

## LESLIE AND CARLYLE HOTELS

1244-1250 OCEAN DRIVE, MIAMI BEACH

The Ocean Beach Subdivision and its four additions were all platted even before Miami Beach was incorporated as a town in 1915. These subdivisions, at the south end of Miami Beach, were all filed by the Lummus brothers' Ocean Beach Realty Company. The two subject properties occupy Lots 1, 2 and 3 of Block 17 in Ocean Beach Addition 2.

J. N. Lummus, the town's first mayor, built his own residence, "Salubrity," at 1204 Ocean Drive. By 1932 this was still the only building in this block of Ocean Drive.<sup>1</sup> Within a few years, however, even in the midst of the national Depression, Miami Beach would undergo a building boom that is today celebrated in the National Register Historic District, designated in 1979. Both the Leslie and Carlyle Hotels are products of that boom, and are among the best-known buildings in the historic district.

In the first eight months of 1937, Miami Beach issued over \$8 million (Depression dollars) in building permits, counting 18 hotels, 57 apartment houses, and about 200 residences.<sup>2</sup> On August 27, 1937, one of those hotel permits was issued to Edward J. Singer, who did business as the Edwards Corporation and the Edsinger Corporation, to build a three-story hotel at 1244 Ocean Drive.

In 1936, Singer had built the Nassau Hotel at 1414 Collins Avenue, designed by architect Albert Anis.<sup>3</sup> Singer sold the Nassau on August 15, 1937, for \$115,000 to Rubin Feinberg, who had sold his Harriet Court Apartments on Pennsylvania Avenue for "over \$100,000" just ten days before.<sup>4</sup> Three days after selling the Nassau, on August 18 Singer bought the vacant lot at

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<sup>1</sup> Polk's City Directory, 1932.

<sup>2</sup> *Miami Herald*, Aug. 29, 1937; p. B-1.

<sup>3</sup> Miami Beach Building Dept. Records

<sup>4</sup> *Miami Herald*, August 15, 1937.

1244 Ocean Drive (Lot 3 of this block),<sup>5</sup> and within ten days he had his building permit. Things were moving quickly.

By this time three other buildings, all designed by L. Murray Dixon, had gone up on the 1200 block of Ocean Drive to join the Lummus residence: the Park View Apartments on Lot 5 in 1934; the Oceanfront Apartments on Lot 4 in 1935; and the towering Tides Hotel on Lots 6 and 7 in 1936. For his new hotel on Lot 3, Singer again hired architect Albert Anis, who had designed the Nassau.

Albert Anis (1889-1964) was born in Chicago and attended the Armour Institute of Technology there, 1908-10<sup>6</sup>. He worked in Miami Beach from the mid-1930s to the mid-'50s, designing dozens of exemplary buildings in the Art Deco, Streamline, and Postwar Modern styles, including the Barnett Bank Bldg. at 420 Lincoln Road, and the following hotels:

Waldorf Towers	860 Ocean Dr.	(1937)
Clevelander	1020 Ocean Dr.	(1938)
Winter Haven	1400 Ocean Dr.	(1939)
Traymore	2445 Collins Ave.	(1939)
Berkeley Shore	1610 Collins Ave.	(1940)
Promenade	1465 Collins Ave.	(1948)
Biltmore Terrace	8701 Collins Ave. )	(1951)

Ed Singer named his new hotel the Edsinger. It had 50 rooms and cost \$75,000. Anis' original plans for the Edsinger are found on microfilm #10225 in the Miami Beach Building Department. The exterior is classic Art Deco style, with a symmetrical facade, strong vertical and horizontal elements, corner eyebrows, and a ziggurat roofline. It is most striking for its boxy right-angles, lacking any of the curves or rounded contours of streamlining, although the windows in the central bay are slightly bowed. A notation on the plans calls for the "entire east elevation and 32' 6" of the north & south elev. to be white cement & sand finish. Combed surface." This combing is still evident on the eyebrows. The plans also show that the cast

<sup>5</sup> Miami-Dade County Deed Records.

<sup>6</sup> Keith Root, Miami Beach Art Deco Guide, Miami Design Preservation League, 1987, p.32.

stone railing of the front porch is still the original design, with alternating square and round posts. The original windows were casements.

Lobby plans show that the reception desk was originally at the southwest corner; a double door flanked by two windows comprised the south wall; and a fireplace flanked by two windows stood on the north wall. The most striking discovery is that the lower lobby walls were paneled in wood. A notation on the elevation of the reception desk appears to say "walnut panels."

These exterior and interior details are confirmed by three photographs of the Edsinger, dated January 11, 1938, in the Romer archive of the Miami Public Library (#A489-L, M and N), and by several postcard images, although these are drawings. The Romer photograph shows that a prominent vertical sign originally rose from the third-floor eyebrow to above the parapet at the center of the front facade.

