

**REPORT OF THE CITY OF CORAL GABLES
HISTORICAL RESOURCES & CULTURAL ARTS DEPARTMENT
TO THE HISTORIC PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE DESIGNATION OF
THE PROPERTY AT
720 MADEIRA AVENUE
(AKA 710 OBISPO AVENUE)
CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA**



Historic Photo, May 1993
Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser



LHD 2024-013
December 19, 2024

**LOCAL HISTORIC LANDMARK DESIGNATION:
720 MADEIRA AVENUE, CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA
(AKA 710 OBISPO AVENUE formerly SW 16TH LANE)**

Application: Designation application filed by owner

Historical Resources &
Cultural Arts

2327 SALZEDO STREET
CORAL GABLES
FLORIDA 33134

☎ 305-460-5093
✉ hist@coralgables.com

<u>Folio Numbers:</u>	03-4108-002-0770
<u>Legal Description:</u>	Lot 7, Block 7, Coral Estates Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 19, at Page 7, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida
<u>Original Permit No.:</u>	unknown
<u>Constructed:</u>	1937
<u>Owner/Builder:</u>	M. G. Laigle/Laigle-Built Homes
<u>Original Architect:</u>	<i>attributed to Paist & Steward</i>
<u>Present Owner:</u>	720 Madeira Holdings, LLC
<u>Building Type / Style:</u>	One-story SFR / Minimal Traditional
<u>Site Characteristics:</u>	The property is located on an interior lot on the south side of Madeira Avenue between Cortez and Casilla Streets. The lot dimension is 50' by 145'.

SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The single-family home at 720 Madeira Avenue (aka 710 Obispo Avenue) was built in early 1937 when new construction in south Florida was sparse. Located in the Coral Estates subdivision, the home was in unincorporated Dade County at the time of construction - the subdivision was annexed by Coral Gables in 1948. In late 1936 Marshall Laigle, a construction engineer who had built homes Coral Gables in the 1920s, purchased twenty lots in Coral Estates to build homes that blended with the adjacent Coral Gables aesthetic. Laigle hired the Coral Gables firm of Paist & Steward to design the homes, and he solicited realtor George Merrick, founder of Coral Gables, to handle the sales. For ten homes Laigle secured Federal Housing Administration (FHA) insured loans. Part of the Housing Act of 1934, the loans were to provide affordable homes for families after the lean Depression years. 720 Madeira Avenue was amongst these homes.

The Minimal Traditional home responded to the economics and aesthetics of the times. Renowned architectural historian Virginia McAlester states that "*The Minimal Traditional house was a well-studied and thoughtful response to the most challenging conditions ever to affect home construction in the United States.*" Its simplicity was a response to the economic hardships of the Depression and the burgeoning modern aesthetic of subtle ornamentation and streamlined homes. These homes were well-built, often using modern materials and methods. In Coral Gables a variant of this style emerged in the mid-1930s embracing the Modernistic aesthetic while thoughtfully retaining Mediterranean Revival influences. The home at 720 Madeira Avenue home retains its historic integrity and is an example of how this style manifested in the Coral Gables area.

CORAL GABLES REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES: Preserving the City's Story

The built environment reflects the beliefs, values, creative expressions, and technical capacity at a place in time in history. Historic Preservation preserves those structures and spaces that tell the story of the community's historic past. The buildings that comprise the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places portray the City's story of progress, change and preservation. They are valuable, non-renewable resources that embody our collective heritage. The retention of these tangible touchstones provides a sense of community, a sense of evolution, a sense of identity, a sense of ownership, and a sense of place for the City of Coral Gables. In other words, these historic resources provide continuity and context; they are the foundation of the City's identity.

Coral Gables is a Certified Local Government (CLG) and as such must maintain a Register of Historic Places and abide by associated preservation standards. A local community works through a certification process --jointly administered by the National Park Service (NPS) and the State Historic Preservation Offices (SHPOs)-- to become recognized as a Certified Local Government (CLG). Once certified the community gains access to benefits of the program and agrees to follow required Federal and State requirements.

The City of Coral Gables was certified in 1986 and was amongst the first cities in Florida to become a CLG. Hence, it is the task of Historic Preservation, and an obligation of Certified Local Governments, to identify and protect those resources that contribute to the story of the City over time. Furthermore, the City must abide by the federal regulations as put forth in The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties: with Guidelines for Preserving, Rehabilitating, Restoring, & Reconstructing Buildings.

CRITERIA FOR SIGNIFICANCE

Article 8, Section 8-103 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code--*Criteria for designation of historic landmarks or historic districts*--states that to qualify for designation as a local historic landmark individual properties must have significant character, interest, or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural heritage of the City, state, or nation.

The single-family residence at 720 Madeira Avenue is eligible as a local historic landmark based on its historical, cultural, and architectural significance. For designation, a property must meet **one (1)** of the criteria outlined in the Code. As discussed below, 720 Madeira Avenue meets the following **three (3) criteria**:

A. Historical, Cultural significance

Criterion 4: Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community

B. Architectural significance

Criterion 1: Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more distinctive architectural style

Criterion 2: Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction

HISTORIC CONTEXT

Founding of Coral Gables

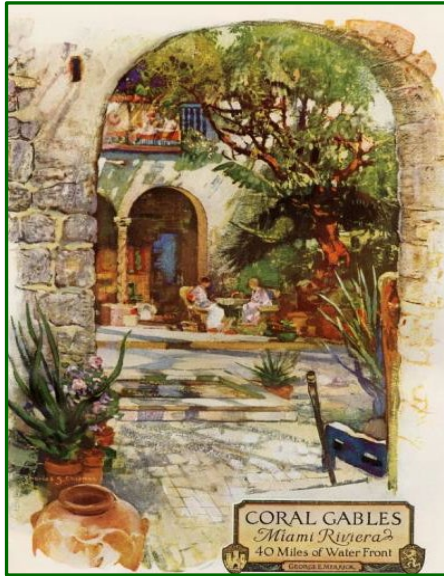
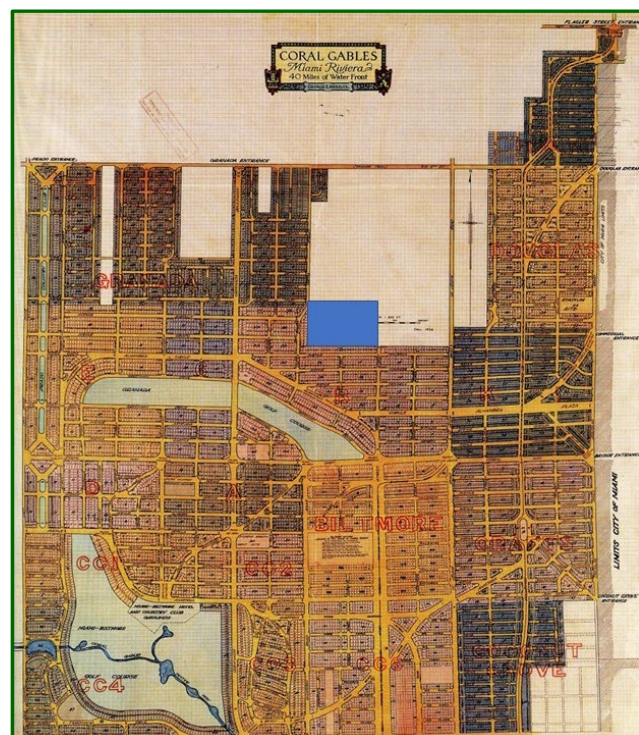
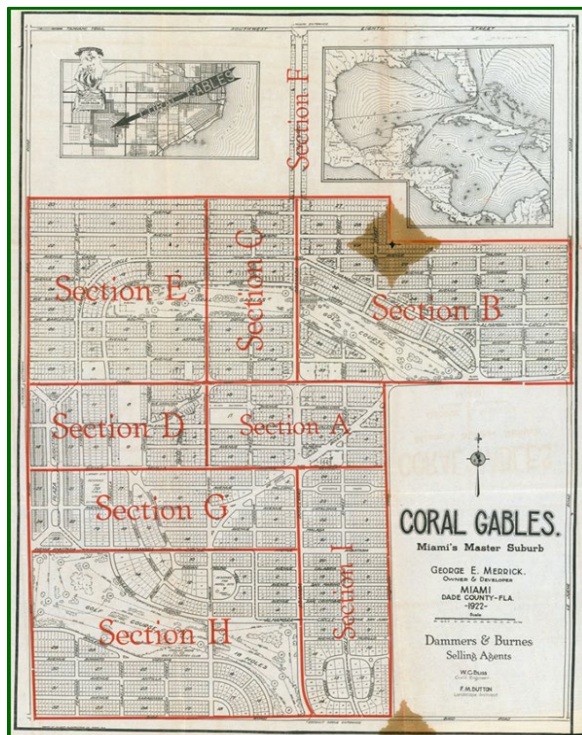


Figure 1: Advertisement in *House Beautiful*, 1925

Coral Gables was originally conceived as suburb of Miami and attracted investors from across the nation during the South Florida real estate boom of the 1920s. Founder George E. Merrick drew from the Garden City and City Beautiful movements to create his vision for a fully-conceived, cohesively-designed, Mediterranean-inspired city. It is now considered one of the first modern planned communities in the United States.

