

The Reef

2275 South Ocean Boulevard



DESIGNATION REPORT

November 20, 2019

Landmark Preservation Commission

Palm Beach, Florida

DESIGNATION REPORT

The Reef: 2275 South Ocean Boulevard

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Report produced by Murphy Stillings, LLC

I. General Information

Location: 2275 South Ocean Boulevard
Palm Beach, Florida

Date of Construction: 1972-1974

Original Owner: Palm Beach Reef Development Company

Architect: Clifford Eugene "Gene" Lawrence

Contractor: William Passalacqua

Current Owners: Multiple Owners (Please see attached list)

Present Use: Residential Condominium Building

Current Legal Description:

The tract of land in Section 14 of Township 44 South, Range 43 East, Palm Beach County, as bounded as follows:

On the East by the waters of the Atlantic Ocean; on the West by the waters of Lake Worth; on the North by the North line of the South 100 feet of Lot 126, of Palm Beach Estates according to the plat thereof recorded in Book 8, Page 3, Palm Beach County Records and such line extended Westerly to the waters of Lake Worth and on the South by the South line of the North 45 feet of Lot 128 of said Palm Beach Estates, and said line extended Westerly to the waters of Lake Worth in the Town of Palm Beach, Palm Beach County, Florida, together with all riparian and littoral rights thereunto appertaining; less and except the right-of-way of State Road A-1-A.

List of Owners and Parcel Control Numbers

101A Elena Merjanian, Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1010

101N & 108N John & Jane Shalam: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1010

101S Rebeca L. Owen Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1010

102A Barbara h. Stark: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1020

102N John & Jane Shalam: 50-43-44-14-01-001-1020

102S Mary Jo Joyce: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1020

103A Barry Lowenthal & John McCusker: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1030

103N Daniel P. Desimone & Alan R. Sternberg: 50-43-44-14-01-001-1030

103S Steven L. Cicatelli & Peter Lannan 50-43-44-14-01-002-1030

104A Mary Rosoff: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1040

104N Scott K. Sanders & Peter S. Wilson: 50-43-44-14-01-001-1040

104S Marlene Frada Borey: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1040

105A Victoria & Hedy Jarras Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1050

105N Barry Blumberg & Sarah Gaulak: 50-43-44-14-01-001-1050

105S Jay A. & Lorraine J. Fleischman: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1050

106A Taylor Wilson: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1060

106N Peter S. Marx: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1060

106S Geraldine Polinger Family Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1060

107A Kathleen E & Stephen L. Levinson: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1070

107N Michael J. & Pamela T. Davies: 50-43-44-14-01-001-1070

107S Lisa Lazurus: 50-43-44-14-01-002-1070

108A Deborah O. Day & Raul G. Viera: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1080

108S Raymond J. Wean, III & Suzanne C. Wean: 50-43-44-14—01-002-1080

109A Reef Condominium Association, Inc.: 50-43-44-14-01-003-1090

201A John L. Jarema & Mark Walter: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2010

201N John R. & Sandra Blair Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2010

201S Barbara E. Toll: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2010

202A Winter Evans & Claudio A. Guidi: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2020

202N: Thomas W. Shaffer: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2020

202S Suzanne C. Wean: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2020

203A: Robert L. Copley: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2030

203N Melvin & Lisa Katz: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2030

203S Marvin Yontef: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2030

204A Pala Z. Mostoller Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2040

204N Jay Allen Renfeld: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2040

204S & 205S: Joan Genser: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2040

205A Steven S. Stolman & Richard Wilkie: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2050

205N Katherine M. Shenaman: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2050

206A Philip A. Nardone, Jr. & Scott E. Peltier: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2060

206N Harjas Chatwal & Maria L. Mezzomo: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2060

206S BRC Associates LLC: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2060

207A Nathan N. Gold & Abram Majtlis: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2070

207N Carole Moran: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2070

207S BRC Associates LLC: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2070

208A Steven S. Stolman & Richard A. Wilkie: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2080

208N Janet R. Matthews: 50-43-44-14-01-001-2080

208S BRC Associates LLC: 50-43-44-14-01-002-2080

209A Pala Z. Mostoller Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-003-2090

