

# Explore the Morris Lapidus / Mid 20th Century Historic District

Miami Beach's Morris Lapidus / Mid 20th Century Historic District was designated by the City of Miami Beach Commission on October 14, 2009. Located along a one-mile long stretch of oceanfront land, this district spans from 44th Street to the 5300 block of Collins Avenue and is bounded to the east by the Atlantic Ocean and to west by Indian Creek. Twelve (12) of the 14 total properties within the district contain mid-20th century structures, all built between 1954 and 1966. A remarkable five (5) of these historic properties are home to among the most distinctive, grand, and architecturally dramatic mid-century structures designed by internationally acclaimed Miami Beach architect, Morris Lapidus.

## History

Until March 10, 1950, the exotic one mile stretch of sandbar east of Collins Avenue, between 44<sup>th</sup> street and about 60<sup>th</sup> Street, was zoned "Estate District". It was home to the lavish pre-Depression private oceanfront winter residences of America's industrial and corporate barons and baronesses. The list of owners was impressive, including the homes of John Hertz, of Yellow Cabs, Albert E. Erskine, of Studebaker and Pierce Arrow Cars, Mrs. J. Richard Francis, of Marvel Carburetors, and Harvey S. Firestone, of Firestone Tires, among many others. The exclusive strip was called "Millionaires Row", a term still used by savvy realtors today, even though in the decade following World War II things changed very dramatically.

In this turbo charged post-World War II atmosphere, two equally audacious and visionary individuals,

Ben Novack and Morris Lapidus, found themselves unexpectedly intertwined in a high stakes development adventure that would redefine the modern American resort hotel and strongly influence the future of modern American resort apartment living. In so doing, they would also propel the new mid-century architecture of South Florida permanently into the national psyche.

Highly successful hotel developer Ben Novack wanted to build the biggest, most luxurious hotel in Miami Beach, and he had acquired the former Harvey Firestone Estate at 44<sup>th</sup> Street, for just that purpose. But in 1953 Novack still had no architect for the hotel he would soon name *The Fontainebleau*, after the grand Fontainebleau Palace, in France. Morris Lapidus, who had emigrated to the Lower East Side of New York City from Odessa, Russia, in 1902, with his parents at the age of nine months, had trained at Columbia University and become a confident architect and brilliant interior designer in high demand across the nation. But Morris had never designed an entire building from the foundations up, not to mention a 565 room luxury hotel. It was a match made in heaven, and hell, with Lapidus agreeing to work for a ridiculously low fee. But by the beginning of 1954 Lapidus had moved his drafting office into the living room of the old Firestone mansion, and work on construction documents for America's mid-century dream hotel commenced.

And so began a new generation of major American resort architecture on Collins Avenue, as the Fontainebleau became the first major Miami Beach hotel to replace the former early 20<sup>th</sup> century industrial millionaires' oceanfront estates north of 44<sup>th</sup> Street. Equally luxurious oceanfront apartment buildings of a scale never before seen on Miami Beach, and competing with each for outstanding mid-century design and level of amenity, would soon follow.

