

**The Atlantis Hotel, Paradise Above the Sea:
A Study of Art Deco Hotel Interiors in Miami Beach**

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Chapter One—Introduction

Introduction to Thesis

On January 19, 1936, the Atlantis Hotel opened its doors to rave reviews in the *Miami Herald*.¹ The newspaper gushed, “tradition of a lost civilization whose culture is linked to that of ancient Greece, whose glory and splendor has grown through the ages, is revived with the completion of the Atlantis Hotel.”² This grand description captured the excitement of the opening of this spectacular hotel. Designed by Lawrence Murray Dixon, the leading architect in Miami Beach, the Atlantis gave expression to the Art Deco style on a scale never before seen.³ The hotel is now considered “Dixon’s grand oeuvre.”⁴ Unfortunately, the Atlantis was demolished in 1973, so today we are only able to visit this unique hotel through photographs, remembrances, and written descriptions.

The architecture of the Atlantis, like many Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach, was streamlined and Modern. Art Deco buildings often had sleek, undecorated, and curved exteriors. The decoration that appeared on these minimalist buildings, like that found on the Atlantis, was often whimsical and playful. The exteriors of many Art Deco buildings in Miami Beach have been deeply researched, written about, and well documented. However, the interiors of Miami’s Art Deco hotels, such as the Atlantis, have not been studied or

¹ Atlantis Hotel (1936-1973), not the Atlantis Condominium (1982-present) in Miami Beach.

² *Miami Herald*, “The Atlantis, Distinctive Miami Beach Hotstelry, Opens Today,” January 19, 1936.

³ One of the most profound architects in Miami Beach was L. Murray Dixon. He was educated at Georgia Tech and created many Art Deco buildings in Miami Beach. In fact, over 100 of his buildings still stand today. Prior to moving to Miami Beach, Dixon worked in New York for the architectural firm Schultze & Weaver. This was where Dixon started working on hotels.

⁴ Jean-François Lejeune and Allan T. Shulman, *The Making of Miami Beach: 1933-1942, The Architecture of Lawrence Murray Dixon* (The Bass Museum of Art: Miami, 2000), 172.

discussed in great detail. Largely this is because most of the interiors no longer exist or are not in pristine condition. Yet it was the interiors that were perhaps the best expression of the guests who frequented the hotels. The interiors also were the spaces where guests spent their leisure time and relaxed while on vacation. In this way, the interiors reveal the creation of a new kind of leisure. A more casual style of vacation started in the 1930s in Miami Beach setting the standard for leisurely middle-class vacations that became the norm after World War II. Miami Beach represented the ultimate escape to a leisurely and exotic vacation destination and the hotel interiors found there helped transport guests from their everyday lives into a fantastic paradise. Guests who experienced Miami Beach through its Art Deco hotels were truly living the American Dream.

The interior spaces of the Atlantis were highly decorated and ornate. A guest at the Atlantis could experience a wide range of atmospheres while walking through the hotel. This included a highly decorated lobby themed around the fantasy of a grand civilization below water, an elegant and sophisticated dining room, a more casual Eastern European dining space, and a Modern cocktail room. These unique interiors made the Atlantis Hotel one of the most elaborate, decorative, and magical Art Deco hotels in all of Miami Beach. This combination of themes found throughout the interior of the Atlantis allowed its middle-class guests from across the country to enjoy an environment that was Modern, tropical, and fantasy-like all under one roof. In addition, these diverse interiors

allowed guests to experience the exoticism found throughout the world without traveling outside of the United States.

If the hotel's exterior acknowledged high Modernist ideas about less ornament and sleek surfaces, the interior of the Atlantis took its guests in the other direction. It decidedly reveled in ornamentation, fantasy, and themes. But the Atlantis also incorporated design elements that were familiar to its guests. This balance of familiar and unfamiliar was common in many Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach. However, the interiors of the majority of hotels were not as elaborate, well decorated, or themed as the interiors found in the Atlantis. As a result, the Atlantis set the tone for the numerous Art Deco hotels located throughout Miami Beach.

