



United States Department of the Interior
National Park Service

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
REGISTRATION FORM

This form is for use in nominating or requesting determinations for individual properties and districts. See instructions in How to Complete the National Register of Historic Places Registration Form (National Register Bulletin 16A). Complete each item by marking "x" in the appropriate box or by entering the information requested. If any item does not apply to the property being documented, enter "N/A" for "not applicable." For functions, architectural classification, materials, and areas of significance, enter only categories and subcategories from the instructions. Place additional entries and narrative items on continuation sheets (NPS Form 10-900a). Use a typewriter, word processor, or computer, to complete all items.

1. Name of Property

historic name Coconut Grove Playhouse

other names/site number Coconut Grove Theater; Players State Theater; The Grove; FMSF DA01070

2. Location

street & number 3500 Main Highway not for publication

city or town Miami vicinity

state Florida code FL county Miami-Dade code 025 zip code 33133

3. State/Federal Agency Certification

As the designated authority under the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended, I hereby certify that this nomination request for determination of eligibility meets the documentation standards for registering properties in the National Register of Historic Places and meets the procedural and professional requirements set forth in 36 CFR Part 60. In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. I recommend that this property be considered significant nationally statewide locally. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Alisea Lotane, Deputy SAPO 8/22/18
Signature of certifying official/Title Date

Florida Department of State, Division of Historical Resources, Bureau of Historic Preservation
State or Federal agency and bureau

In my opinion, the property meets does not meet the National Register criteria. (See continuation sheet for additional comments.)

Signature of certifying official/Title Date

State or Federal agency and bureau

4. National Park Service Certification

I hereby certify that the property is:

- entered in the National Register See continuation sheet
- determined eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- determined not eligible for the National Register See continuation sheet.
- removed from the National Register.
- other, (explain) _____

Joe [Signature]
Signature of the Keeper

Date of Action

10-19-2018

5. Classification

Ownership of Property

(Check as many boxes as apply)

- private
- public-local
- public-State
- public-Federal

Category of Property

(Check only one box)

- buildings
- district
- site
- structure
- object

Number of Resources within Property

(Do not include any previously listed resources in the count)

Contributing	Noncontributing	
1	0	buildings
0	0	sites
0	0	structures
0	0	objects
1	0	total

Name of related multiple property listings

(Enter "N/A" if property is not part of a multiple property listing.)

"N/A"

Number of contributing resources previously listed in the National Register

0

6. Function or Use

Historic Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

RECREATION AND CULTURE/Theater

Current Functions

(Enter categories from instructions)

VACANT/NOT IN USE

7. Description

Architectural Classification

(Enter categories from instructions)

LATE 19TH & 20TH CENTURY REVIVALS/
Mediterranean Revival

Materials

(Enter categories from instructions)

foundation Concrete
walls Stucco
roof Asphalt
other

Narrative Description

(Describe the historic and current condition of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

8. Statement of Significance**Applicable National Register Criteria**

(Mark "x" in one or more boxes for the criteria qualifying the property for National Register listing.)

- A** Property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- B** Property is associated with the lives of persons significant in our past.
- C** Property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master, or possesses high artistic values, or represents a significant and distinguishable entity whose components lack individual distinction.
- D** Property has yielded, or is likely to yield information important in prehistory or history.

Criteria Considerations

(Mark "x" in all the boxes that apply.)

Property is:

- A** owned by a religious institution or used for religious purposes.
- B** removed from its original location.
- C** a birthplace or grave.
- D** a cemetery.
- E** a reconstructed building, object, or structure.
- F** a commemorative property.
- G** less than 50 years of age or achieved significance within the past 50 years

Narrative Statement of Significance

(Explain the significance of the property on one or more continuation sheets.)

9. Major Bibliographical References**Bibliography**

Cite the books, articles, and other sources used in preparing this form on one or more continuation sheets.)

Previous documentation on file (NPS):

- preliminary determination of individual listing (36 CFR 36) has been requested
- previously listed in the National Register
- previously determined eligible by the National Register
- designated a National Historic Landmark
- recorded by Historic American Buildings Survey

- recorded by Historic American Engineering Record

Areas of Significance

(Enter categories from instructions)

ENTERTAINMENT/RECREATION

ARCHITECTURE

Period of Significance

1927

1956-1970

Significant Dates

1927

1956

1965

Significant Person

N/A

Cultural Affiliation

N/A

Architect/Builder

Arch: Kiehnel, Richard; Parker, Alfred Browning

Blder: Peacock, Albert

Primary location of additional data:

- State Historic Preservation Office
- Other State Agency
- Federal agency
- Local government
- University
- Other

Name of Repository

10. Geographical Data

Acreage of Property 2.9 Acres

UTM References

(Place additional references on a continuation sheet.)

1	1 7	5 7 5 7 1 7	2 8 4 5 5 9 1
	Zone	Easting	Northing
2			

3			
	Zone	Easting	Northing
4			

See continuation sheet

Verbal Boundary Description

(Describe the boundaries of the property on a continuation sheet.)

Boundary Justification

(Explain why the boundaries were selected on a continuation sheet.)

11. Form Prepared By

name/title Max Adriel Imberman, Historic Preservationist

organization Bureau of Historic Preservation date June 2017

street & number 500 South Bronough Street telephone (850) 245-6333

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399-0250

Additional Documentation

Submit the following items with the completed form:

Continuation Sheets

Maps

A USGS map (7.5 or 15 minute series) indicating the property's location.

A Sketch map for historic districts and properties having large acreage or numerous resources.

Photographs

Representative black and white photographs of the property.

Additional items

(check with the SHPO or FPO for any additional items)

Property Owner

(Complete this item at the request of SHPO or FPO.)

name Trustees of the Internal Improvement Fund of the State of Florida

street & number 3900 Commonwealth Boulevard #412 telephone

city or town Tallahassee state Florida zip code 32399

Paperwork Reduction Act Statement: This information is being collected for applications to the National Register of Historic Places to nominate properties for listing or determine eligibility for listing, to list properties, and amend listings. Response to this request is required to obtain a benefit in accordance with the National Historic Preservation Act, as amended (16 U.S.C. 470 et seq.).

Estimated Burden Statement: Public reporting burden for this form is estimated to average 18.1 hours per response including time for reviewing instructions, gathering and maintaining data, and completing and reviewing the form. Direct comments regarding this burden estimate or any aspect of this form to the Chief, Administrative Services Division, National Park Service, P.O. Box 37127, Washington, DC 20013-7127; and the Office of Management and Budget, Paperwork Reductions Projects (1024-0018), Washington, DC 20503.

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Coconut Grove Playhouse

Name of Property

Miami-Dade County, FL

County and State

N/A

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SUMMARY

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is a three-story Mediterranean Revival theater located at the northwest corner of Main Highway and Charles Avenue in the heart of downtown Coconut Grove, a neighborhood in the city of Miami, the county seat of Miami-Dade County. The building was originally opened in 1927 as a movie theater and was modified in 1955 to become a playhouse. The theater has seen a number of changes over the years, both interior and exterior, with additions constructed on the back and sides of the building, as well as street-level commercial bays being filled in by the theater infrastructure. Despite these additions and modifications, the building maintains its Mediterranean Revival character.

SETTING

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is located at the southwestern end of Coconut Grove's business district. The theater is located at the intersection of Main Highway and Charles Avenue. Main Highway runs from northeast to southwest, and passes by businesses, schools, houses, and places of worship on the west and east. Charles Avenue is primarily residential, with some commercial properties on the far east end. The Coconut Grove Playhouse is surrounded by a large parking lot. Across Main Highway to the east are multiple large domestic properties, and across Charles Avenue to the south are commercial properties. While there are a few small trees on the playhouse property, nearby lots have many trees, a common feature in Coconut Grove.

PHYSICAL DESCRIPTION

Exterior

The footprint of the Coconut Grove Playhouse is asymmetrical, with a three-story central auditorium fronted by a three-story forebuilding with offices and former restaurant spaces, all surrounded by additions weighted to the northeast. The building has a flat roof, decorated with a rim of red-roof tile on the southern elevation. The entire building is made of concrete masonry with a stucco finish.

Main (South) Elevation

The frontage on Main Highway and Charles Avenue (Photo 1) is three stories tall and bow-shaped, with three sections. The west and east sections of the frontage are mostly similar, but the west section is slightly longer than the east one. The roofline across the entire south façade is flat and lined with red terra cotta tiles in the Spanish style. The central entrance section faces the intersection of Main Highway and Charles Avenue, and is characterized by its ornamentation. The entrance consists of two doors covered by an awning supported by two metal rods. It is flanked by two pairs of Solomonic columns, where each pair originally surrounded a space for advertising posters (Photo 2). The right poster spot has been converted to a door. To the south of the southern pair of Solomonic columns is a door, which was originally mirrored by one on the north side, but has now been filled in.

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This central section has five bays, which each have shared design features going up all three stories. There is a wide central entry bay, flanked by two bays characterized by the Solomonic column pairs at the base of the building, and two bays at the far ends of the central section which correspond to the original placement of the doors to the south and north. On this section of the southern elevation, the more elaborate ornamentation is placed in the central bay, while the column bays have less, and the door bays have little to none. The central bay is topped by a symmetrical stucco ornamentation feature with eight mini-arches on the bottom. The windows on this elevation of the building are all 8-light fixed windows. On the second story of the central bay, there are three windows, each contained within an arch and topped by an ornamental stucco shield. The three windows are separated by miniature stucco Solomonic columns that match the height of the windows. Unlike most of the rest of this elevation, in which the windows are inset in the stucco, these windows are surrounded by a thick stucco base, exactly as wide as the windows on the third floor and as tall as the entire second floor, in which the aforementioned arches are set. The third floor windows are slightly wider-set than the second floor ones, and they are each surrounded by a thinner stucco border. The south and north of the three third-story windows have a stucco scrollwork pediment, while the central window is instead topped by a capital with a more elaborate version.

The column bays are symmetrical, with the windows and decorative elements on the second and third stories centered between the first-floor architectural ceramic Solomonic columns (Photo 3). The columns on both sides are topped by a stucco entablature, which attaches to the arched stucco ornamentation in the central bay from both sides. Each side gives the impression of a balustrade flanked by a finial, surrounding the second-story window. The windows in these bays are slightly narrower than the other windows in this part of the building. The second-story window is topped by a thin decorative stucco element which acts as a sort of eyebrow to the window. The window on the third story is surrounded by stucco borders, just like the windows on that floor in the central bay, but lacking the pediment. Just above the third-story window of the column bays on both sides is a stucco rondel.

The door bays of the far south and north of the central section are relatively undecorated. The door on the south side is centrally located in the bay, while the north bay is flat stucco. The second-and third story windows are each centrally located and unbordered. Above the third-story windows on both sides are sets of three scuppers.

The south (Photo 4) and north (Photo 5) sections of the south elevation are very similar in design, but the south section facing Charles Avenue is slightly longer. The bottom floor of the building's southern elevation is currently covered up with a projecting wooden structure protecting scaffolding that helps support the exterior wall, while the north elevation consists of three filled-in storefront bays followed by a door. On the second floor of the north elevation, two 8-light windows are placed above each storefront bay, and one window above the north door. A similar organizational pattern was present on the south elevation as well. The windows on the second floor of the south and north sections match the wider windows of the central section's second floor. The south section has nine evenly-spaced windows, while the north has seven. The third floor is characterized by decorative wrought-iron balconets fronting sets of three tall windows (Photo 6), which are surrounded by decorative stucco elements topped by a coat of

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arms and scrollwork pediment. On the north side, the balconets are located over the first and third bays, and on the south side, the first is located over the third second-floor window, while the second is located over the fifth and sixth. One major difference between the north and south sides of the third floor is that the north side has only balconet features and single windows, while the south side has two double windows. On both sides of the building, the third floor is characterized by two sets of paired scuppers at the center and north side. The Coconut Grove Playhouse's sign (Photo 7) hangs on the far south side of the north section of the building's southern elevation, extending from the roofline to the top of the former commercial bays on the first floor.

To the north of the three storefronts facing Main Highway, there is a one-story hyphen connecting the original theater building to a two-story building (Photo 8). Originally this was a free-standing commercial building, which has now been connected to the Coconut Grove Playhouse. The hyphen is characterized by an arched iron gate leading to a double door with a fanlight. Two recesses mimicking enclosed storefronts flank the entryway. The two-story former commercial building is made of painted concrete block masonry with enclosed retail bays on the first floor and three windows on the second floor.

West Elevation

The west elevation, visible from Charles Avenue, features a small one-story utility building connected to the main theater building, as well as one side of the auditorium of the playhouse (Photo 9). The utility building is made of reinforced concrete and covered in stucco, and consists of two components. The westernmost component is tiny and rectangular, with the western side featuring a single door to the north, a double door in the middle, and a small fenestration with metal louvers on the right. The larger component has five sides and an uneven roofline. Originally, this building was a free-standing mechanical room for the theater's air conditioning. It was later connected to the theater by an addition that housed the kitchen for the theater's restaurant. Along the western side of the utility addition, there is one window and two fenestrations with metal louvers. On top of this addition is a massive air conditioning unit. From this view, one can also see some windows on the back and side of the three-story office forebuilding, with three boarded-up windows visible on the second floor and five visible on the third floor.

The west side of the theater auditorium (Photo 10) can be seen behind the utility building. Along the back end of the auditorium, there are three doors and three windows at ground level, as well as a large backstage addition to the auditorium, which is much shorter than the original fly loft. Between the utility building and the auditorium, there is a two-flight concrete staircase with metal balustrades (Photo 11). This wall of the auditorium building is stucco with a low parapet, with five supportive buttresses toward the front of the building. Toward the back of the building, the parapet increases in height over corresponding to the fly loft at the back of the auditorium.

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North Elevation

On the north elevation (Photo 12), visible from the Coconut Grove Playhouse property's parking lot to the north, one can see the north side of the addition to the back of the auditorium, a blank, rectangular stucco wall with an air conditioning unit, and a louvered opening.

East Elevation

The east elevation, visible from the Coconut Grove Playhouse's parking lot, which surrounds the property from all sides except the south, mirrors the west elevation in the original building, but has different, newer additions disrupting the symmetry. The aforementioned backstage addition to the back of the theater auditorium is also asymmetrical (Photo 13). While it had been flush with the walls of the western elevation, it extends outward to the north and east. The east side of this addition is characterized by two entrances, one of which is a large loading bay with a projecting covering, as well as a small covered door accessed by a small staircase. Much like the east side of the building, the sides of the auditorium (Photo 14) have door entrances on the first floor, as well as five buttresses. A three-flight metal staircase leads up to the forebuilding's second floor on the east side of the building. On the backside of the forebuilding's southern elevation, there are four surviving four-over-four sash windows on the third floor, two of which have arches above them pressed into the stucco. One window survives on the second floor. To the left of this is the two-story building which was incorporated into the theater with the construction of the one-story hyphen. This now-attached building is made of concrete masonry with two windows on the back side's second floor and six windows on the east side's second floor. The addition features one door on the east side's first floor. A two-flight metal staircase with balustrades leads to a wooden door on the second floor on the back side of the addition.

Interior

Lobby

The entrance to the Coconut Grove Playhouse, at the far east end of the building, consists of four doors (single on each side, double in the middle) topped by an arch (Photo 15). On each side of the doors is a thin vertical picture window. The entrance vestibule walls are clad with cinnamon-colored marble. The entrance vestibule has a shallow vaulted ceiling matching the contour of the arch over the door. The ceiling flattens to the north, where the entrance vestibule meets the lobby, at the site of two structural columns now covered in marble. The ceiling of the inner lobby is flat as well. The west wall of the entrance vestibule has three ticket windows (Photo 16). The inner lobby, which is square, has three exits. There is a hallway to the east, and two sets of doors, one to the north leading into the lounge, and one to the west leading into the Encore Room Theatre. This room, as well as most rooms in the theater, are heavily vandalized with graffiti.

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Lounge

The wall between the lobby and the lounge is slightly curved and symmetrical, with the pattern of doors matching the front doors to the theater. The western wall of the lounge has a wide arch that leads to two bathrooms. Each bathroom has tiled walls and floors, as well as arched features over the stalls (Photo 17). The arches, most of which are original to the building, are supported by Solomonic columns (Photo 18), around half of which were part of the theater's original 1927 design, but the auditorium's shortening in the course of the 1955 Alfred Browning Parker's reconfiguration of interior spaces left some columns and arches stranded among kitchens and bathrooms.

The northeast corner of the lounge is characterized by two wide gated arches (Photo 19), which separate the lounge from a snack bar. The snack bar (Photo 20) has a tiled wall to the north, as well as two of the original theater arches with two sets of double columns to the east. In the southeast corner of the room, there is an angular arch (Photo 21) that contains a wide carpeted staircase that heads up to the second floor mezzanine. Both the snack bar and staircase were both completed outside the period of significance. The entrances to the auditorium are at the northwest and northeast corners of the lobby and are each double doors.

Second Floor Lounge

The second-floor lounge runs the width of the auditorium. It has an oak floor and a lightly arched ceiling. At the east and west ends of the room are staircases (Photo 22) that lead up to the balcony overlooking the auditorium. Doors to the southwest lead to the second floor offices.

Auditorium

The auditorium is the tallest part of the building. The ceiling is a shallow vault and the floor is carpeted. The auditorium is symmetrical. Four shallow arches decorated with stenciled designs line the aisles flanking the auditorium seating (Photo 23). Located near the aisle entrances are two dolphin fountains, one per aisle, (Photo 24), that are sunken into the floor, the result of Alfred Browning Parker's modification to the slope of the theater floor to accommodate live performances in the 1950s. On each side of the auditorium, there are two emergency exit doors (Photo 25) located close to the theater stage. In addition to the two flanking aisles, two aisles divide the approximately 800 seats on the bottom level into 3 equal sections. The seats cross through the metallic proscenium arch (Photo 26), which has been painted black. The proscenium arches consist of two pressed metal, segmental arches that span across the stage and the area immediately in front of it. The front rows of the auditorium seating extend underneath the larger arch. Between the two arches, the walls slope inwards, so the rear arch is smaller than the front arch. The arches themselves feature a variety of classically inspired geometric designs, which were probably originally painted a variety of colors (Figure 7, section 8, page 5). However, the arches and the sloping walls between are now painted black. The proscenium arches provide a frame through which the action on the stage would be viewed. On each side of the stage, there are ornate painted plaster decorative figures with a shield design (Photo 27) on top fastened to the wall extending

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from the top of the emergency exit doors to near the ceiling. The plaster figures do not appear to date from the period of significance.

The mezzanine balcony, added in the 1960s, has around 300 seats and blue carpet (Photo 28). There are three aisles in the east, west, and center of the balcony. Along the back wall of the balcony, there is a small windowed lighting control room. The original painted plaster crown molding is present along the top of the wall on both sides, located at the springing point of the vault (Photo 29). The molding originally extended further along the full length of the auditorium but was cut off to accommodate Parker's mezzanine balcony.

