

RENDALE HOTEL / SCHMIDHEISER HOUSE
3120 COLLINS AVE. / 3127 INDIAN CREEK DRIVE, MIAMI BEACH

I. Historical Context

These properties occupy part of Block 16 of the Miami Beach Improvement Company's Oceanfront Subdivision of Miami Beach. This is one of the oldest sections of the city. Pioneer John S. Collins and his family formed the Miami Beach Improvement Company in 1912, before Miami Beach was even a town, and platted their Oceanfront Subdivision, which extends from Collins Park northward to approximately 44th Street, in February 1916. Most of this subdivision, including the subject buildings, is included in the Collins Waterfront Historic District, designated by the city in January 2001. More recently, the Collins Waterfront district has been added to the National Register of Historic Places as well.

Block 16 of the Oceanfront Subdivision lies between 31st and 32nd Streets, from Collins Avenue to Indian Creek Drive. It is divided into an irregular arrangement of 14 lots: Lots 1 to 5 face Collins Avenue; Lots 11 to 14 line Indian Creek Drive, and Lots 6 to 10 are clustered in between.

Under consideration here are two entities that were built separately but are now consolidated: the first was a small residence constructed in 1926 on the northwest corner of the block, at 3127 Indian Creek Drive; the second was the eight-story Rendale Hotel, now the Atlantic Princess Condominium, built in 1940 at 3120 Collins Avenue, directly east of the earlier house.

II. Schmidheiser Residence, 3127 Indian Creek Drive

This charming little residence occupies Lots 11 and 12 of the block, facing west toward Indian Creek, and its rear garage occupies Lot 9. The building permit for this two-story, \$30,000 structure (quite costly at the time) was issued on September 1, 1926, just days before the great hurricane would

hit Miami Beach. The original owner was Edward C. Schmidheiser, who, with his wife Louise, is listed at this address in city directories through 1940, but no other information about him has been found. Architects of the house were Edwin L. Robertson and Lawrence R. Patterson, who had formed a partnership a few years earlier. (See Biography following) Mediterranean was their style of choice.

This house is a striking example of the Mediterranean architectural style with Moorish elements (pointed arch and turrets). Original plans were found on Microfilm #1951 in the Miami Beach Building Department. In addition, an early photograph taken from the northwest was published in the 1930 Yearbook of the Architectural League of Greater Miami.¹ The original plans include foundation and roof plans, first and second floor plans, and west and north elevations. The garage is not included in the plans but is seen in the photo as having two stories, a clay tile roof, and entries for two cars on the north elevation.

The footprint of the house is basically L-shaped, conforming with the street corner, and of two stories with an additional half-story tower over the interior stairwell. The hip roofs are of clay barrel tile. A number of whimsical touches include a chimney with peaked cap and crenellations, scalloped molding on the tower and atop it, an elaborate wrought-iron weathervane in the form of a ship. The front entrance, on the west elevation, is recessed into a scrolled, pointed archway. The plans show a plaque above the front door with the letter S --- probably for Schmidheiser. In recent years a metal lantern hung in this archway but has since disappeared. Also gone is a second-story door opening onto a small wrought-iron balcony, and elaborate iron grilles on the first-floor windows, all seen in the 1930 photograph. Original windows seen in plans and photo were multi-paned sash type that have since been replaced with horizontal panes.

¹ Florida Room, Miami Public Library. (p. 22)

At the south end of the west elevation, a two-story projection originally housed screened porches that have since been enclosed. On the second floor this was a sleeping porch in that era without air conditioning. On the first floor, the plans show rods of turned wood enclosing the screens, and a scroll in the stucco of the exterior wall. The photo shows canvas awnings added to this first-floor porch. There was also a low, solid masonry wall enclosing the property, fragments of which still survive. The entrance on the west had a wrought-iron gate with scrolled-stucco posts. This was probably not a driveway, since the garage was entered from 32nd Street, on the north.

The original floor plan shows the front door opening into a stair hall, and the living room, with fireplace, to the right. The dining room was set inside the angle of the L-shaped footprint. Continuing eastward were the pantry, kitchen, and a service area. Upstairs were four bedrooms with adjoining bathrooms, and oak floors documented on the plans.

The north elevation of the house, seen more clearly on the plans than in the photo, still retains many of its rich decorative elements, especially on the stairwell tower. Between the two stories, multi-paned French doors open onto a small iron balcony and are set into a rounded arch which has a floral design in bas-relief. An escutcheon, scalloped molding, and two clusters of scupper holes decorate the upper tower. The first-floor windows here, as on the west elevation, originally had iron grilles. An exterior stairway and new doors have been added to the north elevation at an unknown date.

The Building Permit Card indicates that E.L. Robertson continued to work on the house for Mr. Schmidheiser, with “repairs” in 1929 and a “two-story addition” costing \$10,000 in 1931. Plans #4382 for this addition were found but are illegible. No plans were found for other Robertson additions in 1933 and ‘34.

The south and east elevations of the property are not included in the plans nor seen in the photograph, so their original design is undocumented. At present, part of the first floor on the north elevation is recessed to create a patio.

