

AO-206-FL

2nd ed.
230⁰⁰

V6-1-

A GREAT,
AMERICAN &
CITY REGION





IF YOU HAD never heard of Coral Gables, but thrilled with some vast sunset, had adventured westward from Miami on that Ta-Miami Trail which marches clean across Florida from the Atlantic to the Gulf of Mexico, and had come upon a tremendous gateway, revealing to the southward a city like an artist's dream set in a great open garden, you would go through that gateway, drawn by an urge to know more. You couldn't help it. But when you had followed the boulevards sweeping like great ribbons through the whole 10,000 acres, through the actual soil and structure of a man's vision, when you had been absorbed and uplifted by that sense of far-flung design which makes one whole of superb sky, crystal light and marching green acres with roads and groves and trees and colorful houses and golf links and more houses and shops and tennis courts and gardens and hotels, you would have learned more than the fact that it was called Coral Gables. You would know also that you had seen the working out of a new idea. For it is now certain that Coral Gables has become, not only a splendid adventure in creative development, but the first thoroughly established city-region in the United States.

We are accustomed, in this country, to ugly cities. The great American superstition is that ugliness is a practical necessity for American cities. We pride ourselves upon organizing ability, on our engineering ability, on our practical far-sightedness. Yet in the matter of creating cities to live in we have only two methods. The first is the cow-



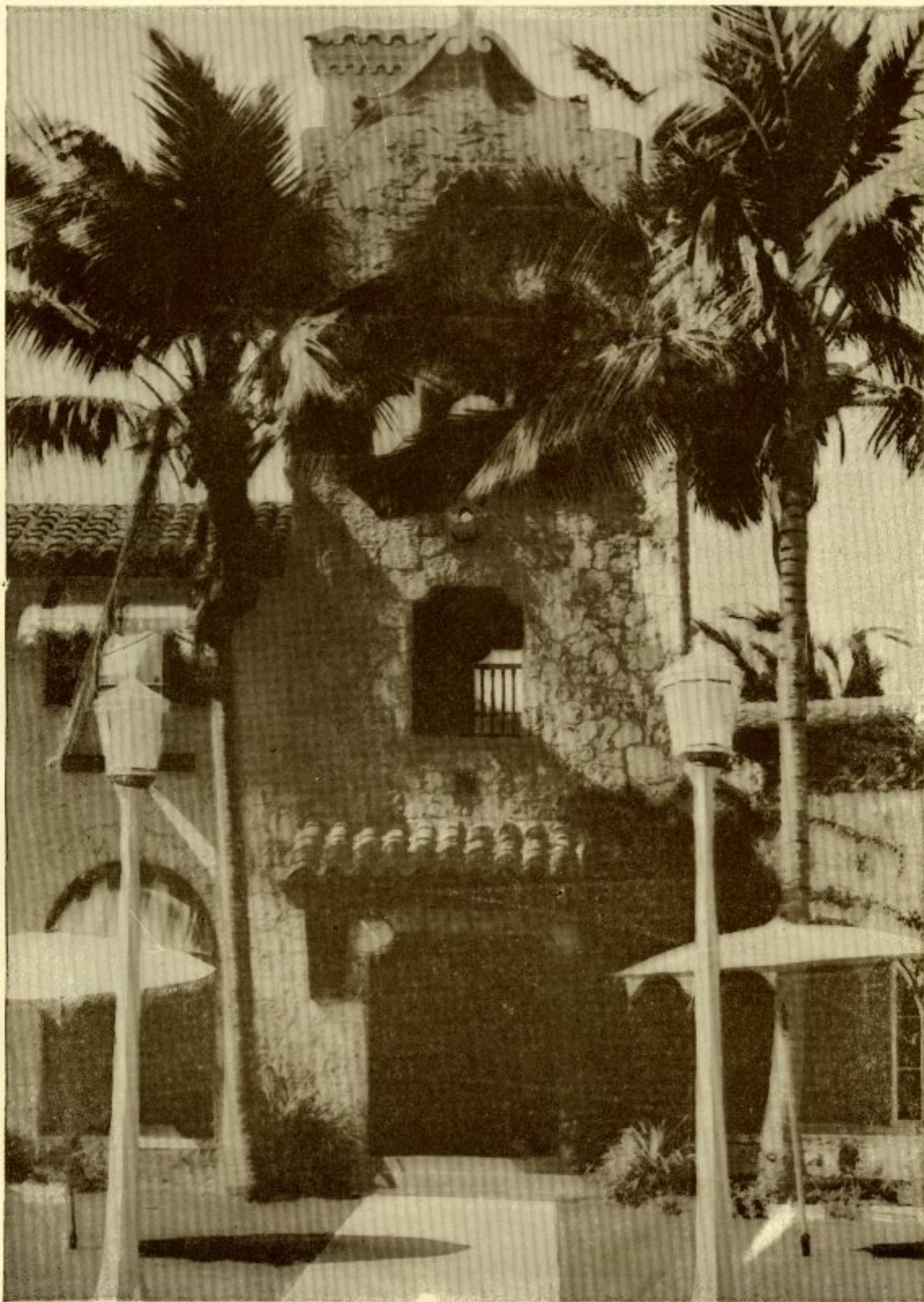
Interior of Coral Gables Sales Office, Merrick Building, Miami