301A Meryl Ann Metz: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3010

301N Douglas T. & Elizabeth L. Osborne Trust 50-43-44-14-01-001-3010

301S & 302S Carla B. Herwitz 50-43-44-14-01-002-3010

302A Sharon Bush: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3020

302N Kellie M. Hudson: 50-43-44-14-01-001-3020

303A Dorita H. Normile: 50-43-44-01-003-3030

303N Howard G. & Sarah H. Slavitt 50-43-44-14-01-001-3030

303S Charles Landle Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-002-3030

304A In-Law Pad LLC: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3040

304N Sarah B. Newton: 50-43-44-14-01-001-3040

304S Thomas A. & Barbara J. Palacorolla: 50-43-44-14-01-002-3040

305A Richard B. Reading: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3050

305N Barbara A. Hussey: 50-43-44-14-01-001-3050

305S & 306S Andrea M. Weiss: 50-43-44-14-01-002-3050

306A Harriett Eckstein: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3060

306N Summers & Varga Family Trust & George E. Mueller, Jr. Trust & Julit
K. Muller Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-001-3060

307A Bittan Ninette Ricca: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3070

307N Jennifer Ruys Trust & Ted Sith Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-001-3070

307S & 308S Ladove Community Property Trust & Lawrence & Linda A.
Ladove Trust: 50-43-44-14-01-002-3070

308A Neal A. Schott: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3080

308N Amalfi Associates: 50-43-44-14-01-001-3080

309A Florence M. Faul: 50-43-44-14-01-003-3090

Townhouses

T 1 Susan S. Channing: 50-43-44-14-01-004-0010

T 2 Myles Family Trust & Laurie J. Goldhar Trust 50-43-44-14-01-004-0020

T 3 Peter Cromarty 50-43-44-14-01-004-0030

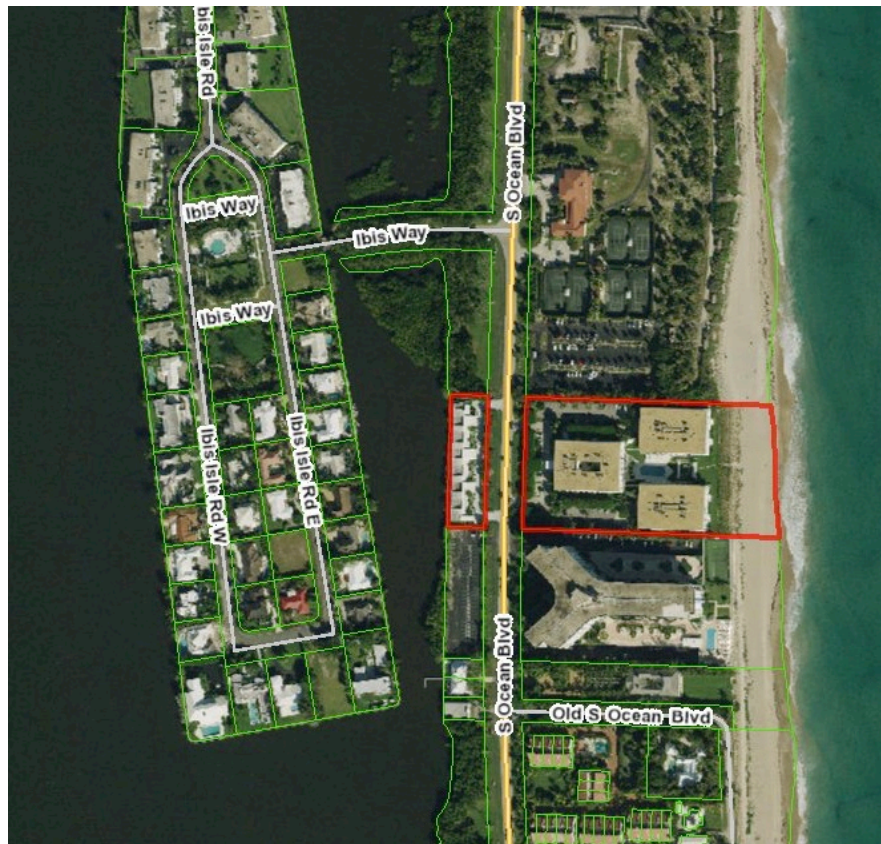
T 4 Joni C. Sherman & Alan J. Statman 50-43-44-14-01-004-0040

T 5 Miles A. Coon 50-43-44-14-01-004-0050

T 6 Candee Weitzman 50-43-44-14-01-004-0060

T 7 Mario F. Nievera 50-43-44-14-01-004-0070

II. Location Map



III. Architectural Information

The Reef Condominium, located at 2275 South Ocean Boulevard, was designed in the Modern architectural style by prominent Palm Beach architect Eugene Lawrence in 1972 and constructed by William Passalacqua Builders from 1972-1974. The Reef's design and site plan takes advantage of its location along the ocean and lake with three buildings positioned in a U-shape around a central swimming pool that leads to the ocean, and seven townhouses on the west side of South Ocean Boulevard along the Intracoastal Waterway.



