





LHD 2022-13  
March 15, 2023

## LOCAL HISTORIC DESIGNATION 517 ARAGON AVENUE, CORAL GABLES, FLORIDA

**Application:** September 13, 2022: Historic Significance Determination application received as per request by Board of Architects  
October 19, 2022: Determination issued: Does meet the minimum eligibility criteria for designation as a local historic landmark  
December 9, 2023: HPO granted owner's deferral request to Feb 2023  
February 15, 2023: HPB granted owner's one month deferral request

Historical Resources &  
Cultural Arts

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**Folio Number:** 03-4108-001-1670  
**Legal Description:** Lot 17 & the West 36.4 feet of Lot 16, Block 10, Coral Gables Section "B," according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 5, Page 111 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida  
**Original Permit No.:** 5357  
**Date of Construction:** 1937  
**Original Architect:** William H. Merriam  
**Present Owner:** 517 Aragon, LLC  
**Building Type:** One-story, SFR  
**Style:** Minimal Traditional  
**Site Characteristics:** The property is located on an interior 86.40' x 110' lot on the north side of Aragon Avenue between Segovia and Hernando Streets.

### **SUMMARY STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE**

The single-family residence at 517 Aragon Avenue was designed by architect William Merriam in the Minimal Traditional style. Permitted in February 1937 it is amongst the few homes built during the New Deal Era in the City. The Minimal Traditional style emerged in direct response to the Housing Act of 1934.

As construction in Coral Gables tried to regain its footing in the 1930s Depression era, it shifted away from the elaborate and embellished Mediterranean Revival style of the 1920s towards simpler and more modern designs that reflected the new aesthetic and priorities of society. In doing so, Coral Gables began to follow national housing trends and the City entered a new architectural era. 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.*"

The home at 517 Aragon Avenue thoughtfully acknowledges the City's Mediterranean Revival foundation while embracing Modernistic aesthetics. It was one of the first homes in the City to usher in this new style. It retains its historic integrity and serves as a visible reminder of the history and the cultural heritage of the City.

## **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 517 Aragon 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, 517 Aragon 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

### Coral Gables' Developmental History: Section B

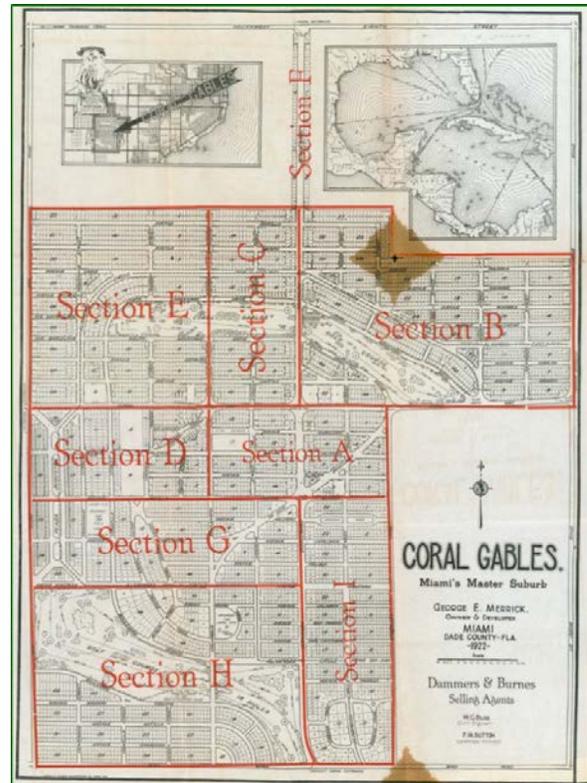
Coral Gables' developmental history is divided broadly into three major historical periods:

- Initial Planning and Development/Florida Land Boom (Pre- 1926 Hurricane),
- 1926 Hurricane/Great Depression Aftermath and New Deal/Wartime Activity (1927-1944),
- and Post World War II and Modern periods (1945-1963).

The single-family home at 517 Aragon Avenue was constructed in early 1937 during the New Deal era.

Coral Gables was originally conceived as a suburb of Miami and attracted investors from across the nation during the South Florida real estate boom of the 1920s. Merrick drew from the Garden City and City Beautiful movements of the 19th and early 20th century to create his vision for a fully-conceived Mediterranean-inspired city which is now considered one of the first modern planned communities in the United States. Advised by landscape architect Frank Button, artist Denman Fink, and architects H. George Fink, Walter De Garmo, H.H. Mundy, and Phineas Paist, Merrick converted 3000 acres of citrus plantation and native hammock into a community with ornate plazas and grand entrances, small parks, scenic areas, and golf courses melded with monumental buildings and tree-shaded picturesque residential streets. During the 1920s, careful attention was paid by his development team to ensure that the buildings and streetscape elements conformed to Mediterranean ideals. Merrick felt that this type of architecture harmonized best with south Florida's climate and lifestyle. The goal was to create architectural splendor in a Spanish suburb with tropical luxuriance.

Nationally-acclaimed landscape architect Frank Button drew the first comprehensive maps of Coral Gables in 1921-2. They were based on an infrastructure of the grid of trees from the Merrick family's citrus plantation and the native pineland. Laid carefully over the resulting grid of orthogonal streets (north-south) and avenues (east-west) are a series of diagonal and curved roadways. Coral Gables' initial development was predominantly



**Figure 1: 1922 Map:**  
“Coral Gables: Miami’s Master Suburb”



**Figure 2: Map of Pre-1935 Single-Family Residences**

*Blue boxes: built homes*  
*Red arrow: 517 Aragon Ave*

around the Merrick family’s Coral Gables Plantation in Section A. Lots in Sections A, B, and C were offered for sale in 1921-2. (Figure 1) The majority of initial construction was concentrated north of, and in the direct vicinity of, the Granada Golf Course. 517 Aragon Avenue is in Section B which was well-developed in the early 1920s. (Figure 2)

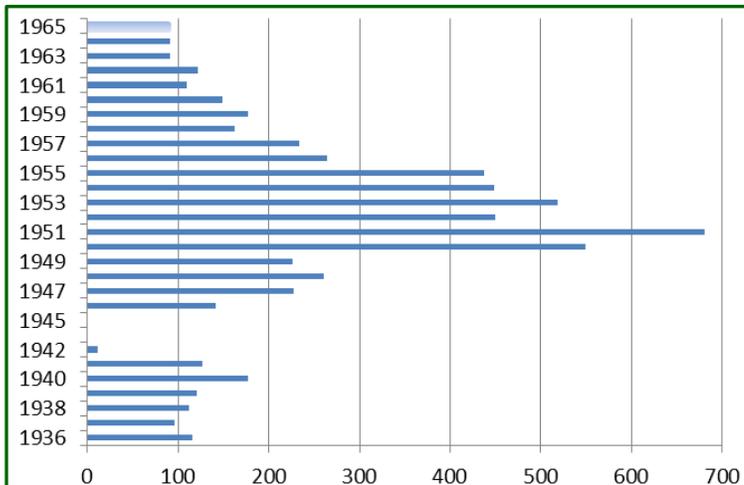
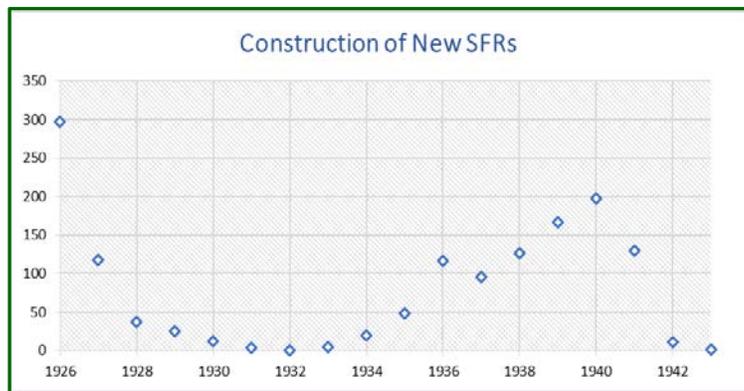
Construction in the City boomed until the devastating combination of the 1926 Hurricane and the Great Depression. In the aftermath of the 1929 Wall Street Crash, the economy in Florida declined steeply. Between 1929 and 1933, 148 state and national banks in Florida collapsed. By 1933, approximately one out of four Floridians was receiving some type of public assistance. In the mid-1930s, relief measures expanded under the New Deal administration and people adjusted to a new way of life. Priorities and aesthetics changed, and this was reflected in all aspects of life including the types of homes that were built.

