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Designing Destinations:
Hotel Architecture, Urbanism, and American Tourism in Puerto Rico and Cuba

BY

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THESIS

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SUMMARY

This study examines hotel design—from interior furnishings and artworks to their place in the larger urban environment—to reveal the importance of these sites in shaping international relationships and in the negotiation of national identities. Spanning the key period of tourism development in the two most popular destinations in the Spanish Caribbean, my project positions the hotels of Havana, Cuba and San Juan, Puerto Rico as primary agents in a complex, multidirectional flow of influence between Havana, San Juan, Miami, Washington D.C., New York, and beyond. In contrast to art historical and historical scholarship that situates these hotels, whether stylistically, politically, or economically, as impositions of U.S. power, my research returns agency to the local architects, governments, and residents in shaping the design and meaning of the buildings I examine. Tracing a web of influence through an approach that systemically ties visual analysis with economic, social, and political histories, I demonstrate how three themes that were bound to hotel design visually and discursively—the modern, the historic, and the tropical—reveal the tensions and contradictions that shaped these exchanges and their impact on larger cultural and political contexts.

The years surveyed in this study cover an important period in which a major shift in thinking about architectural style took place. From the Mediterranean Revival style of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt (1919) to the High Modernist design of the Havana Riviera (1957) and the Tropicana cabaret (1951-56) less than forty years later, leading trends in architectural design shifted from the eclecticism of Beaux Arts architecture to the machine-inspired forms of International-style-oriented modernism. Scholars have often portrayed this as an abrupt rupture in architectural history and while this dissertation does analyze the way in which later hotel designs proclaimed themselves as modern by positioning themselves in contrast to earlier hotels,

SUMMARY (continued)

in reality all of the hotels under study were conceived of as thoroughly modern. Through extensive archival research that utilizes diverse materials such as government documents, promotional brochures, and architectural publications, this dissertation reclaims the far-reaching importance of these designs.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. **Puerto Rican and Cuban Hotels: The Politics of Place and Space**

“One part white rum, one part cream of coconut, and three parts pineapple juice. Mix with crushed ice until smooth and serve in a chilled glass with garnish.” This is the recipe that Caribe Hilton bartender Ramon Marrero developed in 1954 when asked to invent a cocktail that would help satisfy the thirst U.S. travelers had for a tropical experience. The result—the piña colada—is just one example of many that helped construct the tropics in the U.S. imagination, establish the Caribbean as a desirable destination and enrich the cultural diversity of the mainland. Sipping a piña colada from under an umbrella on the beach, strolling through the old colonial gates, or gazing out at the turquoise waters of the Caribbean Sea from your hotel room balcony—these activities, whether we have done them or dream of doing them, were constructed as part of the tourism industry in the Hispanic Caribbean during the first sixty years of the twentieth century. In particular, hotels played a large, but often unrecognized, part in shaping the vacationer’s experience.

1. **Scope and Approach**

Focusing on suburban, resort-like hotels in San Juan, Puerto Rico and Havana, Cuba between 1898 and 1959, this project illustrates the way hotel design worked to convey a sense of place and culture, and shaped the built environment. The study is organized around four hotels that function as case studies: the Gran Condado Vanderbilt (1919, San Juan), the Hotel Nacional de Cuba (1930, Havana), the Caribe Hilton (1949, San Juan), and the Havana Riviera (1957, Havana). The study considers how the agents behind various hotel projects, ranging from government officials to U.S. businessmen, incorporated their ideals into the design of these hotels. Likewise, it demonstrates the way other interested parties could coopt, subvert, or

renegotiate these designs. By looking at the way architecture and urban design intersect with tourism, economics, politics, and culture, we can gain a deeper appreciation for how these sectors form a complex network of reciprocal cause and effect.

This dissertation focuses on the key period of tourism development in the two islands. Tourism continually increased from 1898 to 1959, with notable peaks after the two world wars, due to the general increase in mass tourism that was fueled by a growing middle class and more affordable travel infrastructure. Puerto Rico and Cuba targeted their programs toward U.S. citizens because of geographical proximity and because of their relationship with the United States, resulting in a tourism trade composed primarily of U.S. citizens. The construction of new, modern and attractive hotels was fundamental to the success of San Juan and Havana as tourist destinations.¹

Drastic changes in the political, economic, and social sectors of these islands defined the period covered in this dissertation, and had a significant impact on the built environment. I start my study in 1898. In that year, after becoming engaged in the very end of the Spanish-Cuban-American war, the United States claimed the spoils of war, in this case acquiring Puerto Rico, Guam, and the Philippines from Spain as permanent territories and gaining temporary control

¹ There is not a vast amount of scholarship on the history of architecture on these islands in general. Studies written by scholars from Puerto Rico and Cuba in the last century seem to be part of larger tendencies to endeavor to construct a national identity through their scholarship, thus downplaying or avoiding architecture that was strongly tied to U.S. involvement in the islands. Likewise, U.S.- and Eurocentric tendencies in architectural history have largely, although not completely, written off architecture in peripheral areas as simply watered-down versions of an “authentic” architecture that is born in the United States or Europe based on their values of what is good or important architecture. Not much has been written about hotels, and the scholarship that exists tends to focus on the United States and Europe. Some works, such as A. K. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel: An American History* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007) and Elaine Denby, *Grand Hotels: Reality and Illusion* (London: Reaktion Books, 1998) briefly discuss the spread of the modern hotel in relation to nineteenth century colonialism. As this is not the major focus of either study, they merely chart the movement of the modern hotel to various colonies around the globe and do not consider the local influence in these designs or the impact these designs, in turn, may have had on the colonizing nation or other parts of the globe. Another specific example is Annabel Jane Wharton’s study of the Caribe Hilton in *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2001). Because she is focused on the spread of Hilton hotels around the globe, Wharton favors the Hilton perspective and includes a limited discussion of the leading role the Puerto Rican government played in the Caribe Hilton.

over Cuba. The increased presence and interest of the United States fundamentally influenced Puerto Rico and Cuba.