The Modern architectural style originated at the beginning of the 20th century and became prominent after World War II. The style embraced the use of modern materials and building techniques, followed the principal that form should follow function, and was defined by clean lines, simple shapes and unornamented facades.

Lawrence's all white Modern design for The Reef's oceanfront buildings is characterized by its play of vertical and horizontal elements. Modern sloping buttresses rise toward the sky and are traversed by cantilevered horizontal balconies. The buttresses taper as they rise and meet the roofline with subtle curves. The buildings are constructed of steel and reinforced concrete surfaced with smooth stucco and flat roofs.



The three multi-unit buildings are known as the North Building, the South Building, and the center building is the Atrium Building. The Atrium Building features the main entrance, lobby and a central atrium with curvilinear planters and fountain. The main entrance features a large rectangular cantilevered entry overhang that is supported by rectangular posts. The overhang shelters stairs that lead to the lobby, and circular planters are located on each side of the stairs. A large opening with multiple fixed windows is centrally located on the west façade to provide light into the lobby.



Atrium Building & Main Entrance



Atrium

The lower level of the three buildings feature pool cabanas and storage areas and the condominium units are located on the upper three floors. As in many Modern architectural designs, the simplicity of The Reef's exterior accentuates the gracefulness of Lawrence's design with the sloping buttresses and cantilevered balconies being the principal design features of the structures. The exterior fenestration is primarily comprised of glass doors, some with accordion shutters, which provide access to the balconies with simple metal railings.



North Building and Pool



South Building & Pool

Across South Ocean Boulevard to the west are a series of seven townhouses. These units feature views to the west of the Intracoastal Waterway and Ibis Isle. Each townhouse features a garden and a carport on the east façade and terraces on the west façade. The townhouses are surfaced with stucco and horizontal siding. The roofs are angled and feature clerestory windows looking to the east.



Example of East Façade of a Townhouse Unit



Example of a Townhouse Unit Carport



Example of West Façade of a Townhouse Unit

The Reef Condominium Association and the condominium owners have recognized the importance of The Reef's design and have been working to preserve and maintain the property's significant architectural features. Over the years there have been alterations primarily to the interior of the units and to the windows and doors but the overall design of the exterior of the structures has been maintained and the property's historic and architectural integrity has been preserved.

IV. Historical Information

Prior to World War II, Palm Beach was most renowned as a resort town where the wealthy came to spend the winter season. There were grand estates built by some of the richest people in America as well as upper middle class neighborhoods, attractive commercial corridors and luxury hotels. Following the War, Palm Beach flourished and grew exponentially. A controversial zoning law passed by Town Council in 1947 led to dramatic growth in much of mid-town Palm Beach. Royal Park and Floral Park were two of the earliest subdivisions in Palm Beach where many of the oldest frame cottages and bungalows existed.¹ Prior to 1947, these subdivisions had mostly exclusive residential zone A classification. The new law changed much of the land in these subdivisions to zone C classification permitting hotels and apartments. At the same time, the Town Council raised the housing density in the stretch of land starting at Sloan's Curve and running south to Palm Beach's southern border, which included the land where The Reef was constructed. All of this rezoning created a building boom that endured for decades.

The first major building constructed south of Sloan's Curve in Palm Beach following the rezoning was The Ambassador Hotel built in 1947 by winter resident and Cleveland developer Charles Bernstein. The hotel was a success and became "a mecca for a discriminating clientele." Sander Weinstock, nephew of Charles Bernstein, purchased the Ambassador Hotel in 1953 and moved to Palm Beach. There was little development in the 1950s, however, the Phipps family was attracted to the South End for development and platted the Ibis Isles subdivision on the former Penner Island on the west side of South Ocean Boulevard. Town officials worked out a deal with the Phipps family that resulted in the town getting the land across South Ocean Boulevard for what today is Phipps Ocean Park.²