Backstage

The stage has exits to its left and right. To the left side of the stage (from the audience perspective), there are three offices, as well as a staircase (Photo 30) that leads up to a second-floor lighting booth. (Photo 31). Directly behind the stage is a hallway with a row of 5 small dressing rooms (Photo 32). At the end of this hallway is a large unadorned concrete masonry backstage area with a loading dock entrance (Photo 33). A set of concrete stairs in this room (Photo 34) leads down to a sunken storage and workshop area.

Former Bar

The east area of the theater's forebuilding, which was converted from street-level shops to a bar and lounge in the course of the Parker-era alterations, is now a storage area. It was heavily modified and now extends as one open and interconnected space through the base of the forebuilding, the hyphen, and the first floor of the old 2-story commercial building that was incorporated into the theater after the period of significance. In the northeast corner of the room is a wooden door next to a metal spiral staircase (Photo 35). The room has a concrete and tile floor and drywall walls (Photo 36). In the former commercial building now incorporated into the playhouse proper, the second floor consists of a hallway with small storage rooms and offices on both sides.

Former Restaurant

Alfred Browning Parker enclosed the storefronts along Charles Avenue to accommodate a restaurant during the course of his 1955 alterations to the playhouse. After the period of significance, the restaurant was converted into a black box theater, with walls entirely painted black. A beam along the far south wall of the building is currently exposed and being held up by metal scaffolding. North of the black box theater is a kitchen and freezer (Photo 37), both of which were being used for storage when the theater closed.

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Second and Third Floors

The second and third floors of the building both consist of single hallways with entrances to offices on the theater side and apartments overlooking the street side. There are original staircases (Photo 38) at each end of the hallway, both of which access all three floors, as well as an elevator (Photo 39) added by Alfred Browning Parker located toward the south, next to the ticket vestibule on the first floor. The offices and apartments (Photo 40-42) are in disrepair, with windows boarded up for protection.

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ALTERATIONS

The Coconut Grove Playhouse has seen a number of changes in its history, both to its exterior and its interior.

Exterior

The building’s entrance façade has maintained consistent massing, but has experienced some significant alterations. When the building was first constructed, the ground floor on both wings of the entrance housed seven commercial bays, with four on the west side and three on the east side (Figure 1-2). In the course of the 1955 Alfred Browning Parker alterations, this commercial space was reoriented inwards, forming a bar and a restaurant (Figure 3). The original fixed storefront windows and single centralized doors, as well as the overhead awnings and steel shutters, were replaced with a flat stucco wall with a ribbon window. By the 1980s, planters had been added to the bottoms of the ribbon windows on the left side of the building, while the windows on the right had been filled in.

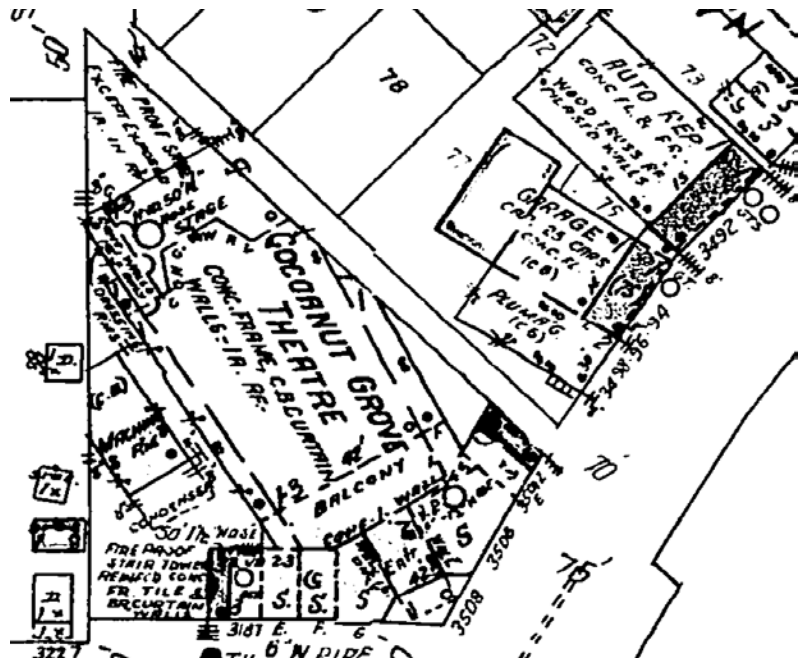


Figure 1: Historic 1946 Sanborn map reflecting the original shape and layout of the Coconut Grove Theater before it was converted into a playhouse. Note the now-gone cross-street to the north, which explains the building’s unconventional shape. Also visible is the commercial building (labeled “Plumb’g”) that will be added to the theater after 1970. (Source: Sanborn Map Company, *Miami, Dade County, 1924-1951*, Volume 3, Sheet 259)

When the theater first opened, a decorative fountain graced the building’s entrance, but by the 1950s, it had been removed. On the second and third floors, casement windows were replaced at some point by fixed windows, but the fenestration and overall impression remain intact. While the original design had a door on each side of the entrance, next to the Solomonian columns, leading into the commercial bays, the right door has now been totally removed, and the left door has had a small archway on top of the door filled in. The left door has also been replaced by a metal exit door which cannot be opened from the outside. Along the flat roofline, the left and right sides of the front façade remain identical to their original construction, characterized only by red roof tiles. The building’s entrance bay, in 1927, had a

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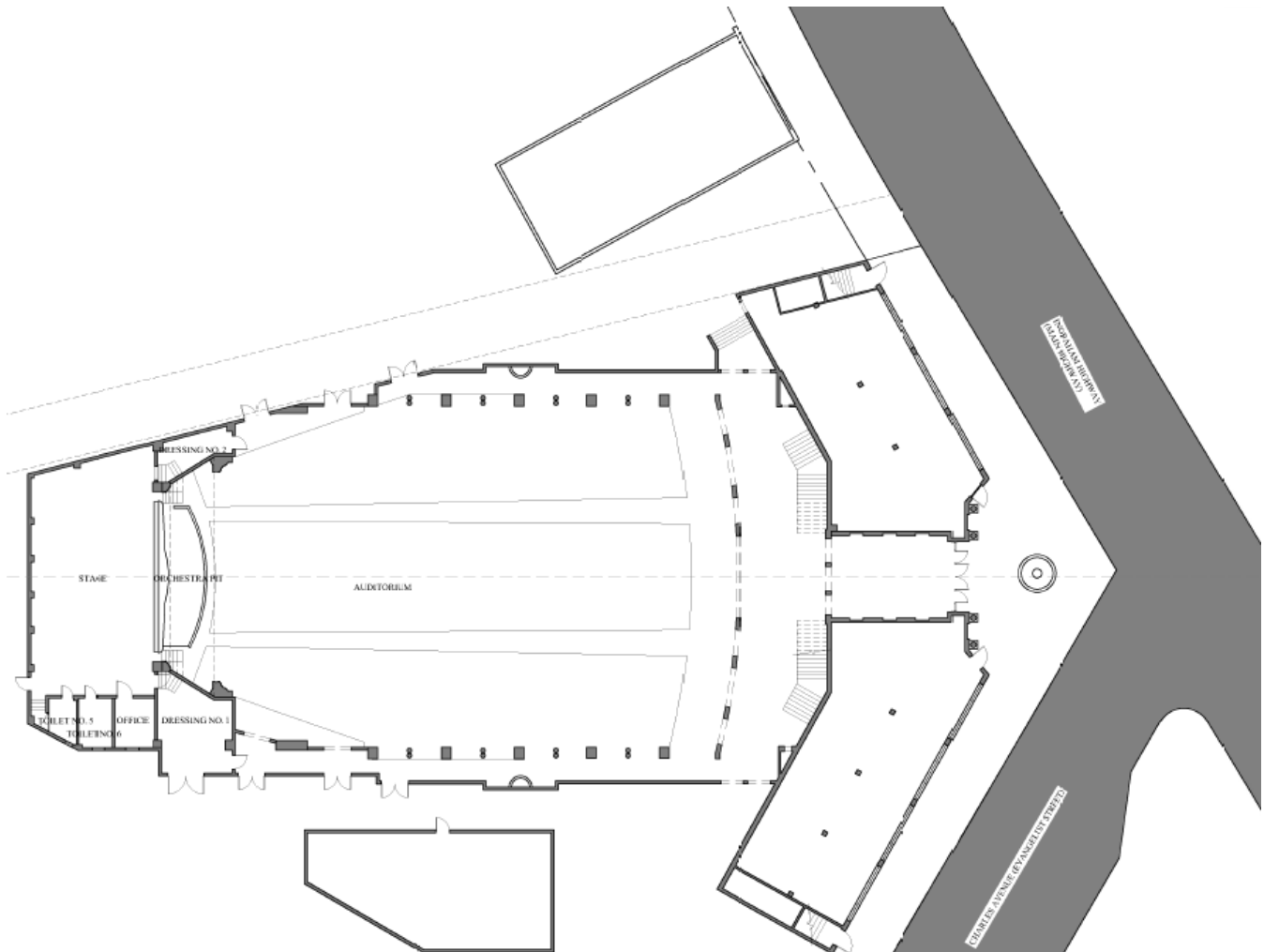


Figure 2: Plan of the 1926-1927 Kiehnel and Elliott design of the Coconut Grove Theater. Note the very large auditorium space and storefronts along the main façade. Source: Jorge L. Hernandez, Architect

good deal of ornamentation along the roofline, with a symmetrical pattern of crenulated parapets as well as a central ornate pediment. These features were removed by the 1950s, and today the roofline is simple red tile, matching the left and right wings of the building. Over the decades, some of the more complex ornamentation of the original Kiehnel and Elliott design has been lost, and the removal of the storefront bays has had an overall smoothing effect on the building's façade. While the building's first floors and roofline decoration have been altered, the overall impression of the entrance remains the same. The decorative elements on the second and third floors along the entire length of the façades remain intact as well, including stucco elements and balconets.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse has also had multiple other additions on its back and sides, to accommodate the necessary infrastructure for a live theater, restaurant, and bar. The original air conditioning mechanical or utility building was connected to the main building in the 1950s (Figures 2-

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3). Alfred Browning Parker’s largest exterior additions took place on the back of the theater auditorium,

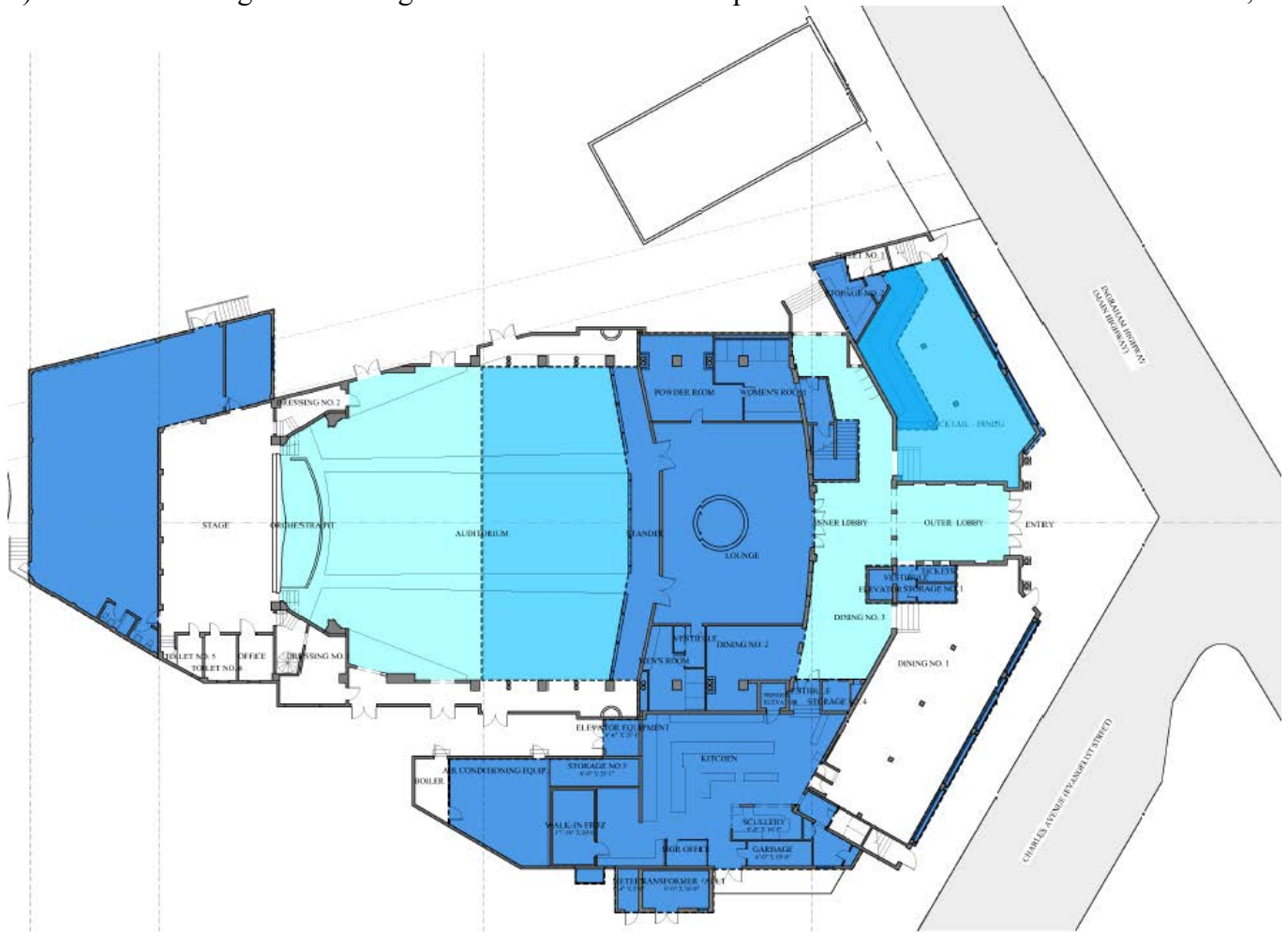


Figure 3: Plan of the 1955-1956 alterations done by Alfred Browning Parker. Parker shrunk the auditorium to incorporate a lobby space, and integrated the main façade storefronts into the theater proper to include a bar and restaurant. Source: Jorge L. Hernandez, Architect

converting the building from a movie theater to a playhouse, which requires a lot more space for set design, dressing rooms, and storage. Parker added a backstage to enable these uses within the building. The latest addition to the building’s exterior was built to the northeast of the entrance, with a neighboring historic two-story building becoming connected to the theater by a one-story hyphen and a streetside wall and gate (Figure 4). This final alteration took place outside the period of significance.

While these additions have had an indelible impact upon the building’s overall design, they are not clear from the street level, which maintains a similar impression to historic photographs from the 1920s and 1950s. The 1950s additions are only visible from the parking lot to the back of the building, and the 1980s addition is clearly distinguished from the original, looking almost like a separate building from

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Figure 4: Plan detailing the alterations done by Ferguson Glasgow Schuster Inc. in 1982. This set of alterations primarily reconfigured the public-facing part of the building’s interior, and fused the playhouse with its neighboring building to the northeast. (Source: Jorge L. Hernandez, Architect)

the street level because of the wall and gate. The changes to the exterior of the building, while altogether seeming like large changes, do not detract from the feeling of the historic building, which evokes a similar sentiment as it did when it was constructed. With the period of significance being 1955-1970, the only external addition constructed since then is the hyphen connecting the original playhouse building to its former neighbor, which is relatively minor.

Interior

Just like the exterior of the building, the interior has been altered over the decades, due to changing needs as well as changing styles. The removal of the original streetside storefronts to create a restaurant and a bar within the theater had an impact upon the floor plan of the building. When it was first constructed, the theater’s first floor plan was basic and consisted of an entrance vestibule leading to a

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small lobby and a massive auditorium. With the 1950s Alfred Browning Parker alterations, the theater’s internal infrastructure began to fill more of the building. Apart from additions adding new rooms and



Figure 5: Plan showing the 1998-1999 Chisholm alterations to the building’s interior. This last set of changes again further changed the former bar and restaurant. (Source: Jorge L. Hernandez, Architect)

areas to the back and sides of the building, the largest significant changes to the interior came from the 1955 Parker alterations, when the auditorium was made smaller (taking it from 1500 seats to 800 seats),

a new back wall was built, and the area taken out of the auditorium turned into a lounge, snack bar, kitchen, and bathrooms. Alfred Browning Parker increased the slope of the auditorium floor to accommodate live theater, which led to some of the decorations seeming sunk into the ground. Parker added a fountain and a decorative dome to the lobby area, which were both removed after the period of significance. Some of the arched and columned elements from the original auditorium walls are retained in their new settings. The corresponding arches within the auditorium have since been removed, leaving stenciled walls where rich decorations were once located. The other major alteration to the building was

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the addition of a mezzanine balcony to the auditorium, which was accessed by the public through a staircase located in the lounge area. The mezzanine balcony added 300 seats to the auditorium. The interior of the building has had extensive alterations to fit the evolving technological and logistical needs of a twentieth-century entertainment venue. While the building has changed immensely since its initial construction, the changes since Parker's work in the 1950s and 1960s have been, structurally, relatively minor, and many could be reversed. The building has been expanded to the northeast, and much of Parker's decorative elements have been removed, but the overall interior plan has been maintained and corresponds with the period of significance.

INTEGRITY

Despite the Playhouse's complex history of modifications, first in 1955, and then periodically thereafter, the Playhouse retains sufficient levels of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship while retaining a high overall level of integrity of location, setting, association and feeling.

Condition

The building has been shuttered for a decade, and has experienced significant vandalism on the interior. However, this is primarily limited to graffiti, broken glass, and damaged furniture. While visually unpleasant, the vandalism does not negatively impact the integrity of the building.

Architectural Integrity: Exterior

Architecturally, the building's integrity varies between the exterior of the property and the interior. Externally, the building retains a sufficient level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship associated with the original 1926 Kiehnel and Elliot design. The central portion of the primary façade facing the intersection of Charles Avenue and Main Highway retains most of the original architectural features as designed by Kiehnel and Elliot, including its three-level design with elaborate pediments, arches, architraves, Solomonic columns, and finials. The only significant missing design elements are the original castellated parapet walls along the roofline and central pediment.

The other public façades on the east and south sides of the buildings also retain a large proportion of Kiehnel and Elliot's design, including elaborate Mediterranean style pediments over French doors with iron balconets on the third floor of each façade. Significant changes are limited only to the storefronts at street level, which were filled in originally by Alfred Browning Parker. However, the openings for the original 1920's storefronts are still expressed and read as part of the design of the building on the east side facing Main Highway. The storefronts on the south façade facing Charles Avenue are gone, replaced by a temporary wood wall which shelters a modern concrete block and steel wall supporting the structure of the building.