In Coral Gables the dire downturn in the economy, coming so closely on the heels of the devastating Hurricane of 1926, had a drastic impact on construction as illustrated in Figure 3. Recovery was slow. In Coral Gables few single-family homes were built during the Depression Era of the 1930s. With the implementation of the New Deal and other incentives, the building industry finally experienced a small resurgence in the late 1930s and early 1940s. However, it abruptly ground to a halt during the War years as materials, expertise, and manpower were diverted to the war effort. (Figures 4)

In Coral Gables, when construction of single-family homes began again in the mid-1930s, there was a distinct departure from the ornamented and picturesque Mediterranean Revival style that had dominated the City’s



**Figure 3: Coral Gables Total Building Permit Dollars,**



**Figures 4: Number of New SFR Building Permits: 1926-1943 [top]; 1936-1965 [bottom]**

*Note: no data for 1945;*

*1926 building curtailed by a major hurricane in September*

landscape since its inception. Aesthetics and priorities had changed and homes in Coral Gables began to lean towards national trends with a simpler palette. Historic structure surveys of sections of Coral Gables (i.e., North Gables Section, Flagler Section), conducted by Janus Research, indicates that in the 1930s single-family homes transitioned away from Mediterranean Revival and embraced Minimal Traditional, Modernistic, masonry vernacular and ranch styles.

The Post-War prosperity that followed these lean years created an optimism which reigned through the 1950s and 1960s and resulted in an unprecedented building boom. (Figures 4) During this time single-family homes in Coral Gables followed national trends both in numbers and in style. By the late 1950s Coral Gables Section B, to the north, east and west of 517 Aragon Avenue, was built out with new residences. These areas retain this context of single-family homes to present day. The multi-family and commercial area to the south was primarily built out between the 1950s and 1970s. (Figures 5)



**Figures 5:**  
**Aerial Photographs**  
**1948 [top]**  
**1957 [bottom]**  
**Red Arrow:**  
**517 Aragon Avenue**  
*Courtesy of University  
of Florida, George A.  
Smathers Libraries*

### **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 it was common in large developments to fulfill the GI Bill promise that every returning serviceman would be able to purchase a home.

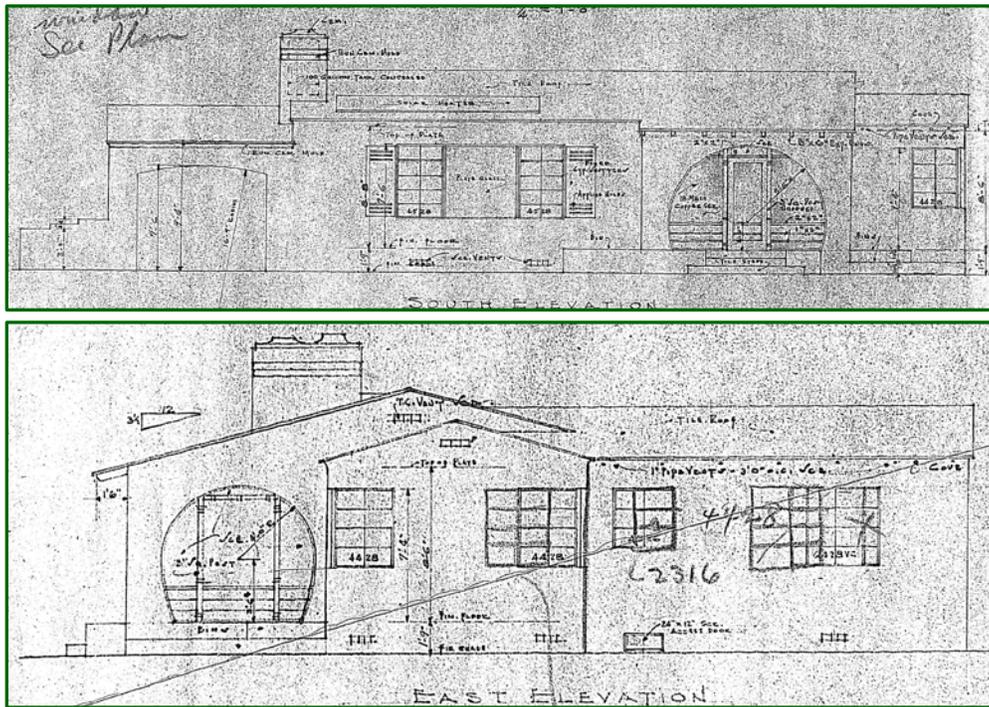
The home at 517 Aragon Avenue was built in 1937 in the style's initial phase. In [A Field Guide to American Houses](#) Virginia McAlester, a leading architectural historian, provides this insight:

*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 U.S. 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 a 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, enthusiastically turned their attention to the design of the small house.*

In the 1930s, Minimal Traditional single-family homes appeared throughout the country as architectural journals and magazines promoted it. 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 efficient floor plans. These homes were well-built, often using modern materials and methods. 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. Hence, there were area-specific variations.

By the mid-1930s in Coral Gables, there was a departure from the ornamented and picturesque Mediterranean Revival style that dominated the City's landscape. Minimal Traditional houses in Coral Gables most often reflected this precursor style as well as the dominant regional Modernistic styles of Art Deco and Art Moderne. Specifically, Minimal Traditional style homes in Coral Gables tended to reflect Mediterranean Revival style influences with features such as barrel tile roofs, grouped vents, arched openings, and prominent chimneys. The Modernistic aesthetic included smooth stucco, a horizontal emphasis, fenestration without sills or lintels, curved and geometric forms, simplified roof types, eyebrows, corner windows, and floral motifs. See Appendix C for examples of homes designated as Coral Gables Historic Landmarks.

**SIGNIFICANCE ANALYSIS AND DESCRIPTION**



**Figures 6: 517 Aragon Avenue Over Time,  
Front (South) & Side (East) Facades: Permit #5357, 1937 [top]  
Front (South) Façade: c.1940s [center]; 2022 [bottom] *Courtesy of Realtor.com***

Permitted in December 1937, the single-family residence at 517 Aragon Avenue was built during the New Deal Era. It was one of only several hundred homes were built in Coral Gables during the 1930s. As construction in the City tried to regain its footing in the 1930s, it shifted away from the elaborate and embellished Mediterranean Revival style of the 1920s towards simpler and more modern designs that reflected the new aesthetic and priorities of society. In doing so, Coral Gables began to follow national housing trends and a new architectural era was ushered into the City.

The home at 517 Aragon Avenue was designed by architect William Merriam in the Minimal Traditional style. This style emerged in direct response to the Housing Act of 1934 and incorporated the new Modernistic aesthetic. In Coral Gables the earliest of these homes also retained some Mediterranean Revival style features. The single-family residence at 517 Aragon Avenue is an early example of a home that embraced the new Minimal Traditional style in Coral Gables.