By the 1960s, many developers became attracted to this area south of Sloan's Curve, as it was mostly undeveloped ocean and lakefront land. Prior to the hurricane of 1947, State Road A1A (South Ocean Boulevard) was located along the ocean. However, the hurricane washed out the road so from Manalapan's Vanderbilt Curve to Palm Beach's Sloan's Curve, A1A was relocated toward the lake side. During this time there was also the addition of lakefront landfills

¹ In 1908, the Palm Beach Improvement Company platted and began developing a 168-acre tract from the lake

² Carlton Varney. "Ibis Isle has Colorful History and a Name Inspired by a Bird." Palm Beach Daily News, March 16, 2017.

on the west side of A1A creating greater buildable lots on both sides of the road. Developers began to see this great opportunity and began building condominium buildings along the ocean and lake south of Sloan's curve. By the end of the 1960s, nineteen condominiums had been constructed between Sloan's Curve and the Town of South Palm Beach.³ The Palm Beach Par Three Golf Course opened in 1961 and the increased development and population growth in the South End created the need for a third fire station which opened next to Phipps Park in 1964. Development was booming and during the 1970s twenty-one more condominiums were constructed between Sloan's Curve and the Town of South Palm Beach and fourteen more in the 1980s. In just three decades more than fifty condominiums were constructed along this three-and-one-half mile ocean to lake narrow strip, ever changing the South End Palm Beach landscape.

This fervor of development did not please everyone in Palm Beach. According to historian and journalist Augustus Mayhew, the Palm Beach establishment saw the town as an enclave for the few while developers saw Palm Beach as a metropolis for the many. With a change in its members, the 1970 Town Council tightened building codes and zoning restrictions to reduce the town's population density.⁴ By March 1970, the town had curbed high rises, setting a five-story limit on apartments and three-story commercial usage.⁵

These limits did not deter developers in the South End of Palm Beach. In April of 1972, Sanders Weinstock, one of the Town's biggest developers, purchased an oceanfront property with 345 feet of beachfront from Michael Susik and Herbert Theile for approximately \$640,000 with intentions to build The Reef Condominium. Weinstock organized the Palm Beach Reef Development Company, Inc. with David R. Jacobson as President, himself as Vice-President and Elsie Rose as secretary. He also hired prominent architect Eugene Lawrence to design the Reef's three 3-story buildings on his oceanfront

³ Nine of these condominiums were built on Ibis Isle in the late 1960s. They are low-rise condominiums developed as the French Villas each with a French name.

⁴ Augustus Mayhew, "High-rise Palm Beach: Changes in Altitude." Palm Beach Daily News, January 20, 2019.

⁵ Ibid. In response to the decades of high-rise residential and commercial development, the Town's 1969 and 1970 council elections proved revolutionary. While it had always been considered impolite to challenge incumbents, George Matthews won a council seat opposing nine-time Councilman John Cushman. The following year, Robert Grace and "Deedy" Matrix were elected. Their incumbent opponents had appeared lax in protecting the town against over development. Matthews, Grace and Matrix kept their pledge to scale Palm Beach back to sea level.

property. William Passalaqua Builders of Cleveland and Pompano Beach were hired as the contractors for the project.

The first building permit taken out for the project dated August 17, 1972 was for construction of an ocean bulkhead. One month later, on September 27, 1972, Building Permit # 98772 was taken out by William Passalaqua Builders to construct a multi-family complex of buildings with three separate buildings each three-stories high with 24 units in each of the two east buildings and 26 units in the west building known as the Atrium Building. The Reef Condominium complex was to be built in a U-shape with a swimming pool in the middle with stairs leading to the ocean beach. The approximate cost of the project was listed as \$3,100,000. The land purchased for The Reef condominium project included property across the street on the west side of South Ocean Boulevard fronting Lake Worth (Intracoastal Waterway). In October of 1972, William Passalacqua Builders took out a permit for seven townhouse units on this west property with Eugene Lawrence as the architect. The estimated cost was \$240,000. With the permits in place, site work and construction commenced on The Reef before the end of 1972.