This thesis makes use of theories, themes, and evidence in the form of photography, advertising, and written descriptions from the 1930s and 1940s to explain the meanings of and bring life to the interior public spaces of the Atlantis.⁵ The first chapter of this thesis includes an introduction to the paper in addition to a history of Miami Beach and a discussion of the city from 1935 to 1941—the height of Art Deco Miami Beach.⁶ This chapter also includes a discussion on the Art Deco movement in Miami Beach. The second chapter is an introduction to the Atlantis Hotel, which includes a description and overview of

⁵ The interior public spaces included lobbies, lounges, dining rooms, cocktail room, and other areas where guests interacted with each other. Private areas for guests and staff like guest rooms will not be discussed. The main reason for this is that very little documentation on these spaces exists.

⁶ Construction on Art Deco hotels began around 1934 so by 1935 guests were staying in these hotels and by 1942 Miami Beach was practically turned into a military base as a result of World War II. Military personnel occupied many of the hotels in Miami Beach instead of tourists. This included the Atlantis, which stationed one of the military branches. (Howard Kleinberg, *Woggles and Cheeseholes: The History of Miami Beach's Hotels* (The Greater Miami & The Beaches Hotel Association: Miami Beach, 2005), 53).

the Atlantis in addition to materials about the hotel. The third and fourth chapters analyze the public interior spaces of the hotel. Chapter Three discusses the lobby and lounge, while Chapter Four explores the dining spaces and cocktail room. The final chapter concludes the thesis.

Before the journey about the exotic Atlantis Hotel begins, it is necessary to look at the larger context of Miami Beach, the city where the hotel came to life.

History of Miami Beach

Less than 100 years ago, Miami Beach was open land. It was not the bustling, glamorous vacation destination that it is today. At the beginning of the twentieth century, Miami Beach was essentially a swamp flanked by the green waters of the Atlantic Ocean. But the birth of Florida's future Gold Coast was soon to come about. Developers John Collins, Carl Fisher, John Lummus, and James Lummus were among the first to develop this beachfront land. The city of Miami Beach was incorporated in 1915 and the first hotels were under construction within months. Miami Beach experienced its first development boom in the 1920s. Wealthy vacationers traveled to hotels in Miami Beach to experience the fabulous weather and take advantage of the wide variety of activities available to them. These hotels were large, high-end, and luxurious resorts built in the Mediterranean Revival style, which was prevalent in the coastal areas of Florida. This first boom put Miami Beach on the map as a

popular vacation destination. As one historian explained, Miami Beach was “regarded as a relaxed, sporting alternative to Palm Beach’s formality” and as the beach town grew it attracted a broader range of Americans than Palm Beach.⁷

In the late ‘20s tourism and construction began to slow in Miami Beach. This downturn was partially caused by a hurricane that hit Miami Beach in September 1926. As it turned out, Miami Beach’s standing as a tourist destination was harmed by the storm more than its buildings; in fact, many of the hotels in Miami Beach were spared any damage.⁸ The Depression also played a role in slowing down tourism and development yet it did not affect Miami Beach like it did the rest of the country. While Miami Beach was almost unscathed economically by the Depression, the downturn in the economy greatly affected the type of tourist that could now travel to Miami Beach and in turn led to a new style of hotel where they would stay.

With fewer wealthy tourists, Miami Beach needed to attract a different type of tourist—the middle and working classes. The middle class had grown during the Depression because many in the upper class had lost a significant amount of their assets.⁹ Yet, these new members of the middle class still wanted to enjoy themselves on vacation as they had once done. They just needed to find a more affordable environment and Miami Beach was poised to be the perfect get-away destination. It enjoyed an environment similar to wealthier resorts like Palm

⁷ Ann Armbruster, *The Life and Times of Miami Beach* (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1995), 10.

⁸ Lejeune and Shulman, 5.

⁹ Harold Mehling, *The Most of Everything* (Harcourt, Brace and Company: New York, 1960), 177.

Beach, yet it had a sportier environment. As a result, hotels needed to be built in a more affordable and quick manner in order to accommodate the rapidly growing number of tourists. This meant that the buildings had to be smaller and less ornamental than the hotels built in the '20s. These new hotels were "originally designed to advantageously combine an extremely modest construction cost with a heightened flashy, popular and modern appearance to specifically attract a new, solidly middle-class group of tourists to this beach area, formerly a resort of the well-to-do."¹⁰ This new group of middle-class tourists brought a second boom of building to Miami Beach. By 1935 historians have emphasized that "Miami Beach was once again the fastest growing city in the country with a per capita building rate twenty times higher than the next city, Washington, D.C."¹¹

Ethnic groups who would be shunned in other resort cities were welcomed in certain areas of Miami Beach. This included a large Jewish population of tourists which added to the influx of middle class tourists to Miami Beach. Some of the Jewish population that made their way to Miami Beach became full-time residents. However, as in much of the world living and social conditions were not ideal for Jews living in Miami Beach. During the 1920s, Miami Beach was described as "one of the most anti-Semitic cities in America."¹² Nevertheless the Jewish population continued to grow especially in the area of South Beach. "Jews found it almost impossible to lease or buy property north of Fifth Street and

¹⁰ Jewel Stern, *Project Skyline* (Museum of Modern Art: Oxford, England, 1982), 4.