**Figure 7: 517 Aragon Avenue**  
**Sketch by Laura Mullaney**  
*Miami Herald, June 10, 1999*

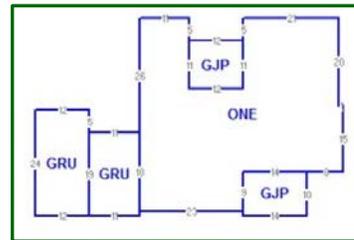
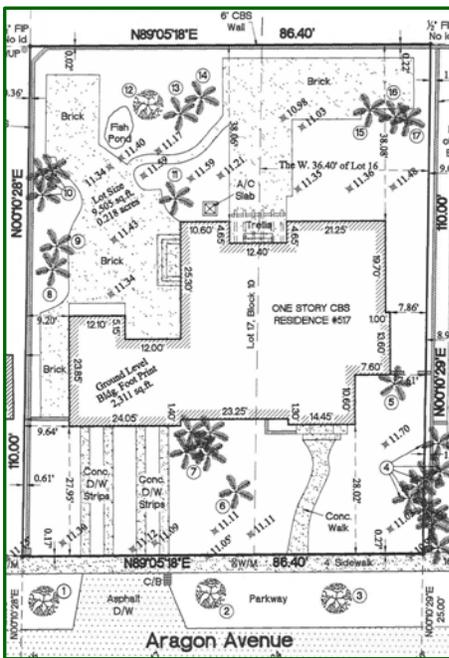
The home has numerous hallmark features of the early Minimal Traditional style. It is one-story with an overall horizontal and geometric emphasis and low roof pitches. The home is clad in lightly-textured stucco and the fenestration is recessed without sills or lintels which gives the Modernistic impression of the openings being carved out. The original openings visible from the street are dominant, and visually balance each other—from Moorish arched front porch to the large rectangular window opening with rounded sides (Figures 10), and to the shallow segmental arched square opening of the car port. In the Modernistic aesthetic, the numerous decorative features the Mediterranean Revival style have been replaced with simple features that impart a geometric impression. Likewise, a large Spanish chimney along the facade has been replaced with an interior chimney--also with a geometric emphasis. While the roof is clad in barrel tile of the Mediterranean Revival style, the roof along the front façade is low and broad with the gable roof and extending to accommodate the porch bay. In the porch bay eave are exposed rafter tails. This is a distinct departure from the use of separate roofs of varying types and heights common in the Mediterranean Revival style. The signature Modernistic feature of corner windows are found on the east side façade. There is also curved Modernistic built-in planter at the southeast corner. Additional embellishment is minimal and is comprised of the Mediterranean Revival element of grouped vents which are condensed in this style to a rectangular linear group in the gable eaves and crawl space openings which add to the horizontal emphasis of the home. The original front and rear porch areas retain their original tile floors.

Historic photos indicate that few changes have occurred to the character-defining features of the home in the subsequent decades and this residence retains its historic integrity. The 1930s was a transitional architectural period in Coral Gables. Due to economics and other influences, there were few houses built during this time. This 1937 home is an early example of a style that emerged in direct response to the housing needs across the nation. Thus, the property at 517 Aragon Avenue significantly contributes to the historic fabric of the City of Coral Gables and is part of the collection of quality residences that contributes to the story and the City's sense of place over time.

Extant Exterior Description



**Figure 8: Avenue, Front (South) Façade, 2022**  
*Courtesy Realtor.com*

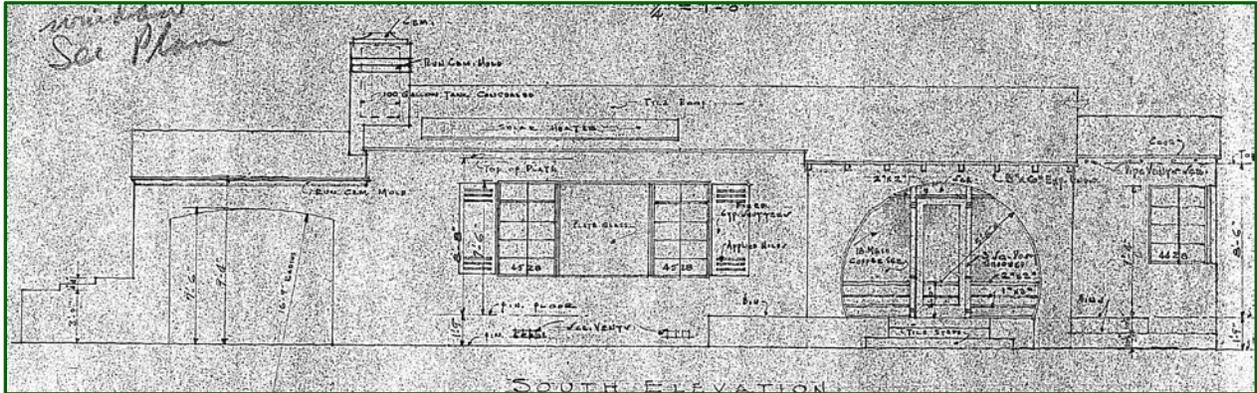


**Figures 9:**  
**Property Overview**  
**Survey, 2022 [left]**  
*Courtesy AFA & Company*  
**Aerial, 2022 [top right]**  
*Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser*  
**Subarea Sketch**  
**GRU: unfinished garage**  
**GJP: glass jalousie porch**  
**[bottom right]**  
*Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser, 2022*

The single-family residence at 517 Aragon Avenue sits on an interior 86.40' x 110' lot on the north side of the street. It is a one-story home of approximately 2,311 SF with an attached original carport and 1961 garage. A concrete walkway, that follows the original 'meandering' path leads to the front entry at the enclosed porch at the eastern end of the home. Two sets of cement ribbon strips lead to the two vehicular doors at the western portion of the home.

The one-story home is constructed with cement block units with a U-shaped plan living space built over a crawl space. At ground level square masonry crawl space vents, grouped in horizontal rectangles, are found on all facades. The home is finished with a lightly-textured stucco. The roofs are a series of low-pitched gables clad in S-tile. (Figures 9) A simple,

rectangular chimney rises between the west façade of the living space and the original carport. All fenestration openings are simple and recessed in the Modernistic fashion, without sills or lintels, giving the impression of the openings being cut out and emphasizing their geometric nature. The windows are predominantly awning in type in the living spaces and jalousie in the front porch. Most fenestration is covered by metal security grilles. The home has a corner window, a signature features of the Modernistic styles, wrapping the south and east facades.



**Figures 10: Front (South) Façade  
Permit #5357, 1937 [top]**

**Current View, 2022 [center] *Courtesy Realtor.com***

**Looking West, 2022 [bottom left] *Photo by Owner***

**Detail of rounded window opening, 2022  
[bottom right]**



The front (south) façade is distinctly horizontal. Main contributors are the low-pitched roofs with shallow eaves and the series of large openings across the façade. The markedly geometric openings are the Moorish arch of the front porch, the large horizontally-oriented rectangular window with rounded edges at the sides, and the shallow segmental arched square openings of the car port and garage. At the eastern end, the front porch bay protrudes slightly from the plane of the remainder of the façade and the gable roof seamlessly continues to encompass it. The street-facing eave extends over the front entry and has carved rafter tails. The two front entry steps are clad in tile as is the built-in planter that extends from the steps to the eastern edge of the center window--which also aid in the horizontality of the home. (Figures 9 & 10)

At the southeast corner of the home are a series of Modernistic elements. The Moorish arches of the south and east facades of the porch are a hallmark feature of the home. As seen in comparing Figures 6 and 11, the frames for the door and jalousie windows tried to follow the lines of the original screen frames. The porch retains its original tile. On the east façade, the southern portion of the home projects slightly and at the bay's southeast corner is a Modernistic corner window. It is partially obscured by hurricane shutter frames. (Figures 6, 10, & 12) Spanning the front porch and the eastern projecting bay is a curved built-in planter which adds to the geometric nature of the street-facing façade. It is currently overgrown but can be glimpsed in Figures 11.