Gene Lawrence During Construction of the Reef

Real estate advertisements for The Reef listed the property as a prestigious luxury condominium with the most modern style and amenities. The units were large and the density was significantly less than allowed by the zoning code. Architecturally the buildings were stunning modern designs with cantilevered

balconies and pristine ocean views that attracted discerning clientele. Lawrence was a hands-on architect who visited the site often to check on its progress. Construction stayed on target and Certificates of Approval and Occupancy were issued by the Town's Building Inspection Department in July and August of 1974.⁶

From the time The Reef was constructed to the present day it has been one of the most fashionable apartment buildings along Palm Beach's South Ocean Boulevard. According to resident and fashion designer Steven Stolman, "Ever since The Reef welcomed its first owners in 1974, it's attracted an eclectic crowd. Only a handful of original owners remain along with a good amount of 'legacy owners' – the children and grandchildren of original 'Reefers.' But a snapshot of The Reef's four and a half decades also reads like a Who's Who of artsy achievers and even a few boldfaced names."⁷ When asked what is it about this discreet cluster of low lying buildings that have historically attracted such a smart crowd, interior designer and resident Simon Doonan responded, "The Reef is a paradox. Homey and welcoming, but also reeking of style and glamour." The Reef's board president Bram Majtlis added, "It is just so architecturally appealing and magnificently preserved." Due to its exceptional modern architectural design along with initiatives to preserve and protect the buildings, The Reef continues to attract an eclectic and cultured group of owners.

V. Architect Biography

Clifford Eugene "Gene" Lawrence, Jr.

Clifford Eugene "Gene" Lawrence, Jr. was a talented, acclaimed and prolific Palm Beach architect with many premier residential and commercial buildings spanning the time period from the 1960s to 2013.

A native of North Florida, Gene Lawrence graduated cum laude from the University of Florida's College of Architecture and Fine Arts in 1957 and then

⁶ The center west building known as the Atrium Building received its Certificate of Approval and Occupancy July 19, 1974, followed by the south building on August 9, 1974 and the north building on August 12, 1974.

⁷ According to the article, the Who's Who of artsy achievers and boldfaced names included actress Stockard Channing, landscape architect Mario Nievara, fashionistas Ninette Ricca and Richard Lambertson, Broadway press agent Peter Cromarty, Esquire magazine alum Stephen Jacoby, ad execs Tom Shaffer and Barry Lowenthal and socialite Sharon Bush.

served in the Navy's Civil Engineering Corps before coming to Palm Beach.⁸ After moving to Palm Beach he worked with various architectural and engineering firms in Florida before opening his private practice, The Lawrence Group Architects, in 1965 in an office at 205 Worth Avenue. He continued working in that building for 47 years until his retirement in 2013.

In Palm Beach, Gene Lawrence served on the Architectural Review Commission, the Planning and Zoning Commission and the Code Enforcement Board using his expertise in architecture and construction for a total of 36 years. He also volunteered as a director of the Palm Beach Civic Association and as a board member of the Palm Beach Chamber of Commerce. He was also very involved as a President, Board Member and Foundation Board Member of the Graham Eckes Palm Beach Academy.

Thousands of condominium homes in Palm Beach are in buildings designed by Lawrence. In addition to The Reef, his work includes the residential buildings at Sloan's Curve, the Sun and Surf, L'Ermitage of Palm Beach, Parc Regent, Sutton Place, Ambassador South, The Cove, The Regency of Palm Beach, Il Lugano and the Bellaria. Lawrence's firm also redesigned the Palm Beach Biltmore as part of the former hotel's conversion into luxury condominiums.⁹

Lawrence as well designed many prominent Palm Beach commercial buildings, including 150 Worth Avenue (The Esplanade), Neiman Marcus, Salvatore Ferragamo, Cartier, Trillion, Café L'Europe and the Palm Beach Park Centre office building at 440 Royal Palm Way. The spring 2013 issue of Worth Avenue magazine named Lawrence among the eight most important designers in the Town's history.¹⁰

Much of Lawrence's work is contemporary, but in a 2013 interview he stated he was never a "signature architect" with a single definitive style. Instead, he said his approach was to have the building fit the owner and what the situation dictates, and that has meant that he worked in many styles, including Mediterranean Revival, Modern and British Colonial.¹¹ Accepting challenging

⁸ Lawrence enlisted in the Navy to serve in the Officer's Candidate school. In 1958 he was assigned to the Navy's civil engineering corps as an assistant officer in charge of construction. In this position he worked in several Southeast Asian countries like Vietnam, Laos, Thailand and Cambodia.

⁹ William Kelly. "Longtime architect retires: Lawrence shaped look of island." Palm Beach Daily News, April 7, 2013.