The lobby photographs show the original wood paneling, fireplace (with mirror above), "coffee shoppe," and reception desk. The reverse-ziggurat ceiling contour still survives, but a metal lighting trough originally ran down the center. A decorative metal grille is barely visible on the double door on the south wall. The "pie-chart" design that still exists in the lobby terrazzo is also seen in the photograph, but the checkerboard sections on either side were covered by oriental rugs.

A few days after these Romer photographs were taken, the building card notes that on January 14, 1938, a permit was issued for a \$500 dining room addition to the Edsinger, also designed by Albert Anis. No plans for this project were found on microfilm. Perhaps it was a remodeling of the coffee shop seen in the photograph.

A 1941 postcard of the Edsinger includes a photograph of Singer himself. He and his wife Reba were resident managers.<sup>7</sup>

A year after the Edsinger was constructed, on August 22, 1938, Singer's Edwards Corporation bought Lots 1 and 2 of this block, at the corner of 13th Street.<sup>8</sup> While this acquisition secured an open view and breezes for Singer's hotel guests, nothing was built here until he leased the land in 1941 to Harry W. Lehman, president of the Concord Realty Corporation.<sup>9</sup>

On this double lot, with 95' frontage on Ocean Drive (the south 5' was attributed to the Edsinger) and 130' on 13th Street, ground was broken in September 1941 for a 75-room hotel to be designed by the firm of Kiehnel and Elliott.

Richard Kiehnel (1874-1959) was born in Germany, educated in Breslau, and began his U.S. career as a designer for the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago. After moving to Pittsburgh, he formed a partnership with John B. Elliott in 1906 that continued for 35 years. Kiehnel came to Florida in 1917 to represent the firm when they were hired to design "El Jardin," a winter home in Coconut Grove for Pittsburgh steel magnate John Bindley. Preserved today as the Carrollton School, El Jardin was second only to Vizcaya as the seminal Mediterranean Revival style building in South Florida. Kiehnel remained here the rest of his life, as the head the Miami office of Kiehnel & Elliott (there is no evidence that Elliott ever came to Florida), and in private practice.

What distinguishes Kiehnel's design style is a combination of overall grandeur together with exquisitely fine decorative detail, particularly pierced masonry that is sometimes considered his signature. In addition to the Bindley estate, he also designed the Semple estate "La Brisa," and many other residences in Coconut Grove and elsewhere, as well as Coral Gables Elementary School, Coral Gables Congregational Church, the Coconut Grove Playhouse, and the Seybold Building in Miami. Besides pioneering the Mediterranean style, in 1925 Kiehnel designed the Scottish Rite Temple, said to be Miami's first Art Deco building.

In Miami Beach, Carl Fisher hired Kiehnel & Elliott to design his King Cole Hotel (now demolished) on Surprise Lake. Kiehnel designed the Nunnally Building at 914 Lincoln Road for candy baron James H. Nunnally in 1935. Kiehnel had also designed Nunnally's home in Morningside in 1927, and he was the chief designer of Nunnally's development of Miami Shores in the 1930s. Three Kiehnel & Elliott hotels still survive in Miami Beach: the Barclay Plaza at

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<sup>7</sup> Polk's City Directory, 1941.

<sup>8</sup> Miami-Dade County Deeds Records.

<sup>9</sup> "\$125,000 Hotel to be Started," *Miami Daily News*, Sept. 7, 1941.

1940 Park Avenue (1935), the Shorecrest at 1535 Collins Avenue (1940), and the Carlyle at 1250 Ocean Drive (1941).

According to the specifications and plans preserved on microfilm, the Concord Realty Company planned to call their new hotel the Concord Plaza, but when it opened it was named the Carlyle, perhaps because the Concord Apartments already existed on Michigan Avenue.<sup>10</sup> The replacement name was probably inspired by the elegant Carlyle Hotel that was built on East 76th Street in New York in 1929. (It was a common practice in the past to name Miami Beach hotels after famous hotels up north, but in recent years this has led to several lawsuits for trademark infringement that resulted in the Tiffany and Fairmont Hotels in Miami Beach losing their names. Federal legislation initiated by local preservationists in 1999 now exempts historic properties from such lawsuits.)

The Carlyle spreads out horizontally across its double lot in roughly a J-shape that swoops around the corner of 13th Street. The shorter wing on the east side, fronting Ocean Drive, allows ocean views and breezes to reach the longer wing in the rear. The Cardozo Hotel, across the street to the south, had been designed by Henry Hohausser two years earlier, and the Carlyle was obviously designed to harmonize with it.