Advised by a design team, Merrick converted 3,000 acres of citrus plantation and native hammock into ornate plazas, grand entrances, parks, monumental buildings, and tree-shaded streets. They felt that Mediterranean architecture harmonized with south Florida's climate and lifestyle and these features were built using elements common in Spanish, Moorish, and Italian architecture. In November 1921 George Merrick publicly launched Coral Gables as "Miami's Master Suburb," placing Section A lots for sale. Throughout the early 1920s Merrick continued to expand. (Figures 2)



**Figures 2: Coral Gables Section Maps
1922 [left]; December 1924 [right]
Blue box: future location of Coral Estates**

Coral Gables was incorporated in 1925 and construction continued rapidly until South Florida was struck by a devastating hurricane in September 1926. This turned the prior land boom to bust and ushered in the Depression-era years. It also stifled, and eventually ended, Merrick's ability to build his vision. Coral Gables fared better than many of the surrounding communities during this lean economic period but there were very few new homes built after 1928 until the early 1940s. When the City began to grow again it embraced new trends and aesthetics.

720 Madeira Avenue is now part of Coral Gables, but when built in 1937 it was in unincorporated Dade County. It is located in the Coral Estates subdivision that was annexed by Coral Gables in 1948. As discussed below, from the inception of the platting of Coral Estates it was meant to harmonize with Coral Gables (Figure 5) and followed the same building trends. Though there were few homes built in the 1930s in the area, the implementation of the New Deal and other incentives led the building industry to experience a small resurgence in the late 1930s and early 1940s. One of the styles that emerged during this time was the Minimal Traditional. 720 Maderia Avenue, as well as other homes throughout Coral Gables and Coral Estates, was designed in this style.

Minimal Traditional (1935-1950) and Federal Housing Administration Program (1934-)

The Minimal Traditional style was a popular national house style that emerged during the New Deal era. Homes of this style were small (2-3 bedrooms) and meant to be affordable for working-class families. It remained prevalent into the 1950s, when it was supplanted by the Ranch style. The popularity of the style was due to its ability to adjust to societal needs. It had three distinct phases. Its inception and rise during the New Deal era were in part due to its capacity to meet the Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan requirements. During this period, it incorporated features from contemporaneous styles. During World War II, it became a simpler home built quickly to accommodate wartime needs. After the war its popularity continued as these homes easily adjusted to fulfill the GI Bill promise that every returning serviceman would be able to purchase a home. During this third phase the style branched in two directions. The first was a return to, or continuance of, the pre-war aesthetics of the style with some modern updates such as the prominence of the garage. The second was a more holistic embrace of modern aesthetics; this is sometimes referred to as Minimal Modern.

In A Field Guide to American Houses Virginia McAlester, a leading architectural historian, provides this insight to the rise of this style:

The Minimal Traditional house was "the little house that could." It was the small house that could be built with FHA-insured loans in the midst of the Great Depression between 1935 and 1940...The Minimal Traditional was a well-studied and thoughtful response to the most challenging conditions ever to affect home construction in the United States. In the early 1930s, the Great Depression virtually shut down the home-building industry.... Banks were going under, mortgages were past due, and there were no funds for new construction. The urgent first step was the creation of new method for insuring long-term, low-interest mortgages. This was accomplished in 1934 through the creation of the FHA, whose goal was to produce small homes the average working American could afford. The FHA not only provided insurance that covered the mortgage loan a bank made, it also prepared publications that showed how to most effectively design a small house.

Architects, desperate for work after 1930, had enthusiastically turned their attention to the design of the small house. Large portions of professional journals were devoted to this subject beginning in the mid-1930s. It was of paramount importance to design the most efficient floor plans, kitchens, and baths since every extra square foot added to the cost. A high home cost both limited the market and made it harder to qualify for the all-important FHA loan insurance. At that time, the FHA, along with its associated Fannie Mae, limited the maximum sales price of homes they would insure so that the average home size and cost remained within the reach of a broad market.

In the 1930s, Minimal Traditional single-family homes appeared throughout the country as architectural journals and magazines promoted it and as it easily adapted to qualify for FHA-insured loans. Its simplicity was a response to the economic hardships of the Depression and the burgeoning modern aesthetic of subtle ornamentation and streamlined homes. Typically, Minimal Traditional homes were one-story with low or moderate roof pitches, prominent exterior chimneys, integral garages, and well-considered floor plans. These homes were well-built, often using modern materials (i.e., plywood, modern cement mixtures) and methods (i.e., solar). This style also focused on practicality and included the emerging trend of attached garages. Minimal Traditional homes combined a restrained variety of features from earlier ornate house styles with the contemporary Modernistic aesthetic. In general, common influences on Minimal Traditional style homes across the nation were Colonial Revival, Arts and Crafts, and Tudor styles. However, the Minimal Traditional style was flexible and could embrace various features and hence, led to area-specific, and sometimes architect-specific, variations. In South Florida an area-specific version arose from the melding of elements from the former Mediterranean-inspired architecture with the Modernistic aesthetic.

In Coral Gables, by the mid-1930s there was a distinct departure from the ornamented and picturesque Mediterranean Revival style that had dominated the City's landscape since its inception. Minimal Traditional houses in Coral Gables most often reflected this precursor style as well as the dominant regional style of Art Deco. Specifically, Minimal Traditional style homes in Coral Gables tended to reflect Mediterranean Revival style influences with features such barrel tile roofs, grouped vents, arched openings and prominent chimneys. The Art Deco influences often included eyebrows, corner windows, floral motif elements, and wide eaves. The overall Modernistic aesthetic included smooth stucco, an overall horizontal emphasis, fenestration without sills or lintels, curving and geometric forms, and simplified roof types.

The home at 720 Maderia Avenue was built in 1937 during the style's first phase. As discussed below it was designed specifically to meet FHA loan insurance requirements. It incorporated elements from the Mediterranean Revival and Modernistic styles – purposefully in keeping with the aesthetic of the adjacent Coral Gables.

Coral Estates

The Coral Estates Section was platted in May 1925 by the Merchant Home Builders. (Figures 10) It was part of a 40-acre tract in unincorporated Dade County held by Miami pioneer James Girtman since 1901. Coral Gables developed around the Girtman tract. Coral Estates was located at the southwestern corner of the tract and shared borders with Coral Gables. (Figure 3 & 4) Despite opposition from Girtman, in 1948 Coral Estates and his adjacent subdivision Coral Groves, was annexed into the City of Coral Gables.

James Davis Girtman (1874-1960), born in Decatur, Georgia, grew up on a 65-acre orange grove farm in Lake Apopka, Florida. After a series of hard freezes, the Girtmans relocated south to Miami. In 1900, Girtman took a six-month job in Honduras managing over 30,000 acres of coconut and citrus trees. In July 1900, he returned to Miami opened a grocery store on Flagler Street across from the courthouse. Nearby, his brother, William Horne Girtman, owned the W. H. Girtman Saloon. Girtman traded with the Indians for furs and hides which led to a long-lasting friendship. Often after trading they would sleep in the back of his store. Girtman later recounted how they would help themselves to breakfast from the store and they would settle up based on the number of empty cans when he arrived in the morning. Girtman was the first ‘white man’ invited to the Seminoles’ “Green Corn Dance,” an annual tribal council meeting held in the Everglades. In 1917, Girtman appeared before a Congressional Committee on Investigation of the Indian Service (House of Representatives) to testify on their behalf.

At the turn of the century, Girtman bought the groves that stretched from what is now Madeira Avenue to Tamiami Trail (Eighth Street) to the north; from Cortez Street to the west and to just west of Salzedo Street to the east. (Figures 2) In 1902, James spearheaded an effort to raise money to build Le Jeune Road, a portion of which would run through his groves. In 2004, the City of Coral Gables erected a historic marker commemorating Le Jeune Road as a State Historic Roadway. It acknowledges Girtman as the driving force behind its construction. Around 1915, the Girtman family moved “to the edge of town” to permanently settle on their grove.

