

Explore the Normandy Isles National Register Historic District

Miami Beach's Normandy Isles Historic District was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 2008. Its boundaries span the eastern portions of two partially man-made islands in Biscayne Bay, the Isle of Normandy and Normandy Shores. Within this roughly 14 block area are 237 buildings and one object, 201 of which are contributing and 36 of which are non-contributing to the architectural significance of the district. Constructed between 1925 and 1963, the contributing buildings represent a variety of styles including Mediterranean Revival, Classical Revival, Masonry Vernacular, Minimal Traditional, Art Deco and Moderne; however the vast majority of the buildings are of the postwar modern style with distinct local adaptations that have become recognized as "Miami Modern" or "MiMo".

History

Henri Levy's Normandy Beach Properties Corporation began development of the Normandy Isles in 1926. Nominally themed French (undoubtedly an homage to Levy's homeland), the Isle of Normandy was particularly distinguished by its generous infrastructure and comprehensive planning. The island's Oceanside (1926) and Trouville (1926) subdivisions, both laid out prior to the real estate bust of the same year, were designed by D.E. Rossetter, an engineer noted as 'a master city builder' who was formerly associated with Carl G. Fisher Properties. The picturesque, gracefully curving and tree-lined parkways, ample waterfront lots and a golf course were combined with esplanades and a civic monument in a central place which functioned as a town center. Bay Drive, which encircled Normandy Island, was a

70-foot "whiteway" boulevard (referring to a roadway lighted with the White Way lighting system). A large site at the southeast corner of the island, on the axis of Brest Esplanade, was set aside for the development of a grand hotel.

Levy also conceived and promoted the Isle of Normandy as an element of his proposed Everglades Avenue Causeway linking North Beach to mainland Miami, as well as to Hialeah Park Racetrack, which lay directly to the west. Initial plans were prepared by an engineer named Lassiter and submitted to the U.S. Corp of Engineers for approval as Miami's third causeway (after the Collins Causeway and County Causeway). Completed in 1929, the Everglades Avenue Causeway incorporated the divided parkway system called North and South Everglades Concourses (later renamed 71 Street and Normandy Drive) that bisected the Isle of Normandy. The two roads met at Vendome Plaza, whose triangular layout formed the commercial and civic center for the area. At the center of Vendome Plaza was the Vendome Fountain, a centerpiece of the island's civic arts program. The Normandy Isles would emerge, like Coral Gables, Miami Shores, Miami Springs, Opa Locka, and other Miami garden city suburbs, as a decorous laboratory of "City Beautiful" era planning and modern community development.

