215 Mediterranean Road



DESIGNATION REPORT April 20, 2022 Landmark Preservation Commission Palm Beach, Florida

DESIGNATION REPORT

215 Mediterranean Road

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I. General Information

Location: 215 Mediterranean Road

Palm Beach, Florida

Date of Construction: 1950

First Owner: Russell Conwell Downes

Architect: Emily and Harold Obst

Present Owner: Tatiana Van Zandt

Present Use: Residential

Present Zoning: RB

Palm Beach County

Tax Folio Number: 50-43-42-34-02-000-1020

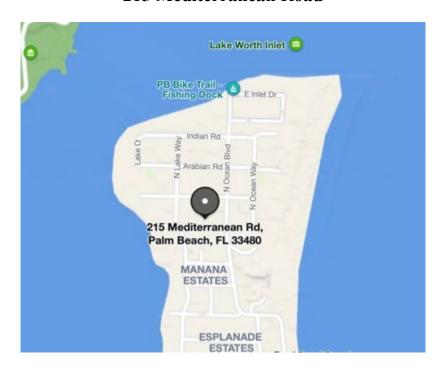
Current Legal Description: Lot 102 of Boca Ratone Company's Inlet

Subdivision, according to the Plat thereof as recorded in Plat Book 12, Page 15, Public Records

of Palm Beach County, Florida.

II. Location Map

215 Mediterranean Road





III. Architectural Information

The residence at 215 Mediterranean Road, located on the north side of Mediterranean Road between North Ocean Boulevard and North Lake Way, was designed in the Mid-Century Modern style by Emily and Harold Obst, longtime prominent Palm Beach architects. The Obst's were commissioned to design the single-family residence in the far north end of Palm Beach for Russell Conwell Downes and Maybelle Downes in 1950.¹



South Façade, Looking Northeast

215 Mediterranean Road is a very good example of the Mid-Century Modern style of architecture. Mid-century Modern architecture designed during the Post-World War II Era was a by-product of post-war optimism and the nation's dedication to building a new future. With the desire to forget the pains of the Great Depression and World War II, architects and designers were breaking away from the period styles that had been popular before the war and were adapting various modernist movements to create new designs. This new architecture often used modern materials and building techniques and was defined by clean lines, simple shapes, and unornamented facades. It was a further development of Frank Lloyd Wright's principles of organic architecture combined with many elements reflected in the International and Bauhaus movements. Mid-Century Modern residential architecture generally features geometric forms and asymmetrical compositions, low-pitched gable or flat roofs with overhanging eaves, facades surfaced with smooth stucco or wood siding with minimal ornamentation.

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¹ Town of Palm Beach Building permit #17050 dated May 24, 1950.

215 Mediterranean Road is a one-story residence with asymmetrical massing and fenestration. The house was constructed of wood framing and is surfaced with horizontal wood siding and slump brick accents. The home has a strong sense of horizontality, which is a characteristic of Mid-Century Modern architecture. The horizontality of the home is highlighted by the home's multiple flat roofs with wide overhanging eaves that overlap each other, horizontal wood siding and brick features. Brick is used in several areas of the home including the lower portion of the eastern section of the main façade, the columns of the carport and the chimney. The brick is in a stacked pattern which emphasizes the home's horizontality.