Under Alfred Browning Parker, exterior changes to the building were limited primarily to the expansion of the building to the rear with several additions to accommodate a larger backstage that was missing

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from the original Keihnel and Elliot Design and the removal of Keihnel and Elliot's elaborate parapet crenellations and pediment on the main façade. On the primary facades facing Main Highway and Charles Ave, nothing remains of Alfred Browning Parker's limited redesign of the theater's exterior, outside of the infilled storefronts and a new exit door on the south side of the main entrance. The building was also joined to a neighboring building to the northeast by a small hyphen connection, which is obscured by a small wall and gate.

The exterior retains a good level of integrity of materials and workmanship. It retains its original stucco finish and architectural terra cotta ornament. The windows are not original to the 1920s or 1950s, but do not detract significantly from the overall integrity of the property.

Architectural Integrity: Interior

Compared to the exterior, the interior lacks integrity for Keihnel and Elliot's original movie theater design due to changes in the 1950s and later. It retains a moderate to low level of integrity for Alfred Browning Parker's design. Changes made after the period of significance, concentrated in the 1980s, negatively impacted Parker's Modernist design.

Parker's significant modifications to the original theater in 1955 included the reduction in the size of the theater space by 1/3 to accommodate an entrance lobby with a fountain, modifying the slope of the auditorium to facilitate better sight lines to the main stage, the enclosure of the storefronts on the east and south sides of the building to provide space for a restaurant and bar, the construction of a kitchen for the restaurant, the addition of a second-floor reception space above the new lobby space, and the construction of additional back stage space for changing rooms, workshops, and storage. Parker also designed the 1965 mezzanine balcony added by Zev Buffman.

For the most part, the building retains nearly all of Parker's interior layout of spaces and his modifications to the auditorium. However, key aesthetic features of Parker's design, such as the interior fountain, dome, and modernist finishes, as well as the decorative designs in the bar and restaurant spaces, are now gone due to changes to the building after the period of significance. The building has a low level of integrity of materials or workmanship from the Parker period, as the materials and finishes that characterized his work are now obscured or missing, much like how the building has a low level of integrity for design and workmanship on the interior for the Keihnel and Elliot period due to Parker's modifications. However, as a whole, the building retains sufficient elements of Parker's changes to the organization and layout of the building to retain a moderate level of architectural integrity for this time period.

Integrity of Location, Setting

The Coconut Grove Playhouse retains to a very high degree its integrity of location. The building, although altered and expanded, has not been moved. The Playhouse also retains to a very high degree its integrity of setting. It maintains its historic placement on the border between a residential and a

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commercial section of Coconut Grove. While much of Miami (and Coconut Grove specifically) has been plagued with rampant development, the area surrounding the Playhouse has not changed very much since the period of significance.

Integrity of Association and Feeling

While the levels of architectural integrity vary depending on the portion of the building examined, the Playhouse still retains a high degree of associative integrity with the events that occurred at that location. The theater’s auditorium retains a high level of integrity from the period of significance associated with George Engles and Zev Buffman and the productions they coordinated and sponsored. The only major change to the auditorium was Buffman’s addition of a mezzanine balcony, designed by Parker, in 1965, within the period of significance. More significant changes have occurred in other interior spaces, including the lobby, restaurant, and bar, where historic finishes are missing and some reorganization of interior space has occurred (primarily in the bar area on the northeast side of the building). However, the overall spaces as redesigned by Parker are still present.

In addition, the exterior still retains a good level of integrity with this period, as it reflects the Keihnel and Elliot design as modified by Parker in the 1950s. The only major exterior changes are the loss of some decorative elements used by Parker to infill the storefronts.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse retains to a high degree its integrity of feeling. The building clearly conveys a sense of early twentieth-century glamor, which Kiehnell and Elliott built and Parker maintained. While the interior has been altered and degraded, it still maintains its historic feeling as well.

Overall Integrity

The building retains sufficient integrity of location, setting, design, materials, workmanship, association and feeling for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

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Summary

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment and Recreation, and Criterion C in the area of Architecture for its Mediterranean Revival façade. The period of significance consists of 1927, when the building was originally constructed, then extends from 1955, when oilman George Engle purchased a 1927 movie theater aiming to restore and convert it into a world-class playhouse, to 1970, when theatrical producer Zev Buffman sold the theater, ending its golden age. The Coconut Grove Playhouse is a locally significant example of Mediterranean Revival architecture, and it was designed and renovated by two generations of legendary architects. The playhouse was originally designed as a movie theater by the architectural firm of Kiehnel and Elliott for a 1927 opening, and it was converted into a playhouse by prolific Modernist architect Alfred Browning Parker. The building is also a local landmark, a point of pride for the Coconut Grove community, as well as having been an important economic and cultural presence in downtown Coconut Grove, as well as Greater Miami in general.

Historic Context

History of Coconut Grove

Coconut Grove began as a frontier town rivaling early Miami, located around five miles to its southwest. Its early residents were mainly Northeasterners drawn to the tropical climate and low population density. Since South Florida was so remote, with no form of easy access via rail line, Coconut Grove incubated a unique culture, characterized by some of its early residents, including a few notable artists. Ralph Middleton Munroe, a yacht designer who was one of the Grove’s earliest residents, was also known for his photography. In addition, Kirk Munroe, a children’s adventure book author and conservationist who was not in any way related to Ralph, was very active in establishing Coconut Grove’s early community institutions. The arrival of Henry Flagler’s Florida East Coast railroad in Miami in 1896 brought a population and economic boom to the region. The Grove’s residents attempted to stand strong. In the face of rapid change, residents of Coconut Grove sought to maintain a frontier community character while also reaping the benefits of economic growth.

By the 1920s, Coconut Grove had grown quite a bit, as it converted from a remote frontier community to a sister community to a growing national powerhouse. John Irwin Bright, an architectural planner who created an ambitious 1921 plan that would have completely altered the fabric of the Grove, described Coconut Grove’s growth from 1896 to 1920 as “slow and gradual... There always was an abundance of land at a reasonable cost.”¹ Bright paints a picture of Coconut Grove as a place that had *enough* business for the residents to be comfortable, but not *too much* as to cause traffic congestion. While the wealthy “Swells” lived along the shoreline, with properties averaging over six acres, Bright diagnosed an impending land value issue in the middle of Coconut Grove, where the black community of Kebo stood,

¹ John Irwin Bright, “Housing and Community Planning: The Plan for Coconut Grove,” *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, (Washington D.C., The Press of the American Institute of Architects, 1921), 110.

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although by the 1920s referred to as “Colored Town.” He bemoaned the dip in property values surrounding Colored Town, and saw it as detrimental to the overall Grove tax base.² Bright’s plan entailed widening Main Highway, a road that ran through the business district as well as passing by the beachside properties of the wealthy. He also sought to limit the growth of Coconut Grove by surrounding it entirely with a massive municipal park. Bright believed that boundless growth in a small town “is a conception dedicated to the accumulation of riches, not for the benefit of the city itself but for a small minority of its inhabitants.”³ In essence, Bright’s plan was to move the inhabitants of Colored Town to the edge of the community, and to replace their homes with a golf course as well as a shopping district. The plan aimed for glitz and glamor, featuring a reflecting lake for the City Hall, as well as automobile showrooms, banks, and a luxury hotel. All new construction would be built in the Mediterranean Revival style.⁴ Bright’s plan, which was fundamentally segregationist, was meant to create a unified character for a community that had always been eclectic. It was also aimed to prevent the type of rapid, rampant growth that the city of Miami experienced in the early decades of the 20th century. The plan was never implemented, and Coconut Grove maintained its historic character.

After the First World War, Coconut Grove and Miami began to engage in border and jurisdiction disputes. As Miami’s borders began to creep toward the Grove from the northeast, Coconut Grove incorporated as a town in 1919, a defensive action aimed at codifying the community’s borders. The next year, Grove mayor William V. Little sought to acquire more land in order to gain enough registered voters to incorporate Coconut Grove as a city, but the effort never materialized.⁵ In 1923, Miami made its first attempt to annex Coconut Grove. In January of that year, Coconut Grove was notified that Miami aimed to annex it as well as the neighboring communities of Silver Bluff and Allapattah. Grove leadership canvassed the Coconut Grove populace by mail, determining that 155 out of 197 respondents were opposed to annexation. Before this, however, Miami retracted its attempt over technical concerns about bond indebtedness.⁶ Despite this failure, the city of Miami, spurred by the 1920s land boom, was desperate to expand its borders along with its taxation base. On July 7, 1925, Miami made a second attempt to annex Coconut Grove as well as other nearby communities, and succeeded. With a coordinated fundraising, get-out-the-vote, and advertising campaign, the annexation vote was extremely organized. For Miami, which was on the cusp of becoming the biggest city in the state of Florida, this effort was of the utmost importance. As civic leader A.J. Clearly said, “Every voter who has registered must consider it his duty to vote on the question of annexation. Unless everyone in Miami eligible to

² John Irwin Bright, “Housing and Community Planning: The Plan for Coconut Grove,” *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, (Washington D.C., The Press of the American Institute of Architects, 1921), 111.

³ John Irwin Bright, “Housing and Community Planning: The Plan for Coconut Grove,” *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, (Washington D.C., The Press of the American Institute of Architects, 1921), 114.

⁴ John Irwin Bright, “Housing and Community Planning: The Plan for Coconut Grove,” *The Journal of the American Institute of Architects*, (Washington D.C., The Press of the American Institute of Architects, 1921), 119-120.

⁵ Grant Livingston, “The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove,” *Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida*, (Miami, Historical Association of Southern Florida, Number LX), 2000, 35.

⁶ Grant Livingston, “The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove,” *Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida*, (Miami, Historical Association of Southern Florida, Number LX), 2000, 36-37.

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vote does this we stand in danger of seeing the annexation measure defeated.”⁷ The stakes were high, with Miami seeking to expand its territory and population, and Coconut Grove wishing to maintain its independence.

Residents of Coconut Grove were taken by surprise with this new vote, and were particularly galled by its structure, which had been determined by a Florida State law written in 1905. Under this law, for a city to annex surrounding territory, a vote had to be held. For the annexation to go through, two-thirds of everyone affected by the annexation had to support it (that is, in this case, two-thirds of the voters between Miami and Coconut Grove). Since Miami’s population was so much larger than the Grove’s, Coconut Grove’s votes had very little value. As an advertisement posted in the *Miami Herald* by Coconut Grove residents put it, “Coconut Grove has not more than 240 votes against possibly 25,000 in Miami ... WHAT CHANCE DO WE HAVE?” The election was held on September 2, 1925, and the results were clear: while 87 percent of voters in the Grove disapproved of the annexation, 88 percent of all voters approved.⁸ Miami, previously defined by its clear city limits, morphed into Greater Miami, absorbing Coconut Grove, Silver Bluff, Allapattah, Lemon City, Buena Vista, and Little River, all of which had been independent towns. Coconut Grove was to be absorbed by Miami, without its consent. Despite this, the Grove attempted to maintain its own identity. The land boom, which had drawn so many people to South Florida, suddenly ended that year, putting to an end the feelings of perpetual growth that had defined South Florida for so long. Nevertheless, Coconut Grove, despite being annexed, refused to become just a part of Miami, and still built its own institutions, including the movie theater that would one day be converted into the Coconut Grove Playhouse.

Historical Significance: Entertainment/Recreation

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is significant at the local level under Criterion A in the area of Entertainment/Recreation. Since 1927, the building has housed various forms of entertainment, including movies, television and radio programs, and plays. Each successive owner of the building approached it with grand designs, intending for it to be a cultural center for the city of Miami and perhaps the nation. In some senses, they succeeded, with the playhouse premiering numerous theatrical productions, many of which found their way to New York City. The Coconut Grove Playhouse was, for a time, a staging ground where kinks were worked out of productions before moving to the more traditional venues. From 1927 to 2006, through economic booms and busts, the Coconut Grove Playhouse served as a heart of the Coconut Grove community, its distinctive façade drawing visitors with the promise of quality entertainment. Between 1955 and 1970, under the leadership of George Engle and Zev Buffman, the playhouse was a popular and prominent theater in the Miami community.

The Rise and Fall of a Coconut Grove Movie Theater: 1926-1954

⁷ Grant Livingston, “The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove,” *Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida*, (Miami, Historical Association of Southern Florida, Number LX), 2000, 39-40.

⁸ Grant Livingston, “The Annexation of the City of Coconut Grove,” *Tequesta: The Journal of the Historical Association of Southern Florida*, (Miami, Historical Association of Southern Florida, Number LX), 2000, 43-46.

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The building that would later become the Coconut Grove Playhouse opened on January 1, 1927 as the Coconut Grove Theater (colloquially known as “The Grove”). The two men who financed the theater were Irving J. Thomas and Fin L. Pierce, realtors and builders who had an active guiding hand in the early municipal development of Coconut Grove. While both men came from Cleveland, Ohio in 1910, they each had become fascinated by South Florida, and especially Coconut Grove, in 1910. Both planned to move there. The rapid ascension of South Florida real estate and infrastructure after the advent of Henry Flagler’s railroad made the Miami area an attractive location for realtors and builders. Thomas moved to Coconut Grove in 1913 and served as the town’s first mayor after it was incorporated in 1919. Pierce arrived in 1924. The partners were committed to developing Coconut Grove both during and after the Florida land boom of the 1920s. They converted multiple beachside estate grounds into housing developments. When the Southern Bell Telephone Company balked at setting up a telephone exchange in Coconut Grove, Thomas and Pierce led the construction of an appropriate and suitable building for them. Seeing a hole in the entertainment offerings available in Coconut Grove, and looking to make a statement about Coconut Grove’s cultural competitiveness with the city of Miami, Thomas and Pierce sought to create a world-class movie establishment, one that could be a center of the community. While they originally wanted to simply build a movie theater, their plans gradually expanded until the final design included seven street-level storefronts, offices on the second floor, and multiple apartments on the third floor.⁹



Figure 6: 1946 photograph of the Kiehnel and Elliott-designed Coconut Grove Playhouse Auditorium. Notice the arched features along the wall with the original Solomonic columns and the plaster molding along the roofline. Source: Florida Memory.

At first, Thomas and Pierce intended to operate the theater themselves, but as construction continued, they decided to lease the theater to Paramount Enterprises, a subsidiary of Paramount Pictures which exclusively played films by that company.¹⁰ Paramount was vigorously pursuing the Miami theater market. When the Coconut Grove theater opened, the eleven Paramount theaters in the area had a total of 13,000 seats, allowing for over one-tenth of Greater Miami’s residents to watch Paramount productions at the same time.¹¹ Of course, this meant that Paramount theaters often competed within themselves for customers, especially since Greater Miami was not such a large geographic area at the time.

Thomas and Pierce placed their movie theater in a prominent location and had it designed in a style which conformed to architect John Irwin Bright’s unimplemented 1921 development plan. He had advised that the Grove’s “Colored Town” be moved to the outskirts of the community, and be replaced

⁹ “Former Ohio Men Own Theater Structure,” *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927.
¹⁰ “Former Ohio Men Own Theater Structure,” *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927.
¹¹ “Paramount Theaters have 13,000 Seats,” *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927.

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by Mediterranean Revival civic and shopping centers, including a movie theater. While Thomas and Pierce did not displace the Grove's black community, they did purchase the theater land from Ebenezer Woodbury Franklin Stirrup, a Bahamian immigrant who started as a carpenter's apprentice and eventually accumulated enough land in Coconut Grove to build a black Bahamian community. He was the first black millionaire in Coconut Grove, and the land used to construct the theater was built along the borders of Coconut Grove's white and black areas on Main Highway.

In an attempt to create a truly stunning structure, Thomas and Pierce hired the Kiehnel and Elliott architectural firm. Kiehnel and Elliott had already designed a few distinctive buildings for Coconut Grove residents, some of which were excellent examples of the Mediterranean Revival style. Albert Peacock, grandson of Grove luminaries Charles and Isabella Peacock, was the general contractor for the project, bringing decades of business and social experience in Coconut Grove to bear on the project.¹² It is clear that the goal for the people involved was to create a public institution that would bring glory and prestige to Coconut Grove. The theater was not the first in Greater Miami, but it was designed to rival or outshine the others in luxury and amenities.

The Coconut Grove Theater was the eleventh Paramount theater in South Florida, but a premium was placed on size and comfort. Thomas and Pierce invested about \$500,000 into the project, and the theater was outfitted with state-of-the-art materials throughout. The auditorium was massive, 75 feet wide and 140 feet in depth, with a ceiling 88 feet high. The theater had a capacity of over 1,500 (billed as the most seats for a theater in Greater Miami), and the floor was sloped in such a way that allowed every viewer to see the screen, even with a full house.¹³ The interior of the theater was designed to demonstrate class and sophistication. The building featured an interior fountain by the ticket booth, as well as a richly carpeted foyer and lounge rooms, all leading into the auditorium. The auditorium was immense and open; a very impressed reviewer for the *Miami Herald* wrote that "on looking into the auditorium the feeling that one has is that he is gazing into a great room which opens onto a patio on either side. For, along the side walls are a series of double arches on twisted columns opening through



Figure 7: 1946 photograph of the Kiehnel and Elliott-designed auditorium proscenium, which remains today. The 1955 Alfred Browning Parker alterations added depth to this original stage. Source: Florida Memory

¹² "Many Firms Aided in Completing Theater," *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927.

¹³ "\$500,000 Playhouse Eleventh in Chain," *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927

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fine wrought iron gates into a loggia or promenade.”¹⁴ The arches were meant to give the large indoor auditorium an expansive feeling, presenting an illusion of Old World sophistication.

Much of the design of the building was suited specifically for its location and purpose. Because the theater debuted during the silent film era, it was equipped with a Wurlitzer organ to accompany the films, at the time the largest Wurlitzer in the country, the sounds of which were pumped in through grilles on the sides of the auditorium.¹⁵ Perhaps most importantly for the hot, humid Miami tropics, the theater was installed with a state-of-the-art air conditioning system, created by the York Manufacturing Company at a cost of more than \$40,000.¹⁶ The Coconut Grove Theater was the second air-conditioned theater in South Florida, after the Olympia Theater in downtown Miami. With Miami experiencing sweltering temperatures for much of the year, especially in such a packed theater environment, the availability of air conditioning would be quite a draw for an audience.