In 1925, as Coral Gables continued to grow, Girtman decided to develop the southern section of his land along SW 16th Terrace and Lane. In March he platted Coral Groves on the portion east of SW 44th Street (renamed Segovia Street) shown in orange in Figure 4. He retained ownership of this subdivision and built a new home in it at 1800 Le Jeune Road (2007, designated a Local Historic Landmark). In May he sold the eastern portion, shown in blue in Figure 4 to Merchant Home Builders who platted it as Coral Estates. (Figures 9) They leaned heavily on the proximity to Coral Gables amenities and stated that it would have the same “wise and careful restrictions—identical of Coral Gables which assures character, refinement and utmost desirability.” (Figures 5)

Figure 4: Launching Coral Estates
Location in Unincorporated Dade County
Blue: Coral Estates; Orange: Coral Groves

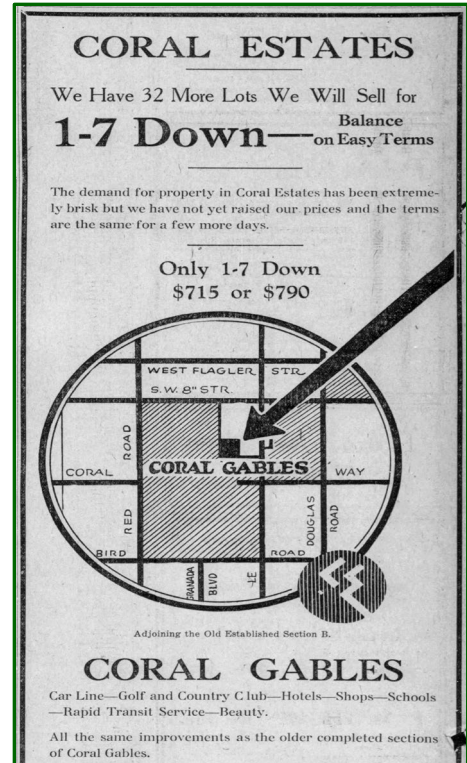
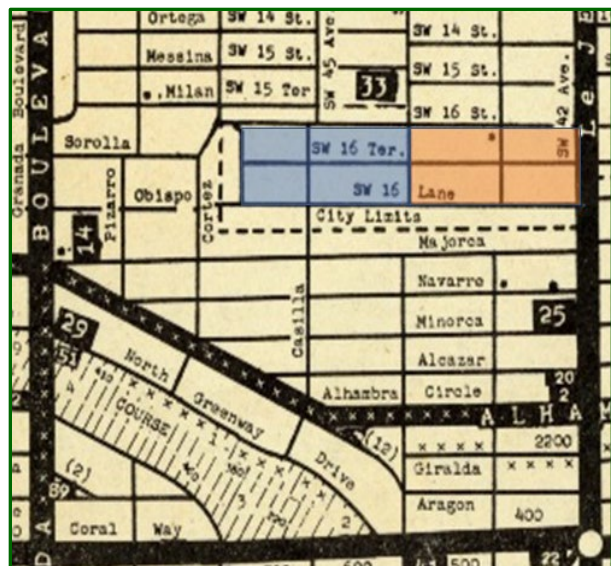


Figure 3: Coral Estates Ad
Miami Herald, October 15, 1925



Although newspapers record some multiple lot purchases by brokers there were few owner purchases or building during the year following the platting of Coral Estates. The September 1926 Hurricane and the downturn in the economy further curtailed interest in the new subdivision for the next decade. Using the New Deal incentives the first substantial building in Coral Estates was initiated in 1936.

Purchase of 20 lots in Coral Estates by Marshall G. Laigle, builder, from the Coronada Investment Corporation, was reported yesterday by Harold L. Sycle of George E. Merrick, Inc., realtors.

Mr. Laigle, who aided in directing the construction of the Century of Progress exposition in Chicago in 1933 and was general superintendent of the Great Lakes Exposition in Cleveland this year, will start a building program of 10 residences immediately.

The Merrick firm will be exclusive selling agents for the houses, which will be priced at \$5,500 and \$6,000.

LOANS OBTAINED FOR 10 RESIDENCES

FHA In Miami Handles Financing of Laigle Building

Federal housing administration loans, handled in the Miami district office by George Brewer, have been obtained for the 10 residences to be constructed in Coral Estates by Marshall G. Laigle, builder.

The builder purchased 20 lots in Coral Estates last week from the Coronada Investment Corporation. The deal was negotiated by Harold L. Sycle, vice president of George E. Merrick, Inc., realtors, in charge of the Coral Gables office of the firm. Construction of the residences will be started this week.

Figures 6:
 Laigle's Coral Estates Lot Purchases
Miami Herald
 1936
 December 15 [left]
 December 20 [right]

In late 1936 Marshall G. Laigle purchased twenty lots in Coral Estates from the Coronada Investment Corporation. (Figures 6) Marshall (Marcel) Georges Laigle (1888-1965) was an engineer and building contractor. In the 1920s he was the Construction Superintendent for R. G. Witters Company. They were the general contractor on many homes in Coral Gables. In the mid-1930s he held the daunting position of general superintendent for The Great Lakes Exposition, aka the World Fair of 1936. It was held in Cleveland, Ohio, in the summers of 1936 and 1937. In 1940 the federal government formed the Defense Homes Corporation to assist in building homes in localities where facilities were needed for the War and Navy departments. Laigle served as their construction superintendent for a number of years. Hence, clearly Laigle was respected in the construction industry and was familiar the Coral Gables aesthetic as well as federal initiatives.

In Coral Estates within three days of publicizing the purchase of twenty lots it was announced that Laigle had secured FHA loans for the first ten homes. The December article also reported that the purchase and subsequent sales were exclusive to realtor George E. Merrick, Inc. (Figures 6) In January it was reported that the firm of Paist & Steward – “Coral Gables municipal architects” – were the designers of the homes. (Figures 7) 720 Madeira Avenue (formerly 710 Obispo Avenue, see discussion below) was amongst this cadre.

BUILDING PROGRAM WILL COST \$70,000

Construction Engineer Buys Several Properties In Coral Estates

Development of Coral Estates through a \$70,000 construction program of single-family dwellings was announced yesterday by Marshal G. Laigle, construction engineer, who has purchased several plots in the subdivision through the Coral Gables office of George E. Merrick, Inc.

The subdivision is located just west of the Miami city limits and joining the Coral Gables city limits on the north. It is within walking distance, five blocks, of the Coral Gables municipal golf course, the Coral Gables Elementary school, theater and shopping center and has bus transportation within two blocks of all building

Each of the dwellings will be designed by the architectural firm of Paist & Steward, Coral Gables municipal architects. The subdivision has a minimum restriction of \$4,500.

tion is at 4414 Obispo avenue. It is of Spanish architecture, with tile roof. It will cost \$6,950.

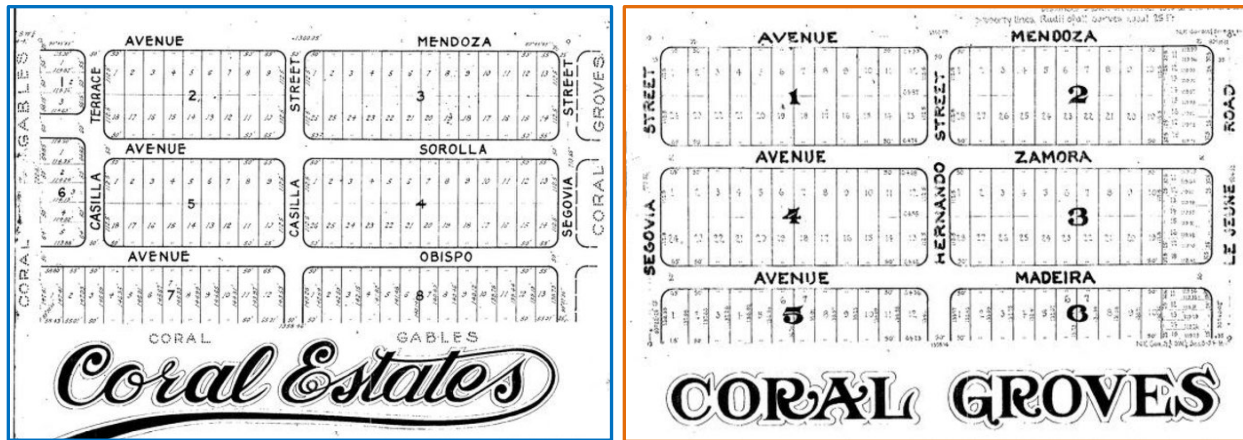
Figure 7: Paist & Steward Architects of Laigle's Homes
Miami Herald
 January 31, 1937

The 1938 aerial photo in Figures 8 shows the initial development of Coral Estates. The small building resurgence throughout south Florida was short-lived. By the early 1940s all materials and efforts were diverted to war efforts. Post-war the nation experienced a tremendous building boom that lasted over a decade. Coral Estates followed suit as seen in the 1948 aerial photograph.