I end my study in 1959 because this year, more or less, marked a shift in hotel design and tourism. The shift was most obvious in Cuba, where Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution resulted shortly thereafter in the dissolution of diplomatic ties with the United States, the death of U.S. tourism to Cuba, and the Cuban government's abandonment of international tourism programs.² The moment of change was less definitive in Puerto Rico. The onset of the 1960s marked a shift in Caribbean tourism away from suburban-oriented hotel vacations to more secluded, all-inclusive resort experiences, which encouraged the construction of remote resort complexes, and Puerto Rico was no exception to this trend. Despite the shift in hotel design after 1959, the historic era covered in this study was fundamental in shaping attitudes about hotel design that still persist today.

Within each of the four hotel case studies, I have focused on the local context and the broader global context of each hotel. For example, I consider each hotel project within the context of local politics, economics, and design tendencies and also analyze the hotel within the greater spheres of international political, commercial, and design discourses that crossed national borders. This approach reveals the larger networks that existed, the form these connections took, and how Puerto Rico and Cuba interacted with the United States, and with other places in Latin America, Europe, and to a lesser extent, Africa. This analysis recognizes the significance of U.S. influence in Puerto Rico and Cuba during the period under study. However, contrary to art historical and historical scholarship that situates these hotels almost exclusively as merely impositions of U.S. influence, I explore how these hotels functioned as both venues where local

² As Cuba's ties with the USSR became stronger in the 1960s, the USSR stationed many Soviets in Cuba for work. They certainly may have partaken in tourist activities in their leisure time. However, it was not until the late 1970s that the Cuban government started promoting vacation travel from the USSR to Cuba.

actors could exert their influence and as projects that were part of larger architectural conversations. I also conclude that insular construction and economic practices and the designs themselves had a meaningful influence on the mainland, in such places as Miami, New York, Washington, D.C., and beyond.

2. The Modern, the Tropical, and the Historic: Visual and Discursive Themes

In this study, I propose a new scheme of analysis as an alternative to the way scholars have relied heavily on style as a way to differentiate architectural works that, in fact, have much in common. I do this by analyzing these four hotels in terms of three themes: the modern, the tropical, and the historic. Hoteliers, architects, tourists and tourism promoters were concerned with these ideas as a means to define a sense of place and the vacation experience. These themes are both visually and discursively bound to the hotel design in ways that encouraged guests to understand the foreign place and its culture in a specific way.

The first theme is the modern. Since the nineteenth century, hotels had been known as a building typology that represented modernity.³ Indeed, the hotel was a product of modern times and the characteristics that defined it, such as advancements in transportation and the belief that one needed to utilize leisure travel as a means to retreat periodically from the enervating effects of modernity. Modern hotel design addressed modern society's needs and eagerly implemented new technologies and modern services and operational systems to run efficiently while servicing large numbers of guests. Various design details that addressed tourists' concerns for comfort, cleanliness, safety, and price signaled the hotel as a symbol of contemporary times. For example, in their design for the Hotel Nacional de Cuba, McKim, Mead & White incorporated the most

³ By modernity, I am referring to the conditions of modern life. In this period, the effects of industrialization, urbanization, commercialism, and advancements in technology and transportation (which compressed time and space), played a big role in defining modernity.

advanced technologies, such as high-speed elevators, pneumatic tube systems, and refrigerating plant with drinking system, which allowed guests to see and experience the hotel in a manner that permitted them to consider the Hotel Nacional on par with or superior to the most modern hotels in the world.

This study also considers the way in which hotel design transformed as ideas about the modern changed over time, particularly within the architectural community. For example, the Beaux-Arts design of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was considered a very modern building at the time of its construction. However, the later proponents of International Style modernism would not have considered the Mediterranean Revival style of this hotel to be modern. This study notes these changes in attitude but focuses more on illustrating how the concern for expressing the modern in hotel design was an overriding preoccupation across many decades. The notion of the modern was obligatory in San Juan and Havana hotels so that guests could consider the foreign location safe enough and locals could embrace new understandings of their nation as modern.