CORAL GABLES MIAMI RIVIERA

path method which seems to believe that man cannot be more efficient for himself than a wandering animal. The other is the engineer method, which is simply that of snapping down a ruler on a map and criss-crossing it with straight lines, right angled, no matter what the configuration of the land, the transportation problems, the living necessities of the people. Both these methods result in cities as hideous and as inefficient as a bad dream. And our impractical and stupid manner of disassociating a city from the country around it, as if it were still a medieval fortress, brings it about that our modern cities are not only hideous and inefficient, but huge and bloated and chaotic; they shut out their people from all the joyous natural advantages of the country, which provide the absolute essentials of exercise and air and gardens which lie at the basis of human health. Not even the most ingenious park system has ever been able to make up for this lack.

In the few cases, like Washington, where a city plan was made before the city was built, the planners did achieve a civic design, but so coldly and so formally that the neighborhood life of people was almost forgotten. A park system and a distant vista of great buildings cannot make up for the lack of consideration.

That is why Coral Gables is so remarkable. It is a city, not at all politically so, but a city in such intimate relation with the region in which it is built that it is more like a great garden set with houses, a park where all the people can live to their best capacities, than a city in the old sense. It is not a city in a region, or a region in a city, but literally that new phrase, a city-region, the most modern, the most



Tower and Entrance at Coral Gables Golf and Country Club

CORAL GABLES ❧ MIAMI RIVIERA

far-seeing method which has yet been found to preserve the right relation between man and his work and his play and his environment.

For new ideas we must have new definitions. Coral Gables is a new idea. Therefore the definition "city-region" has been shaped to fit it. The basis of that is the "region" which geographers use to mean a section of country which has the same natural characteristics. We might have a river region or a mountain region or a valley region. In the case of Coral Gables it is a pineland region. But the old idea of region was merely rough, undeveloped country. You couldn't call Coral Gables that, because it is a place developed to the highest degree for people to live in, more or less as a city is. So when we combine the idea of "region" which means country, and "city" which is where men live, we get a better thing by calling it a "city-region." That is, the whole great acreage is developed as a city would be as far as buildings go, but so placed that the whole countryside becomes a wide, green and gracious city, and the city becomes a combination of park and garden and country expanse.

Any brief glimpse of Coral Gables gives one this splendid stimulating sense of discovery, the exhilarating realization that here at last wisdom and art and craftsmanship have met the age-old problem of how best shall a man live. When George E. Merrick, the man whose dream Coral Gables was and still is, visioned the thing which he wanted, he must have felt infinitely sickened of the old cities. He had seen cities built for men to make money in, ugly barren working cities, which produce bitter lives and cramped children. Hell, Shelley said, was a city like London. The working cities of the north and west are also like it. Mr. Merrick had seen cities built for men to spend money in,