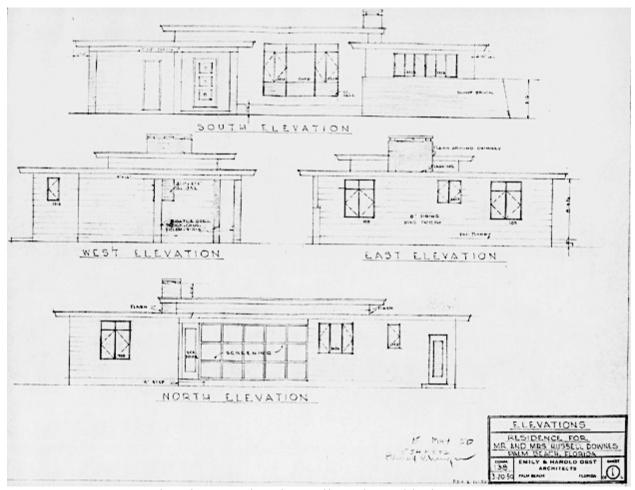
The main façade of the residence faces south toward Mediterranean Road and features three sections, each with a flat roof with wide overhanging eaves. The center section is slightly recessed and taller than those to the east and west. The roof line of the western section, which includes a carport supported with brick columns, extends in front of a portion of the center section creating a sheltered entrance porch which is screened. To the east of the entrance porch, within the center section, is a bay window. The eastern section features slump brick in a stacked pattern below a set of three single light casement windows. A wide central brick chimney, located at the junction of the center and eastern sections of the home, is topped by flat concrete chimney cap. A circular driveway is located off Mediterranean Road and mature vegetation borders the property.



South Façade, Looking Northwest

A review of the Town's building permits indicates that there have been only minimal exterior alterations to the residence since it was constructed which

included roof repairs, window changes and a reduction in the depth of the carport due to enclosing the northern portion of it.² The residence at 215 Mediterranean Road maintains its architectural and historical significance and the integrity of Emily and Harold Obst's 1950 modern design.



Elevation Drawings by Emily and Harold Obst, 1950

IV. Historical Information

The residence at 215 Mediterranean Road is located at the far north end of the island of Palm Beach in the Boca Ratone Company's Inlet Subdivision. The Inlet Subdivision was platted in 1925 during the Town's first building boom, the 1920's Boom Time Era. The subdivision included Mediterranean Road, Caribbean Road, Arabian Road, and Indian Road and extended from the Ocean to the east side of

² Town of Palm Beach Building Permits records from 1950-2021. The bay window on the main façade is not shown on the original drawings but no permits were issued for the construction of this window. A drawing on file with the Town from 1993 shows the bay window as existing, but its date of construction is unknown.

North Lake Way.³ The Boca Ratone Company was one of the Phipps' family development companies and the plat was signed by H.C. Bartholomew as vice-president of the company. While the Inlet Subdivision was platted in 1925 and lots were advertised, the only residence constructed in the subdivision during the 1920's was for H.C. Bartholomew.⁴ It wasn't until the second half of the 1930s that the area began to see more residences constructed and not until the post-World War II period that the Inlet Subdivision's full residential potential was realized.

The Second World War and its aftermath brought significant changes to Palm Beach. During the War the Army stationed tens of thousands of troops in and around Palm Beach County. The undeveloped northern tip of Palm Beach, just northeast of the Inlet Subdivision, was used as a camp by the U.S. Army Rangers to host approximately 200 service members who were there for rest and relaxation.⁵ The halt to nonessential construction during World War II meant there was very little new construction in town during the war years. However, following the end of the war Florida had explosive economic and demographic growth.

During the post-World War II Era, the country began to recover and move to a peacetime economy. The lifting of wartime restrictions and an increasing supply of materials accelerated Florida's post-war economy with new construction, and this became the second big building boom in Palm Beach.⁶ Thousands of soldiers who came to Florida during the war decided to return to live afterwards. In addition, as in previous years, retirees were moving to Florida for the climate, but the number increased as air-conditioning began to be used in residences during the 1950s. The homes being constructed during the post-World War II Era were generally more modest in scale than those of the 1920's Boom Time Era and the residential development in Palm Beach extended northward, producing a surge in single-family residential development on the north end of the island. The residence at 215 Mediterranean Road is representative of the significant growth in the far north end of Palm Beach during this period and of the development of the Inlet Subdivision.

As development in Palm Beach increased during the post-World War II period, the architectural styles of structures were also changing, with a shift away from the

³ In 1936 the Boca Ratone Company platted the Lake Front Addition to the Boca Ratone Company's Inlet Subdivision which included the land to the west of the original Inlet Subdivision to Lake Worth.

⁴ 1510 North Ocean Boulevard was built in 1925 at the corner of North Ocean Boulevard and Mediterranean Road for H.C. Bartholomew by his brother Gene Bartholomew.

