

## Biscayne Boulevard Boomed in the 1950s

Written by Paul S. George, BT Contributor  
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### A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



s noted in June's "Picture Story," Biscayne Boulevard is booming, especially in Miami's Upper Eastside, with revitalized motels, new restaurants, markets, and other businesses.

Contributing to the sharp upswing in its fortunes has been the presence of several nearby historic districts, including the MiMo/Biscayne Historic District and the investments streaming into it. Established in 2006, the MiMo Historic District brackets the Boulevard from NE 50th Street to NE 77th Street.

The historic district of today resulted from the sharp post-World War II rise in prosperity and the proliferation of cars. These developments prompted a shift in focus, away from the commercial and retail properties along the Boulevard toward new tourist motels that would line a main entryway into Miami. The district contained more than 20 motels from the late-1940s through the mid-1950s.

The evolving style for many of those new motels was branded Miami Modern or MiMo, a term coined by South Floridians Randall Robinson and Teri D'Amico, to describe the architecture that flourished throughout the area and in other parts of the country for some 20 years after World War II.

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Elements of this style, reflective of a booming national economy and a rising optimism following nearly two decades of economic depression and war, include futuristic designs, Space Age imagery, neon, pylons, metal grilles, brise-soleils, decorative railings, walls of glass, cantilever, striking masonry sculptures, cheese holes, boomerangs, textured surfaces, and other elements.

Among the district's buildings that best represent the MiMo style is the Vagabond Hotel (its current owner calls the Vagabond a hotel "because it has more amenities than a motel, like a pool") at 7301 Biscayne Blvd. Designed in 1953 by architect Robert Swartburg, whose other works include the Delano Hotel and the original Miami Beach Convention Center, the 45-room Vagabond, as Randall Robinson has noted, includes a star-spangled pylon, sea nymphs, and a triple Venus on the half shell flanked by dolphins. After an early period of success, the Vagabond, reflecting the sharp decline of the Boulevard, fell on hard times.

Its demolition was a real prospect before its purchase in 2012 by Avra Jain, who has restored many historic properties. After expenditures of \$6 million, the hotel reopened in 2014 and is considered one of the most important elements of a historic district that has gained worldwide renown.

*Paul George is historian at HistoryMiami Museum. To order a copy of this photo, contact HistoryMiami archives manager Ashley Trujillo at 305-375-1623, [atrujillo@historymiami.org](mailto:atrujillo@historymiami.org).*

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)