Figures 11: Southeast Corner

Corner Window, ca. 1940s [top]; Front entry porch interior, 2022 [bottom left] *Courtesy Realtor.com*;  
Curved built-in planter, 2022 [bottom right] *Photo by Owner*

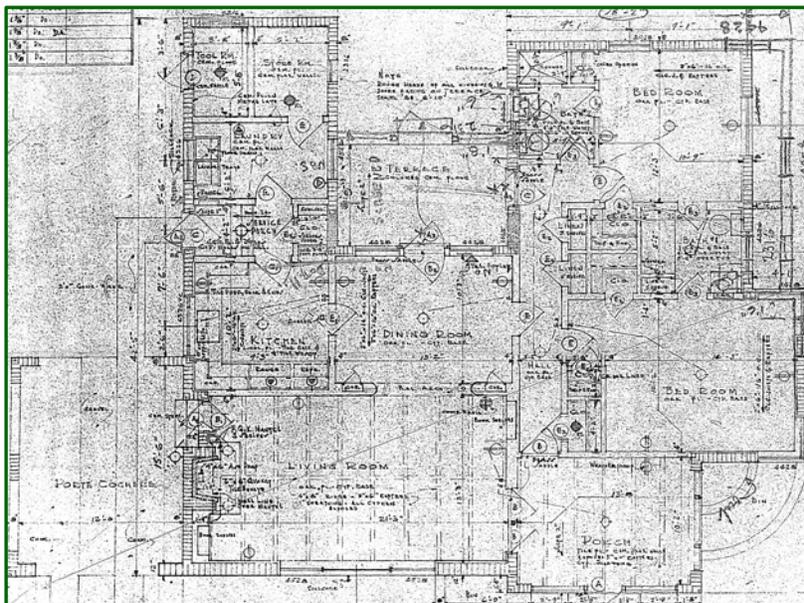


Figure 12: Floor Plan,  
Permit #5357, 1937

*Note:* Corner window,  
southeast corner of  
east façade  
Curved planter at  
southeast corner of  
home

At the western end of the front façade are the original car port and the adjacent 1961 garage addition. Both openings have shallow segmental arched openings that are enclosed by roll-up garage doors. The original carport retains its pass-through essence when the doors are open and the space is used as a covered terrace space as seen in Figures 13.



**Figures 13: Front Façade: Original Carport, 2022**  
Looking north [left]; Looking south [right]  
*Courtesy Realtor.com*

As seen in Figures 9 and 15, the living space of the home has a U-shaped plan. Tucked within the 'U' is an area identified by the property appraiser as a glass jalousie porch. (Figure 9) This area retains its original colored-tile floor. (Figure 12 & 14) A pergola spans the remainder of the area within the 'U.' The living space wings are both one-room wide, with the eastern bay being slightly wider. In the gabled ends are grouped square vents forming a rectangle. On the western wing, French doors lead onto a brick paver area behind the carport and garage. A fountain features adorns the north wall of the garage. (Figures 15)



**Figure 14: Rear Porch Area, 2022**  
*Courtesy of Realtor.com*



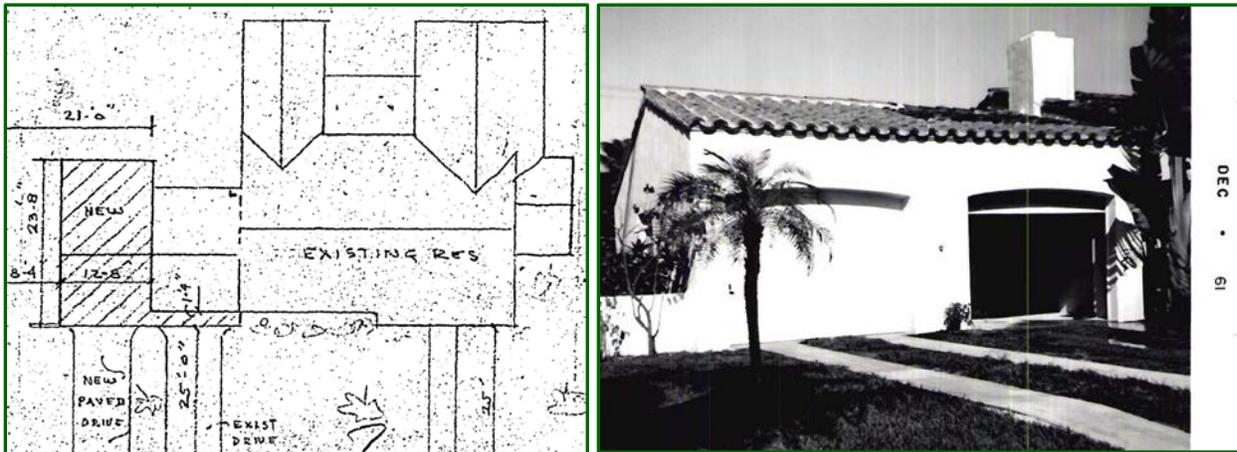
**Figures 15: Rear (North) Façade, 2022**  
Looking southeast [top]; Looking southwest [bottom right] *Courtesy Realtor.com*  
Eastern wing looking south [bottom left] *Photo by Owner*

### **Additions / Alterations**

Comparison of historic photographs with the extant structure, examination of building records, and correlation with public records, indicate that this Minimal Traditional style property retains its historic integrity. The only addition to the home is a garage at its west end. The following discusses notable changes or work undertaken on the property.

The original building permit is provided as Appendix A: Permit #5357, 1937 at the end of this report. These permit drawings are annotated by architect William Merriam indicating that the original design for the home was slightly enlarged to the east, with corresponding fenestration changes, and that the rear terrace was changed to a covered screen porch. (Figure 12) This is not unusual as very frequently changes were made during permitting and/or construction during the early years of the Coral Gables. Hence, the annotated original permit is used as guide to understanding the home in tandem with other primary sources.

The most notable alterations to the home occurred in 1961. (See Appendix B: Permit #17220) At this time a one-car garage was added to the west end of the home adjacent to the original carport. As seen in Figures 16 the front façade of the carport was moved out a few feet to align with the new garage. Garage doors were also installed in the carport at this time. Figure 16 shows the new configuration shortly after completion. The garage doors were changed in 1997.



**Figures 16: New Garage and Carport Alterations, 1961**  
**Permit #17220, Lester Avery, Architect [left]**  
**Historic Photo [right] *Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser***

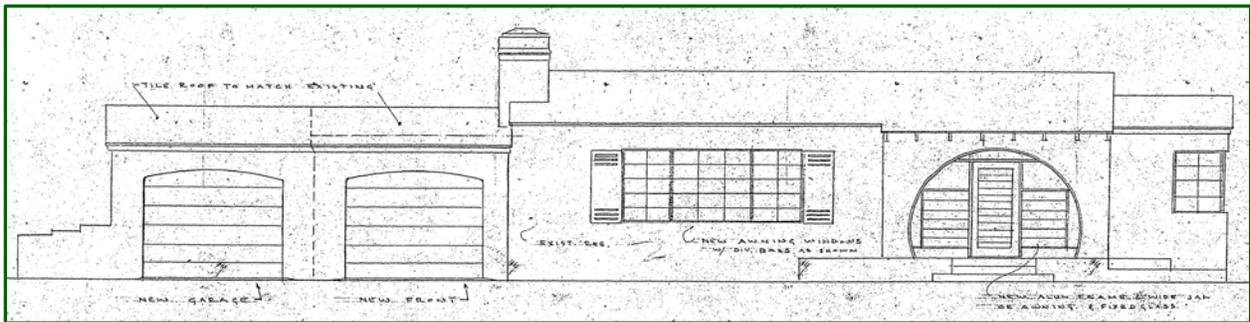
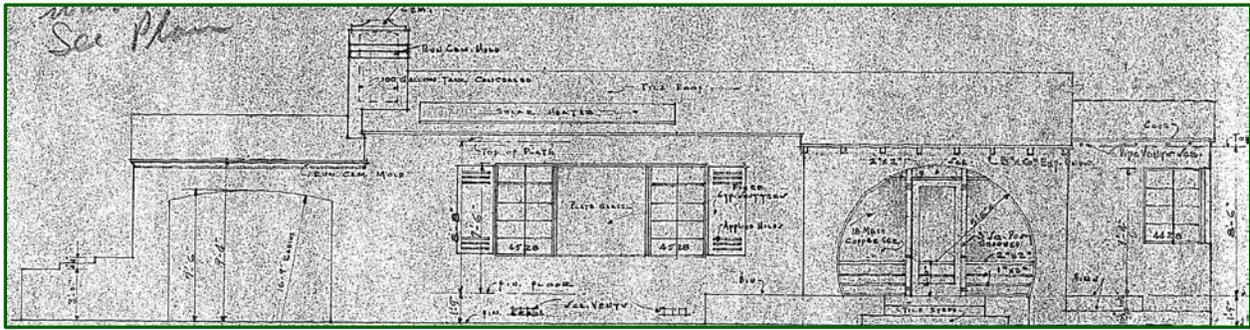
Also in 1961 the Modernistic plate glass and casement window ensemble on the front façade was changed to a series of awining windows. The original opening with its rounded edges was retained. (Figures 18) Additionally the screened openings of the front porch were enclosed with jalousie windows. (Figures 18 & 11) Both features retain these configurations to date.