Figure 8: 1930s photograph of the Coconut Grove Theater. Taken from across Main Highway and Charles Avenue, the photograph demonstrates the original Kiehnel and Elliott design, including the building’s pediment, parapets, and original storefronts. Source: Architectonica International Coconut Grove Playhouse Historic Report

While the theater was designed and built throughout 1926, it finally opened on January 1, 1927, featuring the D.W. Griffith film *The Sorrows of Satan*. The theater made a strong first impression, stunning visitors with its glamorous elegance, playing a film by an innovator of filmmaking technique, accompanied by a twelve-piece orchestra and the largest Wurlitzer organ in the country. Unfortunately, the movie theater was not financially successful. The

ambitious air conditioning was more notable for being noisy than cooling the air, getting in the way of hearing the accompaniments to the silent films on the screen. The grand theater with 1,500 seats had trouble filling them.¹⁷

The programming in the theater gradually declined in quality, first showing second-run movies and serials, as well as amateur talent shows on the stage. During the Second World War, Kate Smith, a singer known as the Songbird of the South, performed her radio show from the Coconut Grove Theater. The theater was also used to train Air Force navigators. In 1953, podiatrist Sid Cassell rented the theater

¹⁴ “Theater Structure is Artistic Triumph,” *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927.

¹⁵ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 3.

¹⁶ “Cooling System for Theater is Feature,” *The Miami Herald*, January 1, 1927.

¹⁷ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 4.

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to produce and direct theatrical productions. He was successful for a year, but abandoned the project because he felt the theater was unsuitable. He complained about the concrete walkways in the theater picking up sound too easily, including that of scuttling wildlife, such as mating land crabs. In addition, he said, “the acoustics were terrible. The only ventilation we had was that ridiculous cooling system. When you turned the fans on, you heard nothing. The acoustics were bad enough without them.”¹⁸ The building, despite its glamorous façade and luxurious interiors, was perhaps a victim of its own ambition. The elements that made it so bold had not yet been refined, so they ended up causing more trouble than they helped. On top of this, the theater opened just after the collapse of the Florida Land Boom, an event which severely damaged the South Florida economy, meaning that people had less money to spend on luxuries like movies. The Great Depression, starting in 1929, compounded this effect. The theater’s original purpose, to be a high-class location to watch the newest Paramount productions, was not achieved in the long run. The theater shuttered in May of 1954.



Figure 9: Early 1950s photograph of the Coconut Grove Theater before the Engle/Parker renovations were completed. Note the parapets along the roofline (now removed) and the commercial bays. Source: University of Florida Architectural Archives

George Engle Creates a “Broadway by the Bay,”
1955-1962

Despite the long-term failure of the Coconut Grove Theater, the building was still attractive and imposing. Noticing this, oilman George Engle endeavored to convert it into a renowned playhouse, and tried to solve the inefficiencies that had plagued the original movie theater.

George Engle was a Kentuckian who owned oil wells all over the United States, but he, like many before him, became fascinated with Coconut Grove and moved there, managing his empire far away from the oil he extracted. He almost immediately made his mark on the community, building and destroying buildings and landscape elements as he saw fit. In an area that had traditionally been fields, he constructed the Engle building, a gray-brick structure that wrapped around a corner and defied the traditional Grove style. While met with initial resistance, his Florida Pharmacy, a one-stop shop for everything from medicine to ice cream to crystal, became extremely popular as a place to congregate and shop. On a whim, he purchased in 1955 the Coconut Grove Theater, looking to establish it as another community institution by converting it into a place for plays.¹⁹

The conversion would be complex, altering both the exterior and interior of the building. To accomplish this task, Engle hired noted South Florida architect Alfred Browning Parker, who was extremely prolific in the Miami area. Parker removed some ornamental features from the front exterior of the building,

¹⁸ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 4.

¹⁹ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 2.

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including an ornate pediment, as well as replacing the original theater marquees with a canopy. The alterations to the interior were much more significant. His main project was to decrease the size of the auditorium from 1,500 seats to 800. The original seat count was very ambitious in the 1920s, but was too large for a playhouse. He also installed a new, steeper floor for the auditorium over the Kiehnel and Elliot original, sinking the original arch and column features on the sides of the auditorium into the ground. In addition, Parker had to improve the acoustics of the room. By changing the rear wall of the auditorium and installing sound-diffusing panels, the portions of the auditorium that were closed off were turned into a restaurant and a lounge.²⁰ Much like Thomas and Pierce before him, Engle wanted the building to set the standard for luxuriousness, and he opened up his wallet to achieve that goal. He used the finest materials whenever possible, including silk draperies, 14-carat gold plated shower knobs, rhinestone-studded toilet seats, and Honduran wood. Engle purchased the building for around \$200,000 and spent about \$700,000 refurbishing it.²¹ Engle and Parker rehabilitated an old building that had fallen out of use, with relatively minor changes on the exterior and massive ones in the interior. Their building project echoed the one from decades earlier, in goals and style, but implemented changes and alterations that they thought would improve the overall entertainment product.

The first performance, held on January 3, 1956, was a disastrous rendition of an all-time great play. The Coconut Grove Playhouse was home to the first American performance of Samuel Beckett's absurdist tragicomedy *Waiting for Godot*. Engle, looking to make a splash with his first production, picked *Godot* because it had received critical acclaim throughout Europe. The play, which had received both praise and criticism for its defiance of traditional storytelling techniques and plot, was an unconventional choice for a first

performance. Nevertheless, the Coconut Grove Playhouse advertised the play as the "laugh sensation of two continents," setting up the audience for confusion and frustration. The leads were played by Bert Lahr (best known for his role as the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard of Oz*) and Tom Ewell (*The Seven Year Itch*).²² The two leads had little to no chemistry, were stricken with professional jealousy, and had a difficult time understanding the play, which has humorous moments, but is overall very dark and minimalistic. Opening night was as glamorous as the original Coconut Grove Theater opening night almost three

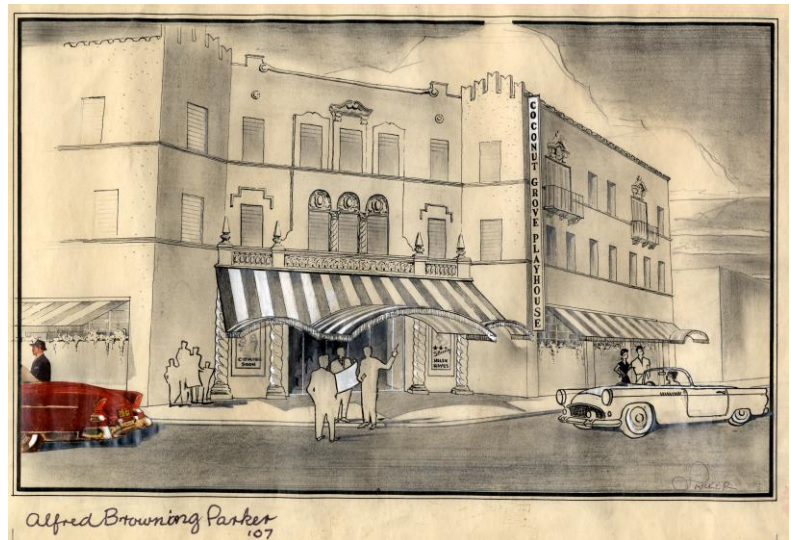


Figure 10: Alfred Browning Parker sketch plans for his alteration of the Coconut Grove Theater building. Source: University of Florida Architectural Archives

²⁰ "Grove Theater Conversion Begins," *The Miami Herald*, July 10, 1955.

²¹ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 4-5.

²² Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 7.

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decades earlier. Local luminaries including playwright Tennessee Williams, socialite John Astor, and historian Marjory Stoneman Douglas showed up, and the restaurant was filled to the brim with people ordering such delicacies as caviar, filet mignon, and pheasant.²³ Engle’s opening night was a smashing success, if one does not take the play itself into account.

The play, billed as an uproarious comedy, did not live up to the audience’s expectations. They did not laugh as much as they expected, and began to flood out of the theater. By the end of the play, three-quarters of the audience had left the playhouse.²⁴ Jack Anderson of the *Miami Herald* wrote that he “almost felt sorry for the first night audience which attended the elegant opening of the Coconut Grove Playhouse...



Figure 11: Alfred Browning Parker’s original design for the Coconut Grove Playhouse’s entryway. The ticket booths are shown on the right side of the photograph. Source: Architectonica International Coconut Grove Playhouse Historic Report

that the playhouse had the attention of Miami’s elites.

You could almost hear the mink stoles in the audience howling with disappointment as the principals on stage... failed to say or do anything funny within the audience’s frame of reference.” Anderson, who had experience seeing the play in London, sensed the actors’ confusion as well as the disappointment of the audience.²⁵ While *Godot* had an ignominious opening in Miami, it eventually had more success in New York City, once audiences had been warned that it was not a traditional comedic play. Engle and his partners picked *Godot* for the first play to draw attention to the Coconut Grove Playhouse, and they succeeded. The Playhouse’s first show was covered nationally, and opening night demonstrated

In the Coconut Grove Playhouse’s early years, George Engle demonstrated an ability to present high-quality scripts with well-known actors. Starting from *Godot*, where Tom Ewell and Bert Lahr, both nationally-famous performers played the leading roles, Engle showed that he wanted the plays shown in his playhouse to be audience draws. The second show was Tennessee Williams’ *A Streetcar Named Desire*, led by controversial stage actress Tallulah Bankhead in the role of Blanche DuBois. Tennessee Williams, the author of the play, and a resident of Miami, had an active role in the Coconut Grove production, though he did not direct. Williams had a decade earlier envisioned Bankhead playing the role of Blanche, writing it with her in mind, and was excited to work with her. Bankhead’s reputation as a libertine affected the audience’s interpretation of the character she portrayed, and the insecure Blanche was imbued with an unintentional bawdy energy. Williams, who initially lamented that Bankhead was

²³ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 7.

²⁴ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 10.

²⁵ Jack Anderson, “Mink-Clad Audience Disappointed in ‘Waiting for Godot,’” *The Miami Herald*, January 4, 1956.

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ruining his play, worked with her to help her overcome the difficulties of her reputation, and turn them into something productive for the stage. When *Streetcar* moved to New York City, this rendition of the play received mixed reviews, but Bankhead's performance was described as a triumph.²⁶ While plays often did not stay at the Coconut Grove Playhouse for very long, it served as a somewhat experimental staging ground where directors and performers worked out the kinks of productions destined for Broadway.

While hosting theatrical luminaries, the Coconut Grove Playhouse still maintained a distinctly local character. While the leading roles in plays were always filled by stars, the bit parts would often be portrayed by untrained locals. *The Solid Gold Cadillac*, starring Billie Burke (who played the role of Glinda the Good Witch in *The Wizard of Oz*), also featured local news anchors Ralph Renick and Jackie Pierce, as well as historian Marjory Stoneman Douglas. *King of Hearts*, starring Donald Cook, featured Alfred Browning Parker's eight-year-old son, as well as his dog. These untrained roles added an element of chaos to the production, but were draws for the local audience.²⁷ As polished as Engle made the productions at the Coconut Grove Playhouse, he could not resist indulging the eccentricities of the community.



Figure 12: George Engle, seated at the far end of the table, entertaining high society guests in the Coconut Grove Playhouse's dining room. Architect Alfred Browning Parker is seated to the far left in the photograph. Source: Arquitectonica International Coconut Grove Playhouse Historic Report

Engle directly managed the Coconut Grove Playhouse until March 1960. He had an active hand in everything from casting to the managing the building. After spending almost a million dollars purchasing and renovating the theater, he spent over \$400,000 over the next 4 years. He continued to bring in high-profile performers, including Jessica Tandy, Chico Marx, and Ed Begley. The stars were paid up to \$30,000 a week. Engle also rotated the décor of the Playhouse's restaurant to match whatever the theme of the current performance was. Engle, like his predecessors in Coconut Grove, had ambitious plans for community development. He briefly considered building a separate opera house across the street and connecting the two buildings with a raised walkway.²⁸ This proposed cultural complex matched the pattern of development in Coconut Grove. Builders and designers almost never wanted to just make something new; they aimed to make something transcendent.

²⁶ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 14-15.

²⁷ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 16.

²⁸ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 22-24.

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In 1958, Engle opened up an art gallery on the second floor of the Playhouse building, converting rehearsal space into a non-commercial gallery with rotating loaned materials on display. The gallery displayed both works by local artists and those by national and international masters. The gallery also could be converted into the Celebrity Room, a bar and dance floor where events could be held. Comedian Dean Murphy hosted a live television program weekly from the Celebrity Room, interviewing people associated with the theater’s plays and art gallery. By 1960, Engle, a perfectionist, had grown tired of the constant expense associated with creating and maintaining a cultural center for Coconut Grove. He handed the reins to Owen Phillips, an experienced theatrical producer who had been working at the Playhouse since 1958.²⁹ Phillips ran the theater until it closed once more in 1962, due to declining ticket sales. The cycle started by Thomas and Pierce had continued with Engle. Each opened up a new entertainment venue with big dreams, only to suffer a relatively quick decline.



Figure 13: 1971 photograph of the Coconut Grove Playhouse’s exterior. The parapets had been removed, and the commercial bays filled in with ribbon windows. Source: HistoryMiami Archives and Research Center

Zev Buffman’s Tenure at the Playhouse, a New Golden Age, 1962-1970

In 1962, Israeli theatrical producer Zev Buffman purchased the Coconut Grove Playhouse for over a million dollars. Like his predecessors, he had grand designs for the building, imagining a wealthy clientele taking advantage of the building’s multiple accommodations. He also expanded the auditorium’s capacity, hiring Alfred Browning Parker to add a 300-seat mezzanine balcony in 1965. While Engle’s productions had mostly been trial runs for shows destined for New York City, Buffman had a different approach, aiming to acquire theatrical rights to Broadway hits. Theatrical rights prevented a play from being performed professionally by potential competitors. No theater

near Broadway could perform a Broadway play. Coconut Grove, tucked into a distant corner of the country, could get the rights to successful plays because it was so far from Broadway. Buffman targeted plays that were at the height of their popularity on Broadway, thinking that the Miami audience would enjoy similar things to the New York audience.³⁰ Buffman did not merely follow in Engle’s footsteps; he innovated and experimented, pushing the envelope and using his experience as a theatrical producer to guide him in selecting programming for the theater and promoting the shows.

Buffman, much like Engle, attempted to make the plays in his playhouse relevant beyond the auditorium. While Engle had shifted the décor of his playhouse to match the play being performed, Buffman brought in art for the upstairs art gallery that matched the setting and theme of the plays. In one case, when the

²⁹ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 22-24.

³⁰ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 43-49.

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musical *Irma la Douce*, set in the Left Bank of Paris, was being performed, Buffman collaborated with local store owners and artists to turn downtown Coconut Grove into the Left Bank. Artists hawked their wares as French music played. The lead actress of the play even judged a poodle competition. This event was so successful that it inspired an annual Coconut Grove Arts Festival, which still exists as of 2017. Buffman was enormously successful in the years he owned the Coconut Grove Playhouse, expanding his business to New York and Hollywood. By 1970, he was ready to move on from the place that had nourished his career, and sold the playhouse to comedian Eddie Bracken.³¹ The Buffman years catalyzed the Coconut Grove Playhouse as a community institution, offering popular entertainment and also providing a vessel for continued artistic and economic development in Coconut Grove.

Decline of the Coconut Grove Playhouse

The theater went bankrupt in less than a year under Bracken's ownership. In 1971, he sold the Coconut Grove Playhouse to Broadway producers Arthur Cantor and Robert Fishko, who both had had experience producing at the Playhouse. They followed Buffman's example, trying to produce Broadway hits, and restored much of the theater's prestige. In 1977, they cashed out, selling their stakes to the Player's Repertory Company, who renamed the theater the Player's State Theater. The theater's name was changed back to the Coconut Grove Playhouse in 1980, when the State of Florida purchased it by acquiring the theater's \$1.5 million mortgage. In 2004, the state transferred ownership to Coconut Grove Playhouse, Inc. under the stipulation that the building continue operation as a theater in perpetuity. The playhouse was shuttered in 2006, during its 50th anniversary year, 79 years after the building first opened as a movie theater.³²

Architectural Context

Mediterranean Revival

Drawing inspiration from architecture in Spain, Italy, and Northern Africa, Mediterranean Revival style architecture was very popular during the Florida Land Boom of the mid-1920s. Mediterranean Revival buildings are characterized by stucco walls, red tiled roofs (often flat), and ornamentation surrounding doors and windows designed to give the feeling of casual elegance. While Mediterranean Revival is common in the parts of the country that had once been under Spanish control, including California, New Mexico, and Florida, Floridian Mediterranean Revival is unique for its adaptation to the cultural and physical climate of Florida in the early twentieth century. In 1925, Matlack Price wrote in the *House Beautiful* magazine that "architects of the Mediterranean Revival style do not mean it to be serious. While they do not intend it to be frivolous, they definitely intend its picturesque informality to express the spirit of a land dedicated to long care-free vacations."³³ Mediterranean Revival architecture is

³¹ Carol Cohan, *Broadway by the Bay: Thirty Years at the Coconut Grove Playhouse*, (Miami, Pickering Press, 1987), 43-49.

³² David Bulit, *Lost Miami: Stories and Secrets Behind Magic City Ruins*, (Charleston, The History Press, 2015), 112-116.

³³ Matlack Price, "The New Mediterranean Architecture of Florida: The Keynote is Expression of the Picturesque," *The House Beautiful*, (vol. IV, issue VI, 1925), 664-666.

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designed to give the impression of wealth and class, of a breezy splendor, and manages to be simultaneously monumental and light-hearted.

Architectural Significance

The Coconut Grove Playhouse's façade is an excellent example of the Mediterranean Revival style. Although its façade has been altered since the theater's opening in 1927, the overall impression remains intact. The building's exterior maintains its original stucco exterior, flat red-tile roofline, and decorative window and door surrounds. The Coconut Grove Theater was designed to capture the elegance and luxury that Coconut Grove sought to project, housing a movie house trying to compete with the other deluxe theaters in the Greater Miami area. Even though the original roofline parapets and pediment have been removed, as well as the seven original bays for streetside commercial properties, the façade maintains its Mediterranean Revival features with its decorative columns and wrought-iron balconets. Designed originally by noted Miami architect Richard Kiehnel, and altered by Modernist Alfred Browning Parker, the playhouse's exterior retains its character-defining features and is an intact example of a public building intended to be a center of its community in the Mediterranean Revival style. Even though the interior has gone through multiple waves of alterations since its 1927 construction, with the original arches and columns within the auditorium space being lost, the building's exterior maintains its Mediterranean Revival characteristics that impressed the 1927 audience.

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VERBAL BOUNDARY DESCRIPTION

The boundary follows the property lines of the lots containing the Coconut Grove Playhouse as stated by the Miami-Dade County property appraiser description below and the attached maps.