¹⁰ Ibid

¹¹ Ibid

jobs and taking risks earned The Lawrence Group a reputation of innovative designers.

Lawrence worked in Palm Beach during a major growth spurt in the town. His firm expanded seven times in the first three years and at one time more than 40 staff members worked in Palm Beach and satellite offices in Miami and Stuart. Lawrence's projects exceeded several billion dollars and reached as far as Mexico, California, New Jersey, North Carolina, New Mexico and Puerto Rico. He later decided to downsize and narrow his focus to Palm Beach. Palm Beach Daily News and Palm Beach Post articles described how Lawrence shaped the look of the Island and made Palm Beach a better place through his architectural designs, preservation projects and as volunteer on Town boards, while always being the epitome of a Southern gentleman. Eugene Lawrence passed away on November 2, 2013 at the age of 79.

A Letter to the Editor of the Palm Beach Daily News titled "Architect Leaves Inspiring Legacy" from Lewis Katz published November 10, 2013 speaks to Lawrence's character, dedication to architecture and his relationship to The Reef:

"At Wednesday's celebration of Gene Lawrence's life and achievements, Mayor Gail Coniglio astutely noted that Gene will be missed not only by his friends who knew him well, but also by those who met Gene just a few times in their lives.

I am part of the latter group since I met Gene only once, shortly before his passing.

This past September, I invited Gene to The Reef condominium, one of the many buildings he designed in Palm Beach, to get his opinion on a renovation project. Gene came along with his wife, Linda, even though he wasn't feeling his best. However, he was pleased to help the board of The Reef and said that he had a special feeling for our building.

A couple of weeks later, Gene called and told me he had a proposal to present and we set a meeting for October 24th. The day before the meeting his wife called to let me know her husband had been admitted to the hospital so he, unfortunately, wouldn't be able to make our meeting. On Wednesday, right after Gene's memorial ceremony, Linda made sure she found me before greeting many of those who came to pay their respects. She was hugging a yellow manila folder containing Gene's proposal: she gave it to me and said, "this is his last work." And then gave me a hug.

Thank you Gene for your dedication to The Reef in your last few weeks when you were ailing and thanks to you Linda for delivering his proposal. I am very grateful and feel privileged to have met you both. People like you make our town great.”

VI. Statement of Significance

The Reef condominium and townhouses are distinctive for their novel Modern architecture designed by prominent Palm Beach architect Eugene Lawrence. The buildings are also significant as representing the vast development of Palm Beach’s South End but standing out as a luxury condominium community that attracts eclectic and cultured owners who appreciate the authentic design and preservation of the buildings.

VII. Criteria for Designation

Section 54-161 of the Town of Palm Beach Landmarks Preservation Ordinance outlines the criteria for designation of a landmark or landmark site and suggests that at least one criterion must be met to justify the designation. Listed below are criteria, which relate to this property and justification for designation:

(1) “Exemplifies or reflects the broad cultural, political, economic or social history of the nation, state, county or town.”

The Reef was built during the immense growth of Palm Beach’s South End starting at Sloan’s Curve and running three-and-a-half miles to the north border of the Town of South Palm Beach. From 1960 – 1990 more than fifty condominiums were built in this stretch between the ocean and the lake. The Reef condominium and townhouses are a luxury development established by Sander Weinstock and due to the high-quality ocean and lake view units, low density, and superb architecture it continues to attract diverse and cultured owners.

(3) “Embodies distinguishing characteristics of an architectural type or is a specimen inherently valuable for the study of a period, style, method of construction or use of indigenous materials or craftsmanship.”

The Reef embodies distinguishing characteristics of the Modern architectural style as interpreted by prominent Palm Beach architect Eugene Lawrence. The elegant Modern design features clean lines, simple shapes, and unornamented facades. The Reef’s angled sloping building supports and cantilevered

balconies embrace the use of modern materials and building techniques in a design that pursues the Modern architecture principal of “form follows function”.

(4) “Is representative of the notable work of a master builder, designer or architect whose individual ability has been recognized or has influenced his age.”

The Reef is an excellent representation of design work of Eugene Lawrence. Lawrence was a very important and prolific architect in Palm Beach from the 1960s through 2013. He designed many condominium buildings in the South End and Midtown Palm Beach that have stood the test of time and are sought after dwellings. His designs were innovative and provided the most modern designs and conveniences for the time. The Reef was known to be one of his favorite designs.

VIII. Selected Bibliography

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