, exchanged for a site on Causeway Island, in Biscayne Bay, for the use of the Coast Guard." "Harding Townsite / South Altos Del Mar Historic District Designation Report" (Miami Beach: City of Miami Beach, Planning, Design and Historic Preservation Division) 1966, P. 16.