N 28 DEG E 83.04FT N 45 DEG W
12.519FT N 28 DEG E 2.65FT
ELY AD 3.68FT N 45 DEG W
124.21FT S 44 DEG W 7.06FT
N 45 DEG W 101.05FT SWLY AD
17.62FT S 89 DEG W 5.20FT
S235.78FT TO POB & E140FT OF
N117FT & E52.5FT LESS N117FT OF
BLK 29 FROW HMSTD PB B-106 &
LOTS 1 & 2 ENGLE SUB PB 64-43

Folio: 01-4121-045-0140 MUNROES PLAT DB D-253

BOUNDARY JUSTIFICATION

The above boundaries enclose all of the contributing resources associated with the historic Coconut Grove Playhouse.

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LIST OF PHOTOGRAPHS

Photograph Subject: Coconut Grove Playhouse

Photograph Address: 2100 Biscayne Boulevard, Miami (Miami-Dade County), Florida

Photographer: Ruben Acosta

Date Taken: November 2016

- 1: South Elevation, Looking North
- 2: South Elevation Solomonic Column Features, Looking North
- 3: South Elevation Second and Third Floor Central Bay, Looking North
- 4: South Elevation Left Bay, Looking North
- 5: South Elevation Right Bay, Looking West
- 6: South Elevation Balconet Feature, Looking West
- 7: Coconut Grove Playhouse Sign, Looking North
- 8: South Elevation 1980s Expansion, Looking West
- 9: West Elevation Utilities Building, Looking East
- 10: West Elevation, Looking East
- 11: West Elevation Stairs Entrance, Looking South
- 12: North Elevation, Looking South
- 13: East Elevation, Looking Southwest
- 14: East Elevation, Looking Southwest
- 15: Theater Lobby Entrance
- 16: Theater Will Call Windows
- 17: Theater Lounge Bathroom Arch and Stall
- 18: Theater Lounge Bathroom Arch and Columns
- 19: Theater Snack Bar Arches
- 20: Theater Snack Bar Arch and Columns
- 21: Theater Lounge Mezzanine Stairway
- 22: Theater Mezzanine Staircase to Second Floor Balcony
- 23: Theater Auditorium Western Stencils
- 24: Theater Auditorium Decorative Dolphin Fountain
- 25: Underside of Second Floor Balcony with Soundproof Material
- 26: View of Stage from Mezzanine Balcony (David Bult, March 2017)
- 27: Decorative Figure Feature West of Stage
- 28: View of Second Floor Balcony from Stage (David Bult, March 2017)
- 29: Disrupted Plaster Molding on Eastern Wall Next to Second Floor Mezzanine Balcony
- 30: Backstage Staircase to Second Floor Lighting Booth
- 31: Second Floor Lighting Booth Overlooking Stage from West
- 32: Backstage Dressing Room
- 33: Backstage Loading and Workshop Area
- 34: Backstage Sunken Workshop Area

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35: Second Floor Metal Staircase in Northeast 1980s addition

36: Storage Area in Former Bar and Lounge

37: Converted Kitchen in Southwest of Building

38: Theater Staircase

39: Second Floor Theater Elevator

40: Third Floor Apartment

41: Third Floor Boarded-Up Window

42: Third Floor Bathroom

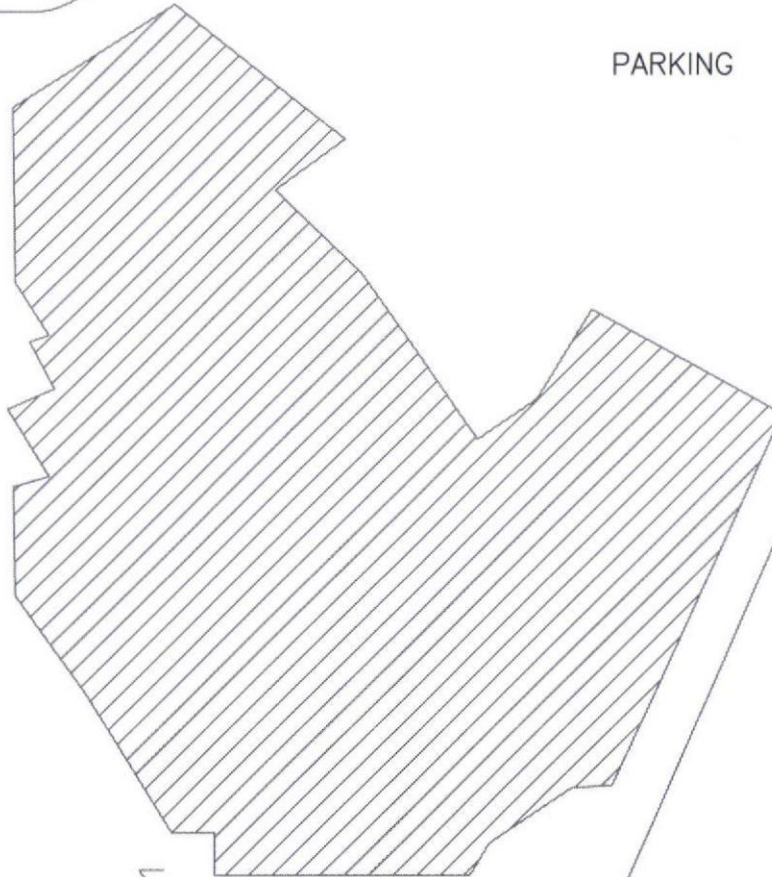
WILLIAMS AVE

PARKING

PARKING

MAIN HIGHWAY

CHARLES AVE.



COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE
3500 MAIN HIGHWAY
MIAMI (MIAMI-DADE COUNTY), FLORIDA



DESIGN PREPARED BY:
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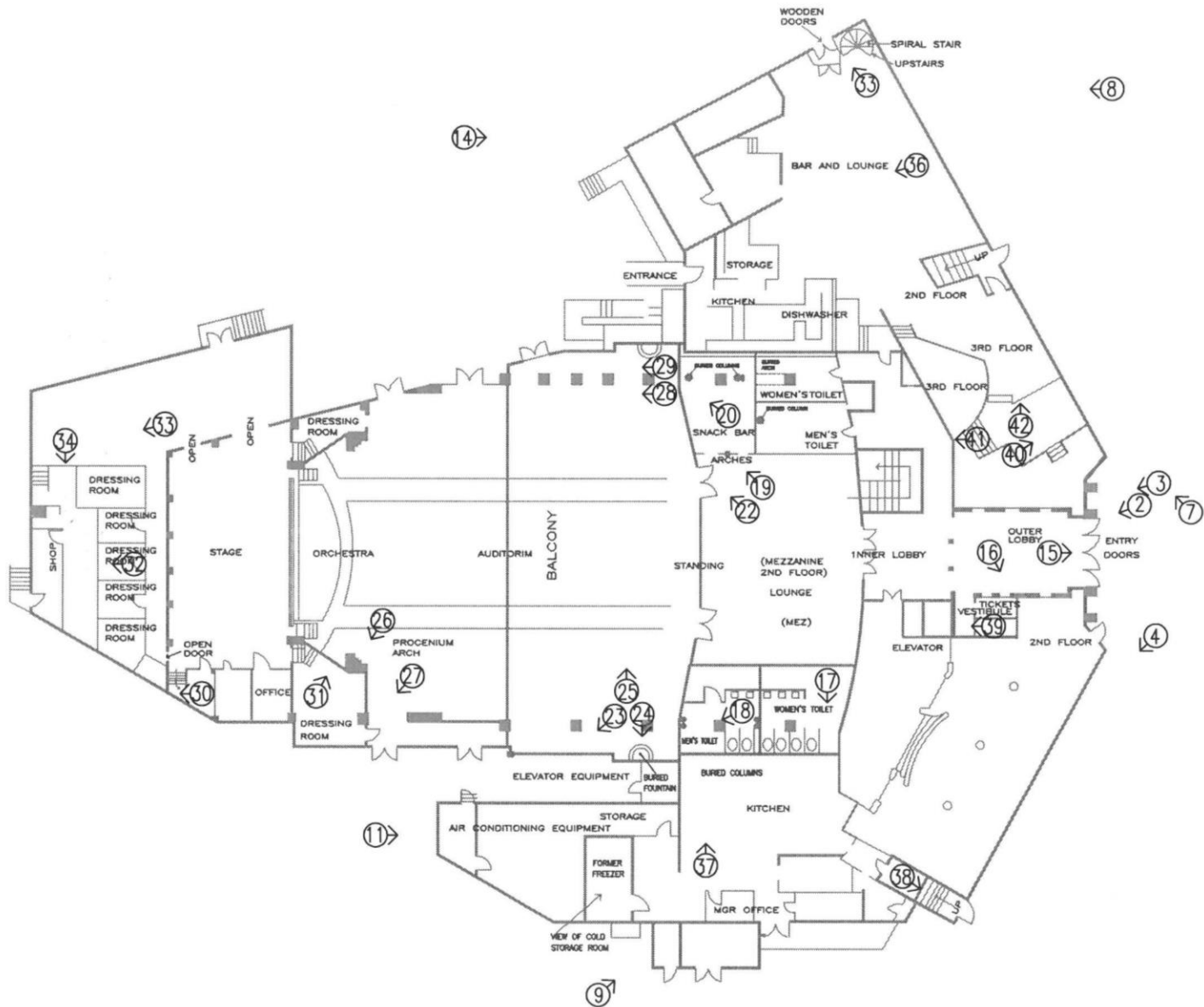
MAP PREPARED FOR:
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DRAWN BY: W. CARL SHEVER
DRAWING DATE: FEBRUARY 2017

THE COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE PLANS ARE DRAWN UPON
ALREADY ISSUED A VARIETY OF OTHER RESOURCES
INCLUDING PERMITS, DEEDS OF SUCCESSION, ETC.
SUCCEEDS ASH PROPERTY AND APPEAR ON MAPS

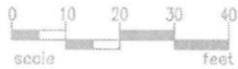
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N/A

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PHOTOS ← 23

COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE
 3500 MAIN HIGHWAY
 MIAMI (MIAMI-DADE COUNTY), FLORIDA



DESIGN PREPARED BY:
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DRAWN BY: W. CARL BEYER
 DRAWING DATE: FEBRUARY 2017

DRAWING NUMBER SHEET NO. 1 OF 2
 16/A

THE COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE PLANS WERE FIRST USED BY MICHIGAN UNDER A UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN LICENSE. INCLUDING SOME WORDS OF SCOTT STREET WEST, MIDDLE GIRT ARCHITECTURE AND APPROVED BY MPP.

MAP PROVIDED BY: CARL BEYER
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 FAX NUMBER (904) 344-6428

Coconut Grove Playhouse


3500 Main Highway
Miami, Miami-Dade County
Florida

Lat./Long. Coordinates:
25.726309 -80.245168

UTM:
17R 575717 2845591

Datum: WGS84

Legend

 Proposed NR Boundary

Date: 6/8/2017

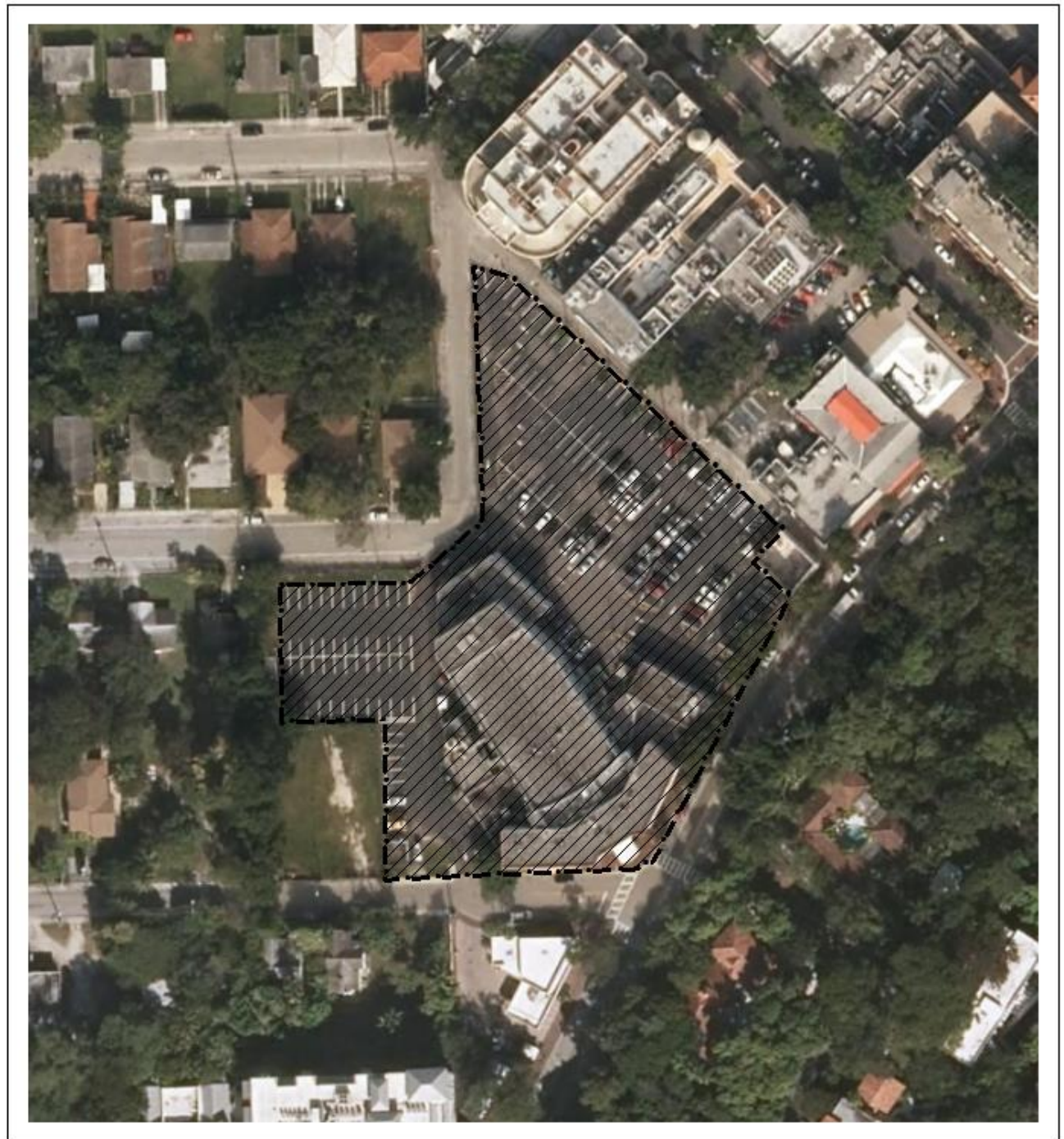
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DigitalGlobe, GeoEye, Earthstar
Geographics, CNES/Airbus DS,
USDA, USGS, AEX, Getmapping,
Aerogrid, IGN, IGP, swisstopo,
and the GIS User Community



Coconut Grove Playhouse


3500 Main Highway
Miami, Miami-Dade County
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Lat./Long. Coordinates:
25.726309 -80.245168

UTM:
17R 575717 2845591

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Legend

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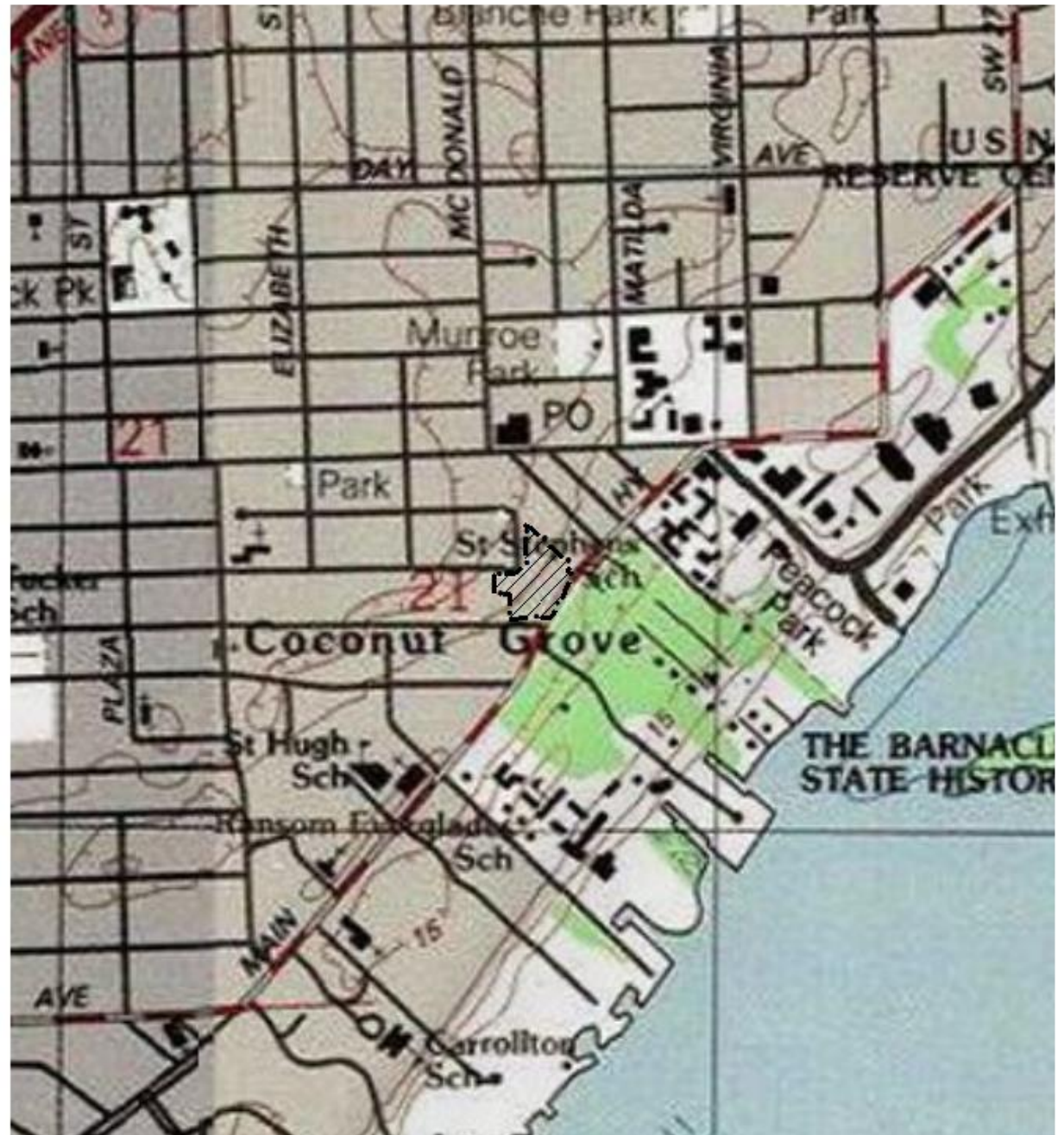
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Geographic Society, i-cubed





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CASTLE OF THE ARCHBISHOP

1000





OCEAN BEACH HISTORICAL MARKER
THE OCEAN BEACH HISTORICAL MARKER
WAS PLACED AT THE CORNER OF
OCEAN BEACH AND 14TH AVENUE
ON APRIL 15, 1964. THE MARKER
IS A REMINDER OF THE HISTORICAL
SIGNIFICANCE OF THIS AREA.
THE OCEAN BEACH HISTORICAL
MARKER WAS PLACED AT THE
CORNER OF OCEAN BEACH AND
14TH AVENUE ON APRIL 15, 1964.
THE MARKER IS A REMINDER OF
THE HISTORICAL SIGNIFICANCE
OF THIS AREA.