¹¹ Lejeune and Shulman, 11.

¹² Joann Biondi, *Miami Beach Memories* (Insiders' Guide: Guilford, Connecticut, 2007), 3.

therefore congregated in the lower end of the beach.”¹³ In fact, by the end of the ‘30s 20 to 25 percent of Miami Beach’s population was Jewish.¹⁴ In addition to visiting hotels in Miami Beach, some of the Jewish residents developed and owned hotels.¹⁵

“The growing popularity of Miami Beach with Jewish tourists” was “reflected in the *Jewish Daily Forward* newspaper ads of the ‘30s. In 1935, only the Nash Hotel at Collins Avenue and Eleventh Street, owned by Morris Nashelsky, and the Victor Hotel, on the Beach at Twelfth Street, advertised in the *Jewish Daily Forward*. But in 1939 the page dedicated to hotel advertisements was loaded with Miami Beach locations.”¹⁶ It is not known if the Atlantis advertised in the paper, but other existing Atlantis advertisements did not contain any anti-Semitic language that was used by other hotels in Miami Beach.

Life as a Tourist in Miami Beach

New classes of tourists traveled to Miami Beach to experience good times, good weather, and “the flashiest and most up-to-date...popular architectural fashion.”¹⁷ But what did the tourists do while vacationing in Miami Beach? During the ‘30s, Miami Beach was a city of leisure, pleasure, and play. The relaxed and leisurely atmosphere of Miami Beach even carried over to the name of one of its

¹³ Biondi, 3.

¹⁴ Armbruster, 79.

¹⁵ Biondi, 17.

¹⁶ Armbruster, 79.

¹⁷ Laura Cerwinske, *Tropical Deco: The Architecture and Design of Old Miami Beach* (Rizzoli: New York, 1981), 50.

leading radio stations, WIOD, which adopted as its slogan: Wonderful Isle of Dreams.¹⁸

In addition to sunbathing, visitors to this beach paradise would lounge by their hotel swimming pools, socialize in hotel lobbies, and play shuffleboard or croquet (Image 1).¹⁹ However, one of the most popular activities was gambling. One Miami Beach historian has suggested that “gambling was the primary diversion of the Florida tourist of the thirties.”²⁰ A dog track opened in 1926 followed by horseracing with the opening of Hialeah Racecourse in the early ‘30s and soon by two other horse tracks, and eventually casinos.²¹ Other types of gambling, not found in casinos at the time, such as roulette and blackjack also appeared in clubs along the beach. Even though these games were illegal, the police tended to look the other way during tourist season.²² Turning a blind eye on illegal activities was not new in Miami Beach law enforcement. During Prohibition, drinking was quite prevalent in Miami and also ignored by the police.²³

Other activities also drew tourists to Miami Beach. Simply being seen in Miami Beach was important. Therefore, lounging or sitting in the hotel lobby, bar, or restaurant became an acceptable social activity. Nightclubs also were popular. Watching live bands and dancing was a preferred way to spend evenings in

¹⁸ WIOD NewsRadio 610 Web site, “History,” WIOD, <http://610wiod.com/pages/history.html>.

¹⁹ University of Miami Libraries, <https://scholar.library.miami.edu/promo/1930s.htm>.

²⁰ Armbruster, 58.

²¹ Seth Bramson, *Images of America: Miami Beach* (Arcadia Publishing: Charleston, SC, 2005), 40.

²² Armbruster, 58.

²³ Miami Design Preservation League, Walking Tour, “Ocean Drive and Beyond,” August 2007.