The second theme is the tropical, which was key in establishing a place as foreign or exotic. The tropical, or tropicality, refers to discursive representations of the tropics, which were the result of European, and later North American, ideas that were developed and had been evolving since the age of exploration in the late fifteenth century.⁴ Krista Thompson, who works in the fields of art history and tourism studies, has defined tropicality as “the complex visual systems through which the islands were imagined for tourist consumption and the social and political implications of these representations on actual physical space on the islands and their

⁴ David Arnold has outlined this historical framework by positioning the idea of tropicality as a parallel to Edward Said’s concept of Orientalism as a cultural and political construction of the west. David Arnold, ““Illusory Riches”: Representations of the Tropical World, 1840-1950” *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 21, no. 1 (2000), 7.

inhabitants.”⁵ She traces how notions of tropicality were carefully constructed and negotiated for non-locals, in particular through the “exoticism, and overabundance of nature.”⁶ Tropicality was visually captured through the picturesque, and its ability to be contained and manipulated allayed any fears that this foreign vocabulary was dangerous. The ability to control was important as the tropics were traditionally viewed as places less civilized than Europe or the United States, marked by tropical diseases and a lack of sanitation.⁷ Discursive representations of the tropics were about more than just vegetation; they worked to conflate local people and their culture with the landscape, allowing visitors to see exoticness and a lack of development—for tropicality was defined in contrast to civilization and progress—in the landscapes and people around them.⁸

Hotel owners and architects invoked the tropical in a variety of ways, most often through attention to vegetation and climate. Designers used architecture as a way to highlight the positive characteristics of tropicality, while downplaying the negative aspects. The role of vegetation in constructing the theme of the tropical was paramount. Designers landscaped hotel grounds to present highly controlled visions of tropical nature, carefully coordinating palms, hibiscus, and other tropical signifiers in designated areas, such as the Caribe Hilton’s “Garden of Eden.” Designers also incorporated tropical vegetation into the interior design of the hotel in various ways, from small potted plants to larger landscaped areas. This is perhaps no better exemplified than in the outdoor pool and garden that runs under a plate glass wall into the Caribe Hilton’s

⁵ Krista A. Thompson, *An Eye for the Tropics: Tourism, Photography, and Framing the Caribbean Picturesque* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 5.

⁶ Ibid, 98.

⁷ The danger associated with the tropics was based on more than just a fear of illness. The tropical region of the world was at one point or another all colonized by Europe and the United States and fears date back to these periods. Fear also arose out of the appearance and practices of indigenous groups that U.S. citizens and Europeans found to be unusual and uncivilized. On understandings of the tropics as dangerous or untamed see Nancy Leys Stepan, *Picturing Tropical Nature* (London: Reaktion, 2001). On the history of U.S. citizens considering Latin America, often conceived of as tropical, safe enough for travel, see Catherine Cocks, *Tropical Whites: The Rise of the Tourist South in the Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2013).

⁸ During the period under study in this dissertation, in general, society regarded progress as a positive attribute and a worthwhile aspiration. The idea of progress placed a value on modernization and the use of science and technology to better the human condition.

lobby area. The architects of this hotel also utilized deep overhangs in some locations and open patios in others, which is characteristic of how all of the hotels in this study had certain parts open to warm ocean breezes and direct sunlight, while other areas were shaded as a way to combat the heat from the sun. Designs blended or connected indoor and outdoor spaces through a variety of approaches, from the open loggias and arcades of revival styles to the plate glass and lack of walls of architectural modernism. In other instances historical styles that referenced exotic locations, such as the Mediterranean Revival, carried connotations of tropical climate.

The third theme is the historic, which was used to reference heritage, tradition, or a past time that is often perceived as simpler and almost always romanticized. Reference to the historic was a means to engage with topics of national identity and place, whether through a connection to the historic or refutation of it. As historian Phoebe Kropp has discussed in her work on the role of culture and memory in modern place making, past and present may be positioned in opposition, but they often worked in concert. Nostalgia for a historic past was not simply the expression of a fear of or disdain for modernity and progress. As Kropp posits, the impulse for history and nostalgia was an integral part of modernity itself.⁹

The theme of the historic in hotel design was most visually obvious in such examples as the revival style architecture of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. In some cases, hotel design addressed the historic as something of the past, while in other instances the interplay of heritage with modernity suggested new ways in which the historic could be relevant in the present. For example, the Havana Riviera engaged with the theme of the historic through the large quantity of Cuban artworks incorporated in the hotel's public spaces. Though thoroughly modern in style, all of the artworks engaged with various aspects of Cuban heritage,

⁹ Phoebe S. Kropp, *California Vieja: Culture and Memory in a Modern American Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 4.

such as Carnival, dance, and Afro-Cuban religions, in ways that suggested that modern Cuban identity was fundamentally rooted in traditions passed down through history. The Havana Riviera was located a relatively short distance from *Habana Vieja* (Old Havana), which illustrates how, in some cases, the hotel was a complement or contrast to the historic that was located outside of the hotel grounds, such as the historic city centers that underwent preservation in the twentieth century.

In exploring these three themes I propose the ways in which these ideas were tools used at once to exoticize and localize the designs. Looking at them over a period of time reveals some of the tensions and continuities among these ideas. Finally, the thematic and stylistic entanglements that run throughout the study are paralleled by the entwined cultural and political relationships between the insular governments and the U.S. government, insular governments and locals, U.S. business interests and insular governments, insular governments and U.S. tourists, and locals and U.S. tourists, to name some. The lines of power and influence are hard to draw as they were complex and constantly shifting. Probing the enmeshed relationships of Puerto Rico and Cuba with the United States allows us to understand how politically charged hotel design was.

3. Place: Puerto Rico and Cuba—Two Wings of the Same Bird?

There is a saying that Puerto Rico and Cuba are two wings of the same bird.¹⁰ Puerto and Cuba both originated as Spanish colonies in the Caribbean; both fell under heavy U.S. influence; and both share much history. On the other hand, it is an oversimplification to think that they were the same. From the onset of Spanish colonization, the two colonies served very different

¹⁰ This saying, “Cuba y Puerto Rico son de un pájaro las dos alas,” is a line from a poem by Puerto Rican poet Lola Rodríguez de Tío that was published in 1893. While the saying may have already existed, this poem made the phrase wildly popular when it was published and encouraged a sense of camaraderie between Puerto Ricans and Cubans in their fight for independence in the 1890s.

purposes for the crown and developed their own unique cultures, economies, politics, and histories. A general understanding of the histories of the two islands allows us to better appreciate an integrative history of the two, especially in terms of the built environment.