Figures 8: Aerial Photographs –
1938 [top]; 1948 – at time of annexation [bottom]
Red Arrow: 720 Madeira Avenue; Blue Box: Coral Estates; Orange Box: Coral Groves
Courtesy University of Florida Collection

In January 1948 122 property owners in Coral Estates and Coral Groves approached the Coral Gables City Commission with an annexation proposal which included funding for the necessary election. The City accepted and issued Ordinance #554 calling for special elections. On February 24 the majority of residents in the two subdivisions voted to proceed with the annexation process. Following the vote Charles Girtman, James' son, filed an injunction to prevent the City from moving forward with a citywide election regarding annexation. A circuit judge denied Girtman's injunction and on April 6 the Coral Gables residents voted in favor of annexation. Later that day the Commission issued Resolution #3024 to annex the forty acres. Later that month emergency Ordinance #561 was issued to change the street names (as chosen by the residents) and street numbers to correspond with the established number system in the City.

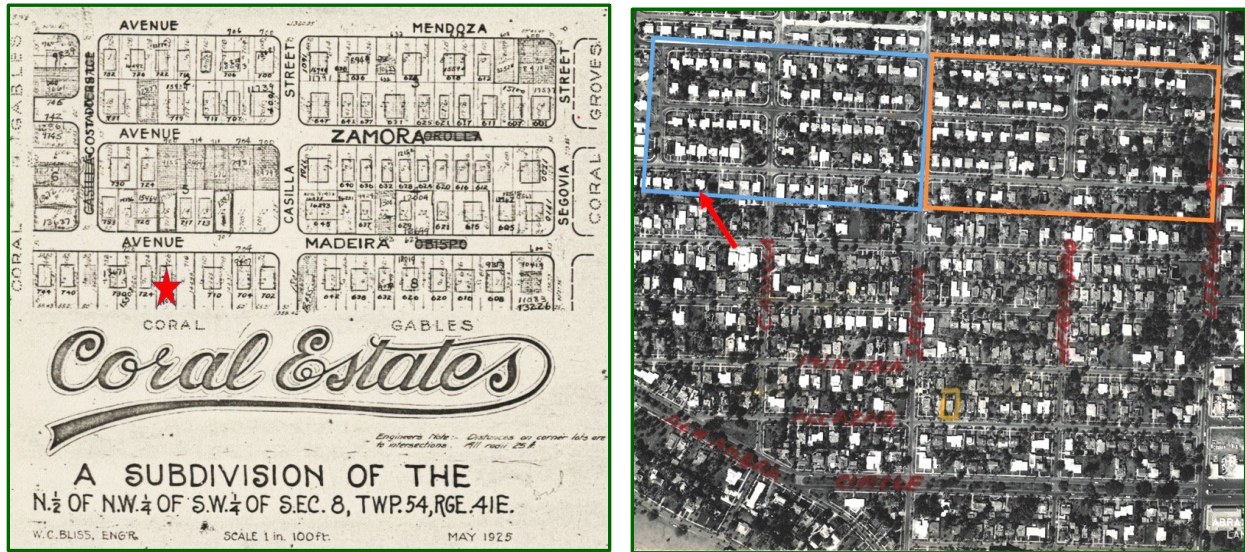


Figures 9: 1925 Coral Estates and Coral Groves Plat Maps

In 1925 Coral Estates and Coral Groves were platted with street names chosen by the subdivision owners. (Figures 9) However, since they were in unincorporated Dade county there was also the county road names and numbering system in place for these blocks. (Figure 4) Prior to annexation using either system was accepted and it sometimes varied from house to house on the same block. However, after annexation it was not as easy as doing away with the unincorporated Dade system since the platted sections were not consistent with each other or Coral Gables.

When Girtman platted Coral Groves he chose to continue the street names Mendoza, Zamora and Madeira Avenues from Coral Gables across LeJeune to the east. A few months later when the Merchant Home Builders platted the adjacent Coral Estates, they chose to continue the street names Mendoza, Sorolla and Obispo Avenues from Coral Gables Section B to the west. Both plats respected the overall block number established by Coral Gables – meaning Coral Estates streets were the 600 and 700 blocks. The City Commission asked the residents to choose one or the other street naming scheme.

In the end it came down to choosing a scheme that impacted the fewest households. That decision lay largely with how the individual houses were originally numbered. Coral Estates numbered their lots in a tight sequence, 700, 702, 704, etc. Coral Gables and Coral Groves used a more expansive system meaning a similar sized block may run from 700 to 750 while Coral Estates ran 700 to 720. It was decided to renumber the lots in Coral Estates to be more in keeping with the adjacent blocks. After much discussion regarding the street name changes and due to the extensive house renumbering in Coral Estates, it was decided that Coral Estates would also change their street names. This was a protracted endeavor that has led to confusion, mislabeling, and loss of historic documentation for these subdivisions. (Figures 9 & 10)

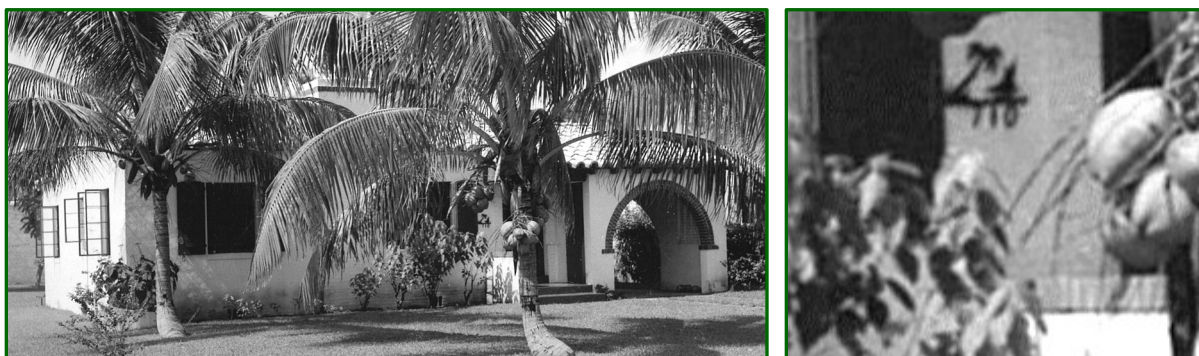


Figures 10: 1925 Coral Estates Red star/arrow: 720 Madeira Avenue Plat with Post-Annexation Annotations [left]; 1957 Aerial Photograph [right]

As seen the 1957 aerial photo in Figures 10, in tandem with the 1950s housing boom Coral Estates was largely built out by the end of the 1950s with contemporary homes. It retains the context of a single-family residence neighborhood to date.

720 Madeira Avenue aka 710 Obispo Avenue

The single-family residence at 720 Madeira Avenue was built in 1937 in unincorporated Dade County prior to Coral Estates joining Coral Gables. Recordation of the permit nor the plans has been located to date. At the time of construction, the property's address was 710 Obispo Avenue. Annotated Sanborn maps document the address change. Additionally, a c.1940s historic photo bears the 710-street number. (Figures 11)



**Figures 11: Historic Photos, c.1940
710 Obispo Avenue House Number**

As discussed above, this property was amongst the ten properties developed by Marshall Laigle with a Federal Housing Administration (FHA) loan. This is determined by the various newspaper accounts and sales ads about Laigle's project. As shown in Figure 7, Laigle hired architects Paist & Steward to design the homes. This is the only documentation located to date regarding the architect of any of Laigle's homes. Hence, 720 Madeira Avenue (aka 710 Obispo Avenue) is attributed to Paist & Steward.

SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION



Figures 13: 720 Madeira Avenue Overview over Time
Historic Photos: c.1940 [top]
May 21, 1993 *Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser*
Current Photo: September 2024 [bottom]

Executive Summary

The single-family home at 720 Madeira Avenue (aka 710 Obispo Avenue, formerly SW 16th Lane) was built in early 1937 during the Depression when new construction in south Florida was sparse. Located in the Coral Estates subdivision it was part of unincorporated Dade County at the time of construction. Coral Estates was annexed by Coral Gables in 1948. In late 1936 Marshall Laigle, a construction superintendent who had built homes Coral Gables in the 1920s, purchased twenty lots in the Coral Estates subdivision. His intention was to build homes that harmonized with the adjacent Coral Gables aesthetic. It was the first concerted effort to develop Coral Estates. Laigle hired the Coral Gables firm of Paist & Steward to design the homes, and he solicited realtor George Merrick, the found of Coral Gables to handle the sales. For ten of the homes Laigle secured Federal Housing Administration (FHA) insured loans. These loans were part of the initiative instituted by the Housing Act of 1934 intended to provide affordable homes for families after the lean Depression years. The single-family home at 720 Madeira Avenue was amongst these homes.