Miami. Other “see-and-be-seen” activities included going to movie theatres, burlesque shows, the pier, speedboat races, and polo matches.²⁴ The Magic of Miami Beach, a 1938 book on the history of Miami Beach, painted this picture. “Today Miami Beach embraces exactly eight square miles of enchantment. There is no place quite like it on earth.” The author went on to praise the natural conditions of Miami and the developers who have “added every attraction that his ingenuity could devise.”²⁵

Throughout the ‘30s, the city of Miami Beach and its chamber of commerce advertised in order to draw even more tourists to the city. One slogan that proved popular was “Miami Beach is calling you.”²⁶ Brochures also were created to entice people to this tropical city. One brochure, *Life is Better in Miami Beach*, stated:

Here in Miami children and grownups play in the sunshine all twelve months... More than 400 miles nearer the sun than the southernmost point on our Pacific Coast, this Metropolis of the Tropics thus offers unique protection from winter ailments and an unparalleled opportunity for vigorous outdoor exercise or sunbathing. Here indeed is health headquarters not only for the infirm or those advanced in years, but for everyone wise enough to consult ‘Dr. Sun’ as often as opportunity permits. No wonder Miami has become a great city of homes where illness and worry are rare as furnaces and coal smoke.²⁷

Other travel brochures designed to entice tourists south included: *Miami, America's Sunshine Capital, Miami—Metropolis of the Tropics...Nearer the Sun*,

²⁴ Bramson, 42, 48.

²⁵ Charles Edgar Nash, *The Magic of Miami Beach* (Washington Square: Philadelphia, 1938), 140.

²⁶ Lejeune and Shulman, 10.

²⁷ University of Miami Libraries, <http://scholar.library.miami.edu/promo/1930s.html>.

and *Miami By the Sea: The Land of Palms and Sunshine*.²⁸ All of these advertisements and brochures were designed specifically as a call to the middle-class tourist encouraging them to escape everyday life and travel to healthy, leisurely, and tropical Miami Beach.

The call to tourists in a Miami Beach hotel and apartment book also was quite dramatic. Published in 1936, this guide was entitled "Welcome to Miami Beach, Florida 'America's Year 'Round Playground.'" The introduction of this publication proclaimed that Miami was one of the "best equipped" cities for "a large influx of vacationers." Since Miami was only a mile and a half wide, tourists could conveniently enjoy the Atlantic Ocean and Biscayne Bay. Additionally, the guidebook touted man-made amusements as well. Polo, fishing, golf, tennis, dancing, bicycling, boating, motoring, swimming pools, and dog racing were some of the many diversions that Miami offered. All of this was topped off by Miami being "the world's greatest winter playground" and having unequalled hotels. Indeed, according to the guide, the range of hotels offering "luxury suites" to "efficiency apartments" made the city a perfect destination for all budgets.²⁹

Clearly the writer of the publication was selling prospective tourists on the activities, amenities, modernity, hospitality, and most important the intoxicating beauty of Miami Beach. Such ads helped draw visitors to Miami Beach, who traveled south by plane, train, or automobile. A trip on the Atlantic Coast Line Railroad from Washington, D.C. to Miami cost \$17.90 one way or round trip

²⁸ University of Miami Libraries, <http://scholar.library.miami.edu/promo/1930s.html>.

²⁹ *Miami Beach Hotel and Apartment Book*, Season 1936-1937, City of Miami Beach Archives, <http://weblink.miamibeachfl.gov/Search.aspx>.

\$32.25.³⁰ If flying down to Miami was in a tourist's price range, a seven hour one-way trip from New York to Miami with a layover in Charleston, South Carolina cost \$129.20.³¹

A fascinating look into life in Miami Beach is seen in the popular 1941 movie *Moon Over Miami*. Starring Betty Grable, Don Ameche, and Robert Cummings, *Moon Over Miami* is the story of Kay, a young woman who travels to Miami with her sister and aunt. The women conspire to get rich by marrying wealthy men. This lighthearted musical follows the women through their entertaining journey. Even though *Moon Over Miami* is cheery and sometimes silly, it is intriguing to see the way life in Miami is depicted during this time period.

Moon Over Miami features carefree vacationers in Miami partying, dancing, and enjoying life in the sunny weather. The only real work being done is by the employees at the hotel or by servants, which was likely the case in real life. Activities in the musical are exactly the same as what real vacationers enjoyed while visiting Miami Beach in the late 1930s. In the musical vacationers are drinking at parties, lounging or swimming at the pool, tanning on the beach, boating around the Florida swamps, and betting on horses at the racetrack.

Even though the hotel featured in the set of *Moon Over Miami* is not Art Deco, there are some interiors of the set that clearly contain elements that could be

³⁰ *The Washington Post*, Atlantic Coast Rail Line Advertisement, November 24, 1940.