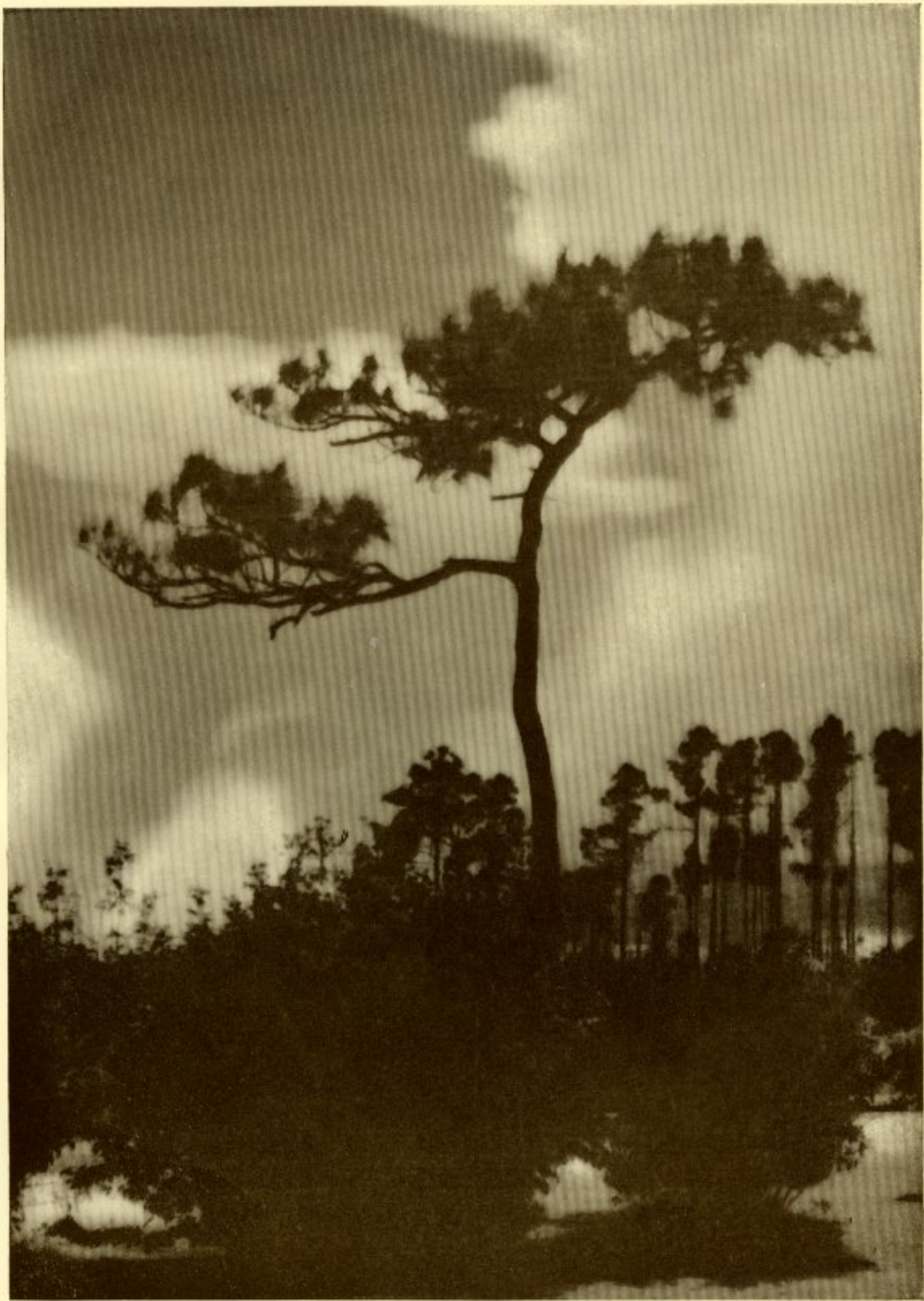
Tower of the Congregational Church of Coral Gables

CORAL GABLES ❧ MIAMI RIVIERA

chaotic, disturbed, tawdry cities, cheapening the life of the whole region where they took their mushroom growth. But he had seen very few built primarily for men to live in. Yet how immeasurably the city where a man lives conditions everything about him, his health, his work, his pleasures, the welfare and the future of his family, all his thoughts and his happiness. We shut our eyes, in this country, to all this, under the old pioneer necessity of making the best of it.

But Mr. Merrick had an idea of making the best of it with a difference. So he laid out his region, where the gates and towers and roofs of his city were to be, with the feeling first of all that this was to be a place where a man and his family could live to the fullest degree possible, sanely, healthfully, zestfully, valuably. He built Coral Gables to be a city-region whose citizens would be rich in all the things which make a man's life interesting and worthwhile.