In the 1961 permit drawings, the shutters flanking the large front façade window are depicted. Shutters were often used with the Modernistic plate glass window ensembles to add further elongation and horizontal emphasis to the feature. As seen in the c.1940 photo detail in Figure 17 and the permit drawings in Figures 18, the shutters had a series of horizontal lines at the top and bottom and a series of cutout geometric shapes at its center. It is not clear when this feature was removed from the front façade but building records indicate that it likely occurred when the metal security grates were installed over all of the windows in 1978. These grates, along with the hurricane shutter tracks installed in 2001 obscure the windows of the home. These, however, are reversible interventions.



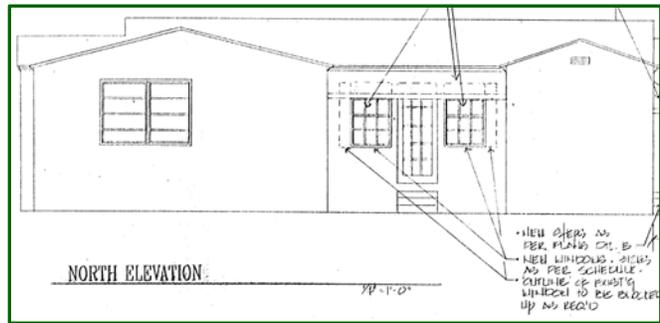
**Figure 17: Detail, Historic Photo, c.1940**  
***Note: shutter and solar panel***

In Figure 17 also note the solar panel on the roof above the window. Minimal Traditional homes often incorporated modern cost-saving methods such as solar. As depicted in the 1937 permit the solar tank was housed in the chimney. (Figures 18, top). This feature is not depicted in the 1961 permit and not visible in historic photos dating to 1971. The barrel roof tiles have been changed several times. The current S-tile roof was laid in 2006.

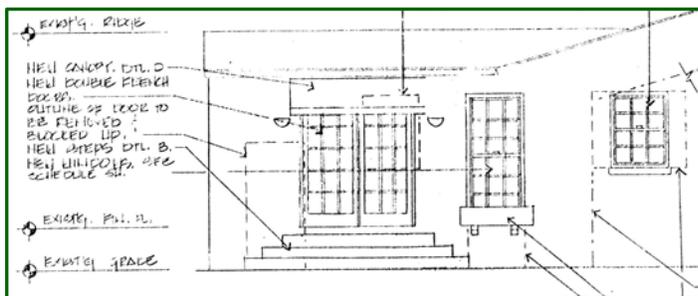
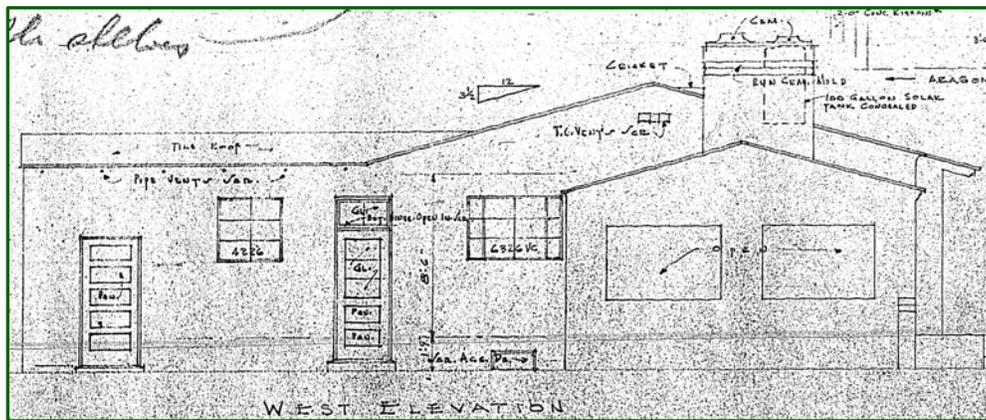


**Figures 18: Front (South) Façade**  
Permit #5357, 1937 [top]; Historic Photo, c.1940 [center top]; Permit #17220, 1961 [center bottom];  
Historic Photo, 1980 [bottom] Courtesy Miami-Dade Property Appraiser

In 1994 the interior of the western wing was renovated. This also included door and window changes to the west and north facades of the home. As noted on the permit drawings in Figure 19 the rear porch windows on the north façade were reduced and new steps introduced. On the west elevation the fenestration was more extensively reworked. As seen in the permit drawings in Figures 20, There were originally two doors on this façade. In 1994 the northern door was closed up and its adjacent window was expanded to accommodate French doors. The second door was reconfigures as a tall window and the the southern window was reduced in size. These changes are discernable in the stucco of the extant home. There are few other permits on file for this property but there appear to be no other significant changes to the exterior of the home.



**Figure 19: 1994 Fenestration Alterations  
 North elevation, Permit #94020098**



**Figures 20: Fenestration Alterations, West Façade  
 Permit #5357, 1937 [top]  
 Permit #94020098, 1994 [above]  
 Current Photo, 2022 [right]**



## Ownership History

*Note: Records regarding ownership prior to 1950 have not been located. The ownership history for this time is based on numerous sources including R. L. Polk City Directories (available from 1926-65), building permits, realtor notes, other records on file within the Coral Gables Historical Resources Department and the Miami-Dade County Clerk.*

Since its construction in 1937, the single-family residence at 517 Aragon Avenue was largely owner-occupied with several long-term owners. The home was built for Laura B. Larson (1863-1956). She moved to Coral Gables after the death of her husband in 1935 to be near her children Lucy and Leon. Laura Larson was born in Norway and married William Larson in Wisconsin in 1894. William was the vice president and general manager of the Farmers' Store company. He was involved in growing the business from one store in Bloomer, Wisconsin in 1891 to a chain of twenty-two stores by the time of his death. (Figure 21) The store building in Eu Claire, Wisconsin is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Laura Larson lived in the home on Aragon Avenue for nineteen years. Upon her death it was passed to her daughter Lucille Williams. In 1961 Shirley Screven purchased the property, added the garage, and occupied it with her mother for the twenty-seven years. The current owner bought the property with her husband in 1999. The home was just sold in November 2022 to the current owner, 517 Aragon LLC. See below for a full listing of owners.



**Figure 21: Postcards, Farmers Store Company**  
**Original store, c.1890 [left]** *Courtesy Wisconsin Historical Society*  
**Store buildings in Wisconsin, 1918 [right]** *Courtesy Chetek Area Museum*

## **Owners & Occupants of 517 Aragon Avenue**

1937-1956	Laura B. Larson
1956-1960	Lucille Larson Williams (daughter)
1960-1961	Bernard J. & Cora M. Cass
1961-1988	Shirley M. Screven
1988-1999	George & Yeline Jaile
1999-2006	Ronald W. Parham & Patricia Ann Finlay Parham
2006-2022	Patricia A. Parham

## Architect

William H. Merriam (1897-1992) was born in Minneapolis, Minnesota. He attended the Ohio Mechanics Institute from 1915-17 earning a Certificate in Architecture. In 1918 he served in the Army and a year later he entered the Georgia School of Technology from which he earned a degree in Architecture in 1922. During this time, he worked as a draftsman for the prominent architect W. H. Sears in Chattanooga, Tennessee. Upon his graduation, Merriam went to work as a draftsman for Sears' mentor, the nationally-acclaimed architect, Reuben H. Hunt. Both architects have numerous buildings listed on the National Register for Historic Places.