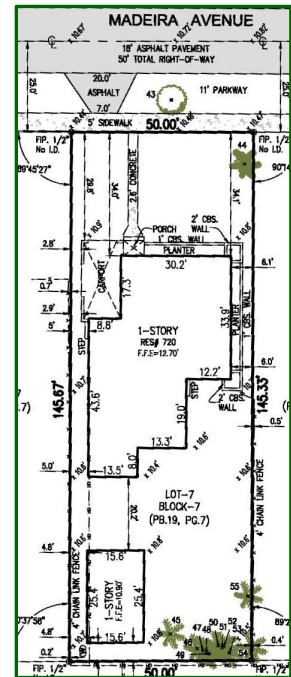
The Minimal Traditional style emerged in direct response to the Housing Act of 1934. It could be adapted to meet the FHA loan specifications while embracing traditional styles in a Modern manner. In South Florida, a region-specific version arose from melding elements of the area's traditional Mediterranean-inspired architecture with the new Modernistic aesthetic. 720 Madeira Avenue is an early example of this variant. It was described at the time as a modern Spanish bungalow. As intended, at first glance the dominant visual features of the barrel tile roof, the casement windows, and the porte cochere impart the impression of a 1920s Mediterranean-inspired home common in Coral Gables. However, a second glance reveals the Modernistic influences and the meshing of the two in the Minimal Traditional manner. The home is one-story under low roof pitches with an overall emphasis on horizontality and geometric features. In a departure from the picturesque and ornamented Mediterranean Revival style it was intended to invoke, decorative or ornamental features are few. The home is clad in lightly-textured stucco and the fenestration is recessed without sills or which gives the Modernistic impression of the openings being carved out. An arched porte cochere was a hallmark of Mediterranean Revival style home in Coral Gables. In this home the front-facing arch is framed in brick in such a way that the arch appears anchored, and the geometric nature of the arch is emphasized in the Modernistic aesthetic. Rectangular cutouts with brick dividers are additional Modernistic and geometric features of the porte cochere. Likewise, while the home has a prominent semi-engaged chimney common in Mediterranean-inspired architecture, it is not delicate or sculptural but rather monolithic and geometric in the Modernistic aesthetic. The roofs are clad in Mediterranean-inspired barrel tile; however, the gable and hipped roofs are long, low, and broad. This is a distinct departure from the use of separate roofs of varying types and heights common in the Mediterranean Revival style. In the gable eave are incised horizontal lines. Additional original embellishment is minimal and is comprised of rafter tails and the front door with its surround.

In accordance with Article 8, Section 8-103 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code--*Criteria for designation of historic landmarks*: "Districts, sites, buildings, structures and objects of national, state and local importance are of historic significance if they possess integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, or association," Staff visually assessed the property and examined building documents, historic photographs (Figures 13), historic records and determined that the property retains sufficient integrity for designation. 720 Madeira Avenue is an early South Florida Minimal Traditional style home, and it represents the New Deal Federal Housing Administrative initiative intended to provide affordable homes for families after the lean Depression years.

Extant Exterior Description & Alterations Discussion

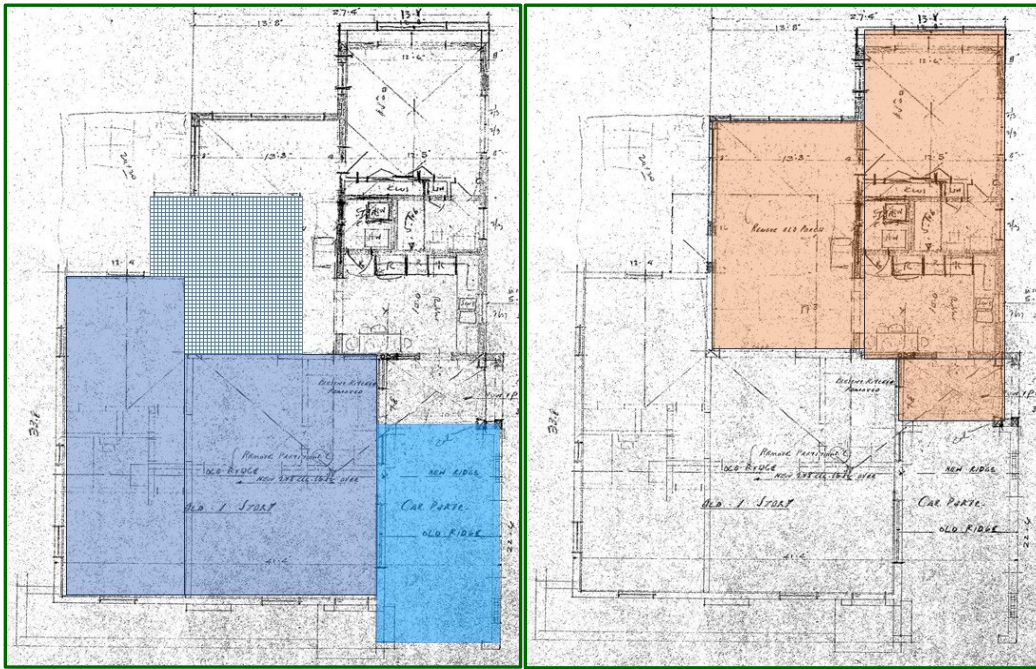


Figures 14: 720 Madeira Avenue, 2024
Front Façade Looking Southwest [top]
Aerial Photo of Property [left]
Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser
Property Survey [right]
Courtesy Royal Point Land Surveyors

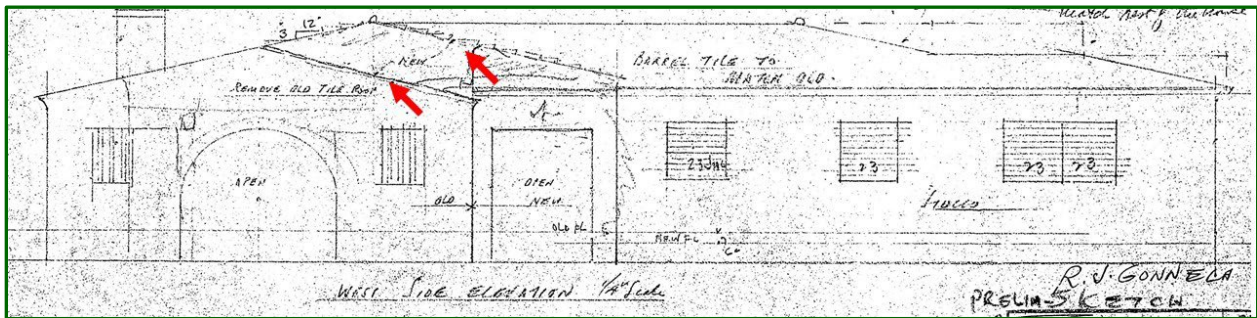


The property at 720 Madeira Avenue sits on a 50' x 145' interior lot on the south side of the street. It contains a 1,708 SF single-family residence centered on the lot and a detached 400 SF auxiliary structure at the lot's southwest corner. Concrete tire strips lead to the original porte cochere opening. The one-story residence is built of cement block units clad with lightly textured stucco. The roofs are low-pitched hipped and gabled and clad with two-piece barrel tile. A permit to paint the tiles white was issued in 2005.

In 1963 there was a 900 SF, one-story addition to the rear and west side of the home. (Figures 15) Designed by architect Walter Shiner, the addition essentially doubled the size of the home but maintained the street presence of the original modest home. Shiner's plans are provided at the end of this report as Attachment A. Please note there are some differences between the plans and the final build. In this building campaign, Shiner removed a covered porch off the rear of the home, replacing it with a Florida room. Along the west façade the addition extended back from the rear wall of the porte cochere, leaving the porte cochere as an open car bay and blocking access to the original detached garage. The design also altered the roof of the porte cochere. The south portion of the original gable roof was raised and terminated creating the impression of a saltbox roof along its west façade. The stucco of this alteration, as well as the addition, is smooth and is easily discernible from the original portions which have a lightly-textured surface. (Figures 16) The original windows, as documented in historic photos and initial ad listings (Figures 12 & 13), were steel casements. They were replaced during this campaign with the current jalousie windows.



Figures 15: Annotated Floor Plan: Original Spaces [left]; 1963 Addition [right]
Blue: Living Space: Checked Blue; Covered Porch; Aqua Blue: Porte Cochere
Orange: 1963 Addition: Bedroom, Kitchen, Mud Room, Florida Room



**Figures 16:
 Porte Cochere
 Roof
 Alteration**

**1963 Permit
 Drawing**
 Courtesy Walter
 R. Shiner, AIA
 [top]

**2024 Photos:
 Roof & Stucco
 Change**
 [bottom]



Figure 17: Front (North) Façade, 2024

The massing and placement of primary features of the front façade remain intact. Most notable are the projecting porte cochere with its framed arched opening; the large, solid-looking, semi-engaged rectangular chimney that pierces the roof is a major geometric feature of the façade; the front entry with its original door and surround; and shallow-pitched, barrel tile roof with seamlessly extends over all bays.