Coral Gables begins with the sky. The sky, in Coral Gables, is literally its third limit. After you have stood on a street corner or a front lawn or the golf links and let your eyes and the flight of your mind carry you up the tremendous dome of the sky, you wonder why mountainous regions are called "The Land of the Sky." Only here, where the great reaches of earth are so open that you can see from one low horizon to the other; only here where the tropic blue stretches above you, a blue deeper and more dazzling than any other in America, and where the majestic Gulf clouds like sculptured snow come drifting slowly over before the trade wind that makes the whole air salt sweet with distant sea and vital and stimulating with movement, do you realize what a South Florida sky is really like. And when you stand awestruck, as everywhere at the hour of sunset you see



The pines stand guard for the rich green of the fruit groves

CORAL GABLES  MIAMI RIVIERA

people standing, to watch the sunset exploding all over the sky in such marvels of gold and bronze and molten copper, such changing bursts of scarlet and lavender as you have never seen before, you will realize why the sunset hour is an event in Coral Gables. There are stars, also, just beyond the treetops, and moons, huge, glowing tropic moons, that turn the air into silver and the links and roads into pools and streaks of silver, and the palms and pines and groves into black magic touched with silver and the night to witchery, through which the lanterns and street lights make more enchantment and the music from the country club dances, drifting between, into the horns of a realized city of delight.

Sky and air are the first requisites of human living. In northern countries civilization might be said to have begun with the discovery of fire. But here in South Florida the sun is fire, and comfort and life and growth. So that the second requisite, leaving out for the moment the broad earth itself, is not fire, but water, that necessity of the tropics. Coral Gables needed water, water in fountains and patio pools, water in swimming lagoons and canals, but more especially, the shining neighborliness of the sea itself. For if South Florida is the country of the sky, it is equally the country of the sea. The sea made this land thousands of years ago and now that it has risen, slowly with the travail of centuries out of the turquoise and peacock shadows of these exquisite waters, it is still intimate with the unforgotten deeps. Its winds are sea winds. Its distant meadows are like sea levels, rippling with shining grasses. Its carven white fire of cloud are sea clouds. Its very soil is the rich bleached bones of the ancient sea. And in the same way its people desire the sea, turning their faces instinctively to the salty purple reaches of distant ocean. Coral Gables was therefore made a



Where lofty palms stretch a graceful arm over the loveliest homes

CORAL GABLES ❧ MIAMI RIVIERA

neighbor of the sea and its horizons were lifted to the sea's horizons. Six miles of shining white sea beach, bordered with the strange green of mangroves and of palms and rare jungle growths and some six thousand acres bordering on the lower reaches of Biscayne Bay, which here widens out to the open sea, were added to the original plan of Coral Gables. It was thus made possible that Coral Gables should be a complete section of geographical South Florida, sea coast, pine land and high ridges. Grouped islands along the coast, boulevards skirting the shore, canals and waterways and yacht basins were planned to carry Coral Gables to the sea, and the sea to the very heart of Coral Gables. The magic of sea water was added to the landscape, sea water with its tonic life and sparkle and tang, its burden of sails and white hulls and bows curving eagerly from such perfect harborage, to the challenge of the sea itself outside. The sea, with its strange tropic colors, its amazing marine life, its constant call to the thing in man which makes sea water his most invigorating plaything.

But sea and sky are only part. Finally there is the quality and nature of the broad earth itself. Years ago, before Miami was much of a settlement, Coral Gables was a great pine forest, mile after mile after mile of those rare and beautiful trees which you find in no other place in America except South Florida, the true tropical Caribbean pine. Then when Mr. Merrick's father first cleared pineland for his groves of orange and grapefruit, the pines' high and lacy ranks stood guard for the deep rich green of the fruit groves, groves which added gust after gust of exquisite perfume to the pine-sweet air at blossoming time and lit the shade with pale gold clusters in deep-fruited winters. So that the pine