When Christopher Columbus landed in Cuba during his first exploratory voyage to the Americas, various indigenous groups inhabited the island. The Spanish crown did not fully map out Cuba until the first decade of the sixteenth century and established the first settlements in Baracoa (1511) and Havana (1514). From the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries the island was a strategic stopping point between Europe and the productive colonies in Central and South America. Ships would stop in Havana to stock up on fresh water and food when coming or going across the Atlantic (Figure 1). Economies then shifted in the nineteenth century and Cuba's sugar industry boomed, as did the number of slaves imported from Africa to work on the plantations, and the sugar industry transformed transportation infrastructure on the island. The nineteenth century also marked the most fervent campaign for independence, though it took sixty-two years from the date of the first armed uprising to achieve freedom from Spanish sovereignty. Once free from Spain, Cuba found itself under the thumb of the United States, beholden to its neighbor to the north until it could produce a constitution acceptable to the U.S. government. After 1898, U.S. capital dominated the Cuban economy, a situation that the Cuban government reinforced through its generally uninterrupted inclination to favor U.S. interests. The Cuban government endeavored to make Cuba a first-world country, primarily through emphasis on positioning Havana as a modern metropolis that symbolized the nation. Though a sizeable and strong middle class emerged, many Cubans, especially those living in rural areas, suffered from extreme poverty, illiteracy, and lack of access to medical help in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries. Fidel Castro tapped into the dissatisfaction that many Cubans had with

Fulgencio Batista's dictatorial presidency, successfully overthrew the government in 1959, and ultimately established the country as a communist state aligned with the USSR.

While on his second voyage to the Americas one year after landing in Cuba, Christopher Columbus arrived in Puerto Rico, another island in the Greater Antilles inhabited by indigenous groups similar to those in Cuba (Figure 2). In 1509, the Spanish started settling the island and Puerto Rico, or "rich port" started exporting gold until the mines were depleted in 1570. From the late eighteenth and into the nineteenth century, coffee and sugar were increasingly cultivated as export crops largely through the development of a plantation economy, though Puerto Rico was never as dependent on slaves as were other sugar states in the Caribbean. As a reward for Puerto Rico's continued loyalty in the face of massive revolts across Central and South America in the nineteenth century, the Spanish crown granted generous economic liberties to the colony. However, the 1868 *el Grito de Lares* (Cry of Lares), the first major uprising against the Spanish crown in Puerto Rico, soon became symbolic of the Puerto Rican fight for independence. After Puerto Rico became a territory of the United States in 1898, U.S. interests and capital unleashed massive efforts at modernization, largely through urban infrastructure that greatly augmented the nineteenth-century efforts of the Spanish crown. Luis Muñoz Marín, the first popularly elected governor of Puerto Rico, undertook a post-World War II program of modernization inspired by the New Deal policies that helped the island through the Great Depression. Muñoz's program was also shaped by the U.S. government's desire to test the Point Four Program, which was a U.S. assistance program designed to help developing countries, in Puerto Rico during this period.¹¹ In 1952 Puerto Rico gained commonwealth status, which did little to clarify the

¹¹ By implementing the Point Four Program in Puerto Rico the United States unequivocally announced their opinion of Puerto Rico as underdeveloped. The program was not devised with Puerto Rico in mind, as it was conceived of as a way to win over developing countries in the climate of the Cold War, but was first implemented in Puerto Rico as a means to showcase the program to other countries.

complicated relationship of the island with the United States. The island's political status—to continue as a commonwealth, to become a state, to gain independence, or to adopt something entirely different—is still hotly debated.

In this study, I have tried to craft a comprehensive or integrative history, which I believe can be more useful and revelatory. This approach is part of an interest to answer calls by such scholars as architectural historian Jorge Rigau for more cohesive studies of the Hispanic Caribbean.¹² Although it might have been desirable to include the entire Caribbean or at least the three major islands of the Hispanic Caribbean, this study excludes the Dominican Republic for a number of reasons. The first is just the sheer size of an analysis that would result from consideration of the three islands. To focus the study, it was logical to exclude the Dominican Republic because, while definitively under the influence of the United States in the twentieth century, the Dominican Republic was never a territory of the United States, temporarily or permanently, and never entered the U.S. imagination in the way Puerto Rico and Cuba did. Furthermore, the Dominican Republic did not develop a tourism industry similar to those in Puerto Rico and Cuba in the first three quarters of the twentieth century.¹³

Puerto Rico and Cuba allow us to see how the U.S. empire, and by extension empire in general, shaped tourism and how tourism in turn reinforced or undermined empire. We see this in patterns of leisure travel in which citizens of the sovereign nation vacationed in the colony or former colony. Leisure travel often developed out of business travel, and this makes particular

¹² Jorge Rigau, *Puerto Rico 1900: Turn-of-the-Century Architecture in the Hispanic Caribbean* (New York: Rizzoli, 1992), 11.