NO PARKING
ANY TIME

NO PARKING
ANY TIME



DORSEY BREW & ICE HOUSE







DUNN'S OLD TIME THEATRE

[Blank white sign]

CORNY GARDEN PLAZA









NO TRESPASSING
Unauthorized entry is strictly prohibited.
Penalties apply.

NO TRESPASSING
Unauthorized entry is strictly prohibited.
Penalties apply.

NO TRESPASSING
Unauthorized entry is strictly prohibited.
Penalties apply.









EXIT

HEP

GAIN

THANK YOU
[Large blue graffiti drawing of a face]



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National Register of Historic Places
Memo to File

Correspondence

The Correspondence consists of communications from (and possibly to) the nominating authority, notes from the staff of the National Register of Historic Places, and/or other material the National Register of Historic Places received associated with the property.

Correspondence may also include information from other sources, drafts of the nomination, letters of support or objection, memorandums, and ephemera which document the efforts to recognize the property.

UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR
NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES
EVALUATION/RETURN SHEET

Requested Action:

Property Name:

Multiple Name:

State & County:

Date Received: 9/4/2018 Date of Pending List: 10/1/2018 Date of 16th Day: 10/16/2018 Date of 45th Day: 10/19/2018 Date of Weekly List:

Reference number:

Nominator:

Reason For Review:

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Appeal | <input type="checkbox"/> PDIL | <input type="checkbox"/> Text/Data Issue |
| <input type="checkbox"/> SHPO Request | <input type="checkbox"/> Landscape | <input type="checkbox"/> Photo |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Waiver | <input type="checkbox"/> National | <input type="checkbox"/> Map/Boundary |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Resubmission | <input type="checkbox"/> Mobile Resource | <input type="checkbox"/> Period |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other | <input type="checkbox"/> TCP | <input type="checkbox"/> Less than 50 years |
| | <input type="checkbox"/> CLG | |

Accept Return Reject 10/19/2018 Date

Abstract/Summary
Comments:

The nomination is submitted under A and C, with distinct periods of significance related to each criterion. Under C, the emphasis is on the exterior of the building as an example of Mediterranean Revival. Criterion A relates to its use as a live theater venue (after its conversion from a movie theater). the conversion into a live theater venue resulted in wholesale changes to interior finishes and spatial arrangements, with some of these changes expressed on the exterior. These exterior changes impact, but do not overtly diminish the essential exterior design characteristics of the building, and it remains eligible under Criterion C. Remnant interior details, including columns and arches, give hint to the original design but in and of themselves are not supportive of Criterion C, and the interior cannot be considered significant related to the period of significance under that Criterion. Under Criterion A, the building's significance begins with the conversion to a live theater venue. Changes made at that time, including alterations to the exterior, have (for the most part) acquired significance as they reflect the historic and significant use of the building from 1955 to 1970. Of primary importance are the spatial arrangements, including the treatment of the auditorium (and addition of the balcony), creation of backstage spaces/dressing rooms, and modifications to spaces such as the lobby and lounge and restaurant. Later alterations of these spaces, primarily cosmetic in terms of materials, do detract from the original design intent of Parker (the architect of the 1955 rehab), but do not so diminish the spaces the eliminate eligibility under Criterion A. Information provided subsequent to the SHPO's submission provides a strong and compelling case that many of the changes made after 1970 diminish the design significance of the theater, and had this nomination come in under Criterion C for Parker's design, the information would have been convincing enough to reject the argument. However, the changes made post 1970, while sometimes awkward and inappropriate to either the original or subsequent designs, do not so overwhelm the spatial integrity of the theater as viewed through the lens of Criterion A. The performance spaces are there; the preparatory spaces are there; the viewing spaces are there; and while finishes and details have been changed, the theater is recognizable as a theater. Non-historic changes to the restaurant spaces (black box theater), and the incorporation of a formerly independent building are noncontributing.

Recommendation/
Criteria Accept / A & C

Reviewer Jim Gabbert

Discipline Historian

Telephone (202)354-2275

Date _____

DOCUMENTATION: see attached comments : No see attached SLR : No

If a nomination is returned to the nomination authority, the nomination is no longer under consideration by the National Park Service.



Regulatory and Economic Resources Department
Office of Historic Preservation
111 NW 1st Street, Mailbox 114 • 12th Floor
Miami, Florida 33128
T 305-375-4958



February 1, 2018

Mr. William E. Hopper, Chair
Historic & Environmental Preservation Board
Commission Chambers
3500 Pan American Drive
Miami, FL 33133

Re: DA01070 Coconut Grove Playhouse, National Register of Historic Places Nomination

Dear Chairman Hopper:

Pursuant to Miami-Dade County Ordinance 81-13, Chapter 16A-3.2, I offer the following recommendation on behalf of Miami-Dade County. Miami-Dade County recommends approval of the nomination of the Coconut Grove Playhouse to the National Register of Historic Places, provided the following condition is met:

The nomination be revised to address deficiencies in the analysis of its Period of Significance and integrity, specifically:

- The Period of Significance should extend continuously from 1927-1970
- The analysis of integrity should note that the interior of the Playhouse exhibits a low level of integrity to Alfred Browning Parker's design.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is an important historic and cultural institution, and we appreciate you and the Historic & Environmental Preservation Board for taking the time to review the nomination, and for considering the County's recommendation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Sarah K. Cody".

Sarah K. Cody
Historic Preservation Chief
Miami-Dade County

Encl: Miami-Dade County response to State Division of Historical Resources



February 1, 2018

Mr. Ruben A. Acosta
Survey and Registration Supervisor
Division of Historical Resources
R.A. Gray Building
Bureau of Historic Preservation
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0250

Re: DA01070 Coconut Grove Playhouse, National Register of Historic Places Draft Nomination

Dear Mr. Acosta:

Thank you for providing Miami-Dade County with the opportunity to review and comment on the revised National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Coconut Grove Playhouse. The County appreciates the State's efforts to officially recognize the significance of the Playhouse through this nomination. The Office of Historic Preservation has reviewed the current draft and while it considerably improves upon the previous draft, it still exhibits deficiencies in its analysis that require attention.

The conclusions regarding the Period of Significance and existing integrity of the site are not supported by the information provided in the narrative.

- **Period of Significance:** two distinct periods of significance are identified as 1927, 1956-1970. However, given that the Areas of Significance are established as Entertainment/Recreation as well as Architecture, the narrative supports a more inclusive period extending continuously from 1927 through 1970. During the currently excluded years of 1928-1955, the Playhouse continued to reflect its historically significant Mediterranean Revival architecture, which greatly define not just the character of the Playhouse, but of the broader character of Coconut Grove.
- **Integrity:** the narrative text discusses the impact of Alfred Browning Parker's renovations on both the exterior and interior of the Playhouse, and states that "key aesthetic features of Parker's design, such as the interior fountain, dome, and modernist finishes, are now gone...The building has a low level of integrity of materials or workmanship from the Parker period, as the materials and finishes that characterized his work are now obscured or missing..." Despite this narrative, the draft nomination concludes that the Playhouse retains a moderate level of architectural integrity, due in large part to the retention of Parker's spatial organization. However, given that the defining elements of Parker's interior design have been eliminated by subsequent architectural interventions, the Playhouse exhibits a low level of integrity to Parker's overall design. Because the documented architectural significance of the Playhouse results from Richard Kiehnel's



original Mediterranean Revival exterior, an analysis of architectural integrity must speak to that, as Parker's design has not been substantiated as architecturally significant. We agree with the narrative's conclusion that "the interior lacks integrity for Kiehnel and Elliot's original movie theater design."

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is an important historic and cultural institution, and we thank the State for taking the initiative to nominate it for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, and for taking into consideration our professional evaluation and comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah K. Cody".

Sarah K. Cody
Historic Preservation Chief
Miami-Dade County

Cc: Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Miami



Ruben A. Acosta
Survey and Registration Supervisor
Bureau of Historic Preservation
R.A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

February 2, 2018

Re: Coconut Grove Playhouse (DA01070), 3500 Main Highway, Miami, Miami-Dade County

Dear Mr. Acosta:

I support the nomination of the Coconut Grove Playhouse to the National Register of Historic Places, but feel that the interiors retain, at most, a low level of integrity with regards to Alfred Browning Parker's design. The following comments address errors of facts important to the designation of historic fabric and its integrity in association with Parker. The headings below refer to the nomenclature given to the permanent spaces of the Playhouse as discussed in the report.

- 1) Lobby (Section 7, page 4) The spatial configuration, placement and design of the lobby is original to Kiehnel's design. This space was refaced by Parker in travertine. The travertine walls and ticket booths retained their integrity. The ceiling is not by Parker. The nomination photograph #15 depicts a broad mechanical soffit with a composite synthetic faux stone molding, disproportionate to the space and not of Parker's authorship.
- 2) The lounge (Section 7, page 4) Only half, "not most", of the arches now in kitchens and bathrooms on either side of the lounge are original to Kiehnel. All of Kiehnel's arches were semicircular in profile (Figure 1, Section 8, page 4). Their reconfiguration into segmental and/or flattened arches (photographs 17 & 18) are not by Parker. These changes were made during a subsequent period. In the existing space depicted in photo 17, Parker fashioned a private dining room. The space identified in photo 18 was a small bathroom, also by Parker. Both of Parkers designs for these spaces were different in spatial configuration, detail and design from what exists today. On the opposite side of the lounge, Parker fashioned a ladies powder room and bathroom. The ladies powder room has been removed and a kitchen inserted in its place (photograph 20). Parkers design for the ladies bathroom has also been removed. None of these spaces, as they stand today, are of Parker's authorship. The main space of the lounge is absent all of its detailing, finishes and significant design features. The circular fountain, mirrored dome ceiling, wall paneling and other furniture and finishes have been removed. The material, details and configuration of openings in the walls (photograph 19) of the lounge were changed in the 1980's subsequent to Parker. The traditional moldings, cornices, plinth blocks and baseboards depicted in the report photos, throughout the lounge, are clearly

OCT - 5 2018

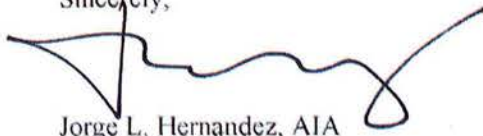
not Parker's mid-century details. These traditional moldings were added in the 80's during the reconfiguration of these spaces.

- 3) The former bar (Section 7, page 6) The report photograph 35 (keyed as photo 33 in the map) depicts a spiral stair. The majority of this space which includes a bar, lounge, kitchen and a second floor, as described in the report, is an area that was never part of the historic fabric of the Playhouse for the period of significance identified in the nomination. This space was annexed to the Playhouse in the 80's and bears no connection to Parker's hand (photographs 35 and 36).
- 4) Former restaurant (Section 7, page 6) This space, original to Kiehnel's design, has been completely reconfigured and gutted in such a manner that there remains no fabric, design, layout, or semblance of the interiors which Parker designed here. This space, as documented in the report, bears no association, whatsoever, with Parker.
- 5) Auditorium (Section 7, page 5) The auditorium hall, original to Kiehnel's design, was shortened by a third of its volume by Alfred Browning Parker. Later, a mezzanine was projected into the remaining volume of the space, by an additional third. The resulting affect is an anomaly to Parker's hand and clearly a work of expedience. Parker's interiors are typified by an exquisite handling of scale, detailing, finishes and a masterful sense of compositional resolution, all of which are absent here. Baroque columns, indiscriminately sunken into concrete pits, then later removed entirely and dolphin fountains submerged into raised concrete floor slopes, show little concern for the incongruity and abruptness resulting in the juxtaposition of Kiehnel's original design elements with the changes Parker had to make to accommodate live stage performances. This is a work of Parker's hand. It does not demonstrate the quality of his hand or the significance of his architecture.

The original versions of the spaces enumerated in points 1 - 4 do bear a connection to Parker's work but, in collaboration with then wife, interior decorator, Martha Parker. Their collaboration explains the ornate and traditional character of some of the details of these interiors. Traditional fabric valances, swags, curtains and cut crystal chandeliers are absent in the interiors of Alfred Browning Parker. As stated previously, those interiors have been removed and the spaces have been reworked. Most of what exists today replaced the interiors he and Martha Parker designed for the Playhouse. What remains bears no association to the work of Alfred Browning Parker.

I think it important to be very accurate with the authorship of fabric being proposed to the Register. The institution of misappropriations in a National Register Nomination are difficult to correct and can mislead the public's perception of the significance of Parker's hand in this historic site. I offer the above suggestions as constructive criticism in the spirit of the greatest possible accuracy in the draft text of this nomination. I suggest that the integrity of the Playhouse's historic fabric associated with Alfred Browning Parker be ranked at a low level of integrity.

Sincerely,



Jorge L. Hernandez, AIA

CC: Michael Spring, Senior Advisor, Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor
Sarah Cody, Historic Preservation Chief, Miami-Dade County
Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Miami Planning Dept.



**City of Miami
Planning and Zoning Department
Historic Preservation Office**

STAFF REPORT

APPLICANT: State Historic Preservation Office

FILE ID: 3577

PROJECT ADDRESS: Coconut Grove Playhouse

ITEM: HEPB.10

HEARING DATE: 2/6/2018

A. GENERAL INFORMATION:

REQUEST: The Preservation Office is respectfully requesting the Historic and Environmental Preservation Board (HEPB) provide a recommendation to the State Historic Preservation Officer on the proposed National Register of Historic Places designation of the Coconut Grove Playhouse as nominated by the State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO).

B. ANALYSIS:

The SHPO has prepared a nomination proposal to add the Coconut Grove Playhouse, 3500 Main Highway to the National Register of Historic Places (Attachment A). The SHPO has determined the site is eligible for inclusion on the National Register as it meets:

- National Register Criterion A as it is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history in the area of entertainment and recreation; and,
- National Register Criterion C as it embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction in the area of architecture for its Mediterranean Revival façade.

Pursuant to Section 23-5(b) of the City Code of Ordinances, as amended, the HEPB shall obtain a written recommendation from the City Commission and the Miami-Dade County Board of Commissioners as to whether a property should be nominated to the National Register. At its meeting on January 11, 2018, the City Commission recommended approval of the nomination. A recommendation has not yet been received from Miami-Dade County.

C. CONCLUSION:


Pursuant to Section 23-5 of the City Code of Ordinances, as amended, the HEPB shall forward to the SHPO its action on the nomination and the recommendations of the local officials. If either the HEPB or local officials, or both, support the nomination, the SHPO will schedule the nomination for consideration by the Florida National Register Review Board at its meeting scheduled for February

8, 2018. If both the HEPB and the local officials recommend a property not be nominated to the National Register, the SHPO will take no further action unless an appeal is filed with the SHPO.

Support for or against a nomination must be based upon the National Register criteria.

D. RECOMMENDATION:

Preservation staff recommends approval of the nomination to add the Coconut Grove Playhouse to the National Register of Historic Places.



Warren Adams
Preservation Officer

CURRENT PHOTO





**Miami
FL**

Recommended Approval
Feb 6, 2018 3:00 PM

**HEPB Resolution
HEPB-R-18-018**

A RESOLUTION OF THE MIAMI HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD, PURSUANT TO SEC. 23-5 OF THE CITY CODE OF ORDINANCES RECOMMENDING APPROVAL OF THE STATE HISTORIC PRESERVATION OFFICE NOMINATION TO ADD THE COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE LOCATED AT APPROXIMATELY 3500 MAIN HIGHWAY, MIAMI, FLORIDA, WITH THE FOLIO NUMBER 0141210450140, TO THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES AS IT MEETS NATIONAL REGISTER CRITERIA A AND C; FURTHER INCORPORATING THE ANALYSIS IN THE ATTACHED HEREIN AS "EXHIBIT A", AND ALSO FURTHER TRANSMITTING THE FEBRUARY 1, 2018 LETTER FROM THE MIAMI DADE COUNTY OFFICE OF HISTORIC PRESERVATION SUBMITTED INTO THE RECORD AT THE FEBRUARY 6, 2018 MEETING OF THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD AS EXHIBIT "B".

Information

Department: Historic and Environmental Preservation Board
Sponsors:
Category: Other

Attachments

- [Agenda Summary and Legislation](#)
- [3577 - Exhibit A Analysis](#)
- [3577 - Exhibit B Letter from Miami Dade County Office of Historic Preservation](#)
- [3557 - Submittal - Letter from Jorge L. Hernandez, Architect](#)

Body/Legislation

The recommendation of the Coconut Grove Playhouse be approved based on the following criteria:

- Criteria A – that the property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and
- Criteria C – the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master (Keihnel and Elliot and Albert Browning Parker), or possesses high artistic value.

Meeting History

Feb 6, 2018 3:00 PM Video
Historic and Environmental Preservation Board
Regular Meeting

Member Lewis briefly noted with regard to condition number 2 in the letter from Miami-Dade County which recommends the approval of the nomination on County imposed conditions. Member Lewis expressed her opinion that County condition number 2 of the letter is an inaccurate synopsis of what the State Historic Preservation Office text says with regard to integrity and stated the following:

- The State says that externally the building has moderate to high level of integrity to the Keihnel and Elliot design;
- The State then begins talking with regards to the 1956 conversion from a movie theatre to a playhouse and introduces Alfred Browning Parker and his design;
- The State says the building retains nearly all of Parker's interior layout of spaces;

The building retains sufficient elements of Parker's changes to the organization and layout of the building to retain a moderate level of architectural integrity;

There is a high degree of integrity to the setting;

The State continues there is a high level of associative integrity with events that occurred within the auditorium;

The State says that the exterior still retains a good level of integrity with the Keihnel and Elliot and Albert Browning Parker's design;

The State says there is a high degree of integrity of feeling; and

Lastly, the State says that the building's exterior maintains with the Mediterranean revival characteristics.

Motion

The recommendation of the nomination of the Coconut Grove Playhouse to the National Register of Historic Places be approved based on the following criteria:

Criteria A – that the property is associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history; and

Criteria C – the property embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period, or method of construction or represents the work of a master (Keihnel and Elliot and Albert Browning Parker), or possesses high artistic value.