There were some alterations to the front façade. Most occurred in 1957. Most alterations are reversible. The primary alterations were the application of a stone veneer across the base of the home and on the chimney and the installation of a built-in planter across the front of the home. As seen in Figure 18, slump brick originally ran under the west window near the front entry and up a portion of the chimney. Since this area is largely obscured by vegetation is it unclear where the slump brick stopped since it does not appear at the top of the chimney. In reviewing other contemporaneous homes by Laigle it is likely that it ran to the top of the windows (like other projects) or the roofline. The stone veneer was installed in these areas and also extended across the façade and the full length of the chimney. There is a written permit for this work, however the areas are not detailed. The built-in brick planter was likely installed at the same time. With its installation two original features were removed – the spiral built-in planter at the northeast corner of the home and the eastern front stoop wall. (Figure 18)



Figure 18: Front (North) Façade, c.1940s *Note: Spiral Planter at NE corner*
Red Arrows: slump brick

At the western end of the street façade is the projecting porte cochere bay and tucked under the same roof is the front entry. The roof is clad in barrel tile in the Mediterranean Revival tradition. However, the same roof is extended over all bays in a Modernistic fashion which is a distinct departure from the Mediterranean-inspired practice of roof each bay individually resulting in multiple roofs of varying types and heights. In the eave of this projecting portion of the roof are curved rafter tails – a feature often used in Coral Gables Mediterranean Revival homes. (Figures 20) In both ceilings are exposed rafters – also a feature in the interior.

Except for the removal of the stoop’s perimeter wall during the 1957 planter installation and the installation of a flat decorative metal column, the features of the front entry remain intact. The two-step covered stoop is accessed both from the front sidewalk and from the porte cochere. The stoop leads to a recessed doorway. The rectangular entry to the recessed doorway is

framed by a visually-heavy masonry surround detailed with a series of striations emphasizing its geometry and elevating the entry to a focal point on the front façade (Figures 19) Portions of the surround are visible in the 1940s photo. (Figure 18) The front door is also original. The vertical plank door is inset in a wooden moulded frame and features a vertical rectangular window and applied geometric wood ornamentation.

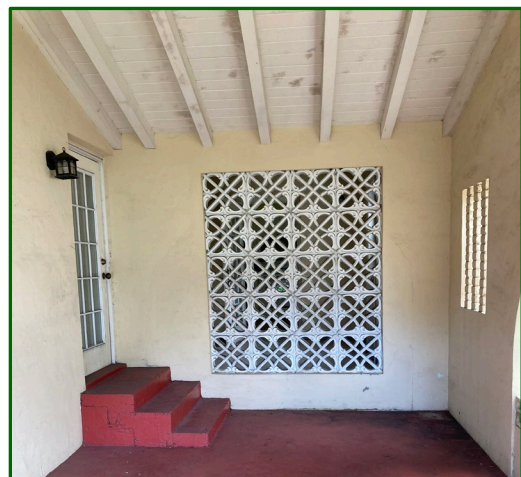


Figures 19: Front Entry Stoop & Door, 2024

An arched porte cochere was a hallmark of 1920s Mediterranean Revival style home in Coral Gables. It was a deliberate choice to keep this feature. During the 1930s there was a concerted effort towards attached garages, hence eliminating the porte cochere and detached garages common in the 1920s Mediterranean Revival homes. However Coral Estates wanted to appear to be part of Coral Gables. The Minimal Traditional style were modest homes focused on efficient use of space, modern conveniences, and practicality and hence included the emerging trend of attached garages. As the style progressed the garage gained more prominence often projecting forward from the home. At 720 Madeira Avenue the porte cochere was pulled forward, which in the Mediterranean Revival style they were not. Hence, the home retained the porte cochere to evoke Coral Gables, but it was executed in the Minimal Traditional fashion and, as discussed below, with a Modernistic aesthetic.

The porte cochere currently has two semi-circular arched openings. While 1920s Mediterranean Revival homes often had porte cochere with arched openings the emphasis was on the sculptural

quality of the arch. In this home, while the porte cochere harkens to the earlier Coral Gables homes it is detailed in a Modernist manner that emphasizes simplicity and geometry. (Figures 20) Brick frames the street-facing arch from its spring point. The brick work is terminated in a fashion that suggests the arch is sitting on pillars, thus anchoring the arch. The brick detailing highlights the geometric nature of the arch is emphasized in the Modernistic aesthetic. The large arch on the west side of the porte cochere originally spanned to ground level. Recently the blocking in of the lower portion of the arch was started but left uncompleted. Additional Modernistic and geometric features of the porte cochere are the rectangular cutouts with brick dividers flanking the side arch. The exposed rafters of the porte cochere are original and show the original roof pitch. As discussed above, in 1963 the south (rear) gable pitch was raised to accommodate the roofs of the new additions. However, these original rafters were not disturbed in that alteration. At the rear of the porte cochere is a masonry block screen. Originally the rear of the porte cochere had an arched opening. When the mudroom was added behind the porte cochere in 1963 the rear vehicular opening was enclosed and the masonry screen feature installed. The outline of the original arch opening is still discernable in the stucco. Also, at the rear of the porte cochere is door that originally opened into the kitchen. (See Attachment A) Since the porte cochere was no longer a drive-thru space enlarging the stairs was possible. The new stairs were poured over the original small two steps which are still clearly visible.



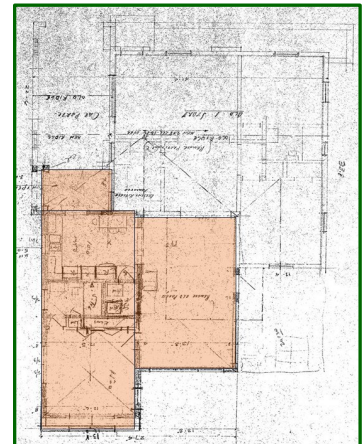
Figures 20: Porte Cochere, 2023

The east façade is the original home. In the gable end is a rectangular vent and a series of thick horizontal incised lines. It is one of the few decorative features of the home and in the Modernistic fashion it is a horizontal and geometric element



Figures 21: East Façade: Horizontal Incised Lines in Gable End, 2024

The west and rear façades are largely the 1963 additions. In Figures 22, the annotated floor plan discussed earlier is provided for reference of the location of the additions. They are simple in nature with no ornamentation. The stucco is smooth and easily distinguishable from the lightly textured stucco of the original home.



**Figures 22: Rear Facades, 2024 [bottom]
Annotated Shiner Drawings [right]
Orange denotes 1963 Additions**



At the southwest corner of the property is the original detached garage building. Many of the openings were altered when it became a storage building as the 1963 addition blocked access to it. It is one story CMU building clad in stucco. It is under a hipped roof clad in barrel tile. The roof tile, like the house, was painted



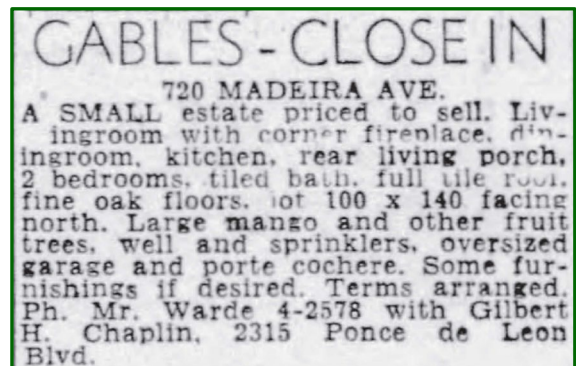
**Figure 23:
Original Detached Garage,
Now a Storage Building, 2024**

white.

Ownership History

- 1939-1945** Arthur B. Mack, Jr. & Rose Mack
1945-1949 Ruth Speier & Morton Speier
1949-1952 George N. Hurad (1882-1952)
1952-1953 Hans Gartner & Catherine Gartner
1953-2023 Gonella Family
1953-1984 Renato J. Gonnella (1904-1968) & Thelma Gonnella (-1984)
1984-2023 *Eventual Gonnella Heirs:* Timothy Bellah, Jo Anna Yarchak,
John M. Gonnella, Joseph Gonnella, Barbara Gonnella
2023-2024 Alina Hellman & Gil Hellman
2024 720 Madeira Holdings, LLC

As shown, Renato and Thelma Gonnella purchased the home in 1953. Figure 24 provides a description at the time of purchase. The property remained in the family for the next seventy years. The Gonnella's hired Shiner to for the 1963 additions. Incised on the step leading to the mudroom is "Supervised by Timothy." (Figure 25) Timothy Bellah was Renato and Thelma's grandson and was about four at the time of the mudroom addition. It seems that he was a part of pouring the step and has left a lasting memory. He later was one of the heirs of the home.



