

Interview Subject: Richard Dixon
Son of L. Murray Dixon, famed Deco architect

Date Recorded: 6-27-12

Location: The Hotel of South Beach

Date of Birth: 12-22-33

Richard Dixon brought his extended family down from Marietta, Georgia to see the Art Deco district and visit the hotel and places his father built. This gave us the opportunity to interview him.

Rationale behind smaller hotels, post-Depression.

During World War II, government set the prices on the rooms lower than cost to maintain the building. Had to take government to court to re-establish profit making and evict people after the war. The prices went back to normal.

Owned the Lawrence apartments.

He describes early memories: swimming, fishing, climbing trees and looking across the bay to Miami.

As kids they had the island to themselves. They could go to any beach they wanted; could play clay courts for tennis, outside all the time. Summer time they'd go to the beach in the morning and stay past dark. They were living a very nice life.

Went through 11 hurricanes. As kids they were fun. They played games, lost power for 2 weeks. Everybody had gas stoves so we cooked. They would go to the icehouse to get ice.

They'd help people prep by taking down their awnings and taping windows. They would take our surfboards out and paddle around the neighborhood cause everything was under water.

Because his father was an architect, their house was stronger than others.

Talks about how people would prep and get ready for the hurricanes.

Memories of his father: very strict person. He didn't paddle, he gave extra homework, much harder than school was. Strict about how they ate at the table. "Keep your hand in your lap." Bowles Military Academy in Jacksonville, 8th, 9th and half of 10th grade. Father died. Went to Miami Beach High.

He taught him to swim. He wanted him to play sports and do well at school. He wasn't athletic but he could manage events. He had 80 percent recall of information.

His father fell off a building and broke his back. While he was recovering at home, they would bring him books from the library. Had encyclopedias about wars throughout history.

Prop airplanes used to disturb television reception and they got the flight pattern changed to not fly over Miami Beach.

Themes of Art Deco, designed to look like ships with portholes and decks. He describes the design and style.

He describes the family home that his father built for them. Very modern inside.

Father helped design the Waldorf Astoria in NY. He decided he wanted to do Art Deco. He talked to Richard's older brother about work and design. His employees worked like mad but they liked it because they got good Christmas bonuses.

His father's office: Reception area very small. Would talk to clients there. Big room full of drawing tables with full time artist and a dozen draftsmen. Very particular about the furniture that went into the building.

His father's was strict about quality construction. Worked 24 hours a day doing foundations.

He would have built the Fontainebleau. It wouldn't have been the same design.

He did not like Frank Lloyd Wright. He was critical of him as a person, his ego.

He was a friend of Henry Hohauser. His father was the number one designer of swimming pools on Miami Beach.

His father couldn't understand why South Miami Beach got so run down.

His father loved the water. They had a cabana, which his father would come to after work and plop down and relax.

Flamingo Park, center of sports. Turned out top tennis players.

Tax money collected from Miami Beach hotels financed Miami Beach High School. They took airplanes to play sports out of town. But we didn't have a swimming team.

Christmas Parade of boats on inland waterway, decorated with lights, Batista's house. Saw beginning of Cuban influx. They were welcomed. They had a black maid named Inez who lived with them. She raised the children. He describes her as "like a grandmother." Her husband and children would come to visit but they had to leave by sundown.

He describes all the gambling that went on, especially betting on horses and dogs. Very common. His father gambled and he and his brother also.

He describes being out on the street and listening to conversations on the telephone lines, which you could plainly hear because the wires weren't insulated.

He remembers Joe's Stone Crab when it was a shack and not very chic. L. Murray Dixon's father was a dentist. Precision went with dentistry and architecture.

Richard often went with his father to building sites and he remembers his father paying careful attention to the details of carpentry and plumbing and making the workers do it over if he didn't like it.

He remembers Al Capone and lots of underworld guys hanging around him.

In 1956-57 he went into the Navy and refused to sign a contract to be stationed up north in the cold. He was assigned to San Diego.

After the Navy, he went to architectural school at University of Florida but the instructors were more artists than precision engineers. So he decided to do architectural photography but there was no market for it back in Miami. Nothing was happening building wise in the 1960's.

His father served in WW 2. He was too old for combat so they had him building military bases in Savannah and elsewhere.

His parents' social circle consisted of mostly clients. His mother had a bridge club, which included the high school principal so he had to be on very good behavior. His mother was head of the Miami Beach Women's Club. They socialized with the Hershey family.

He describes Lincoln Road traffic before the mall was built. In the busy season, the traffic was horrible, people fighting over parking spaces, the drivers very aggressive and honked their horns as soon as the light changed.

The Beach was strict about car noise because of tourism. Every 6 months you had to get an auto inspection and if your muffler was too loud you had to get it fixed on the spot.