³¹ John A. Stuart and John F. Stark, Jr., *The New Deal in South Florida: Design, Policy, and Community Building, 1933-1940* (University Press of Florida: Gainesville, Florida, 2008), 55.

found in Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach at that time. For example, one scene is set in an Asian-inspired ballroom. The use of exotic motifs was common in many Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach during this time period. Another interior element that was common in Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach was the use of glass blocks. The women's bathroom in *Moon Over Miami* had an entire glass block wall. This was one of the most Modern elements seen in this musical. The dining room in *Moon Over Miami* was very similar to dining rooms in Art Deco hotels. Many dining rooms in Art Deco hotels were simple with light walls, white tablecloths covering the table, and simple, dining chairs. The dining room in the musical contained the same elements. The focus in the dining room in the movie, like in the real interiors, is on the people—this is their stage.

Art Deco Miami Beach

The Art Deco style that was popular in Miami Beach from 1935 to 1941 was different from the Art Deco style that grew out of France and that was popular throughout the world in the 1920s. French designers turned to decorative objects from the 17th and 18th centuries for inspiration. As a result, the use of high-end, luxury materials that were popular in the past such as rosewood, ebony, sharkskin, ivory, and lacquer were popular in French Deco. These past styles were inspired by early Greek and Roman styles, so Greek and Roman elements carried over to French Art Deco as well. In addition to drawing on the past and incorporating expensive materials, Art Deco used bold and

colorful motifs such as zigzags, sunbursts, and geometric shapes. Many of these motifs were inspired by exotic sources from Africa, Asia, and Mesoamerica.

These motifs also carried over to Art Deco design in Miami Beach.

Art Deco was not just popular in France. This style's popularity spread throughout the world finding its way to the United States. Art Deco icons in America included The Wilmett Theater in Los Angeles (1931) and the Chrysler Building in New York (1930). As time passed, the style changed. One reason for this change was the movement itself lasted a long time—approximately 1910 to 1939—and the style simply changed over time. Another important reason for the change in the look of Art Deco was the Depression. Using expensive high-end materials was out of the question during and right after the Depression. As a result, the style became more minimal and streamlined. The streamlined look of Art Deco also was inspired by machines, aerodynamics, and speed that were rapidly becoming popular in the '30s. Where France was the leader of a more ornate and luxurious Art Deco in the 1920s, the United States was the leader of the more affordable, streamlined Art Deco of the 1930s.³²

Art Deco in Miami Beach was unique. While the style was inspired by French Art Deco of the 20's and 30's, Art Deco in Miami Beach was clearly inspired by the local environment that drew so many people to the area. Using

³² Charlotte Benton, Tim Benton, and Ghislaine Wood, editors. *Art Deco 1910-1939* (Bulfinch Press: Boston, 2003). Barbara Baer Capitman. *Deco Delights* (E.P. Dutton: New York, 1988). Alastair Duncan. *Art Deco* (Thames and Hudson: London, 1988). Bevis Hillier and Stephen Escrib. *Art Deco Style* (Phaidon Press Limited: London, 1997). Lejeune and Shulman. Nancy Troy, *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (Yale University Press: New Haven, 1991). Jonathan M. Woodham, *Oxford Dictionary of Modern Design* (Oxford University Press: Oxford, 2004).

local elements for inspiration in Art Deco was not just popular in Miami Beach, it occurred through out other areas of the world in this movement. The inspiring tropical setting dominated both the outside and inside of buildings in Miami Beach. A 1938 article in *Architectural Forum* described Florida architecture by stating, "there is a basis for architecture in Florida that is both local in character and contemporary."³³

The contemporary elements being discussed in the quote above reflected the Modern and streamlined look that took over the streets of Miami Beach. The exterior of most of the buildings built during the '30s in Miami Beach were streamlined and contained curved stucco walls and simple details (Image 2). After the Depression, there was a desire to create a more uplifting atmosphere in the United States no where more so than Miami Beach. Since Miami Beach was a resort town, it had "resort architecture" that "intended to lift the visitor from the gloom of the Depression, to merge his shelter with the glories surrounding nature, and even, perhaps, to remind him of the spirituality of light and air and openness. This was an architecture designed to evoke feelings of delight."³⁴

Using fantasy-like, playful, and whimsical details both inside and outside of buildings was one way to create a positive and relaxing landscape. This uplifting and casual feeling carried over to the overall atmosphere of leisurely vacations in Miami Beach. Unlike other vacation destinations such as Palm

³³ "Florida Architecture: An Outstanding U.S. Resort Center Turns to Modern for its New Residences and Commercial Buildings," *Architectural Forum* 69 (December 1938): 451.