⁵ Environmental Services, Inc. <u>Town of Palm Beach Historic Site Survey</u>, 2020.

⁶ Augustus Mayhew. <u>Palm Beach: A Greater Grandeur.</u>

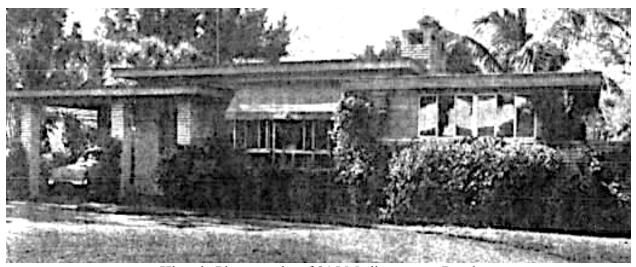
period styles of the 1920's and 1930's to new modern styles. During the post-World War II period, modern architectural styles were popular for residential and commercial architecture throughout the United States, and Palm Beach was no exception. The residence at 215 Mediterranean Road is significant as an example of the modern architectural movement during the post-World War II era in Palm Beach.

The Mid-Century Modern residence at 215 Mediterranean Road was designed by prominent Palm Beach modern architects Emily and Harold Obst. The Obst's met at Columbia University where they received their Master of Architecture degrees. They married in 1943 and moved to the Palm Beach area in 1946 when Harold received a job with architect Byron Simonson to prepare drawings for the Colony Hotel. In 1948, both Emily and Harold received their architectural licenses and founded their own firm, Emily and Harold Obst, Architects. Over the forty years they were in practice the Obst's, who were known for their Modern designs, designed many public buildings, commercial buildings, and residences, including several Mid-Century Modern style residences in Palm Beach. During the 1950's and 60's, they were one of the few married architectural teams in the southeastern United States and Emily was one of the only female architects in the Palm Beach area.⁸

Emily and Harold Obst were commissioned to design the residence at 215 Mediterranean Road in 1950 for Russell Conwell Downes and Maybelle Downes. The Downes' were originally from New York. Russell Downes was the founder of the Salon of Music on Worth Avenue which operated from the late 1930's to the early 1950's and specialized in custom built radio-phonograph systems. In 1951, he became the manager of the Morgan Music Company's Steinway-Hammond Organ Showroom in West Palm Beach. Maybelle Downes had worked in field of commercial art and was active in the Palm Beach arts community. Prior to building the residence on Mediterranean, the Downes lived on Seaspray Avenue. The *Palm Beach Post-Times* featured the residence at 215 Mediterranean Road in an August 17, 1958, article titled "Modern Art Predominates in this Home". The article described the Downes' modern style residence and featured photographs of its modern architectural design, interior design details, and artwork created by their daughter, Marilyn Downes Bennett.

⁷ Harold Obst received a Master of Architecture degree in 1941 and Emily received a Master of Architecture degree in 1944 both from Columbia University.

⁸ <u>Palm Beach Daily News</u>, Memorial Service – Emily V. Obst, November 28, 2015, and <u>Palm Beach Post</u>, "Obst Team Equals Twenty Years of Fine Architecture", April 21, 1968.



Historic Photographs of 215 Mediterranean Road From the Palm Beach Post-Times, August 17, 1958

Russell Downes passed away in 1973, and Maybelle Downes continued to own the property until 1981 when she transferred it to her children, Russell C. Downes, Jr. and Marilyn Downes Bennett. The home was in the Downes' family for thirty-six years until it was sold in 1986 to Richard R. Limehouse, who owned the residence for almost twenty years. In 2005, Tatiana Van Zandt purchased the property and has been a very good steward of the residence.