William Merriam moved to Coral Gables in 1924 to accept a draftsman position with architect H. George Fink who was a member of Merrick's design team. Merriam became a registered architect in 1931 and practiced briefly in New York when work in Coral Gables was scarce. He returned to Coral Gables in 1935 where he opened an office and practiced for the next several decades. In 1946 he was admitted to the American Institute of Architects (AIA). Merriam served on the Coral Gables Board of Architects for several years in the 1950s during Fink's chairmanship. Merriam was the Secretary-Treasurer for the Florida AIA Chapter from 1951-52 and its vice-president from 1952-3. In 1954 he chaired the Florida Building Code Committee. He was granted AIA emeritus status when he retired in 1970 at the age of 73.

Merriam worked consistently and prolifically in Coral Gables and the region in both the residential and commercial realm for over three decades. In 1939 the Coral Gables Association of Architects gave Merriam an award of merit for the design of the home for F. A. Larson at 1043 Alhambra Circle. His work in designing the Coral Gables High School with August Geiger, Vann & Lyell in 1950 and the curved commercial building across from City Hall (401 Coral Way) also received local acclaim in 1956.



**Figure 22: Architect William Merriam  
Vice President, American Institute of Architects, Florida  
South Chapter  
Miami News, January 18, 1953**

Merriam has numerous homes listed on the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places--many of which are contributing structures in the Alcazar Historic District and the Alhambra Circle Historic District. These include: 1008, 1043, 1317, 1414, 2039 and 2523 Alhambra Circle; 520 & 628 Alcazar Avenue; 1132 & 1260 S. Greenway Drive; 611 N. Greenway Drive; 2601 DeSoto Boulevard; 842 Palermo Avenue; 2505 Granada Boulevard; 3621 Monserrate Street, 229 Cadima Avenue, 737 Minorca Avenue, and 3613 Alhambra Court. Merriam is also responsible for the first addition to the Coral Gables Woman's Club in 1948. This building was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1990.

**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 (Coral Gables Zoning Code, Article 8, Section 8-103). To that end, the Coral Gables Zoning Code states that for designation as a local historic landmark the property must meet **one (1)** (or more) of the criteria stipulated in Article 8, Section 8-103.

Constructed in 1937 in the Minimal Traditional style the property at 517 Aragon Avenue (legally described as Lot 17 & the West 36.4 feet of Lot 16, Block 10, Coral Gables Section “B,” according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 5, Page 111 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:**

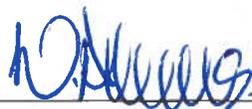
The property at 517 Aragon Avenue is significant to the City of Coral Gables history based on:

**HISTORICAL, CULTURAL AND ARCHITECTURAL SIGNIFICANCE**

**Therefore, Staff recommends the following:**

A motion to **APPROVE** the Local Historic Designation of the property at **517 Aragon Avenue** (legally described as Lot 17 & the West 36.4 feet of Lot 16, Block 10, Coral Gables Section “B,” according to the Plat thereof, as recorded in Plat Book 5, Page 111 of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida) based on its historical, cultural, and architectural significance.

Respectfully submitted,



Warren Adams  
Historic Preservation Officer

### Selected References

- 1940s Archival Photographs, City of Coral Gables, Historical Resources Department.
- Aerial Photography: Florida Collection. 2004-2011, University of Florida George A. Smathers Libraries.
- American Institute of Architects. Membership records, 1946-1970. *File of William H. Merriam.*
- Building Microfilm Records for 517 Aragon Avenue, Building and Zoning Department, Coral Gables, Florida.
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- McAlester, Virginia, *A Field Guide to American Houses*, Alfred A. Knopf, 2015.
- Merrick, George, *Coral Gables Homes, Miami Florida, c.1925.*
- Merrick, George, *Coral Gables Miami Riviera: Heart of the American Tropics, c.1925*
- Miami-Dade County Property Appraisers Department Records.
- Miami-Dade County Clerk, County Records.
- Newspapers.com
- Chippewa Herald-Telegram (Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin)
    - “Farmers Store Official Dies” August 1, 1935, p.2.
    - “William Larson” September 16, 1896, p.4.
  - Florida Times Union
    - “Merrick’s Romantic Story of Great Coral Gables Development” June 28, 1925.
  - Miami News
    - “Architects Induct New Group of Officers” January 18, 1953.
    - “Coral Gables Low-Cost Home Move Launched: Realtors’ Committee to Confer with City and FHA Officials” February 12, 1939, p.47.
    - “FHA Authority Here to Assist in Home Show” December 31, 1935, p.10.
    - “FHA Officials Realty Leaders at Home Show” January 24, 1936.
    - “Mrs. Larson Funeral Set” March 7, 1956, p.24.
  - Miami Tribune
    - “Push Plans for Home Show in Coral Gables” December 21, 1935, p.32.
- 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.
- 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 517 Aragon Avenue, Coral Gables Historical Resources Department.
- United States Census Records, various years.
- Wisconsin Agriculturist*, “Successful Wisconsin Farmers’ Stores: the story of one prosperous co-operative company started 25 years ago” Volume XL, No.25, June 22, 1916.

## 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.

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Property Address:	517 Aragon Avenue
Lot Description:	interior lots
Date of Construction:	1937
Use:	single-family residence
Style:	Minimal Traditional
Construction Material:	concrete block covered with stucco
Stories:	one-story
Roof Types:	gable, clad in S-tile
Photographs Year:	2022