³⁴ Cerwinske, 12.

Beach that were more conservative in atmosphere, interior design, and architecture, Miami Beach offered upper, middle, and working class tourists a more casual vacation experience. This relaxed atmosphere was captured in "a *Chicago Tribune* article that stated: "millionaires 'are a dime a dozen. No one dresses up to visit them. Bankers appear in the shopping district in shorts.'"³⁵ In addition to lifting spirits, the Art Deco hotels and other buildings under construction in Miami Beach were cheaper to build because of their simple construction and materials. Not only did they cost less, they were quicker to go up so many buildings were constructed in Miami Beach in this style.

Many of the buildings in Miami Beach were white stucco yet different colors were used for the trim including greens, blues, oranges and pinks.³⁶ Other exterior details found on many of the Art Deco hotels included eyebrows above the windows, porthole windows, railings, curved walls, tropical details, and glass blocks (Image 3). The color on the hotels and the unique details added to the refreshing atmosphere of Miami Beach. The stucco landscape created by the hundreds of Art Deco buildings in Miami Beach was outstanding. As one historian stated, "it was 'new,' which had an obvious value during the Depression slowdown; it looked neat and cheerful; it was fast and inexpensive to build; it lent itself to colorful decorative touches that heightened the get-away-from-it-all

³⁵ Armbruster, 61.

³⁶ Lejeune and Shulman, 5.

vacation experience; and it bore a moviesque familiarity that guaranteed its popularity.”³⁷

One of the best descriptions of Miami Beach Art Deco states that it was “one part International Style puritanism, one part Art Deco indulgence.”³⁸ This simple quote says it all. The interior and exterior of Art Deco buildings in Miami Beach were a splash of bold, bright and extravagant, but there also was a splash of simple, sleek, and futurism that was found in Modernism. This mix created a unique environment only found in Miami Beach. In Miami Beach, it was not the case of Art Deco versus Modernism it was Art Deco plus Modernism. When this combination was done at its best, like in the case of the Atlantis, the results were breathtaking for tourists.

³⁷ Armbruster, 82.

³⁸ Lejeune and Shulman, 7.

Chapter Two—Atlantis Hotel

Introduction to the Atlantis Hotel

The Atlantis Hotel was located at 2655 Collins Avenue. The eight-story, oceanfront hotel was made of “steel, concrete block and stucco.”³⁹ Guests would enter the Atlantis property by driving “through an attractive entrance of quarry key stone pylons at Collins avenue” that ended at the hotel entrance in a circle.⁴⁰ After exiting their car, a guest at the Atlantis would then experience an up-close look at this attractive and Modern hotel (Image 4).

Construction on the 150-room Atlantis Hotel began in the summer of 1935.⁴¹ At that time, the expected cost for the furnished building was \$500,000, but when the hotel opened eight months later the real cost had escalated to \$750,000.⁴² The developers were over budget by half of the original estimated cost of the hotel which may have been a result of the developers and builders of the Atlantis sparing no expense on creating this marvelous hotel. Developers of the Atlantis included the Atlantis Corporation, Harold Sirken, and B.F. Shoenberg. Bruno Weil and Jack Miller were the real estate brokers.⁴³ Clearly both Miller and Weil were appreciative of their association with the Atlantis as seen in the ad they ran in the *Miami Herald* the day the hotel opened wishing the

³⁹ *Miami Herald*, “Construction on Nine-Story Atlantis Hotel on Ocean Front Plot in Miami Beach,” May 19, 1935.

⁴⁰ *Miami Herald*, May 19, 1935.

⁴¹ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁴² *Miami Herald*, May 19, 1935. *Wall Street Journal*, “Atlantis Hotel Opens Second-Season December 15,” December 14, 1936.