**Figure 24: 1953 Sales Ad
Miami Herald, March 15, 1953**



Figure 25: Incised on Mudroom Step "Supervised by Timothy," 2024

Architect:

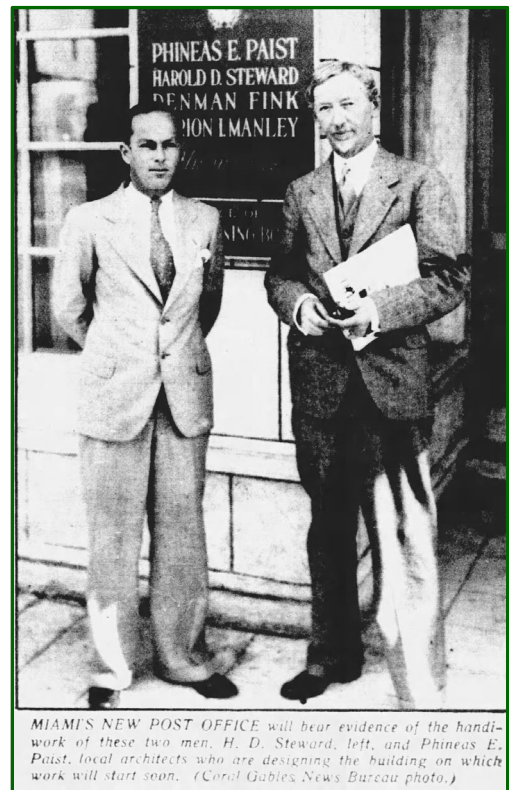
As discussed above, the design of 720 Madeira Avenue is attributed to architects Paist & Steward.

Phineas Paist studied at the Drexel Institute of the Philadelphia Academy of Fine Arts and received the Cresson European Traveling Scholarship for postgraduate studies in Europe from 1904 to 1906. He began his practice in Philadelphia, and in 1916 became an assistant to Paul Chalfin, the designer from New York chosen to be artistic supervisor for the James Deering Estate - Vizcaya. In Miami, he joined projects with Walter DeGarmo and Denman Fink which led to his association with George Merrick and employment as Coral Gables "Supervisor of Color in 1923." Paist became the Supervising Architect for the newly incorporated City of Coral Gables in 1925 and when he died in 1937 Steward stepped into the role until 1940.

Harold D. Steward (1896-1987) was a leading architect in South Florida for over fifty years. In Coral Gables his work spanned the range from modest Mediterranean Revival cottages to monumental civic structures. He was instrumental in shaping Merrick's Mediterranean aesthetic and then later thoughtfully incorporating contemporary styles in the City. After earning his architecture degree from Syracuse University, Steward served in the Navy during World War I. By 1921 he was a draftsman for architect Walter DeGarmo who was a member Merrick's design team. Architect Phineas Paist was also a member of DeGarmo's office at this time and when Paist opened his own practice in 1924 Steward joined him. Shortly thereafter he became a full partner, forming Paist & Steward.

Harold Steward and Phineas Paist collaborated on numerous stellar design projects in Coral Gables and throughout the Miami area. Two of their Coral Gables projects are listed on the National Register of Historic Places. With Denman Fink they designed the Coral Gables City Hall in 1927, and in 1937-39 they designed the Coral Gables Police and Fire Station Building at 2327 Salzedo Street / 285 Aragon Avenue under the Works Progress Administration (WPA). In 1932 Governor Carleton chose Steward, Paist, and Robert Law Weed as the architects for the Florida building to represent the state at Chicago World's Fair: A Century of Progress International Exposition, 1933-34. Their Tropical Florida Building was exceptionally well-received and is also listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Several of their projects have also been recognized as local historic landmarks. Some of these in Coral Gables include the First Church of Christ, Scientist, 410 Andalusia Avenue (1934), 1021 Alhambra Circle (1924), 1025 Sevilla Avenue (1925), 2214 Segovia Circle (1935), 1036 South Greenway Drive (1936), 820 Castile Avenue (1936), 504 Navarre Avenue (1936), 1101 North



Phineas Paist
Miami News, December 20, 1930

Greenway Drive (1937), 515 Alcazar Avenue (1937), and 3317 Toledo Street (1938). Steward was also involved in public housing throughout his career. Paist & Steward were the lead architects for the first public housing project in Dade County. First Liberty Square (1934-37) for black families followed by Edison Courts (1941) for white residents. In 1939 Steward was appointed as the architectural consultant for the United States Housing Authority. During War II he served as head of the local Federal Housing Authority in Coral Gables. Steward also served as the Supervising Architect of the South Florida Division of Federal Housing Administration and the Chief Architect for Miami Federal Housing Administration, as well as on local committees and boards.

STAFF RECOMMENDATION

The purpose of historic designation within the City of Coral Gables is defined in Article 8, Section 8-101 of the Coral Gables Zoning Code as, *to promote the educational, cultural, and economic welfare of the public by preserving and protecting historic structures or sites, portions of structures, groups of structures, manmade or natural landscape elements, works of art, or integrated combinations thereof, which serve as visible reminders of the history and cultural heritage of the City, region, state or nation.*

It is the intent of the Coral Gables Zoning Code to recognize all buildings which possess “significant character, interest or value as part of the historical, cultural, archaeological, aesthetic, or architectural heritage of the City, state or nation” qualify for designation as a local historic landmark (Article 8, Section 8-103). To that end, the eligibility for designation as a local historic landmark is defined by the Coral Gables Zoning Code as meeting **one (1)** (or more) of the criteria stipulated in Article 8, Section 8-103.

Constructed in 1937 in the Mediterranean Revival Style the property at 720 Madeira Avenue (legally described as Lot 7, Block 7, Coral Estates Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 19, at Page 7, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida) is significant to the City of Coral Gables’ history based on the following **three (3) criteria** found in the Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 8, Section 8-103:

A. Historical, Cultural significance

Criterion 4: Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community

B. Architectural significance

Criterion 1: Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one (1) or more distinctive architectural style

Criterion 2: Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction

Staff finds the following:


The property located at 720 Madeira Avenue is significant to the City of Coral Gables history based on:

HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE

Therefore, Staff recommends the following:

A motion to **APPROVE** the Local Historic Designation of the property at **720 Madeira Avenue** (legally described as Lot 7, Block 7, Coral Estates Section, according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 19, at Page 7, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida) based on its historical, cultural, and architectural significance.

Respectfully submitted,


Anna Pernas
Historic Preservation Officer

Selected References

- 1940s Archival Photographs, City of Coral Gables, Historical Resources Department.
- Aerial Photography: Florida Collection. University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries.
- Building Record Books, City of Coral Gables, Historical Resources Department.
- Merrick, George, *Coral Gables Homes, Miami Florida*, c.1925
Coral Gables Miami Riviera: Heart of the American Tropics, c.1925
- Miami-Dade County Clerk, County Records.
- Miami-Dade County Property Appraisers Property Records.
- Newspapers.com
- Butler County Press (Hamilton, Ohio)
 - “Working on the Exposition” photo of M. G. Laigle, June 5, 1936, p.3.
 - Miami Herald
 - “Coral Estates Placed on Sale” September 26, 1925, p.34.
 - “Laigle Purchases 20 lots in Coral Estates” December 15, 1936, p.27.
 - “Loans Obtained For 10 Residences: FHA in Miami Handles Financing of Laigle Building” December 20, 1936, p.28.
 - “Mrs. Thelma Gonnella” obit, January 21, 1984, p.29.
 - Miami News
 - “Discerning Home Buyers Will Appreciate the Layout at 710 Obispo” March 3, 1937, p.31.
 - “First Showing: 611 Sorolla & 710 Obispo in Beautiful Coral Estates” April 11, 1937, p.16.
 - “Laigle Homes – Built in Beautiful Coral Estates Adjoining Coral Gables” June 6, 1937, p.15.
 - Miami Tribune
 - “Exposition Head Starts Development in Miami” December 16, 1936, p.6.
 - New York Times
 - “Miami and the story of its remarkable growth: an interview with George E. Merrick” March 15, 1925.
- Parks, Arva Moore, *George Merrick’s Coral Gables “Where Your ‘Castles in Spain’ Are Made Real!”* Ponce Circle Development LLC with Centennial Press, Miami, Florida, 2006.
- Parks, Arva Moore, George Merrick, Son of the South Wind: Visionary Creator of Coral Gables, University Press of Florida, 2015.
- Polk, R. L. R. L. Polk and Company's Miami City Directory. Jacksonville, Florida: R. L. Polk and Co., various editions.
- Real Estate Records for 720 Madeira Avenue, Historical Resources Department, Coral Gables, Florida.
- United State Census Bureau. Various years.

REVIEW GUIDE

Definition:

The Review Guide comprises of some of the extant and character-defining features, which contribute to the overall significance of the structure and/or district. Hallmark and character-defining features are the *visual and physical features that give a building its identity and distinctive character*.

The Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties embody two important goals: 1) the preservation of historic materials and, 2) the preservation of a building's distinguishing character.

Every historic building is unique, with its own identity and its own distinctive character. Character refers to all those visual aspects and physical features that comprise the appearance of every historic building. Character-defining features are the visual and physical features that give a building its identity and distinctive character. They may include the overall building shape, its materials, craftsmanship, decorative details, features, and aspects of its site and environment.

Use:

The Review Guide may be used to address the impact that additions, modifications, alterations and/or renovations may have on the historic structure and site.