A March 6, 2011, article by Augustus Mayhew in the *Palm Beach Daily News* titled "Unforgettable Palm Beach: Modernist buildings among town's most endangered cultural resources" he speaks of the modern movement during the post-World War II period and the loss of many of these structures since the 1980s. In it he states,

"For more than three decades, Modernism prevailed as Palm Beach's post-World War II paradigm of style...Considering the town's more welcome appreciation for contextual new construction and spec builder's passion for the curb appeal of colossal French-styled chataeus and high-volume Palladian-modeled villas, several hundred of the town's residential midcentury houses have been demolished, leaving its Modernist architectural tradition fragmented, and thus more predominantly evident among its commercial and condominium buildings... Palm Beach's Modernist buildings are among the town's most endangered and devalued cultural resources."

The residence at 215 Mediterranean Road is representative of the modern style residences built during the post-World War II period in Palm Beach, many of which have been lost to new construction.

V. Architect Biography

Emily and Harold Obst

Harold Anthony Obst, known as Hal, was born in Brooklyn, New York, in 1917. He received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Columbia College before attending Columbia University for his Master of Architecture degree which he received in 1941. While pursuing his master's degree, he met his wife and future partner in architecture, Emily Turk and they married in 1943. Emily Virginia Turk was born in Norfolk, Virginia in 1918. She received a Bachelor of Arts degree from Barnard College and then attended Columbia University and received a Master of Architecture degree in 1944.

Harold served as an officer in the U.S. Navy during World War II on a minesweeper in the South Pacific and was Executive Officer of the USS Prowess. After his naval service he returned to New York and was a designer and draftsman for the architectural firm of Webster and Edelbaum from 1945-1946. After Emily graduated, she worked for the Navy's Bureau of Yards and Docks and the architectural firm of Kahn and Jacobs in New York. In 1946, the Obst's moved to the Palm Beach area when Harold was selected for a position with architect Byron Simonson of Simonson and Holley to prepare drawings for the Colony Hotel. In 1948, both Emily and Harold received their architectural licenses and founded the architectural firm, Emily and Harold Obst, Architects, in Palm Beach. Later the name of the firm changed to Obst Associates, Architects and Planners.

The Obst's architectural firm prospered in the Palm Beach area and was known for their modern designs. During the forty years they were in practice the Obst's designed many public buildings, commercial buildings, and residences - including several Mid-Century Modern style residences in the north end of Palm Beach. During the 1950's and 60's, they were one of the few married architectural teams in the southeastern United States and Emily was one of the only female architects in the Palm Beach area. In a 1984 article in the Palm Beach Post, she noted that when she started it was difficult as a woman to become a member of the Palm Beach chapter of the American Institute of Architects. She later was elected

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⁹ <u>Palm Beach Daily News</u>, Memorial Service – Emily V. Obst, November 28, 2015, and <u>Palm Beach Post</u>, "Obst Team Equals Twenty Years of Fine Architecture", April 21, 1968.

president of the chapter in 1976.¹⁰ Emily Obst's modern architectural style was discussed in a letter she wrote to Bud Harvey which he published in his column "Stuff and Nonsense" in the *Palm Beach Post* on August 9, 1946. In the letter she discussed her thoughts on modern architecture versus revival styles and period architecture. She wrote,

"Most of our architects under 45 years of age attended modern architectural schools where they have been taught by masters in the field of contemporary design. (I know-for in the four years that I spent in architectural school, not one project designed by any student which bore the slightest taste of eclecticism or "copy-book" architecture, was given a passing grade by the faculty jury!). Our architects have learned that Function should determine Form, and not nostalgic whim of a client for the glory that was Greece or the grandeur that was Rome."

Both Emily and Harold were very active in community affairs. Emily served as the president of the Palm Beach Chapter of the American Institute of Architects (AIA), a director of the Florida-Caribbean Association of the AIA, a member and chair of the Lake Clarke Shores Planning Board, a member and chair of the Palm Beach County Land Use Advisory Board, a gubernatorial appointed member of the Board of Architects of the Florida Division of Hotels and Restaurants, a member and chair of the Episcopal Diocese of South Florida Commission on Architecture, a member and president of the American Lung Association of Southeast Florida, a member and executive committee member of the Board of the Florida Lung Association, chair of the WHRS television and radio station Citizens Advisory Board (now WXEL), and a juror of the National Council of Architectural Registration Boards. Emily received the Hillard T. Smith Medal and commendation by the AIA for community service.¹¹