¹³ However, for those interested in tourism development and hotel building in the Caribbean after the years covered in this dissertation, the Dominican Republic is an excellent example of the development of remote, all-inclusive resort tourism. On this history of tourism to the Dominican Republic from the 1980s to the present see Evan Ward, *Packaged Vacations: Tourism Development in the Spanish Caribbean* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2008)..

sense in colonies, in which foreign interest was usually grounded in economic concerns.¹⁴ To understand this phenomenon one need only look at the great number of modern hotels built in colonies to accommodate travelers from the governing nation.¹⁵ The influence of empire rendered colonies ripe for tourism development. Through the campaigns of empire, colonies were at once foreign, but familiar enough, to be considered acceptable destinations for travel.¹⁶

Puerto Rico and Cuba also make a good pair because of the more complete history that results from a consideration of the two. The value of this comprehensive approach is no better exemplified than through hotel design, as each island produced significant hotel designs at different moments. For example, hotel building increased greatly in both cities after World War II, but it is useful to first look at tourism in San Juan because the Puerto Rican government was heavily invested in developing tourism in the 1940s, while the Cuban government did not invest in tourism development until the 1950s.

4. Space: Background of the Hotel

By 1900, a broad range of hotel types already existed, from small, informal guesthouses run by house owners, to grand resorts for the wealthy. Likewise, hotels were located in all types of geographic locations, from remote settings in nature, to rural or small towns, to bustling urban

¹⁴ Likewise as the former colony becomes economically developed, its citizens may develop the means to vacation in the former colonizing state.

¹⁵ Poorer countries usually boasted resort hotels if they were the colony or imperial interest of the United States or a European country. As historian A. K. Sandoval-Strausz has chronicled, the crossing of the American hotel type into European building practices happened at the moment when European colonialism was vigorously alive. Thus, colonizers built American-style grand resorts in the areas of the globe they were located in. For example, grand resort hotels were built in such locations as Madeira, Cairo, Marrakesh, Calcutta, Singapore, and Hong Kong, to name a few. Sandoval-Strausz, *Hotel*, 122. While this practice was prevalent throughout Africa, Asia, and the Middle East, it was less common in Latin America, perhaps because the general period of independence movements in Latin America happened before grand hotels became codified as part of a global building practice.

¹⁶ Empire-driven tourism is one type of modern tourism. The other major type is tourism based on sites established by the history and influence of the Grand Tour. I would also suggest that we could think of some of the attractions of empire-driven tourism, such as a desire for the exotic and foreign, as related to the theme of the tropical. Likewise, modern tourism based on the Grand Tour could be thought of in terms of an attraction to the historic.

metropolises. The modern hotel, which developed in the nineteenth century in the United States, had its roots in the guesthouse, or inn, which had been the predominant system of temporary accommodation before that time. As citizens of the United States came to regard the modern hotel as the most current, fashionable, and polite type of accommodations, guesthouses fell out of fashion and preferences shifted to these larger “machines of efficiency,” which provided the most up-to-date in technology and amenities.¹⁷ Modern hotels were usually purpose-built structures that incorporated a large number of guestrooms and other facilities designed to meet guests’ needs, such as dining rooms, ballrooms, and sitting rooms. Their physical design involved an attempt to service a large number of people while extracting the maximum amount of profit. The modern hotel was also referred to as the American-style hotel, due to its origins, and soon this type of hotel was being built all over the world. American-style hotels were not just developed around the globe to appeal to visitors from the United States, but because they were regarded highly as a new, thoroughly modern and technologically advanced building typology that was often tied to issues of civic pride and local boosterism.¹⁸

This study focuses on a specific type of hotel that developed during the period under study—the suburban, resort-style hotel. This rather long descriptive title points to the fact that these hotels operated outside of previously defined hotel typologies. These suburban hotels were predicated upon the extension of a certain level of necessary infrastructure from the urban center to these peripheral areas. Their location just outside of the dense urban core also allowed these hotels to advertise their connection to urban services and activities. These hotels could offer some resort features but because of the relatively small acreage of these suburban resorts, often

¹⁷ For a full analysis of hotels as machines of efficiency see Molly Berger, *Hotel Dreams: Luxury, Technology and Urban Ambition in America, 1829-1929* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2011).

¹⁸ American-style hotels also promised a higher rate of return on investment not only because they operated more efficiently in a manner that produced higher profits, but also because they were more popular among travelers.

delimited by a preexisting urban design or relatively high land prices, they did not have the sprawling grounds of a resort in a rural area and were thus limited in the amount and type of amenities, such as golf courses and expansive gardens, that they could include.¹⁹ This hybrid type of hotel was further underscored by the diversity of clientele to which it appealed. It could serve the purposes of a business traveler by virtue of its location near the city center, while also appealing to vacationers who wanted an atmosphere of leisure.