The Review guide may also inform appropriate new construction in an historic district, neighborhood, or streetscape.

Property Address:	720 Madeira Avenue
Lot Description:	interior lot
Date of Construction:	1937
Use:	single-family residence
Style:	Minimal Traditional
Construction Material:	concrete block covered with textured stucco
Stories:	one-story
Roof Types:	hip, gable

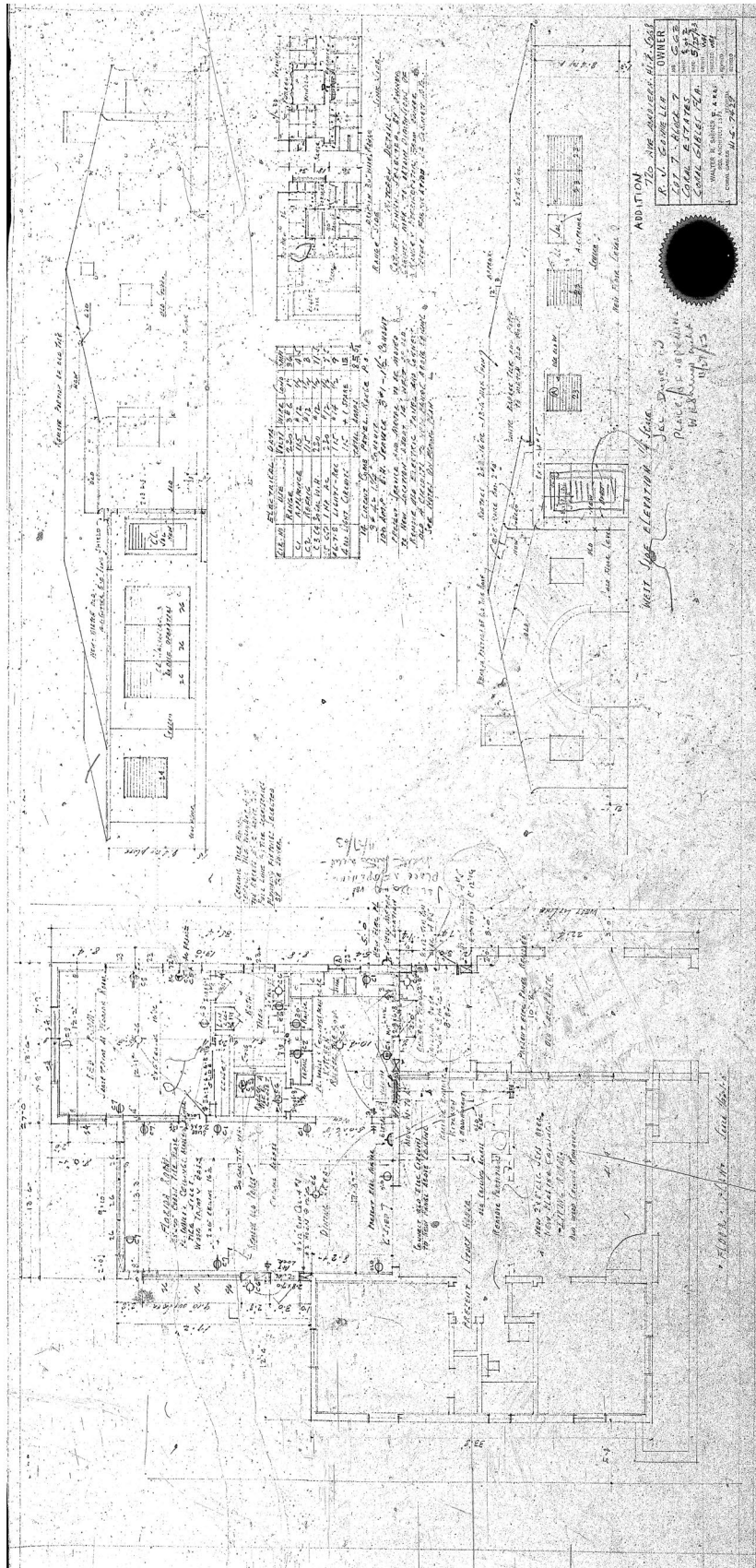
NOTE: The Review Guide is to be referenced in conjunction with the information and photographic documentation contained elsewhere within this Report. Character-defining features may include, but are not limited to, the listing found on the following page.

CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

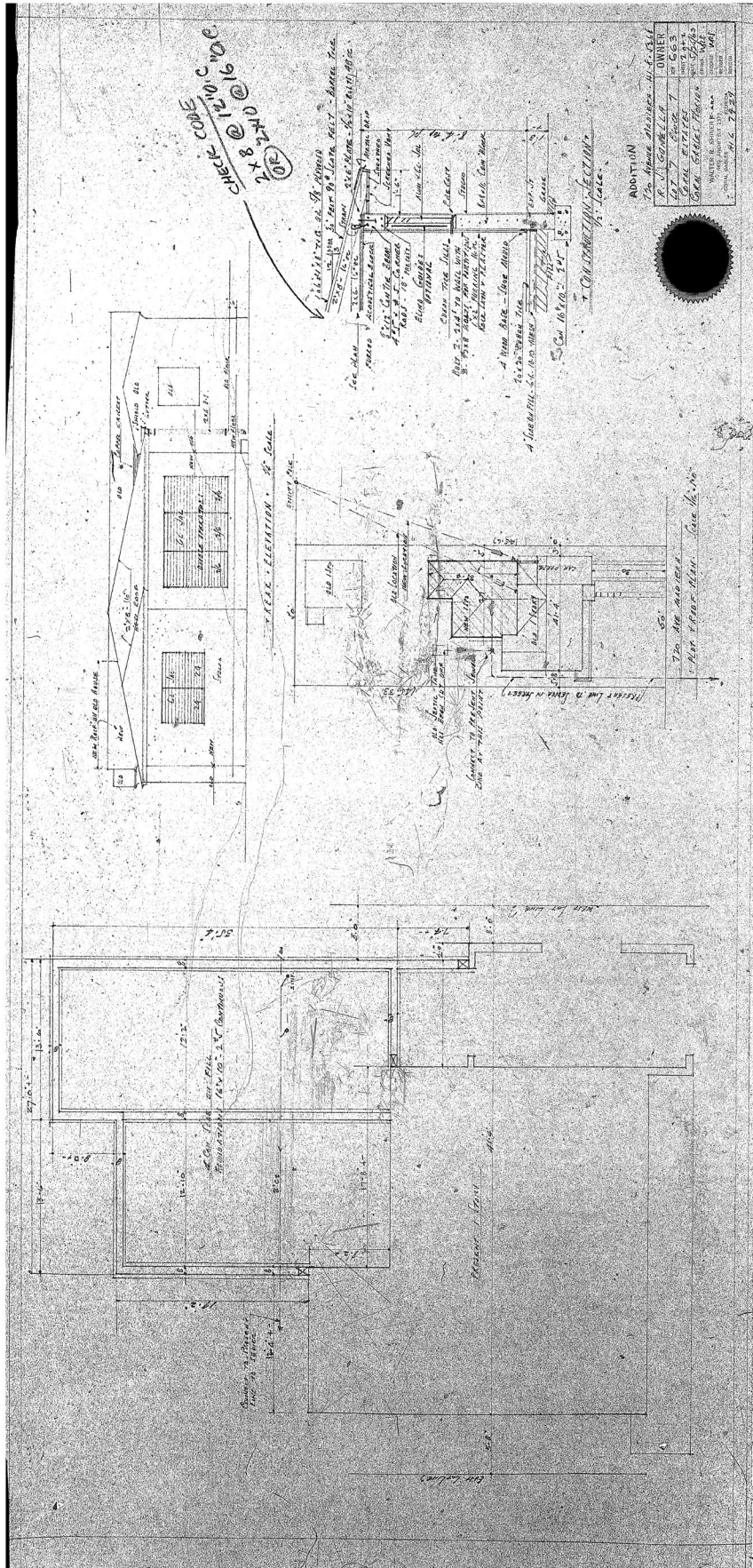
Style: Minimal Traditional



- ✓ one-story under low, long, and broad hipped and gable roofs pitches
- ✓ overall emphasis on horizontality & geometric features
- ✓ decorative or ornamental features are few
- ✓ barrel tile roof
- ✓ casement windows
- ✓ arched porte cochere framed in brick in such a way that the arch appears anchored, and the geometric nature of the arch is emphasized in the Modernistic aesthetic
- ✓ clad in lightly-textured stucco
- ✓ fenestration is recessed without sills
- ✓ rectangular cutouts with brick dividers
- ✓ prominent semi-engaged chimney that is monolithic and geometric in the Modernistic aesthetic
- ✓ incised horizontal lines in gable eave
- ✓ exposed rafters and curved rafter tails
- ✓ front door with its masonry surround



18072 B



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