⁴³ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

owners of the hotel great success.⁴⁴ Lawrence Murray Dixon served as the architect while L.B. Taylor designed the structural engineering.⁴⁵

Though this paper focuses on the interior of the Atlantis, it is important to briefly describe its dynamic and Modern exterior since it was closely related to the interior of the hotel. The hotel was a large, streamlined, and sleek building (Image 5). The exterior was, according to the *Miami Herald* in 1936, “very simple, and what ornamentation” there was had “been deliberately applied to the outside.”⁴⁶

The front façade of the Atlantis was “slightly asymmetrical.”⁴⁷ Instead of being flat, the front was stepped, which was a type of fashionable decoration used in architecture and other forms of Art Deco design such as furniture, ceramics, and metals. This “stepped-tower configuration” resulted in what appeared to be a “fully realized miniature skyscraper of a hotel.”⁴⁸ Most of the façade was smooth and undecorated. However, there were a few decorative features. The Atlantis was “encrusted with plant life reminiscent of Auguste Perret’s rue Franklin apartment building in Paris (1909).” This decoration was located on the first two floors of the façade, beside the porticoed entrance of the hotel (Image 6).⁴⁹ The “vegetal-themed Deco panels” surrounded “four hollow

⁴⁴ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁴⁵ *Miami Herald*, May 19, 1935.

⁴⁶ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁴⁷ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁴⁸ Lejeune and Shulman, 44, 7.

⁴⁹ Lejeune and Shulman, 70.

piers of quarried keystone.”⁵⁰ Between these piers were recessed “window bays and spandrels” that emphasized “the intervening pilasters” that “delivered a powerful vertical surge.”⁵¹ Located six stories above the piers were “capitals that looked like electric condensers.”⁵² The pilasters were playful and added a charming and Modern look to the hotel. This whimsical combination of classical and Modern found on the exterior of the Atlantis carried over into its interior.

The back of the Atlantis “was just as playful and full of invention” as the front of the hotel (Image 7).⁵³ The back façade was L-shaped and instead of using vegetal decoration, “Dixon used black vitrolite in a pattern that mimicked the plan of the hotel” (Image 8).⁵⁴ Vitrolite was a new type of glass tile that was commonly used in the interior and on the exterior of buildings in the ‘20s and ‘30s typically in the Art Deco style. There were three vitrolite panels placed at the back entrance of the hotel. Circles emulating portholes were cut out of the top portion of these panels. This added a nautical element to the Atlantis, which was common in other Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach. Six stories above the vitrolite panels Dixon used the same capitals that were on the front of the building.

“The Atlantis,”—two architectural historians have noted—“molded to its site and program, exhibited a rather typical lack of formality; entered off-axis, its frontal asymmetry was diffused by a series of setbacks while in back the building

⁵⁰ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁵¹ Lejeune and Shulman, 53.

⁵² *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁵³ Lejeune and Shulman, 172.

⁵⁴ Lejeune and Shulman, 172.

was bent to capture more oceanfront views.”⁵⁵ Both the back and the front of the Atlantis were “somewhat awkward, yet pleasant and witty, as if the architect intended to demonstrate that the exercise should not be taken too seriously.”⁵⁶ The interior of the Atlantis also was pleasant and witty, which gave a lighthearted and relaxing atmosphere to the interior spaces found throughout the hotel and Miami Beach.

Clearly, the back of the Atlantis was just as important as the front of the hotel since it was the back of the hotel that overlooked the ocean. As a result, the guests would spend a majority of their time relaxing oceanfront. Guests would spend time sitting at the terrace located off the back of the hotel, where they could sit and enjoy the sun and a bite to eat. In fact, the *Miami Herald* reported that “many sunny hours will be spent at breakfast and luncheon on the attractive terrace of the Atlantis, overlooking the beach walk and the Cabana Colony.”⁵⁷ The *Miami Herald* also reported that the terrace extended “across the entire ocean front with a lawn between it and the ocean boardwalk.”⁵⁸ At the time of construction, there was supposed to be a “series of fountains with unusual lighting systems” on the lawn, yet is unclear if this interesting and unique feature ever was created.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, it is clear that this exterior space was very important to the Atlantis hotel and its guests. In fact, the “In New York” syndicated column included the “ocean front off the Atlantis, with the water a

⁵⁵ Lejeune and Shulman, 53.

⁵⁶ Lejeune and Shulman, 172.

⁵⁷ *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

⁵⁸ *Miami Herald*, May 19, 1935.

⁵⁹ *Miami Herald*, May 19, 1935.

clear and turquoise blue” in its segment on “Lovely Sights in Miami Beach.”⁶⁰

Clearly, the exterior space in the back of the Atlantis was highly regarded by the public.