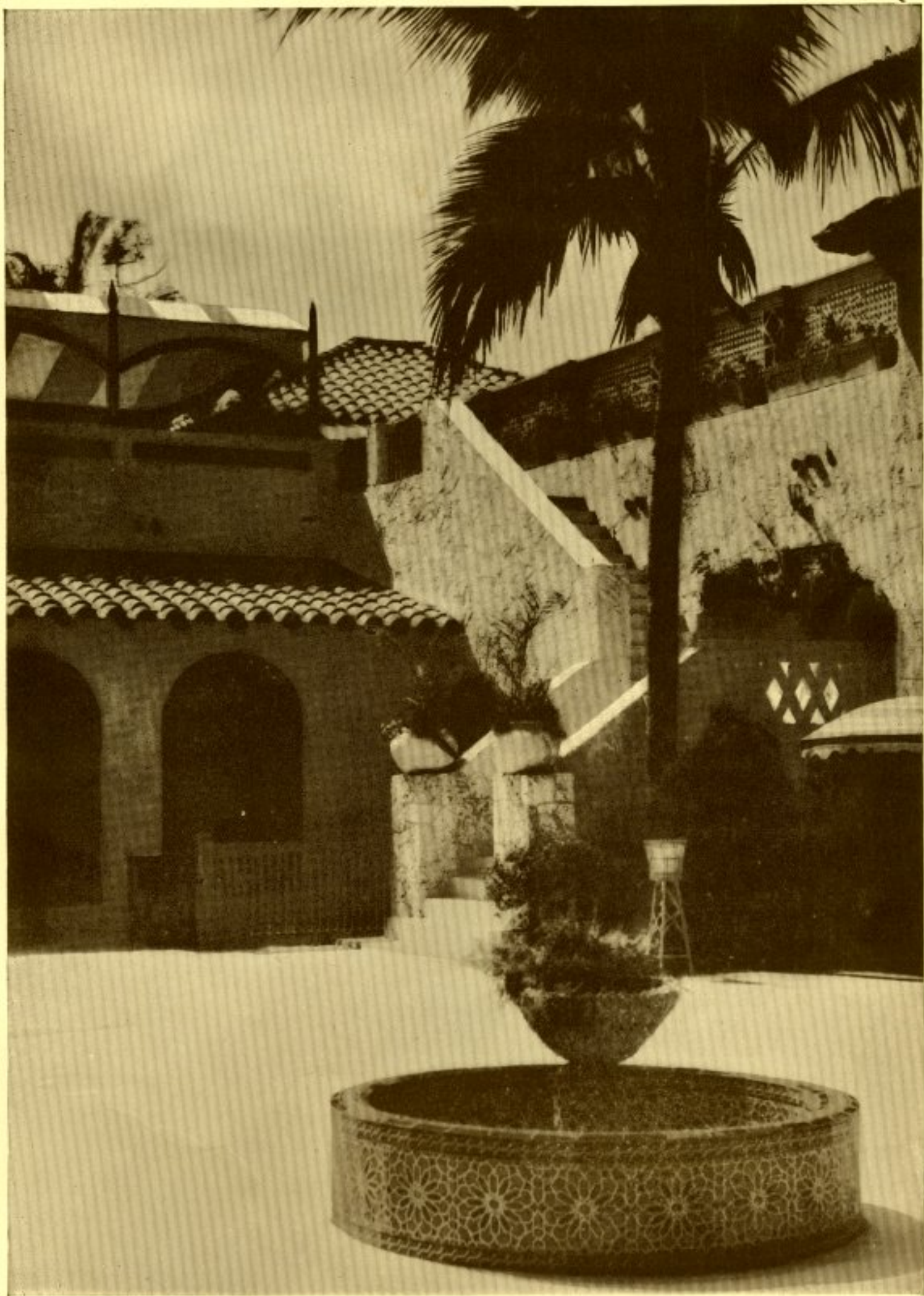
Infinitely right for the shadows of trees and vines and clouds to make charming

CORAL GABLES MIAMI RIVIERA

tree and the orange tree are the first tree-symbols of Coral Gables, witnesses to the bounty of the dark soil.

Everywhere possible the pines have been left. Clear around the full circle of the horizon, behind the farthest houses and over-topping them, the piney ranks march, an etched mural decoration linking earth and sky. A sunset is a greater splendor because its crimson bursts behind their black intricacies and moonlight is more magic because of them. They are the guardians of great houses. They stretch a dark arm over the smallest home. They make parkways significant with loveliness and the long curving roads fit for many cameras. And the groves of orange and grapefruit, sturdier trees and more prolific each year, are equally everywhere, making cool shady avenues of streets and bringing promise of luscious breakfast to housewives, who can pick their own fruit from their own porches. But to be really Floridian, really tropic, Mr. Merrick added a third tree, the incomparable coconut palm. Huge-fronded, lifting their superb curves in groups about tile-roof buildings, making a tropic delight of swimming pool and dance floor, the coconut palms grow freely. They were transplanted here bodily from the Florida keys, only two years or so ago and now are perfectly at home. The palm, the pine, the citrus fruit, these three are the dominating tree friends of Coral Gables.