RESULT: RECOMMENDED APPROVAL [UNANIMOUS]

MOVER: Lynn Lewis, Vice Chair (Dist. 1)

SECONDER: William E. Hopper, Chair (Dist. 2)

AYES: William E. Hopper, Lynn Lewis, Najeeb Campbell, Christopher Cawley, Jonathan Gonzalez, Mika Mattingly, Jordan Trachtenberg, Hugh Ryan, Todd Tragash

EXCUSED: David A. Freedman

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Regulatory and Economic Resources Department

Office of Historic Preservation

111 NW 1st Street, Mailbox 114 • 12th Floor
Miami, Florida 33128
T 305-375-4958

August 7, 2018

Mr. Ruben A. Acosta
Survey and Registration Supervisor
Division of Historical Resources
R.A. Gray Building
Bureau of Historic Preservation
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399-0250

Re: DA01070 Coconut Grove Playhouse, National Register of Historic Places Draft Nomination

Dear Mr. Acosta:

Thank you for providing Miami-Dade County with the opportunity to review and comment on the revised National Register of Historic Places nomination for the Coconut Grove Playhouse. The County appreciates the State's efforts to officially recognize the significance of the Playhouse through this nomination. We recognize that this is a complex property, particularly how the evolution of the resource relates to the analysis of integrity. The inclusion of spatial diagrams that visually depict this evolution are helpful, and critical to understanding the transformation of space that occurred over time.

However, even with the reorganization of the narrative, it maintains deficiencies that must be resolved prior to proceeding with the nomination. Specifically, the descriptive narrative does not support the conclusions made about the remaining integrity of the resource.

The narrative correctly identifies that while the exterior retains integrity to the original Richard Kiehnel design, the interior does not. With regard to the interior integrity of Alfred Browning Parker's design, the narrative does not provide an analysis that places this project within the broader context of Alfred Browning Parker's larger body of work. As a result, Parker's Playhouse design has not been substantiated as being architecturally significant. Even if the assumption is made that Parker's work here is, in fact, significant enough to warrant eligibility, the integrity of his design is not readily apparent.

The narrative states that "key aesthetic features of Parker's design, such as the interior fountain, dome, and modernist finishes, are now gone... The building has a low level of integrity of materials or workmanship from the Parker period, as the materials and finishes that characterized his work are now obscured or missing..." Despite this accurate description, the nomination concludes that the Playhouse retains a moderate level of architectural integrity, due in large part to the retention of Parker's spatial organization. However, given that the defining elements of Parker's interior design have been eliminated by subsequent architectural interventions, the Playhouse exhibits a low level of integrity to Parker's overall design, and ultimately may not be sufficient for listing.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is an important historic and cultural institution, and we thank the State for taking the initiative to nominate it for inclusion on the National Register of Historic Places, and for taking into consideration our professional evaluation and comments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Sarah K. Cody".

Sarah K. Cody
Historic Preservation Chief
Miami-Dade County

Cc: Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Miami



Dr. Timothy A. Parsons
Division Director and
State Historic Preservation Officer
Bureau of Historic Preservation
R. A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

Ruben A. Acosta
Survey and Registration Supervisor
Bureau of Historic Preservation
R. A. Gray Building
500 South Bronough Street
Tallahassee, Florida 32399

July 24, 2018

Re: Coconut Grove Playhouse (DA01070), 3500 Main Highway, Miami, Miami-Dade County

Dear Messrs. Timothy Parson and Ruben Acosta:

I forward this letter in an effort to help clarify and correct the National Register Nomination's assessment of the integrity of the existing interiors of the Coconut Grove Playhouse.

The National Register Nomination for the Coconut Grove Playhouse establishes 1927 as the first of two periods of significance. The 1927 period is referenced under "...Criterion C in the area of architecture for the Mediterranean revival façade." (Sec. 8, pg. 1). The report includes an assessment of the "Architecture Integrity: exterior" (Sec. 7, pg. 12). It states "the building's integrity varies between the exterior of the property and the interior. Externally the building retains a sufficient level of integrity of design, materials, and workmanship associated the original 1926 Kiehnel and Elliot design. The central pavilion of the primary façade facing the intersection of Charles Ave. and Main Highway retains most of the original features." This assessment, with its emphasis on the integrity of the features of the principal façade, coincides with the conclusions of the local historic designation report.

The Nomination also identifies the years 1955-1970 as a second period of significance under Criterion A, in the area of historic events in entertainment and recreation. The nomination does not cite Criterion C, for the association with master architect Alfred Browning Parker for the years 1955-1970 because of the loss of fabric, in great part, the interiors which Parker installed in Kiehnel's 1927 structure. After 1970, the Parker interiors were removed and replaced numerous times over, with subsequent interiors of no import. This is documented in Figure 4 of the Nomination. The National Register Nomination proceeds to argue that the hollows of space, from which Parker's interior designs were removed, evoke, in their current condition, sufficient association with the settings of the midcentury period of significance, 1955-1970. The nomination proposes the inclusion of the current interior spaces, as they exist today, under the protection of the National Register listing.



That argument is flawed for numerous reasons. The most important is that these spaces suffered multiple changes and reconfigurations in the forty-eight intervening years since 1970. These changes involved the loss of design, materials, workmanship and, in many areas, changes in use and spatial configuration. In short, the features and structure of the 1955-1970 interiors were changed. The finishes, materials, workmanship and design changed. The style and idea of these interiors were changed. The hollowed out surfaces absent the materials, workmanship, finishes, forms, elements, spaces and style of Parker's designs have been repeatedly altered since 1970. They are now mostly a pseudo-Mediterranean false style and do not evoke an association with historic recreational and entertainment events that occurred in the Playhouse from 1955-1970. Instead, they misguide the visitor and confuse the viewer. The interior spaces, there today, trigger a false reading of the interior settings of the period of significance where the entertainment and recreational events of 1955-1970 took place.

A careful look at plans incorporated to the report and identified as Figure 3: plans of 1955-56 (Sec. 7, pg. 9) and Figure 4 plans of 1982 (Sec. 7, pg. 10) and other material sent by me to Department staff for review, documents the changes that have occurred, including alterations to spatial configurations and uses. These changes are causal to disassociations with the history and memory of the Playhouse interiors during the period of significance (1955-1970) under Criterion A. Additional changes made after 1981 further complicate the associative memory of the interior settings and question the assessment of the interior integrity of the historic resource in relation to the 1955-1970 period. A reference to the following excerpt concerning nominations to the National Register from the *National Register Bulletin, Chapter VIII, How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property* is pertinent here:

Interiors... "In some cases, the loss of an interior will disqualify properties from listing in the National Register- A historic concert hall noted for the beauty of its auditorium and its fine acoustic qualities would be the type of property that if it were to lose its interior, it would lose its value as a historic resource. In other cases, the overarching significance of a property's exterior can overcome the adverse effect of the loss of an interior. In border line cases particular attention is paid to the significance of the property and the remaining historic features."

For reasons stated above, the Local Historic Designation does not include protection over the interiors. By omission, it frames an accurate understanding of the lack of integrity of the historic interior fabric of the Coconut Grove Playhouse, resultant from the ensuing forty-eight years of interior changes, since 1970.

Thank you for your consideration to this important matter of accuracy with regards to the integrity of the interior of the Historic Coconut Grove Playhouse. This matter should be corrected before the nomination is sent to Ms. Joy Beasley, the Keeper of the National Register.

Sincerely,

Jorge L. Hernandez, AIA

CC: Michael Spring, Senior Advisor, Miami-Dade County Office of the Mayor
Sarah Cody, Historic Preservation Chief, Miami-Dade County
Warren Adams, Historic Preservation Officer, City of Miami Planning Dept.
Max A. Imberman, Historic Preservationist, Florida Department of State

Postscript: Changes to the 1955-1970 interiors are substantial. Beginning in 1982 and continuing afterwards, changes to the interior spaces can be generally categorized as a faux Mediterranean evocation which includes over wrought synthetic moldings, overly compressed arches, superfluous ornamentation, reconfigured spaces, urinals haphazardly fitted beside Solomonic columns and spaces totally gutted out. These are the antithesis of the interiors which Alfred Browning Parker and Martha Parker collaborated on during the 1955/1970 period of significance. Working drawings from the County archives by Richard Schuster document the changes beginning in 1982 and continuing for decades afterwards. These changes altered the material, workmanship, design and layout of the interior settings during the period of significance. Put in place within the last fifty years, these changes do not qualify as historic fabric as defined in Bulletin 22 nor do they exhibit Criterion G, exceptionality, in any way according to the Bulletin. Instead, they evoke an error in association with the settings where the theatrical and recreational events took place during the years 1955 - 1970.



COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE

3500 MAIN HIGHWAY

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI
PRESERVATION OFFICER
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF THE
COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE
AS A HISTORIC SITE

Prepared by Ellen Uguccione for Janus Research,
Consultant

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton, Preservation Officer

Passed and
Adopted on _____

Resolution No. _____

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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Names:

Coconut Grove Theatre
Grove Theater

Current Name:

Coconut Grove Playhouse

Location:

3500 Main Highway
Miami, FL

Present Owner:

Coconut Gove Playhouse LLC
3500 Main Highway
Miami, FL 33133

Present Use:

Performing Arts Theater

Zoning District:

G/I - Government/Institutional

Tax Folio Number:

01-4121-045-0140

Boundary Description:

That portion of Lot 10 located northerly and westerly of Ingraham Highway and northerly of Charles Street of the plat of MONROE'S PLAT, as recorded in Deed Book D at Page 253, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida; together with the easterly 140 feet of northerly 117 feet, and the easterly 52.5 feet less the northerly 117 feet of Block 29 of the plat of FROW HOMESTEAD, as recorded in Plat Book B at Page 106, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida;

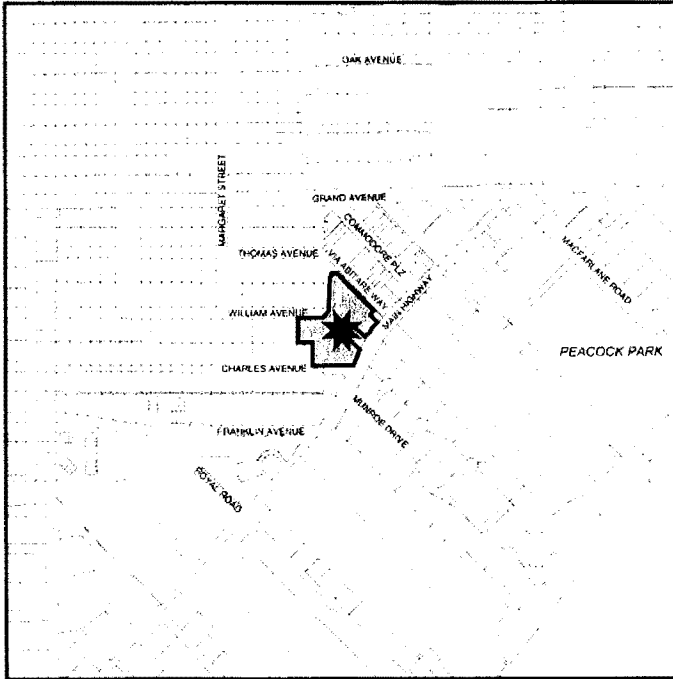
together with Lots 1 and 2 of the plat of ENGLE SUBDIVISION, as recorded in Plat Book 64 at Page 43, of the Public Records of Miami-Dade County, Florida.

Classification:

Historic Site

COCONUT GROVE PLAYHOUSE

3500 MAIN HIGHWAY




location




site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Specific Dates:

1926
1955 – Remodeling

Architects:

Kiehnel and Elliott – 1926
Alfred Browning Parker – 1955

Builder/Contractor:

Albert V. Peacock – 1926

Statement of Significance:

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is a noteworthy expression of the Florida Land Boom that has survived to the present day. The original design by the critically important architectural firm of Kiehnel and Elliott, was a fanciful Spanish Rococo movie palace. The theater was intended to be Miami's most elaborate theater with the largest seating capacity of any theater in Miami. In 1955, under the hand of noted architect Alfred Browning Parker, the theater was remodeled to accommodate the Coconut Grove Playhouse, Miami's first live, legitimate theater, which evolved into one of the most important regional theaters in the country. In many ways, the Coconut Grove Playhouse embodies the metaphoric Boom and Bust cycles that Florida has experienced, and continues as a signature building reflecting the heyday of Coconut Grove.

On January 15, 1926, ground was broken for a new theater at the corner of Main Highway and Charles Street in Coconut Grove. The theater was a project of the Irving J. Thomas Company, which had been brokering real estate in Coconut Grove as early as 1912.

Almost one year later, before its opening, Thomas turned over the theater to Paramount Enterprises, Inc., the moving picture studio and theater builders. Mr. Thomas explained that with Paramount running the movie house, it would better serve the citizens of Coconut Grove, as they were likely to have access to more attractions. The Coconut Grove Theater became the eleventh Paramount Theater to open in southeastern Florida.

In the announcement for the theater's construction, the article boasted that the auditorium would contain more seats than any other theater in Miami, and would be equipped with the latest model of an orchestral pipe organ. The building

would be climate controlled year-round through the use of a "pressure system of ventilation" that could produce cool air during the hottest of days. The building was designed for mixed uses, and included seven storefronts on the ground floor, and offices on the second. The third floor contained apartments.

On Saturday, January 1, 1927, actor Adolf Menjou headlined D. W. Griffith's production of the *Sorrows of Satan*, the opening night feature at the Coconut Grove Theater. Accompanying the movie was the 12-piece orchestra of Arnold Johnson, and Celia Santon playing the Wurlitzer Concert Grand Organ. The theater accommodated 1,500 patrons anxious to experience the fantasy world created by the moving pictures. The Reverend J. D. Kuykendall of Plymouth Congregational Church gave the dedicatory address, comparing the growth of the motion picture industry with that of Coconut Grove itself. The house was packed for both showings of the film.

The theater opened at perhaps the worst possible time, as the financial climate in South Florida was at an all time low. The theater managed to stay open until the 1930s, after which it closed. The theater served a new purpose during World War II, when it was used as a school to train Air Force navigators.

Following the war, the building was shuttered, and would remain so until 1955, when George Engle purchased the theater for \$200,000 with the intent of creating a legitimate performing arts theater. Finding the theater in an advanced state of disrepair, Engle hired Coconut Grove architect Alfred Browning Parker to refurbish it and decorate it for a more contemporary era. The cost of the alterations was estimated at \$700,000. Renamed the Coconut Grove Playhouse, the renovated theater reopened on January 3, 1956, with the U.S. premiere of Samuel Beckett's existential play, *Waiting for Godot*.

Engle found the succeeding years disappointing in terms of financial success and attracting audiences. He closed the theater in 1960. After leasing the building for several years, producer Zev Buffman bought the building in March 1966 for more than \$1 million. In 1970, the Playhouse changed ownership again when former actor Eddie Bracken and his associates purchased the building. When Bracken's group failed to pay its debts, the Playhouse was ordered sold at auction on the steps of the county courthouse.

The Playhouse survived destruction when Arthur Cantor and Robert Fishko managed to buy the theater, which reopened for the 1971-72 winter season. Cantor and Fishko sold their interests to the Players Repertory Theater in 1977, which renamed the theater as the Players State Theater.

The State of Florida acquired the playhouse in 1980 by purchasing its \$1.5 million mortgage. The State contracted with the Coconut Grove Playhouse, Inc. to operate the theater, and in 2004 transferred the title to the Coconut Grove Playhouse LLC Inc.

When it was built, the Coconut Grove Playhouse was an extraordinary example of the style that relied on architectural prototypes from around the Mediterranean Sea. The design became the preeminent choice for architecture in South Florida during the Florida Land Boom of the 1920s. At the time, journalists described it as "Spanish," "Spanish Rococo," and even as "Domestic Spanish type produced in Valencia and Catalonia along the shores of the Mediterranean Sea during the 15th century."

In an article entitled "The New Mediterranean Architecture of Florida," written by Matlack Price and published in the June 1925 edition of *House Beautiful*, the author describes the style that became the pre-eminent choice for buildings in Florida during the Land Boom of the 1920s. He begins by describing the Spanish-derivative forms in California, specifically referencing the Mission Revival, and then continues to Arizona and Texas to describe Pueblo designs.

It is Mr. Price's contention that the "Mediterranean style" is a composite of the trends occurring in California and the West that has a singular character expressed only in Florida, and particularly the Greater Miami area. He states:

It might be said that the architects of Coral Gables recognized, as California recognized, the rightful heritage of Spain, but they did not confine their vision, and scanning the shores of the Mediterranean perceived certain elements of Italian architecture could be effectively blended with Spanish, and that there were other lands on the horizon, as well, lands full of excellent architectural material.

When Mr. Price spoke of "other lands on the horizon," he was referring to Italy, the French and Italian Riviera, as well as the Northern Coast of Africa, which had a rich Moorish heritage.

The Mediterranean Revival style was not limited to Florida, but finds examples across the country, notably in California, Arizona, and Texas. Contemporary architectural historians have differed in their choice of names for this Florida phenomenon, but all agree that there is an eclecticism that capitalizes on a number of design traditions.

Virginia and Lee McAlester, in their best seller *A Field Guide to American Architecture*, begin their explanation with a section entitled "Eclectic Houses 1880–1940." They then call out variants of what has been generically called Mediterranean Revival. They include the following styles: Italian Renaissance, Mission, Spanish Eclectic, Monterey, and Pueblo Revival.

Professor David Gebhard, in his article for the *Journal of the Society of Architectural Historians* entitled "The Spanish Colonial Revival in Southern California," provides a simpler explanation. He states that in the broader application, the style is best called "Spanish Colonial Revival." He then notes that

the Spanish Colonial Revival had two distinctive variations, first the Mission Revival and later the Mediterranean Revival.

In South Florida historians are comfortable with the stylistic identity of Mediterranean Revival. The Coconut Grove Playhouse is indeed a particularly fine example. The hallmarks of the Mediterranean Revival style include masonry construction with broad areas of uninterrupted surfaces covered with stucco that is frequently textured; cast stone or concrete ornament, typically reserved for the embellishment of windows and doorways; a combination of roof slopes including flat, gabled and sometimes hipped; the use of arcades, loggias, and colonnades to provide sheltering, yet open areas; the juxtaposition of one and two stories; clay barrel tile roofing; awnings; decorative ceramic tiles; and wrought iron accents.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse expresses the style of the Mediterranean Revival in its dramatic entrance portal, which is emphasized by the use of cast ornament that continues to the third floor. The spiral or twisted columns and the classically-inspired entablature that runs above the entrance doorway are also characteristic of the style. The loggias on each side of the theater express a key concept of the Mediterranean Revival style as they allow an open, yet sheltered area that maximizes the opportunity to be outdoors.