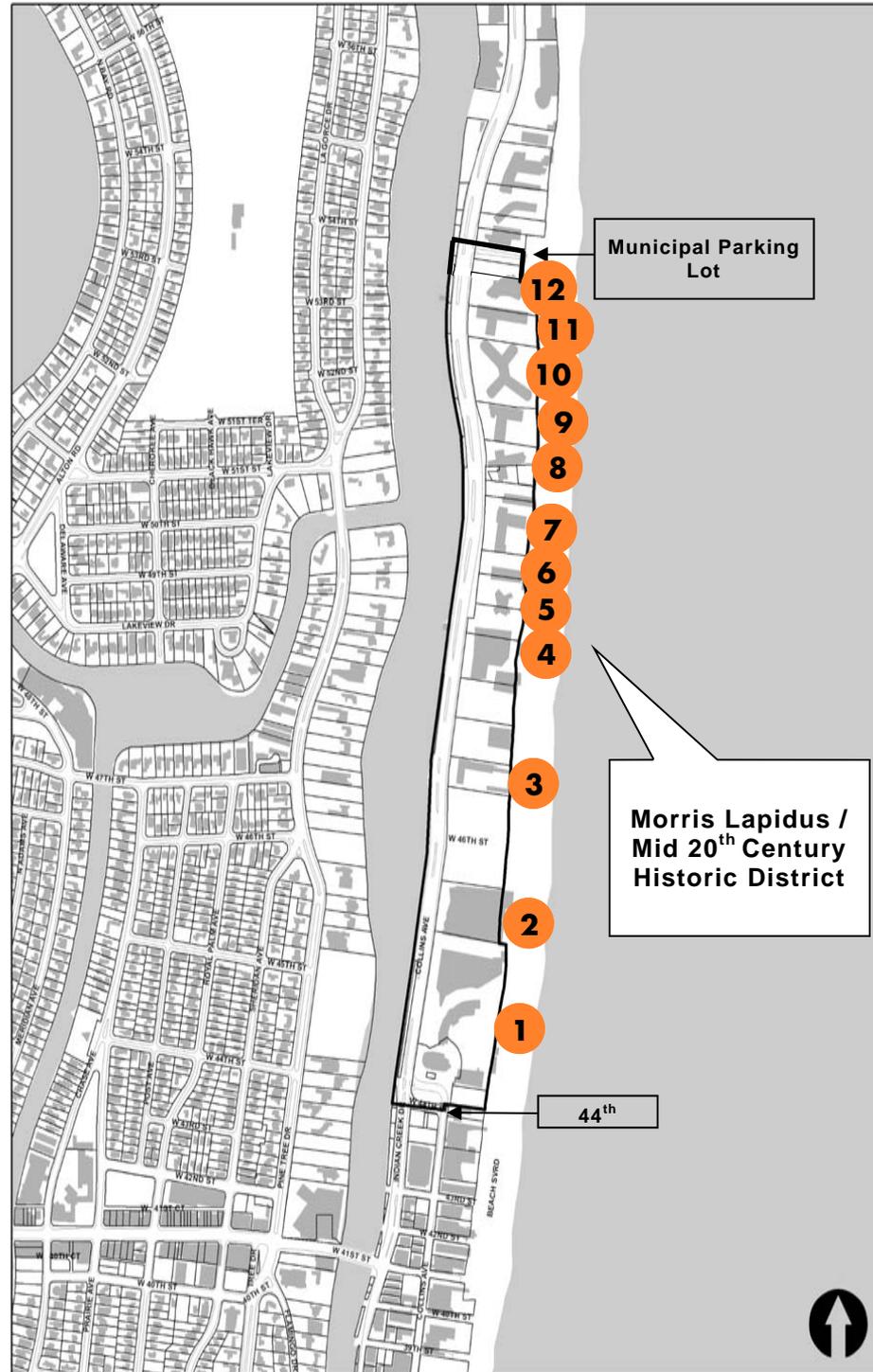
## Architecture

These large, Post War Modern hotels and apartment buildings fronting the Atlantic Ocean were designed to accommodate a dramatically increased volume of guests and provide luxury service in an exotic style. The resort hotels usually featured grand lobbies, cocktail lounges, supper clubs, themed restaurants, ballrooms, banquet halls, retail shops, meeting rooms, spa facilities, enormous swimming pools, expansive outdoor sun decks, and a sweeping array of private beach cabanas. This new American plan provided everything for a total guest experience without the need to leave the hotel for the duration of the visitor's stay. The grand new apartment buildings along Millionaires Row rivaled the new hotels in their size, level of amenity and quality of design.

This collection of buildings incorporates expansive use of glass curtain walls, cantilevered asymmetrical roofs, arches, dramatic fin walls, floating planes, and grand entrance porte cocheres. Primary facades are sometimes graced with bold neon signs, and sky signs were mounted on rooftop features. These hotels and apartment buildings took on futuristic forms, using architecture as advertising in an effort to outdo one another in competing for business. This new architecture celebrated the satisfaction of announcing that the Post World War II era in Miami Beach and America had arrived.

Use this map to explore the Morris Lapidus / Mid 20th Century Historic District.

Numbers on the map are keyed to the building descriptions on the following pages.