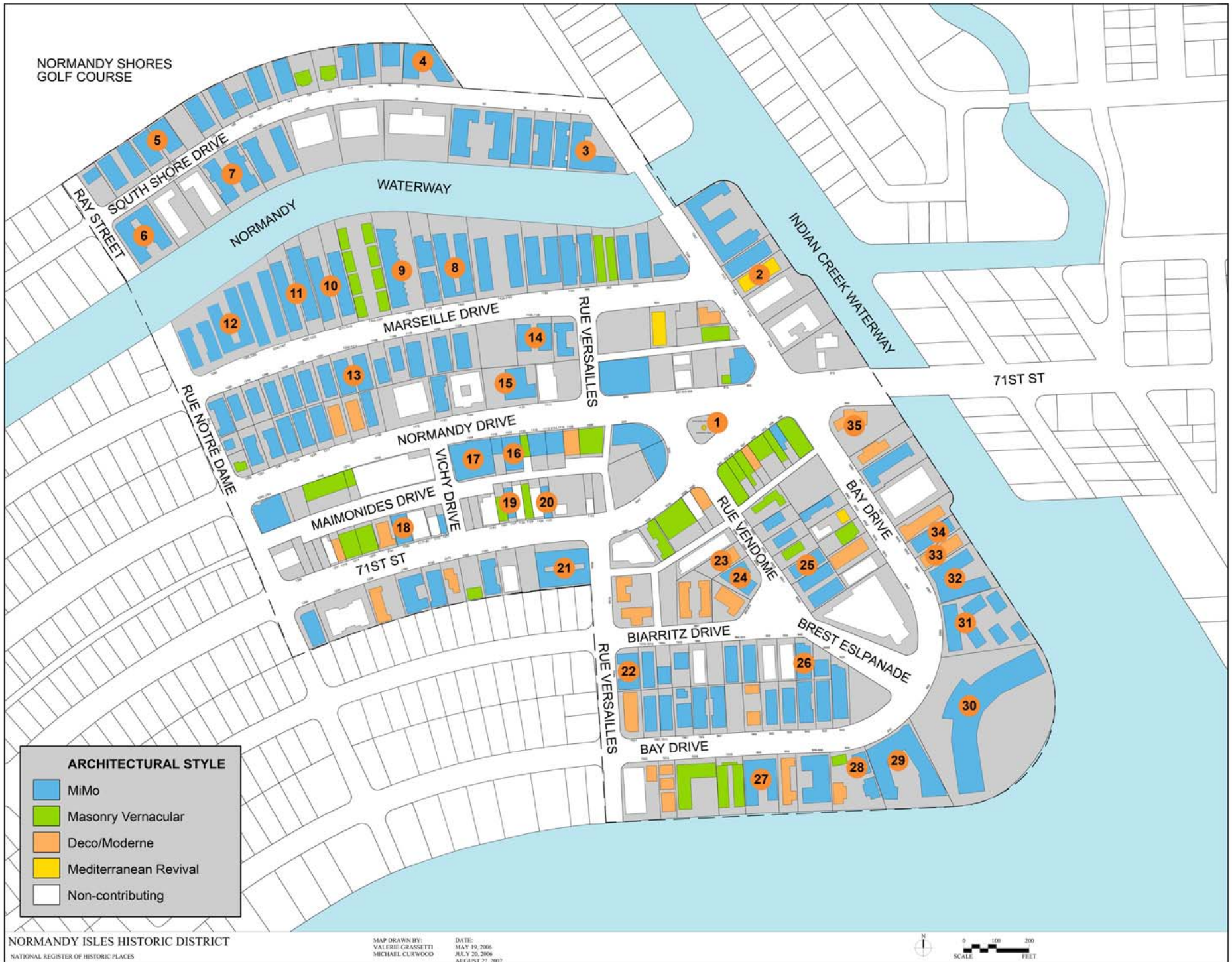
Urban Form

Although sparsely developed in the 1920's and 30's, the islands were largely urbanized in the postwar period. Comprehensively zoned, the island yielded well-defined areas of commercial development, apartment and hotel districts, and neighborhoods of single-family homesites. Within each sub-district, the scale and expression of buildings is largely consistent; a product of the fact that so much of the area was constructed in a compact period of time by a relatively small group of architects. Largely one and two-story garden-oriented residential build-

ings are tightly woven together along the curving streets of the islands, allowing the development of a sense of community within each building as well as along the streets. The commercial district, organized around the Vendome Plaza and fountain, is particularly good urban space. In total, the Normandy Isles approximates a fully developed garden city.

Architecture

The architectural vocabulary of the myriad small buildings in the Normandy Isles district reflects an unusual assemblage of mid-century modern themes. Young architects like Gilbert M. Fein, Frank Wyatt Woods and Gerard Pitt dominated the new construction, while other more established architects like Joseph DeBrito, Leonard Glasser, Harry O. Nelson, and Manfred Ungaro were also quite influential. Together, these architects defined a new direction of mid-century modern design in Miami Beach. The mostly flat-roofed buildings, faced in field stone, slump brick, patterned stucco and perforated concrete screens, punctuated by idiosyncratic pylon forms, projecting concrete fins and decorative modern metal-works, often wrapped around intimate garden patios, convey a consistent architectural sensibility. It nonetheless demonstrates a high degree of continuity with earlier architectural trends, including vernacular, Mediterranean and Moderne style buildings. The architects acclaimed for the construction of South Beach, only 50 blocks to the south, are still present here. Indeed, significant buildings by L. Murray Dixon, Henry Hohausser, Igor Polevitzky, Albert Anis, Victor H. Nellenbogen and B. Robert Swartburg left a small but notable footprint. For good measure, these earlier styles remain interspersed among its postwar modern structures.



A Sampler of Buildings — MiMo and other styles — in the Normandy Isles Historic District



1

Vendome Fountain and Plaza
constructed by developer, Henri Levy, 1926



2

7149 Bay Drive
R. Boilard
1928
(Med. Revival)



3

2 South Shore Drive
Manfred M. Ungarro
1953



4

75 South Shore Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1958



5

275-301 South Shore Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1953



6

350 South Shore Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1958



7

250 South Shore Drive
Leonard H. Glasser
1953



8

1165 Marseille Drive
E. F. Hauser
1957



9

1185 Marseille Drive
Maurice Weintraub
1960



10

1211-19 Marseille Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1954



11

1225-33 Marseille Drive
Nathan Seiderman
1956



12

1255-65 Marseille Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1955



13

1200-10 Marseille Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1958



14

1120-30 Marseille Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1955



15

1133 Normandy Drive
Frances Hoffman
1958



16

1134 Normandy Drive
Gilbert M. Fein
1959



17

1164 Normandy Drive
architect unknown
1952



18

1185 71 Street
Don Reiff
1957



24

6930 Rue Vendome
Nathan Seiderman
1951



30

King Cole Apts.
900 Bay Drive
Fridstein & Fitch;
Melvin Grossman
1961



19

1137 71 Street
Maurice Weintraub
1959



25

6921 Rue Vendome
Robert M. Nordin
1958



31

6865 Bay Drive
Igor Polevitzky
1948



20

1121 71 Street
A. Swary, Riley & Ross
1954



26

940 Biarritz Drive
Robert M. Nordin
1956



32

6881 Bay Drive
Robert Swartberg
1948



21

6930 Rue Versailles
Gilbert M. Fein
1958



27

960 Bay Drive
Robert Swartbeug
1951



33

6891 Bay Drive
Joseph DeBrita
1940
(Art Deco)



22

6835 Rue Versailles
Theodore Gottfried
1956



28

920 Bay Drive
Gerard Pitt &
W.C. Gorman
1956



34

6905 Bay Drive
Gerard Pitt
1959



23

6946 Rue Vendome
Harry O. Nelson
1936
(Moderne)



29

910 Bay Drive
Robert Swartberg
1951



35

880 71 Street
Joseph DeBrita
1941
(Moderne)