Harold remained in the Naval Reserve and was recalled to active duty during the Korean War. He served as Executive Officer of the destroyer USS Melvin which was deployed in the Mediterranean and North Atlantic. He then transferred to the Civil Engineering Corps and was the Commanding Officer of a local Seebee unit. He was an active member, president and director of the Navy League, Palm Beach Council, a member of the West Palm Beach Junior Chamber of Commerce and chair of Capital Improvements of the senior chamber, member and president of the Historical Society of Palm Beach County, member of the Palm Beach Chapter of

¹⁰ Palm Beach Post, "Business Women Say Times Changing for the Better", March 7, 1984.

¹¹ Emily V. Obst Obituary, Palm Beach Post, April 26, 2015.

the AIA and president and director of the AIA Florida-Caribbean Region, and a member of the Rotary Club of the Palm Beaches.¹²

Harold and Emily joined their practice with architect Jeffrey Smith in 1985 with Smith becoming president and the firm was renamed Smith-Obst. The Obst's retired shortly afterward. Harold Obst passed away in November 2007 and Emily Obst passed away in April 2015.

VI. Statement of Significance

215 Mediterranean Road is significant as a very good example of the Mid-Century Modern style of architecture in Palm Beach's far north end. Designed by the architectural firm of Emily and Harold Obst who were known for their modern designs and built during the post-World War II building boom, the residence is also representative of the changing architectural trends and development history of Palm Beach.

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 the 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 residence located at 215 Mediterranean Road was constructed in 1950 during the post-World War II era which was the second large building boom in Palm Beach. Palm Beach's north end including the Boca Ratone Company's Inlet Subdivision received a surge in single-family residential development. 215 Mediterranean Road was part of this significant growth at the far north end of the island. In addition, the residence is a very good example of the modern architectural trend that became popular during the post-World War II period.

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¹² Harold Anthony Obst Obituary, <u>Palm Beach Post</u>, November 11, 2007.

(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."

215 Mediterranean Road is a very good example of the Mid-Century Modern style of architecture. Mid-century Modern architecture was a by-product of the post-World War II optimism and the nation's dedication to building a new future. With the desire to forget the pains of the Great Depression and World War II, architects and designers were breaking away from the past. This new architecture was defined by clean lines, simple shapes, and unornamented facades. Mid-Century Modern features of this house include its asymmetrical compositions, horizontality, overlapping flat roofs with wide overhangs, use of natural materials and minimal ornamentation.

(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 residence at 215 Mediterranean Road is a very good representation of the notable work of architects Emily and Harold Obst. Over the forty years they were in practice, the Obst's designed more than a thousand public buildings, commercial buildings, and residences, including several Mid-Century Modern style residences in the north end of Palm Beach. During the post-World War II Era, the Obst's were one of the few married architectural teams in the southeastern United States and Emily Obst was one of the only female architects to practice in Palm Beach.

VIII. Selected Bibliography

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IX. Florida Master Site File Form

Page 1

○ Original
 □ Update



HISTORICAL STRUCTURE FORM FLORIDA MASTER SITE FILE Version 5.0 3/19

Site#8 PB18674
Field Date 11-7-2019
Form Date 8-1-2020
Recorder # MAD

Sheded Fields represent the minimum acceptable level of documentation. Consult the Guido to Historical Structure Forms for detailed instructions. Site Name(s) (address if none) 215 Mediterranean Road Multiple Listing (DHR of Survey Project Name Palm Beach Historical Site Survey Survey # (DHR only)	
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Cross Streets (nearest / between)	
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Current Use Private Residence (House/Cottage/Ca From (year): 1950 To (year): 2020	
Other Use From (year): To (year):	
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Additions: yes no	
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Ownership History (especially original owner, dates, profession, etc.) VAN ZANDT TATIANA Is the Resource Affected by a Local Preservation Ordinance? DESCRIPTION Clear Style Mid-Century Modern	brick
Ownership History (especially original owner, dates, protession, etc.) VAN ZANDT TATIANA Is the Resource Affected by a Local Preservation Ordinance? yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes yes y	brick
Ownership History (especially original owner, dates, profession, etc.) VAN ZANDT TATIANA Is the Resource Affected by a Local Preservation Ordinance? yes Xino unknown Describe DESCRIPTION Describe	brick

