

The Flamingo, Luxury Resort on the Bay

Written by Paul S. George, BT Contributor
October 2018

A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami



The future Miami Beach was an unnamed barrier island bereft of people in the early 1900s, when Carl Fisher, a brash millionaire from Indianapolis, set his sights on it.

Fisher acquired large swaths of land on both sides of the island, then a veritable jungle, from John Collins, who owned most of the future Miami Beach. Fisher's holdings correspond to a portion of today's South Beach, and beyond.

Soon Fisher began to "carve a city from a jungle." He envisioned a rich resort community, as well as one with a substantial year-round population. He anointed the bay side of the island as the venue for hotels and athletic fields, while the ocean side would be the preserve of wealthy. To link the east and west portions of the island, Fisher planned a grand promenade, to be called Lincoln Road, along which would stand expensive stores and other amenities.

Fisher's vision for the Biscayne Bay side of his holdings got under way with the construction in 1920 of the magnificent Flamingo Hotel overlooking Biscayne Bay on Bay Road near 15th Street. The island's first "totally planned resort hotel," the Flamingo would rise to 11 stories, positioning it as the fledgling community's tallest building. The hostelry was topped with a glass dome illuminated at night in red, green, and gold. The Flamingo contained 200 rooms and cost nearly \$2 million to build.

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The hotel also offered a yacht anchorage, Oriental tea garden, tennis courts, luxurious private cottages, shops, a men's club, broker's office, and barns for 40 Guernsey cows who supplied guests with fresh milk.

Fisher chose the name "Flamingo" while on a cruise to Andros Island in the Bahamas after seeing a pink cloud of flamingos above him. So taken was he with their beauty that he decided to name his hotel for them. In the next installment of "Picture Story" we'll discuss the Flamingo's opening and the years that followed.

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