Original plans for the Carlyle are found on microfilm #16122 in the Miami Beach Building Department., and a rendering of the building was printed in the journal Florida Architecture in 1942. The front facade of this three-story building is divided into three sections, with three fluted vertical shafts breaking up the center section. The north facade, while it does not have an entrance, is also broken up into three sections, with four vertical shafts in the center section. Two lacy pierced-masonry panels, typical of Kiehnel, decorate the front parapet and are echoed in the roofline scupper openings as well. The balustrade around the front terrace also has an intricate design of alternating motifs. Another striking feature is the gentle bowing outward of the south end of the front wing of the hotel, and the eyebrows and dentil band that follow the building's intricate contours all the way around.

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<sup>10</sup> Polk's City Directory, 1941.

Unfortunately no photographs of the original Carlyle lobby have been found, but the building plans offer some clues. They show an asymmetrical lobby, with a bowed-out reception desk offset to the south, and a card room in the northeast corner of the building. "Terrazzo floor" is noted for the lobby and card room. The concave south wall of the lobby had a fireplace flanked by two floor-to-ceiling windows. A 1985 photograph from the Miami News Collection shows this south end of the lobby at that time, when it had been made into a bar and dining room.

Vintage postcard images of the Carlyle consistently show the small channel-letter sign that still perches on the eyebrow directly over the front entrance. Some postcards also show a vertical fin sign on the front facade at the third-floor level, and a pole sign at the street corner. According to the Building Permit Card, permits for "two signs" were issued in 1941 and for "one sign" in 1944. In 1965 there is a permit to "replace vertical sign 'CARLYLE'" that may have resulted in the fin sign seen in a 1986 Miami News photograph; it appears to be of plastic laminate and has since disappeared.

The Carlyle was one of the last buildings to be erected on the Beach before World War II. Within a few months of its completion, both the Carlyle and the Edsinger were among approximately 300 buildings in Miami Beach that were leased by the US Army-Air Forces Technical Training Command for military use during the war. Miami Beach became the training ground for over 500,000 troops from 1942 to 1945. Hotels such as these served as barracks; restaurants became mess halls; the nearby golf courses and beaches were drill fields. Miami Beach's availability as a training center at that time is credited with shortening the war effort by six to eight months and saving the government \$6 million in building costs.<sup>11</sup> According to their Building Permit Cards, the Edsinger was returned to civilian use on June 14, 1944, and the Carlyle on July 6, 1944. But even while it was still in military use, in April, 1944, the Carlyle was

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<sup>11</sup> "Army Life on Beach in Second Year," *Miami Herald*, Feb. 19, 1943.

sold for \$180,000 to Mr. & Mrs. S. Belsky, a coat manufacturer from Springfield, Massachusetts.<sup>12</sup>

The Singers also sold their hotel in 1944, to new managers Harry M. Kaplan and David Koch. Obviously the name Edsinger had to go, and at this time the hotel was renamed the Leslie,<sup>13</sup> but the source of this name is unknown. A 1950 photograph shows that the large vertical sign on the front facade remained intact for some time, with the new name in place of the old. The name "Leslie" was also put into the terrazzo floor on the front porch at about this time. In the meantime, the Singers took the proceeds from the sale and bought the Bon Air Hotel, on the corner of Ocean Drive and 11th Street, and briefly named it the Edsinger, but they sold it the following year and it was renamed the Waves<sup>14</sup> (and later the Adrian).

Several later alterations to these hotels are noted on their Building Permit Cards. Architect A. Herbert Mathes did some work on the Leslie in 1949, including replacing two lobby windows, but no plans survive to document this. In 1958 in both the Leslie and the Carlyle, pairs of adjoining hotel rooms were combined to form one-bedroom apartments (with two bathrooms), a common practice at that time. Twenty-six rooms in the Leslie were made into thirteen apartments, and eighteen rooms in the Carlyle merged into nine apartments.

One postcard image of the Leslie Hotel for some reason also incorporates the Oceanfront Apartments next door, but these two buildings are not known to have ever been associated. There was, however, a Unity of Title Covenant for the Leslie and the Carlyle executed by Art Deco Hotels, Ltd., on Sept. 24, 1982.<sup>15</sup> This had to do with a large renovation project at that time that included the installation of central air-conditioning in both hotels, the relocation of the Carlyle's reception desk, and a proposed indoor-outdoor restaurant. The City required that a hotel have at least 100 rooms in order to operate a restaurant. Neither

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<sup>12</sup> *Miami Herald*, April 12, 1944.

<sup>13</sup> Polk's City Directory, 1945-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Miami Daily News*, April 26, 1945.

<sup>15</sup> Miami-Dade County, Platbook 11567, page 533.

hotel had enough rooms by itself, but together they met the requirement. The Carlyle lobby bar and dining room seen in the 1986 photograph was the result.

--- Carolyn Klepser, researcher  
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