**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.

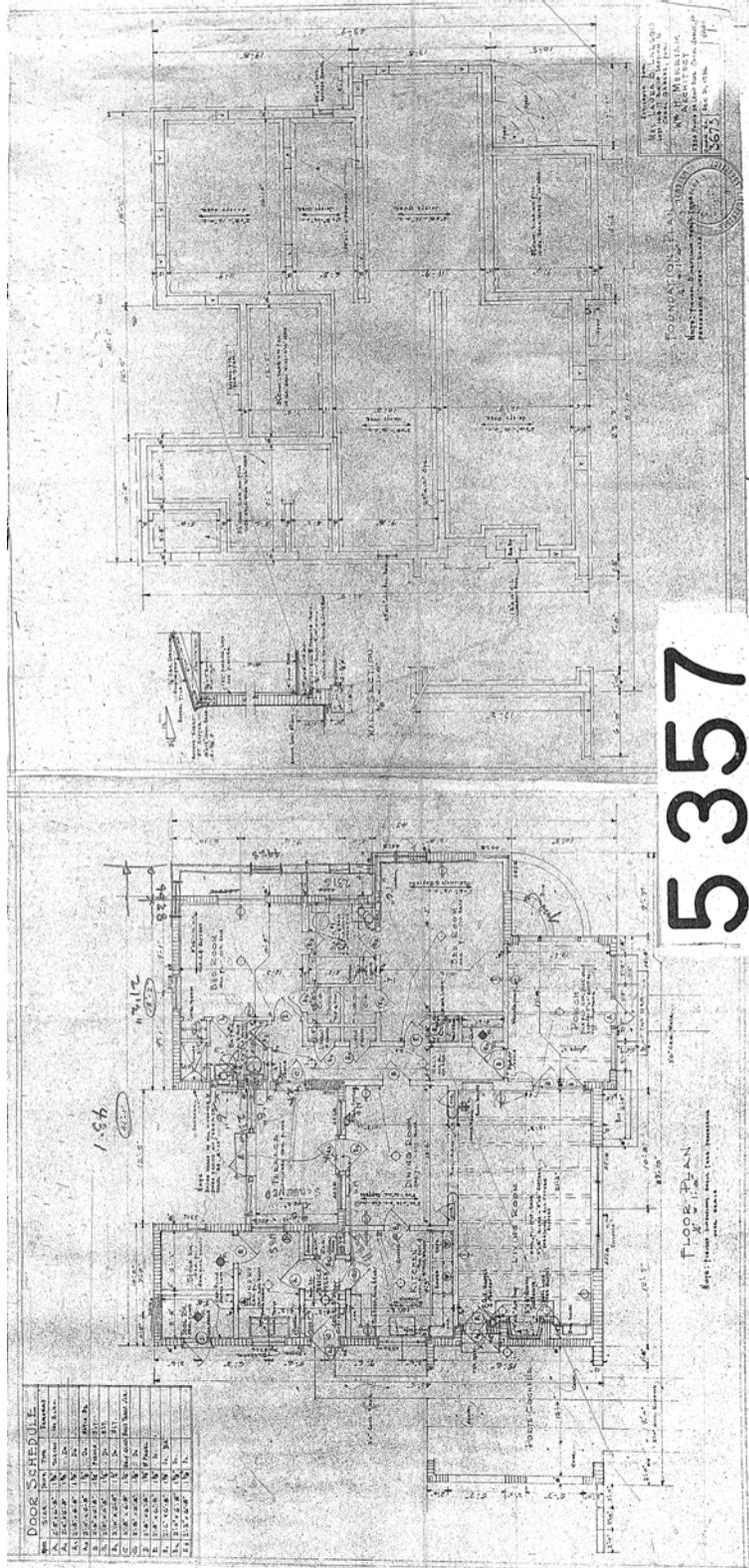
## CHARACTER-DEFINING FEATURES

### Style: Minimal Traditional



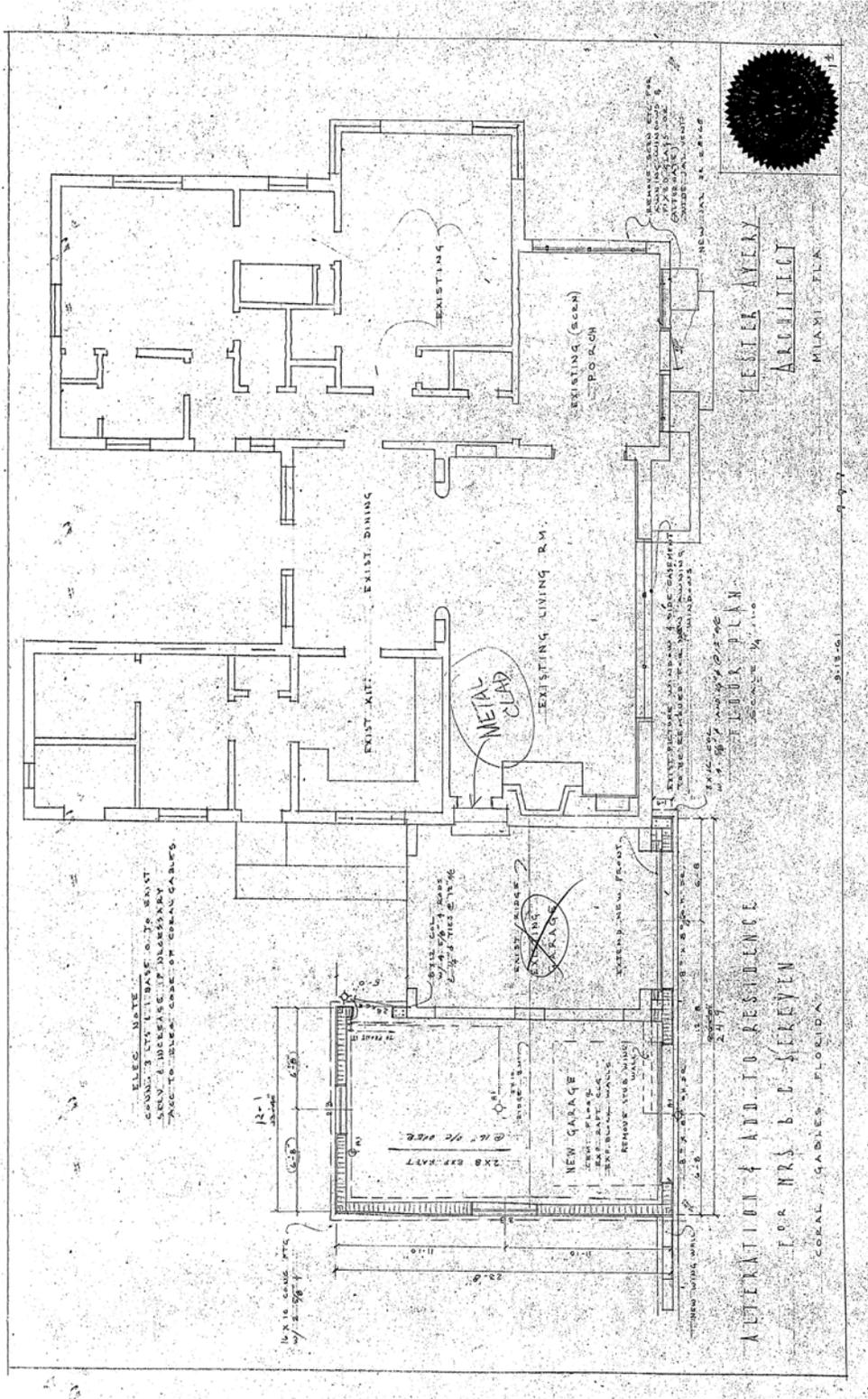
- ✓ one-story
- ✓ overall horizontal and geometric emphasis
- ✓ low roof pitches
- ✓ front façade roofs low and broad
- ✓ corner window
- ✓ lightly-textured stucco
- ✓ recessed fenestration without sills or lintels -- the Modernistic impression of the openings being carved out
- ✓ Moorish arched front porch
- ✓ large rectangular window
- ✓ shallow segmental arched square opening of the carport
- ✓ interior chimney with a geometric emphasis
- ✓ barrel tile roof
- ✓ exposed rafter tails
- ✓ curved Modernistic built-in planter at the southeast corner
- ✓ minimal embellishment
- ✓ rectangular grouped vents in the gable eaves