# Historic MiMo Buildings - in the Morris Lapidus / Mid 20th Century Historic District



## 1 Fontainebleau Hotel

4441 Collins Avenue  
Morris Lapidus, 1954

**North Tower Addition**  
A. Herbert Mathes, 1959

This powerful sweeping c-shaped structure, was the first major luxury hotel built in the U.S. since the Waldorf Astoria in 1932. The dramatic lobby features the iconic 'stairway to nowhere', and black and white marble bow-tie patterned floor.



## 2 Eden Roc Hotel

4525 Collins Avenue  
Morris Lapidus, 1955

Features gently folded front façade and two vertical panels of perforated masonry on a background of Italian tile recalling the depths of the sea. Nautical reference is seen in its distinctive rooftop smokestack. Projecting side and rear balconies repeat the concave folding of the front façade.



## 3 Mimosa Condominium

4747 Collins Avenue  
Melvin Grossman, 1962

Fourteen stories high, the Mimosa's entrance is flanked by planter bins of green marble, and lower exterior walls faced with large, light green ceramic tiles with a leaf pattern in bas-relief. The lobby features green marble faced pillars and large plate-glass windows which open the view to the east.



## 4 Miami Beach Resort & Spa (formerly Doral Beach)

4835 Collins Avenue  
Melvin Grossman, 1962

The slender, vertical tower features a projecting roof slab and continuous glass curtain wall which is in sharp contrast to the grand Spanish Baroque themed interior. One of its most popular attractions was the Starlight Roof Supper Club on the top floor, overlooking Indian Creek.



## 5 The Executive

4925 Collins Avenue  
B. Robert Swartburg, 1959

Features a striking X-shape floor plan and full-height vertical panels of perforated masonry. The entry has a V-shaped porte cochere and a curved, covered walkway. The entry door has a Classical Revival style broken pediment of white and purple marble.



## 6 Carriage Club South

5001 Collins Avenue  
Gibbs & Wang, 1967

This 16-story building features vertical rows of balconies originally with pre-cast concrete railings, now replaced with blue glass. A rectilinear porte-cochere is supported by five round pillars, beneath it, a subterranean garage entry opens to the street.

## Historic MiMo Buildings - in the Morris Lapidus / Mid 20th Century Historic District



### 7 Carriage Club North

5005 Collins Avenue  
MacKay & Gibbs, 1964

This massive apartment building features a large, rectilinear porte cochere with plain round pillars and red quarry tile on the front steps and lobby floor. It is characterized by its powerful horizontal lines.



### 8 Crystal House

5055 Collins Avenue  
Morris Lapidus, 1960

Features an impressive glass front curtain wall, articulated porte cochere and T-shaped plan. The entrance is flanked by panels of perforated masonry in a cheese-hole pattern. Morris Lapidus is quoted as saying, "this was my version of Mies (van der Rohe)," a style re-



### 9 Seacoast Suites

5101 Collins Avenue  
Morris Lapidus, 1963

This T-shaped building features a west façade with vertical rows of projecting balconies, rectilinear porte cochere with pre-cast cornice repeated on the building parapet. Floor and walls at the entrance are faced with yellow and blue veined marble. A planter bin remains to the right of the door.



### 10 Seacoast Towers East

5151-5161 Collins Avenue  
Morris Lapidus, 1965

Lapidus has compared the unusual shape of this building to a cloverleaf. The building features sweeping curves, four grand rotundas, a multi-level sun-drenched lobby, wedge shaped ball-room, and vast landscaped oceanfront pool deck.



### 11 The Alexander

5225 Collins Avenue  
Chas. McKirahan & Assoc., 1962

This narrow, 14-story building is set perpendicularly to street and covered in a full-height abstract stucco relief reminiscent of Polynesian art. This distinctive structure features a drive-through tunnel entrance from the street into a two-story atrium with non-original round arches and coffered ceilings.



### 12 Imperial House

5255 Collins Avenue  
Melvin Grossman, 1961

Features a Fontainebleau-inspired curve, Eden Roc-inspired tile mosaics and a dramatic entry with blue porcelain tiled water walls on either side cascading down to a pool. Round openings in the porte cochere allow sunlight onto the water.