B. Summary of Chapters

The first chapter lays out the groundwork of the history of the resort hotel and how it came to arrive in Puerto Rico through the case study of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt (1919). The hotel was part of a larger program to develop the neighborhood of Condado, an area outside of San Juan's center, into the most modern of residential communities. By tracing the movement of U.S. tourism and its infrastructure as it moved southward in Florida, and the concurrent programs of modernization that occurred in Puerto Rico after it became a U.S. territory in 1898, this chapter shows how a wealthy and powerful U.S. businessman such as Frederick William Vanderbilt would have seen building a resort in Puerto Rico as a natural move and a savvy business decision. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt provided San Juan, which had been primarily a destination for business purposes, with an environment that encouraged the development of tourism geared to the U.S. elite. This chapter considers how the Mediterranean Revival style of the hotel was connected to the popularity of this style in various places in the United States and other newly acquired territories, and related to the particularities of politics and architectural

¹⁹ Although these hotels were “resort-like” and not fully resort hotels in the current sense of the word, I refer to them as resorts throughout the dissertation because “resort-like” is rather clumsy. Furthermore, these hotels were always described as resorts throughout history as an attempt to suggest they provided the same level of amenities as true resort hotel.

trends in Puerto Rico. The chapter ends with a discussion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt's history up to the post-World War II period, with an emphasis on the insular government's efforts to purchase the hotel during the height of the Great Depression as a means for the state to save a struggling establishment they had come to see as a symbol of Puerto Rico and as the future of the island's economy.

Shifting to Havana, the second chapter focuses on the Hotel Nacional de Cuba (1930) as the culmination of the first major tourism boom in Cuba. Similar to the rise in leisure travel in Puerto Rico, Cuba's first tourism boom can trace its roots to U.S. commercial involvement in the island. Born out of a presidential decree that called for a national hotel, the Hotel Nacional was *the* national hotel of Cuba, the first of its kind. The Cuban government awarded the project to a U.S. conglomerate that included McKim, Mead & White as the architectural firm. Designed in a vaguely Mediterranean Revival style with Art Deco overtones, the hotel displayed its stature as the national hotel through design details that referenced the national flag and Spanish colonial tradition, and through the incorporation of vast quantities of fine Cuban wicker and mahogany furniture. This chapter also illustrates how the Hotel Nacional's location in the neighborhood of Vedado, an area located just over two miles from the historic center, was part of a master plan for the city that positioned the hotel as an important urban node that connected busy downtown Havana to points of tourist interest to the west, such as the casino and racetrack. Yet, despite positioning guests with easy access to all Havana had to offer, the Hotel Nacional was defined by a new way of marketing hotels in Havana in which advertising materials promoted the hotel as the destination in itself. Brochures illustrated to the potential guest how their desire for the modern, the historic, and the tropical could be satiated without having to leave the hotel grounds.

After the crippling effect of the Great Depression and World War II on tourism and the economy in Puerto Rico and Cuba, all of the actors involved held high hopes that the postwar period could lead to the development of tourism as an integral part of island economy and of growing San Juan and Havana as global metropolises. Chapter three considers how the Puerto Rican government's commitment to a program of modernization and the U.S. government's support of this program as a piece of Cold War propaganda shaped tourism on the island. This program was spearheaded by the construction of the Caribe Hilton (1949), which visually conveyed the quest for a modern Puerto Rican identity through an architectural modernism using elements derived from Mid-Century Modernism, which was a style that had its roots in the International Style. The chapter analyzes how the hotel's tropical modern design was linked to larger debates regarding modernization programs and the promotion of tropicality as a defining feature of *puertorriqueñidad*. The modern architecture framed picturesque views of exotic flora and seamlessly connected indoor and outdoor spaces, suggesting new relationships in which Puerto Ricans could tame tropicality through modern design. Coinciding with a huge postwar boom in travel abroad by U.S. citizens, especially by a growing and more affluent middle class, the Puerto Rican government's tourism program situated the Caribe Hilton as a starting point into a exploration of the new Puerto Rico as full of fun in the sun as well as serious economic opportunities. Moreover, this chapter positions the Caribe Hilton within a larger framework of hotel design and contends that the Caribe Hilton influenced many subsequent mid-century Miami hotels and shaped the trajectory of Hilton International Hotels. The striking modernity of the hotel was framed as a complement to a new historic preservation program in the colonial city center. This approach warrants comparison with Getulio Vargas's attempts to shape Brazilian national identity through the preservation of Ouro Preto and the construction of Oscar

Niemeyer's Grande Hotel. The location of the Caribe Hilton in a rather deserted segment of San Juan effectively connected this modern hotel environment with the historic city center to the west and the established Condado area to the east, and defined subsequent hotel development in the city. Not only was the Caribe Hilton one of the first Mid-Century Modernist hotels to be built after World War II, it remains as one of the most successful cases in history of a government's use of modern architecture and tourism in a campaign of national identity and economic development.

The fourth chapter aims to recover a history that has been overlooked since 1959 by repositioning the art and architecture of the Tropicana Cabaret (1952-56) and the Havana Riviera hotel (1957) as proclamations of modern Cuban cultural identity in post-World War II Havana. Compared with the Puerto Rican government's Caribe Hilton project, the Cuban examples reveal how the Cuban government negotiated clever ways to capitalize on the private sector's tourism building through the guise of free enterprise. Although these projects were not part of an official national identity campaign, the owners and designers saw the value in projecting Cuban identity as something to be consumed by tourists. Although the Tropicana was not a hotel, its incorporation in this study provides the opportunity to consider the larger tourist environment in relation to hotels and to gain a greater understanding of the intersection of design and tourism in postwar Havana. The Tropicana's design was truly avant-garde, and this chapter looks at the way the architecture was situated within progressive architectural discourse in Cuba and other parts of Latin America. On the other hand, it considers the way in which Cuban architects and artists, in their earnest quest to convey *cubanidad* through their work, were sometimes stymied by the desires of U.S. visitors for affirmation of stereotypical images of Cuba and its people. The Havana Riviera hotel was a veritable exposition of Cuban culture, filled with artworks displaying

the Cuban avant-garde's engagement with themes of heritage, modernity, and identity. In this chapter, I try to explain why many Cubans have misunderstood this legacy and have instead viewed the Havana Riviera simply as an importation of foreign design from Miami. I show how the complex intentions of this design were quickly overshadowed by a limited positive reception at the time and by the anti-Batista and anti-American rhetoric employed by Fidel Castro in his revolution of 1959. Castro deftly coopted the touristic landscape in Havana as one of his most powerful symbols of the reclamation of Cuba from the grips of U.S. domination.

