

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

The Morningside Historic District is significant to the history of architecture, landscape architecture, and community development in Miami. Developed primarily between 1922 and 1941, Morningside contains a wealth of Mediterranean Revival, Art Deco, and vernacular style houses that reflect the diversity and direction of architectural design during the 1920's and 1930's. Morningside is one of Miami's best planned subdivisions, featuring wide, tree-lined boulevards that contribute to the character of the area. This neighborhood was envisioned as an exclusive, residential community, and its amenities and location on Biscayne Bay attracted many influential and prominent local residents. One of Miami's most intact historic neighborhoods, Morningside is the City's best remaining example of a boom-era suburb.

As Miami's population expanded during the late 1910's and early 1920's, new subdivisions reached northward along Biscayne Bay. In 1922, a large, undeveloped bayfront tract near the northern City limits was platted. Called Bay Shore, this area was subdivided by the Bay Shore Investment Company and was the first of three phases that would be developed by the company between 1922 and 1924.

James H. Nunnally, president of the Bay Shore Investment Company, envisioned Bay Shore as an exclusive residential community and planned for every modern convenience. Before the first lot was offered for sale, the subdivision was fully developed: streets, which bore such names in the community's infant years as Toxaway, Hibiscus, Coconut, and Albermarle, were paved and curbed; parkways were curbed and planted with trees and foliage; trees, foliage, shrubbery, and grass were planted between sidewalks and curbs; and street lighting was laid in underground conduits. ~~As a promotional brochure, published in 1924, boasted:~~

Thoughtfulness was the motto. Not one single feature of highly modernized improvements was to be left for future residents to provide. They were to get a finished homesite, with every utility--water, light, gas, and sewerage--provided in the most scientific manner Every feature which might tend toward comfort, convenience, dignity, and beauty was incorporated in the plan of development, and no detail was left unattended when the property was finally pronounced ready for delivery.

At a time when many lots in other Miami subdivisions were being sold undeveloped and unimproved, Bay Shore was notable for its carefully conceived plan for development.

The exclusiveness of the area was also guaranteed by the deed restrictions that the developers attached to each lot. These

restrictions specified the minimum price of each house, ranging from a low of \$7,000 inland to \$13,000 along the Bay. Duplexes, apartments, and hotels were prohibited, as were houses constructed of wood. Building setbacks and lot frontage were also regulated, and the developer required that all plans be submitted for approval prior to construction.

Although Bay Shore developed steadily during the boom and even the Depression, the area witnessed its greatest building expansion between 1936 and 1941. In 1936 the neighborhood was expanded, and a small area south of Bay Shore, along N.E. 55 Street and N.E. 55 Terrace, was subdivided as Bayshore Plaza by Islands Incorporated. Although the houses were often smaller than those in the earlier subdivision, similar deed restrictions guaranteed a continued high level of development.

Houses constructed in the Morningside Historic District reflect the eclecticism popular in the early twentieth century. The earlier buildings in the district are predominantly Mediterranean Revival in style, while structures built in the 1930's and early 1940's are frequently Art Deco. Outstanding examples of both styles are found here.

Morningside also features a large number of masonry vernacular buildings that frequently utilize elements of several styles. An unusual Tudor Revival style house and one of the City's best examples of Mission style architecture add to the area's architectural diversity.

Many of the buildings in the district utilize a variety of local materials, such as keystone and oolitic limestone, and decorative tropical motifs. Especially prevalent are wrought iron screen doors and precast concrete vents displaying palm trees, flamingos, and pelicans.

The Morningside Historic District features the work of more than 40 well-known local architects. Kiehnel and Elliott, who introduced the Mediterranean Revival style to South Florida, designed several houses, including those at 463 N.E. 55 Terrace, 527 N.E. 56 Street, and 759 N.E. 57 Street. Marion Manley, South Florida's first known female architect, designed the house at 598 N.E. 56 Street. The works of Gene Baylis, L. Murray Dixon, H. George Fink, Martin Hampton, Gordon Mayor, V.H. Nellenbogen, Paist and Steward, and Robert L. Weed are also represented here.

In addition to the quality of its buildings, the Morningside Historic District is also significant for its landscape architecture. Inspired by the designs of other suburbs and estates throughout the United States, the developers adapted these ideas to take full advantage of Miami's wealth of tropical trees and plants. After more than 4,000 trees had been planted, the subdivision presented the following appearance in 1924:

A typical street intersection shows the wide parkway in the center of each boulevard, dividing traffic. In the center of the intersection is a circular island, graced with shrubbery. Between curbing and sidewalk is a wide greensward with trees and foliage. All corners are curved and foot crossings set back to increase the park effect of the view up and down the boulevard. Boulevards run at graceful angles and the parkways are of varying width and differ in floral adornment. Everywhere the view is like overlooking an immense garden, through which wind attractive passageways.

Today, Morningside contains a representative collection of the plant material used in residential landscaping over the past 60 years, and large numbers of trees continue to be planted in the area.

From its inception in 1922, Morningside has been home to many prominent and influential local residents. James H. Nunnally, president of the Bay Shore Investment Company, built his own house on the Bay in 1927. Other developers and financiers have also lived here, including Paul Scott, an attorney and president of the Biscayne Boulevard Company and the New Miami Shores Corporation, and Henry H. Filer, president of the Filer-Cleveland Company.

Many politicians and government officials built homes in Morningside, including Frank Wharton, an early mayor and city manager during the 1920's; Perrine Palmer, a later mayor; and William Lehman, current U.S. congressman.

Laura Cushman, one of Florida's most respected educators and founder of The Cushman School, continues to live in the house built by her father in 1925. Sidney Meyer, secretary-treasurer of Wometco Theaters, built a house in Morningside, as did Harold Steward, a local architect with the prominent firm of Paist and Steward. Lawyers, physicians, realtors, business magnates, and other executives have populated Morningside throughout its history.

The Morningside Historic District stands today as one of Miami's most intact historic neighborhoods. Despite the number of post-1941 buildings in the area, Morningside retains a high degree of historic and architectural integrity. This is due, in part, to the fact that most later buildings are not intrusive, but respect the earlier structures in scale, setback, materials, and workmanship. The majority of neighborhood residents recognize the special character of the area and desire its continued preservation.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

The Morningside Historic District is eligible for designation under the following criteria.

1. Is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

The Morningside Historic District has been home to many of Miami's prominent and influential citizens. These individuals have been important in such fields as politics and government, community planning, commerce, education, law, architecture, and communications.

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

The Morningside Historic District is Miami's most intact historic neighborhood and is the City's best remaining example of a boom era subdivision. It reflects the type of development activity that occurred in Miami during the early 1920's.

4. Portrays the environment in an era of history characterized by one or more distinctive architectural styles.

The Morningside Historic District reflects the diversity and direction of architectural design during the 1920's and 1930's. The neighborhood contains a wealth of Mediterranean Revival, Mission, Art Deco, and vernacular style buildings.

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

The Morningside Historic District contains a number of outstanding examples of Mediterranean Revival, Mission, Art Deco, Tudor Revival, and vernacular style buildings.

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

The Morningside Historic District contains several fine examples of the work of Miami's prominent architects. Kiehnel and Elliott, Marion Manley, Paist and Steward, V.H. Nellenbogen, L. Murray Dixon, and H. George Fink are represented here.

8. By being part of or related to a subdivision, park, environmental feature, or other distinctive area, should be developed or preserved according to a plan based on a historic, cultural or architectural motif.

The Morningside Historic District is one of the most distinctive subdivisions in northeast Miami. The area's historic and architectural character should be preserved as a reminder of Miami's past.