Richard Kiehnel (1870–1944) studied at the University of Breslau (Germany) and L'Ecole Nationale des Beaux Arts. In 1906, he began a practice with John B. Elliott in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. Kiehnel was named as the designer, and apparently Mr. Elliot dealt with the construction end of the projects. His first commission in Florida came in 1916 when John Bindley, President of Pittsburgh Steel, decided to build a home in Coconut Grove. The home, dubbed "El Jardin," was completed in 1917.

Some architectural critics note that El Jardin is one of the earliest, if not the earliest, Mediterranean Revival designs in South Florida. The home, now a part of the Carrolton School for Girls complex, fronts directly on Biscayne Bay, and is a magnificent Italian Renaissance palace featuring a wealth of picturesque design detail, including the highly intricate Spanish Churrigueresque ornament associated with Baroque architects Jose, Joaquin and Alberto Churriguera. Their lavish surface ornamentation, that some call "over decoration," was a hallmark of the Spanish Baroque style, and can frequently be seen in the works of Richard Kiehnel.

An obituary published in the *Miami Daily News* noted:

It is with deep regret that the *Miami Daily News* notes the passing of Richard Kiehnel, one of the most gifted architects of his time, monuments to his genius are the many prominent Miami buildings he designed. Other architects were quick to follow his leadership in design, thus he may truly be called the father of Miami's distinctive architecture.

Kiehnel's designs include:

The Scottish Rite Temple	471 NW 3 rd Street, Miami
Coral Gables Congregational Church	3010 DeSoto Boulevard, Coral Gables
Miami Senior High School	2450 SW 1 st Street, Miami
Rollins College	Multiple Buildings, Winter Park
Shorecrest Hotel	1535 Collins Avenue, Miami Beach

Alfred Browning Parker (1916–) is the architect who made the change from Richard Kiehnel's Mediterranean movie palace interiors to the stark modernity that characterized his own era. Parker, considered one of the outstanding and precedent-setting architects from the 1950s and beyond, was in fact a contemporary of Kiehnel and, at one time, they both were associated with the magazine *Florida Architecture and Allied Arts*. In 1935, Kiehnel was the first publisher of the magazine, and he served on the editorial board until his death. In 1947, Parker became a member of the editorial staff along with Kiehnel, Robert Law Weed, Robert M. Little, Wahl Snyder, G. Clinton Gamble, and Frederick G. Seelman.

Alfred Browning Parker received his B.S. in Architecture at the University of Florida in 1939. He served as an associate professor at the school from 1942 until 1946, the year he began his architectural practice in Miami.

Parker was certainly aware of the South Florida predilection for buildings of an Art Deco or Mediterranean design. However, Parker chose to abandon any sense of historicism in his own designs, favoring instead an approach that capitalized on the environment, structure, and materials.

Parker became a leading voice in the new contemporary architecture of Florida. He was a prolific writer and expressed his opinions in the *American Institute of Architects Journal*, the *Architectural Forum*, and the *Architectural Record*. In 1965, he published *You and Architecture*, a book that dealt with good architectural design targeted at the layman.

Parker has designed residential, commercial, religious, and institutional buildings during his long career. He is probably most noted for his residential designs. In 1954, *House Beautiful* magazine chose a Parker design for its "Pace Setter House." The 1958–59 edition of *Florida Architecture* magazine published the Don Gayer House in Coconut Grove. Here Parker separated the living and sleeping quarters with an outdoor living space.

Parker's alterations focused on the interior of the theater. Exterior alterations were limited to the removal of the ornamental parapet in the center and side bays of the entrance and the removal of the storefronts, although the reveal of the storefronts is still present. The roofline is now straight, with ornamental tile coping terminating the wall.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Coconut Grove Playhouse has significance in the historical and architectural heritage of the City of Miami; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling and association; and is eligible for designation under the following criteria:

3. Exemplifies the historical, cultural, political, economical, or social trends of the community.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse exemplifies the historical, cultural, economical, and social trends of Coconut Grove during the twentieth century, particularly the Boom and Bust cycles that characterize the history of Miami. The theater was built as the Coconut Grove Theater during the heyday of the 1920s real estate boom. Designed in a flamboyant "Spanish Baroque" style, the theater reflects the optimism and disposable wealth of Miami's citizens and the fascination with Mediterranean architectural precedents. Reborn in 1955 as the Miami's first live, legitimate theater, the Coconut Grove Playhouse evolved into one of the most important regional theaters in the country.

5. Embodies those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The design of the Coconut Grove Playhouse embodies the Mediterranean Revival style, and featured a highly decorative entrance, enriched window surrounds, and decorative detail associated with the design. Despite a few alterations, the Playhouse still retains enough integrity to convey its original Mediterranean Revival style and still exhibits its major character-defining elements.

6. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is associated with two of South Florida's most prominent architects. Richard Kiehnel, who designed the original building, is considered one of South Florida's most outstanding architects. Kiehnel completed much of his work during the real estate boom of the 1920s, but also went on to make contributions into the 1930s and 1940s. As editor of the publication *Florida Architecture and the Allied Arts*, Kiehnel also influenced generations of new architects. Alfred Browning Parker is considered an outstanding living architect whose work is more aptly described as "Modernist." Parker remodeled the interior of the theater, dramatically changing its style from a highly decorative Mediterranean Revival *tour de force* to a building that reflected the "clean," unornamented, geometrically defined architecture of the era to which he belonged.

III. DESCRIPTION

Present and Original Appearance:

Setting:

The Coconut Grove Playhouse is located on the northwest corner of Main Highway and Charles Avenue. The main entrance is canted at the junction of the two streets. A parking lot is located immediately to the north.

The building has a zero-foot lot line, and is directly adjacent to the sidewalk.

Original Appearance:

A *Miami Herald* article, dated January 1, 1927, announced the grand opening of the Coconut Grove Theater. The physical description of the theater in the article was quite detailed and allows a thorough understanding of the subsequent changes.

In addition to the theater, which could seat 1,500 patrons, the building housed seven storefronts on the ground floor, ten offices on the second story, and apartments on the third story. The mass of the building was arranged as two wings that hugged the sidewalk, bridged by the highly ornamental entrance bay, which was canted at the corner.

The entrance bay was intended to be the focus of the composition, and was recessed from the two wings at the corner, lending it even greater prominence. The ground floor featured cast concrete spiral columns that framed the entrance to the lobby and terminated in an elaborate cornice. Above it, the cast treatment extended only to the three windows in the center bay. The third floor was dressed in elaborate window surrounds in anticipation of the termination of the building, an elaborately shaped parapet that extended well beyond the roof. The division of each floor was emphasized by a projecting stringcourse that extended around to the sides of the building.

The design by Kiehnel and Elliott maximized the year-round Florida climate. On each side of the theater, the architects created a loggia, or patio, eight feet in width that was framed by arches with panels containing ornamental wrought iron grilles. A fountain element banked in lush greenery was a focal point on both sides of the patio.

The ornamentation of the sidewalls was purposefully simpler. On the ground floor, the rectangular storefronts were spaced evenly across the sides, with their only embellishment a striped canvas awning. The second floor was left unadorned, with only the rhythm of the casement windows enlivening the space. The third floor was the most decorated with a tripartite arrangement of windows, featuring

an elaborate cast surround that mimicked the ornament of the front entrance, placed intermittently across the façades.

Present Appearance:

In 1955, Coconut Grove architect Alfred Browning Parker was hired by then-owner George Engle to redesign the theater. The great majority of the exterior of the building, however, remains as it did when first designed. The most obvious change is the loss of the ornamental parapet in the center and side bays of the entrance. The roofline is now straight, with ornamental tile coping terminating the wall.

Although the entrance bay originally terminated in an elaborately shaped parapet, the building still expresses its Spanish identity by the flat roof and barrel tile coping that extends across the now unadorned parapet and the original cast ornament surrounds. The storefronts were removed, although the original reveal remains.

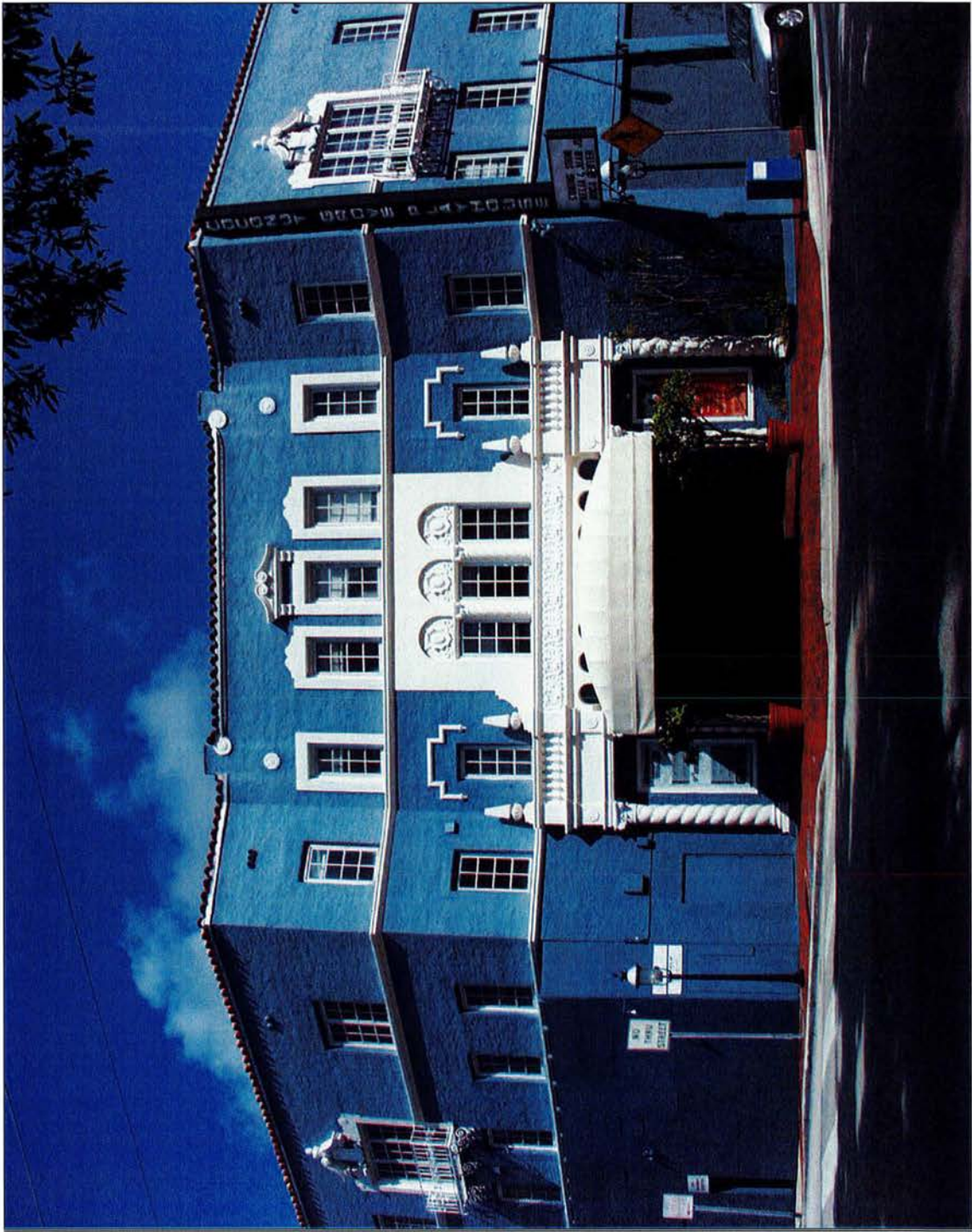
Additions:

Although somewhat inconclusive, a comparison of available building records, photographs, and newspaper clippings seems to reveal that what had previously been freestanding, independent buildings were incorporated into the main theater building sometime in the early 1970s. A one-story hyphen connects the north wall of the theater with a two-story building that fronts on Main Highway and the adjacent parking lot immediately north.

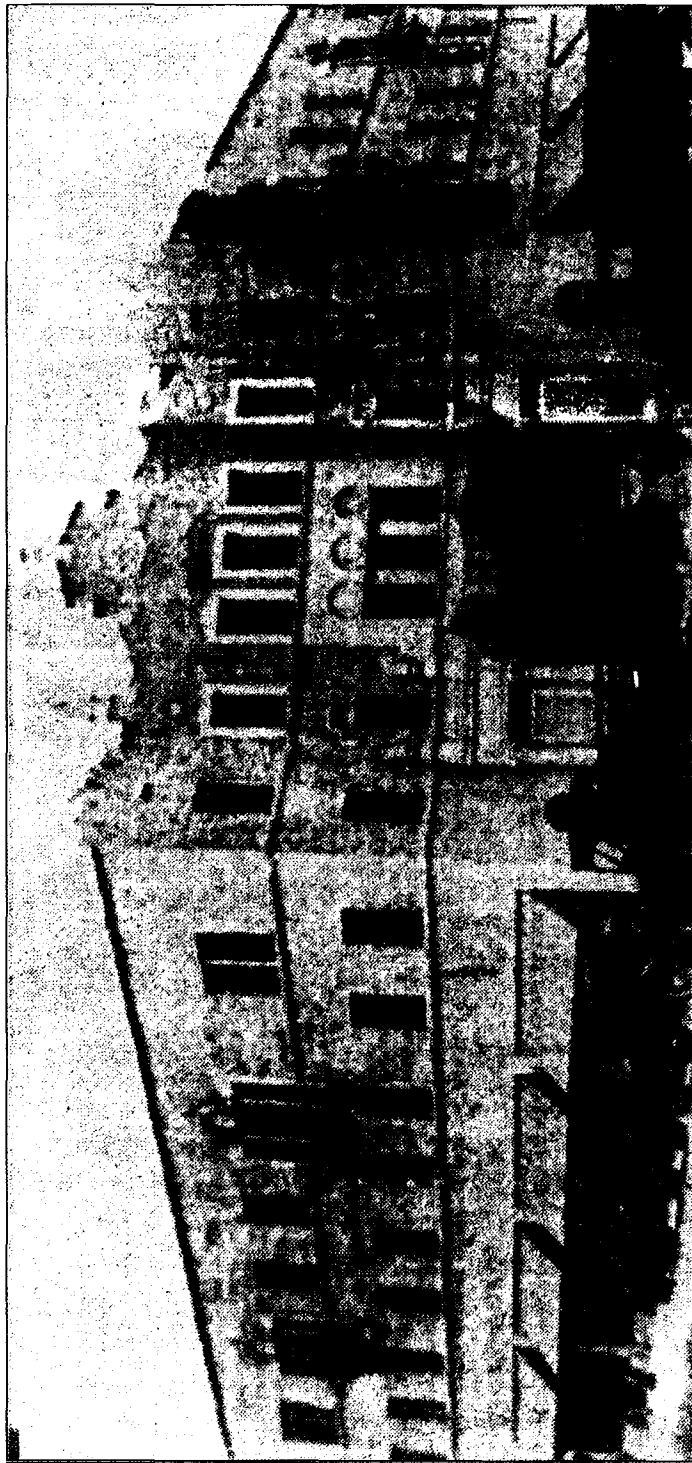
These one- and two-story buildings seem out of character with the original theater building, as the treatment of the connecting bay on Main Highway, while maintaining the rhythm of the bays, is fenestrated with a geometrically disproportionate window. The narrow windows of the second story of the end building also seem not to reflect the proportions of the original building, and the rustication of the exterior appears as an incongruous element.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

Contributing structures within the site include the Coconut Grove Playhouse itself. Only the south and east facades possess architectural significance. There are no contributing landscape features.



Coconut Grove Playhouse
3500 Main Highway
South and southeast façades
2002



Coconut Grove Playhouse
3500 Main Highway
South and southeast façades
1927

IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The Coconut Grove Playhouse ranks high among the landmark buildings in Coconut Grove, along with the Plymouth Congregational Church and The Barnacle (Commodore Ralph Monroe Estate). The previously mentioned buildings represent the nineteenth century pioneering era and the early twentieth century, when Coconut Grove was a sleepy residential enclave. The Playhouse is one of the very few remaining structures in downtown Coconut Grove that typify the flamboyant and frenetic era of the real estate boom of the 1920s.

When the State of Florida transferred ownership of the Playhouse to the Coconut Grove Playhouse LLC Inc. in 2004, it paved the way for the next phase in the evolution of the property. In order to provide a long-term endowment for the theater, the Playhouse has announced its intention to team with a developer to preserve as much of the exterior of the theater as possible, while constructing a new theater, condominiums, and a parking garage on the site.

Preservation Incentives:

Because of the nonprofit status of the Coconut Grove Playhouse LLC Inc., most historic preservation tax incentives are not applicable. The Playhouse, however, has been approved for \$15 million from the 2004 Miami-Dade County General Obligation Bond program. These bond funds will be paired with \$5 million from a previous bond issue to fund a program to restructure the Playhouse.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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FLORIDA DEPARTMENT of STATE

RICK SCOTT
Governor

KEN DETZNER
Secretary of State



August 27, 2018

Dr. Julie Ernstein, Deputy Keeper and Chief,
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Dr. Ernstein:

The enclosed disks contain the true and correct copy of the nomination for the **Coconut Grove Playhouse (FMSF#: 8DA01070), in Miami-Dade County**, to the National Register of Historic Places. The related materials (digital images, maps, site plan, and correspondence) are included.

This nomination has gone through extensive review at the state level, including two National Register review board meetings in February and August of this year. Revisions were requested by the board to address the description of the building and the property's integrity. The areas of significance and integrity are important as they have bearing on a planned rehabilitation of the theater. Staff found that the building has integrity of location, setting, design, feeling and association for Criterion A: Entertainment and Recreation and integrity of location, setting, design, materials, association and feeling for Criterion C: Architecture.

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (850) 245-6364 if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Ruben A. Acosta
Supervisor, Survey & Registration
Bureau of Historic Preservation

RAA/raa

Enclosures



FLORIDA DEPARTMENT OF STATE

RICK SCOTT
Governor



KEN DETZNER
Secretary of State

September 13, 2018

Dr. Julie Ernstein, Deputy Keeper and Chief,
National Register of Historic Places
Mail Stop 7228
1849 C St, NW
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Dr. Ernstein:

The enclosed disks are the resubmission of National Register photographs in .tif format for the following nominations:

Bacardi Complex (8DA06983) in Dade County
Coconut Grove Playhouse (8DA01070) in Dade County
P.K. Yonge House (8ES00250) in Escambia County
Costa, Dr. Frank J., House (8HI03645) in Hillsborough County
First Federal Savings and Loan Association of Tampa (8HI11603) in Hillsborough County

Please do not hesitate to contact me at (850) 245-6364 if you have any questions or require any additional information.

Sincerely,

Ruben A. Acosta
Supervisor, Survey & Registration
Bureau of Historic Preservation

RAA/raa

Enclosures