The conclusion of the dissertation analyzes the connections and overlaps we can see between the four hotels, especially through the lens of the three themes of the modern, the tropical, and the historic. A short epilogue follows that links the previous historical analysis to recent hotel design in the two cities and considers contemporary issues of hotel design and tourism in Puerto Rico and Cuba. Finally, it illustrates how the themes of the modern, the historic, and the tropical are still relevant in hotel design today.



Figure 1. Plano Pintoresco de La Habana con los numerosos de las casas, 1853, published by B. y Ca. May. The map shows the walled historic center to the right and the area of what is now known as Centro Habana to the left. Courtesy of the David Rumsey Historical Map Collection, Cartography Associates.

II. THE GRAN CONDADO VANDERBILT AND THE ORIGINS OF THE SUBURBAN RESORT HOTEL IN THE HISPANIC CARIBBEAN

In 1923, John McEntee Bowman, owner of the Biltmore hotel chain, wrote an article about hotel design for *Architectural Forum*. In it, he asserted that the chief goal of the architect of a hotel project was to create “atmosphere—that intangible contribution to the well being and satisfaction of hotel guests,” which was a result of “hotel exteriors and interiors which attract and hold interest, establish correct impressions, and create memories which insure recurring patronage and recommendations.”²⁰ Bowman’s comment reflected a widely held attitude that design was of preeminent importance in the hotel industry.

This chapter tells the history of how suburban hotel building and leisure travel first developed in the Hispanic Caribbean through the study of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt, which was designed by Warren & Wetmore and opened in 1919 (Figure 3). It first outlines the factors that made the Gran Condado Vanderbilt possible and shaped its design, primarily by looking at two main histories. The first is the history of San Juan and Puerto Rico, including urban design, economy, and cultural life, from the nineteenth century to the construction of the hotel. The second is the history of contemporaneous trends in hotel design and tourism that extended from the United States into Puerto Rico. These two tributaries converged and provided the framework necessary for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt hotel project.

The Gran Condado Vanderbilt was conceived to be the first grand modern resort hotel in Puerto Rico, and one of the first in the Caribbean, stealing a march on Cuba, which already had a more developed tourism industry but whose hotels were located in the more densely built urban

²⁰ John McEntee Bowman, “Good Architecture, a Modern Hotel Requisite,” *Architectural Forum* XXXIX, no. 5 (November 1923), 195.

center. Thus, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt facilitated a change in the way Puerto Rico was constructed in the U.S. imagination. The construction of a grand resort hotel announced that Puerto Rico was a place to enjoy luxury and leisure in a manner similar to the resort destinations in Florida, California, and other locations in the United States. Furthermore, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt contributed to great changes in the urban development of San Juan, especially in the establishment of Condado as a principal zone for elite residences and then later as an area for hotel facilities in San Juan.

Moreover, this chapter looks at the hotel as the living business that it was, subject to the vicissitudes of more powerful forces on both a local and global level. While it does show that the first push in resort building was through private enterprise, and one which might be described as imperialist, this study also looks at the larger history of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt over more than fifteen years after its opening. Through this fuller history we can gain a better understanding of how the Puerto Rican government began to see ownership of hotels as a key tool in bolstering a burgeoning economy through tourism and in shaping the representation of its island to foreign visitors. A longer history also allows us to consider the lasting importance of the hotel's design in the built environment of San Juan.

A. **The Puerto Rican Context: Urbanism and Tourism**

In the nineteenth century the Spanish crown focused attention on architectural and urban developments as a means to promote an image of Puerto Rico as a modern colony.²¹ Civic building and urban design was a way to promote ideas of collective well being, largely through

²¹ As architect and historian Jorge Rigau has chronicled, Spain's determination to become a modern economy affected cities in both Spain and the colonies. Rigau, *Puerto Rico 1900*, 40.

an emphasis on transportation, sanitation, and adaptability to climate.²² The resulting modifications to the built environment and the changing discourses surrounding cleanliness, modernity, and progress in San Juan provided the foundation necessary for a U.S. businessman to consider building a resort hotel in the incipient suburbs of this city.

The Spanish crown's agenda and internal insular conditions affected the city of San Juan. Between 1867 and 1899 the population in Puerto Rico increased by forty-five percent, largely in urban areas because modifications in land tenure and crop growth displaced people.²³ The original area of San Juan was on a small islet surrounded by water and defined primarily by military fortifications. Its geographical definition encouraged urban expansion to land east and southeast, which was easily accessible across the relatively narrow channel to the east of the islet (see Figure 2 from the introduction). The areas that developed outside of the walled city were largely residential, and the historic center of San Juan remained the commercial and cultural center of the city well into the twentieth century.