Of course there are dozens of other varieties of trees. The strange sea grape grows in many a plaza, there are streets of sturdy pithecolobiums and lebbeks and eucalyptus and Santa Marias, all well known tropic trees, rare to the eyes of the northerner. The beauty of their leaf and branch and shade will be added to that of palm and orange and pine as the well stocked Coral Gables nurseries attest.



Corner of Spanish Dance Gardens, Coral Gables Golf and Country Club

CORAL GABLES ❧ MIAMI RIVIERA

The land was rich pine land, with a few hammocks of jungle growth, where Mr. Merrick chose to create his city-region. Level for the most part, it has many little lifts and rises, gentle slopes, rock ridges where a strata was turned, and an infinite sense of distance. No engineer ever set ruler callously to map to criss-cross these streets. A few main boulevards sweep straightly, as main arteries of traffic from Miami, from Coconut Grove and from neighboring county roads. But the rest are laid out as the land required, curving easily, with wide parkways, and opening into great open plazas, walled and arched, set with pools of water, a fit background for the most carefully studied landscape gardening and already chosen spots for the better type of motion pictures. The whole system of roads and boulevards and plazas is equally a delight to the eye of the artist or the wheel of the motorist. As a consequence, to drive about Coral Gables is constantly to be discovering new charms of roadways, new vistas of great distance, new tunnels of green which open out to light flooded plazas, new curving perspectives of trees and charming roofs and great lifts of sky.

Not only the looks of things were regarded, of course, although the attractiveness of the streets of any town are, like that of a child, the sign of health. The roads are built for heavy traffic, for a constant stream of automobiles, and so shrewdly that in all Coral Gables there are no dangerous corners, no death traps. Nor does one waste time driving about them. Their planning takes account of the fact that for driving in a city curves are more often the shortest distance between two points.

Of course, the secret of the matter of roads, and of all buildings here, is that Coral Gables had, not just a city plan,