HRSE048R0319, effective 05/2018 Rule 1A-46.001, F.A.C. Florida Master Site File / Div. of Historical Resources / R. A. Gray Bidg / 500 S Bronough St., Tallahassee, FL 32309-0250 Phone 850.245.6440 / Fax 850.245.6430 / E-mail Site/File@dos.myflorida.com

HISTORICAL STRUCTURE FORM Site #8 PB18674

	DESCRIPTI	ON (continued)	Clear Description Values					
Chimney: No. 1 Chimney Material(s): 1.		2.						
Structural System(s): 1. Wood frame	2							
Foundation Type(s): 1. 81ab	2		Note: you may use the last box in each field to type in					
Foundation Material(s): 1. Poured Cond	crete Footing 2.		an answer that does not appear in the list provided					
Main Enfrance (styletic details)	shol							
off center multi panel door u	nder main roor sner	ter						
Providence of the second secon								
Porch Descriptions (types, locations, most types, etc.) off center screen enclosed porch, attached to carport shelter, brick supports,								
off Center screen enclosed porch, account to carpore summer, street september,								
Condition (overall resource condition): excellent Signature Signature								
Namative Description of Resource This 1950 Mid-Century Modern building is in good condition.								
This 1950 Mid-Cuinculy modern .	building is in your	condition.						
Archaeological Remains			Check if Archaeological Form Completed					
R	ESEARCH METHO	ODS (select all that apply)						
☑FMSF record search (sites/surveys) ☐FL State Archives/photo collection	□library research	☐building permits ☐occupant/owner interview	⊠Sanborn maps ⊠plat maps					
☐FL State Archives/photo collection ☐property appraiser / tax records	□ city directory □ newspaper files	☐ neighbor interview	⊠plat maps □Public Lands Survey (DEP)					
©cultural resource survey (CRAS)	☑ historic photos	☐ interior inspection	☐HABS/HAER record search					
Cother methods (describe) City Staff		Linking top						
Bibliographic References (give FMSF manuscrip	ut# If relevant, use continuation she	et if needed)						
Ol	PINION OF RESOU	RCE SIGNIFICANCE	Clear Significance Values					
Appears to meet the criteria for National Rec	cistor listing individually?	yesno ⊠insuffici	dent information					
Appears to meet the criteria for National Reg			dent Information					
Explanation of Evaluation (required, whether sig								
This building may meet criter	ria for individual 1	listing, but more research						
would be needed to determine	individual eligibil	lity. It does meet criter						
architectural features and as			· · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · · ·					
Area(s) of Historical Significance (see National 1. Community planning & develop	/Register Bulletin 15, p. 8 for catego	ules: e.g. farchitecture*, fethnic nentage*, rco	ummunity planning & development ^a , etc.)					
2. Local	<u>m</u> 3	5 6.						
£, snows	- Toota m							
		NTATION	Clear Documentation Values					
Accessible Documentation Not Filed with the Site File - including field notes, analysis notes, photos, plans and other important documents								
4) Document type Maintaining organization								
Document description		File or accession #'s						
2) Document type		Maintaining organization File or accession #'s						
* Document description								
	RECORDER IN	NFORMATION						
Recorder Name _Patricia Davenport	t-Jacobs	Affiliation Environmental Services, Inc						
Recorder Contact Information 7220 Financial Way, Suite 100, Jacksonville, FL 32256/9044702200/pdavenporte								
(address / phone / fax / e-mail)								
	S 7.5' MAP WITH STRU	UCTURE LOCATION CLEAR	LY INDICATED					
Required								
	TO OF MAIN FACADE,							
		be included in digital <u>AND</u> hard copy	ou format (chia conse amorada propotable).					
		n v 1000 pivols 24 bit color inon or t						