As a result of its unique exterior (and interior as will be discussed later), the Atlantis Hotel promoted itself as one of the most chic hotels in America. The owners ran advertisements throughout the country constantly from 1935 to 1941. The majority, if not all of these ads, ran during the late fall and into the winter in order to attract additional business for those seasons. An ad about the Atlantis ran in *The New York Times* more than a month before the hotel opened. This ad stated, “The ATLANTIS, on the Ocean. Newest and smartest resort hotel in America. Write for booklet. Wm. G. McKeenin, Manager.”⁶¹ This ad, which ran more than 11 times in the winter of 1935 and 1936, was often placed around other ads relating to Miami Beach. A larger advertisement promoting the Atlantis ran in the *Miami Herald* the day the hotel opened on January 19, 1936. This ad described the Atlantis as “America’s Newest and Smartest Resort Hotel, Opening Today, A veritable paragon of advanced engineering and architectural design, combining the latest developments in residential comfort with the efficiency of modern hotel operation. Continental standards of Cuisine and Service add a note of Old World charm to an ensemble as smart as tomorrow.”⁶² From the start, these advertisements about the Atlantis were making a bold statement about the

⁶⁰ George Ross, “In New York,” *Ironwood Daily Globe*, February 11, 1936.

⁶¹ Atlantis Advertisement, *The New York Times*, December 10, 1935.

⁶² *Miami Herald*, January 19, 1936.

high-quality service and unique and Modern lodging available at this well-designed hotel.

Advertisements about the Atlantis continued to be published after the hotel's first season. A want ad ran in *The New York Times* during the winter of 1936-37. It was simple, short and to the point. "In Miami Beach—The Atlantis, America's smartest resort hotel. Directly on the Ocean. Advance reservations available."⁶³ In addition to the want ads, the Atlantis started to publicize itself using large, sleek advertisements that included their logo. One ad ran several times in *The New York Times* in addition to other large market newspapers such as *The Washington Post* and *Chicago Daily Tribune*. This ad stated, "The Atlantis on the Ocean at 27th St...Miami Beach. Modern magnificence, together with Old World standards of cuisine and service, distinguishes The Atlantis...acknowledged one of America's Smartest Resort Hotels. The Balkan Room, a fantasie [*sic*] in decoration and the most talked of spot in Miami Beach, will be more popular than ever."⁶⁴

This ad described the Modern aspects of the hotel. However, the ad also tied the Atlantis to the past by mentioning its Old World standards. Combining Modern elements with those from the past, like we saw with the exterior, was prevalent throughout the Atlantis and other Art Deco hotels in Miami Beach. In addition, this ad was important because it showed the importance of the interior

⁶³ Atlantis Advertisement, *The New York Times*, December 15, 1936.

⁶⁴ Atlantis Advertisement, *The Washington Post*, November 24, 1940.

spaces of the Atlantis. By mentioning the Balkan Room, the owners were placing just as much importance on that space as they were on the oceanfront location of the hotel. In fact, more space is given to the Balkan Room than the prime location of the hotel.

Another ad that ran in *The New York Times* played off the vacation experience of others, "Ask those who have been here...Ask Atlantis guests...their praise will confirm what you have already heard."⁶⁵ This advertisement, focusing on the power of word of mouth advertising was important since a 1939 Works Progress Administration survey of Florida tourists found that nearly 45 percent of the tourists discovered vacations in Florida through word of mouth.⁶⁶

The most eloquent and boastful advertisement about the Atlantis appeared in the 1936 Miami Beach Hotel and Apartment Handbook, which was a guide for tourists that included advertisements from many Miami Beach hotels and apartments (Image 9). This ad stated,

Florida's Finest Resort Hotel....Centuries ago, the fabulous palaces of the 'lost continent' of Atlantis sank into the sea bearing with them a culture that lives in legend, even today, as the outstanding civilization of its time. Now beside that same shimmering sea, there rises a new Atlantis, a palatial hostelry, the Queen of America's winter playground, built in the same tradition of superiority that marked its namesake continent. True to the tradition that inspired its building, the hotel itself is a paragon on modern construction. Its unusually spacious and luxuriously appointed public rooms are designed to take full advantage of the seaside location. A unique and exclusive feature is

⁶⁵ Atlantis Advertisement, *The New York Times*, December 14, 1941.

⁶⁶ "The Florida Tourist Project: The Florida Tourist Survey of Tourists," Work Projects Administration, 1939, 9.