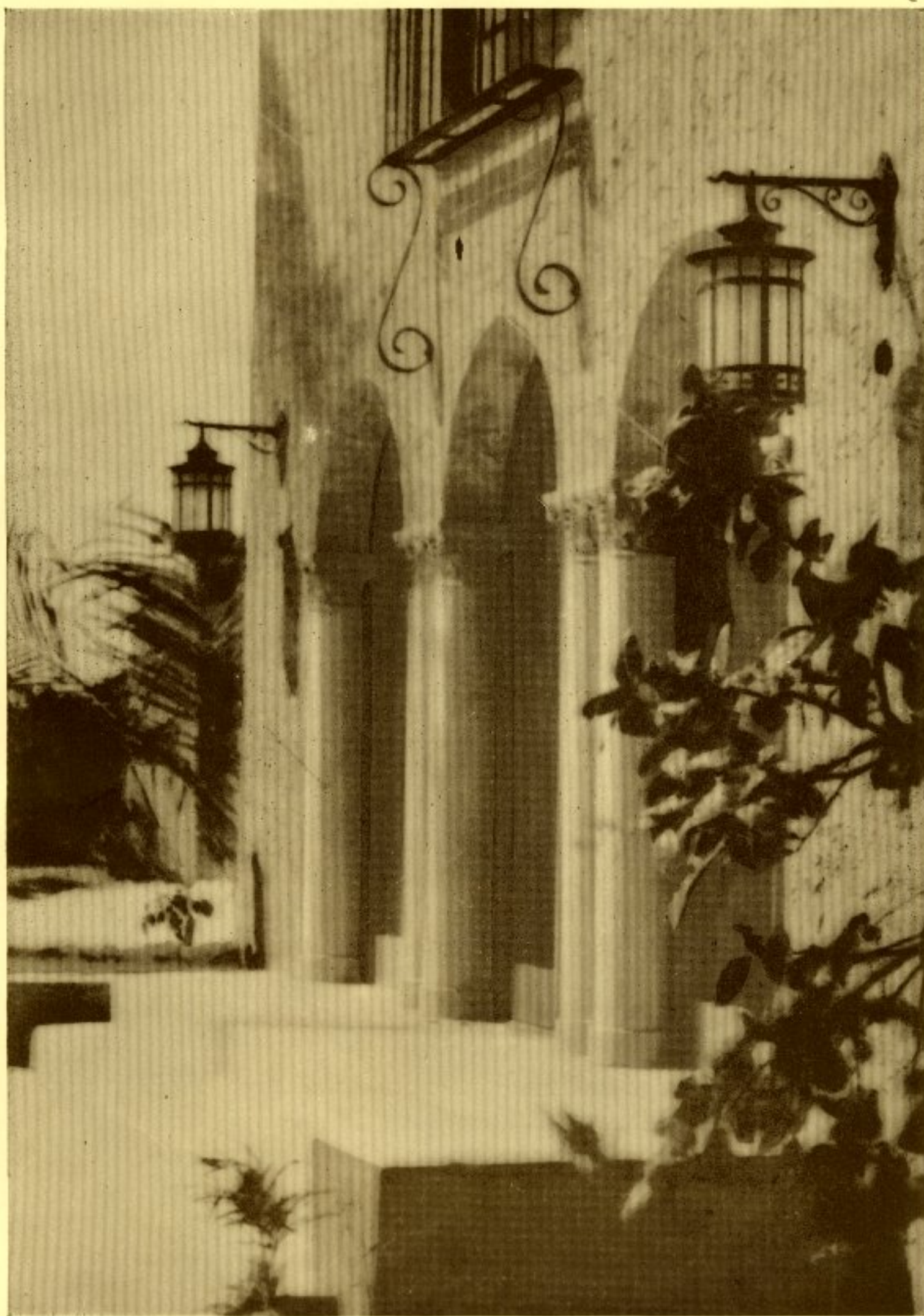


The Venetian Pool. that wonder of shimmering blue and green

CORAL GABLES ☛ MIAMI RIVIERA

but before the first road was laid out or the first house built, a thorough idea which amounted really to a regional plan. The whole 10,000 acres was taken into consideration, the nature and condition of the terrain, the possibilities of the soil, the location, in regard to Miami, the nearest avenues of transportation, and all the types and characteristics of the future development. So when great open plazas were laid at the intersections of many of the main boulevards, plazas with seductive Spanish names like Segovia and Ponce de Leon, the beginnings of the architectural city were made. These plazas serve the double purpose of solving traffic problems and furnishing, with their sweeping, sunbaked walls and dripping pools, their wealth of vines and their mellow suggestion of an age-old leisure, the keynote for all later structures.

But the matter of planting did not end with laying out the streets and regional highways. The future city had to be zoned. It is the folly and ignorance of all cities that allows a factory to be put up in the open space of a residential district, or shops to encroach upon schools and playgrounds, or the tumult of industry upon churches, libraries and hospitals. In Coral Gables there are no factories, but there are industries. People work, in Coral Gables, better because of the light and the air, the convenience and the beauty. So a business zone was laid out, centering about a business hotel. The remarkable printing plant of Col. Parker, the maker of building blocks, the carpenter shop, the art studios, the furniture shop, the plumbers and cement workers, have their own district, which is equally as attractive as any other, the parkways as carefully kept, the shrubs and vines on the charming buildings just as well cared



Fascinating architectural features which indicate gracious living within

CORAL GABLES ☛ MIAMI RIVIERA

for. There is the shopping district, next to the business district, and that is also unique, a great colonnaded block, with splendid orange and brown and yellow and dull blue awnings, where the people of Coral Gables do their shopping conveniently and in no time at all, because there is no necessity for hunting about from street to street for scattered stores. That neither business nor industry needs to be hideous is one of the great modern city-building truths which Mr. Merrick has demonstrated.

After the first plan, after the roads were built and the zones determined on, after the excellent water system and the electric lighting plant, there came the actual question of the houses. The architecture of Coral Gables is unique, from the point of view of all other places in America. The geography, the climate, the tropical horticulture and tropical characteristics of South Florida are matters which have nothing in common with the west or north or the old south. The straight levels of the land, the brilliance of the light, the unique backgrounds of tropical trees and sky demand an architecture which is not imitative of other forms or suited to other places. To be right, it must answer local problems of living. To allow here an old Colonial imitation, there a pseudo-Tudor, next door a rococo horror of the early American pullman type or a California bungalow with great, clumsy earthquake pillars, on these streets which in themselves made a perfect whole, would have destroyed everything. It would no longer be Coral Gables.

It was determined first of all, therefore, that a modified type of Spanish architecture, thoroughly adapted to local needs, should be the style of the whole. And the keynote was first struck, and most impressively, on the great gateways



It is such an inn-yard as Shakespeare wrote "Romeo and Juliet" to be played in