**Appendix A: Permit #5357, 1937**  
**Architect: William Merriam**

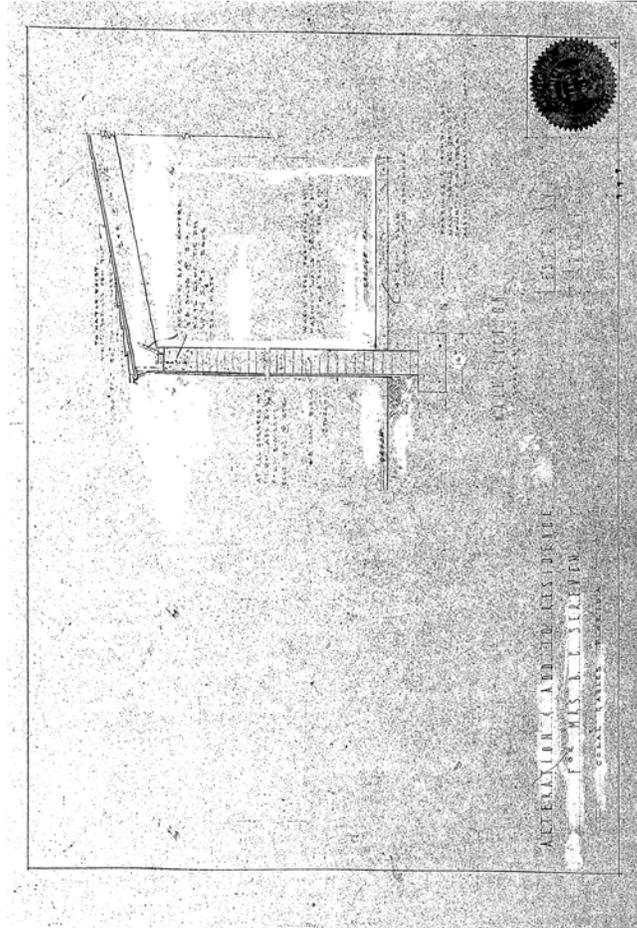




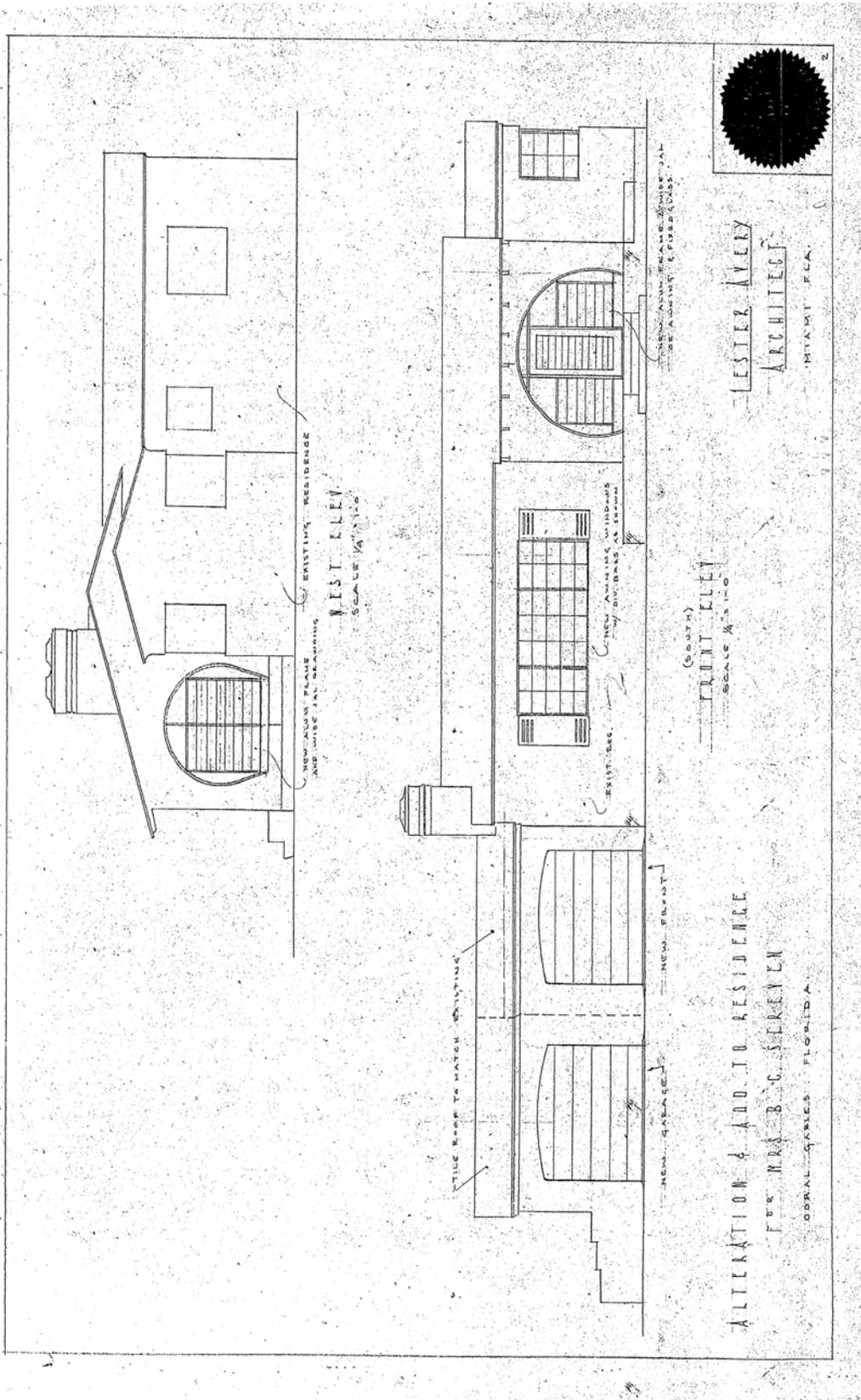
Appendix B: Permit #17220, 1961  
Architect: Lester Avery

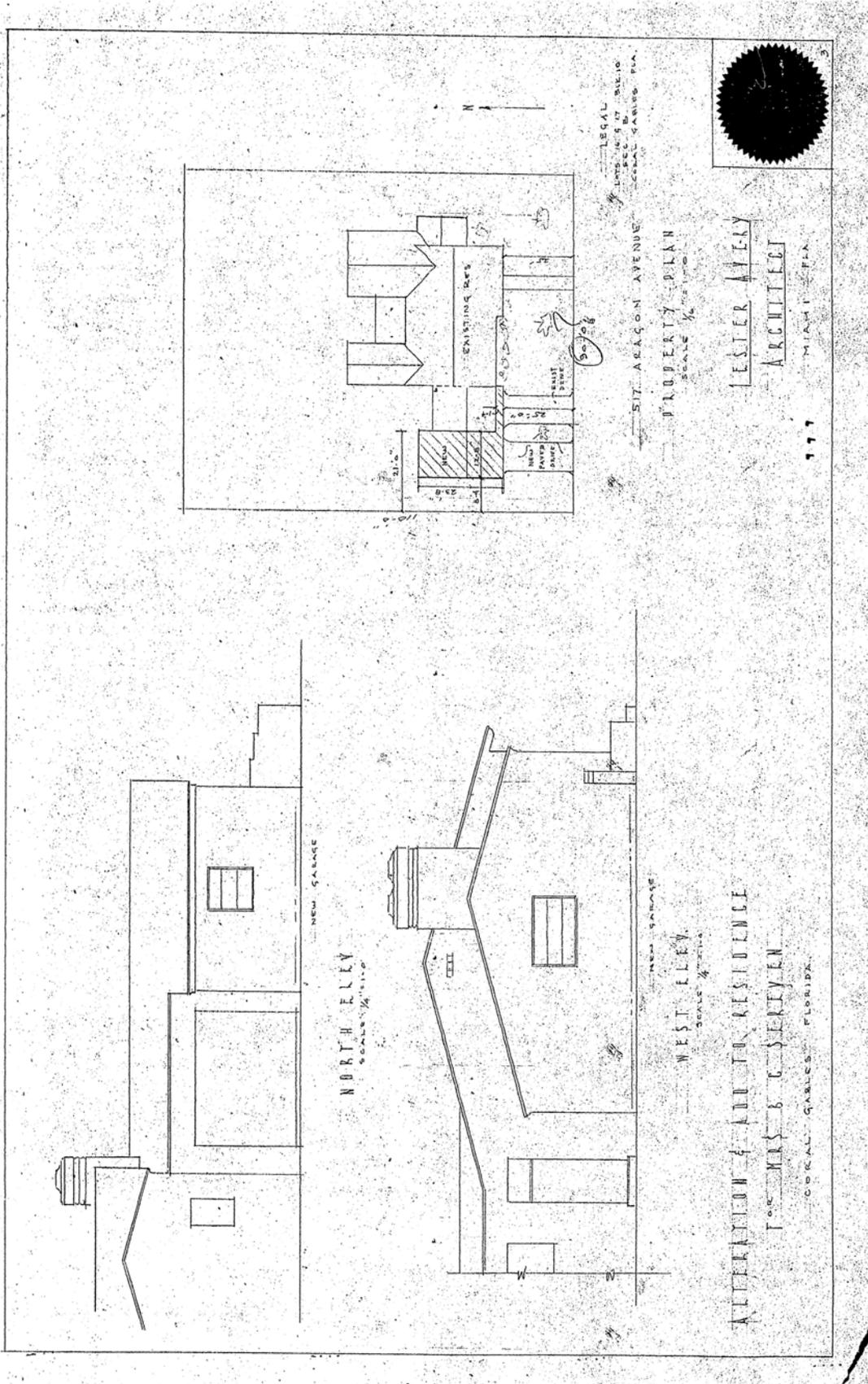


17220



17220





**Appendix C: Single-Family Minimal Traditional Residences  
listed in the Coral Gables Register of Historic Places**



**501 Aragon Avenue, 1938  
Architect: Leroy K. Albert  
Designated: 2016**



**737 Minorca Avenue, 1937  
Architect: William Merriam  
Designated: 2021**



**1700 Cortez Street, 1940  
Architect: H. George Fink  
Designated: 2008**