The Schmidheisers apparently left the house by 1940; the 1941-1942 city directories list it as the residence of Edward and Frances Kester, and they were issued a permit for a sign in 1940. During World War II, when much of Miami Beach was used as a military training base, this house was one of over 300 Miami Beach properties that were leased for this purpose. Government records² list it as the “Rendale Annex” with nine rooms and a capacity for twelve men, rented for “hospital” use at \$4000 annual rent. The 1944 city directory lists it as a “U.S. Army Dispensary.” It was returned to its owner on November 17, 1945. After the war, as Miami Beach prospered again as a resort, this previously private residence became a rooming house. Mrs. Augusta Schott advertised “furnished rooms” here in the 1947 and 1949 city directories, but in 1955 this address is listed as the “Rendale Hotel parking lot.”

III. RendaleHotel, 3120 Collins Avenue

E. L. Robertson, who had collaborated on the Schmidheiser house, designed the Rendale Hotel solo in 1940, for a company called Deko, Inc. (This did not refer to the Art Deco style, a term that was not coined until the 1960s.) Departing from the outmoded Mediterranean style, Robertson designed it as a fine example of Art Deco. It occupies Lots 4 and 5 and the north half of Lot 3 in this block. Eight stories tall, it had 91 hotel rooms plus a dining room and cost \$180,000.

² *Investigation of the National Defense Program*, Senate Res. 6; Jan. 4, 1944; p. 9126 (online).

Original plans were found on Microfilm #14095 in the Building Department, consisting of all four exterior elevations; plot plan, basement and roof plans; first floor plan; typical floor plan; interior elevations of dining room, lounge, and lobby, and details. In addition, photographs of the front elevation and lobby were published in the 1941 issue of *Florida Architecture and Allied Arts*.³ Several postcard images also document the front façade.

Built late in the Art Deco era, the Rendale has a few inventive variations on the style. The front façade is symmetrical, with a vertical row of seven small, rounded eyebrows above the windows along the central axis. Decorative bas-relief panels are interspersed between these windows, five incised horizontal lines wrap around the first floor, and the parapet is stepped up, with two flagpoles as finials. These are all typical Art Deco features. What is unusual are the eyebrows that wrap around the corners of the building: they don't project outward as far as usual, and they are all conjoined by matching vertical fins. These fins split the front façade into the classic three sections of Art Deco. They also seem to presage the "boxed" windows of the Postwar style.

This being a corner building, the north elevation is also fully developed and has the same features as the front: a column of rounded eyebrows above the central doorway (the "north entrance"), bas-reliefs, and the same vertical fins connecting the corner eyebrows.

The front entrance on Collins Avenue has been enlarged from its initial design but still retains original elements. The 1941 photo shows a flight of steps leading up from the front yard (!) to the terrace, which has a roof only across the center section; the north end of the terrace is unroofed. The terrace is enclosed by a low wall of decorative metal panels, with a motif that still survives. The terrace roof is supported by a pair of square columns, and a channel letter sign is centered over the entrance. To the left, the wall of the

³ Published by Miami chapter of A.I.A. Miami Public Library, Florida Room archive.

original dining room bows outward, with five vertical window panels. Most of the Rendale's original windows were casements, replaced by single-hung type in 1983, according to the Permit Card.

The lobby too has been somewhat altered – the reception desk and glass chandeliers are new – but many features seen in the plans and photo remain, such as the geometric patterns in the terrazzo floor, the cylindrical pillars, cove lighting in the ceiling, and the stairway recessed into the south wall, as seen in the 1941 photograph.

The Rendale received its Certificate of Occupancy on January 6, 1941. A year later, the country was at war and, like the Schmidheiser house, the Rendale saw military duty. It was leased for a yearly rent of \$27,500 and served as “quarters for troops or trainees,” with capacity for 287 men in its 91 rooms.⁴ It returned to civilian use on October 30, 1945.

After the war, a swimming pool designed by architect Norman Giller was added in 1949, and air conditioning began to be installed in 1950. (Unfortunately, some were wall units that pierced the exterior stucco.) Giller also remodeled the hotel rooms in 1954 and '55, consolidating pairs of rooms into a total of 24 one-bedroom, two-bath apartments.

⁴ *Investigation of the National Defense Program*, Senate Res. 6; Jan. 4, 1944; pp. 9121 (online).

IV. Architects' Biography: Robertson & Patterson

Edwin L. Robertson, from Mobile, Alabama, trained in New York and came to Miami about 1919, where he first worked with August Geiger.

Lawrence R. Patterson, from Portsmouth, Ohio, graduated from the University of Pennsylvania in 1910. He came to Miami in 1915 and worked with Walter DeGarmo before partnering with Robertson in 1923.⁵

Their buildings in Miami included the Cromer-Cassel Department Store (remodeled as Metromall), the Dallas Park Apartments, and the Alhambra and Alcazar Hotels (demolished).

In Miami Beach, they designed the Club Lido (Rod & Reel Club, demolished) on Hibiscus Island; the Hurlbut and Hiawatha Apartments at 1512 and 1552 Washington Avenue; and the Washington Storage Company (now the Wolfsonian/FIU), as well as several residences.

Robertson alone is the architect of record for the Oasis Restaurant, 801 Washington Avenue (1929); the Paddock Grill, 685 Washington Avenue (1934); and several other commercial buildings.

---Carolyn Klepser, researcher

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⁵ "Architects Are Busy," Miami Herald, May 28, 1926, p. B-10.