The Spanish architects and engineers working in Puerto Rico, who were employed as representatives of the Spanish crown, designed buildings according to the values instilled by the Real Academia de Bellas Artes de San Fernando in Madrid. The 1867 Instructions for the Preparation of Project Proposals and Specifications Regarding Urban Management and Public Buildings and the 1881 Public Works Law promoted a uniformity in building height and a harmonious relationship to the larger urban environment that stressed an overall interest in ventilation and orderly programs of water and sewage networks. These official government directives allowed for artistic license, but buildings generally adhered to the neoclassical style preferred by the academy in Madrid during this period.

²² As Rigau notes, this idea was not new to the nineteenth century, but had been proposed by other European thinkers in the eighteenth century as well. See Rigau, *Puerto Rico 1900*, 21.

²³ Ibid.

As a major port city, nineteenth-century San Juan was marked by a constant flow of visitors who usually came for business reasons. A significant contingent of U.S. citizens composed the travelers to Puerto Rico, as a large number of U.S. companies did business on the island.²⁴ The U.S. businessmen who went to Puerto Rico acted as tourists only secondarily; visits to points of interest or participation in cultural activities would have been subordinate to their commercial motives. The most prevalent form of temporary lodging for visitors was the guesthouse, but by the end of the nineteenth century the modern urban hotel was a fixture in San Juan.

A number of hotels operated in San Juan during the nineteenth century, though unfortunately, the opening dates and locations of many remain unknown. Recounting a trip taken five or six years prior to the Spanish-Cuban-American War, one author reported that the Hotel Pasaje was the place where visitors would stay.²⁵ Later, a 1898 publication intended for a U.S. audience listed all of the “best hotels on the island,” the majority of which were in San Juan and included: Grand Hotel and Restaurant Inglaterra, Grand Hotel de Francia, Grand Café Central, Hotel Marina, Mt. Vernon Hotel, the Mayflower Hotel.²⁶ Interestingly, the names of these hotels suggested a certain stature or character of the hotel through their reference to other places and cultures. The suggestion made through hotel names, whether invoking Old World grandeur or U.S. history, was also a means to appeal to certain types of clientele.

²⁴ The United States supplied Puerto Rico with a variety of raw and manufactured products and food goods. While in the late nineteenth century only one seventh of Puerto Rican imports came directly from the United States, tariff laws made it cheaper to ship U.S. goods through Spain, and as a result it is estimated that half of the goods coming to Puerto Rico from Spain originated in the United States. The total, then, of goods coming from the United States would have been around thirty-five percent. Figures on imports from Margarita Arlina Hamm, *America's New Possessions and Spheres of Influence* (Chicago: F. Tennyson Neely, 1899), 85-86.

²⁵ “Picturesque San Juan,” *The Times of India*, 10 June 1898, 6.

²⁶ Thomas J. Vivian and Ruel P. Smith, *Everything About Our New Possessions* (New York: R. F. Fenno & Co., 1898), 164.

Curiously, the Palace Hotel, located in the historic center of San Juan on Calle Tetuán at the corner of Calle Tanca, was not included in this list, but was one of the more modern hotels of its time. Founded in 1890, this six-story hotel was a rather tall building for its time and location. The hotel was designed with a classical vocabulary, compatible with the historic part of the city and the general architecture tendencies of the period. The ground floor of the façade was rusticated and the most visually interesting part of the exterior. The next four floors were rather plain. French doors topped by arcuated transoms and decorative metal balconies punctuated the facade. The top floor was a large space suited for banquets and galas and offered views of the city. As architectural historian Jerry Torres Santiago has chronicled, the Palace Hotel marketed itself as a place of high society and was a congregating point for the Puerto Rican elite as well as U.S. visitors.²⁷

The Palace Hotel and the Hotel Asturias, located nearby on Calle Tetuán, were most likely designed by Spanish architects or Puerto Rican architects who received their training in Spain, as was the norm in that period. The walled portion of the city was an advantageous location for hotels since it was the major transportation hub for goods and people and was also the heart of commercial activity and government. Therefore, these hotels were ideally situated to appeal to the typical foreign visitor who came to Puerto Rico—people who came primarily to do business or had affairs that related to the Spanish insular government.²⁸

San Juan's Hotel Inglaterra was a hotel that was popular among visitors from the United States. Its exterior bore a similarity to the Palace Hotel, but the Hotel Inglaterra was only three

²⁷ Jerry Torres Santiago, "La Invención de los umbrales del Eden: imágenes, arquitectura y contexto en el desarrollo hotelero de San Juan" [The Invention of the Gates of Paradise: Images, Architecture, and Context in the Development of Hotels in San Juan], in *San Juan siempre Nuevo: arquitectura y modernización en el siglo XX* [Ever New San Juan: Architecture and Modernization in the Twentieth Century], ed. Enrique Vivoni Farage (San Juan, PR: Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2000), 126.

²⁸ Of course here I am referring to the pre-1898 government. After 1898, government affairs would have been with an insular government that was defined and monitored by the United States.

stories. Situated in the walled city center at the corner of Calle Tetuán and Calle Cruz and opposite the Banco Español, the Hotel Inglaterra was conveniently located for guests arriving by steamship. The hotel advertised a variety of amenities to its guests, including “translators, electric bell service, reading and writing rooms, American-style bar, and a cigar store.” The hotel was clearly concerned with providing the modern amenities desired by U.S. travelers.

Just after the end of the Spanish-Cuban-American War, U.S. military officers met at the Hotel Inglaterra for a conference to discuss the evacuation of the Spanish military presence.²⁹ That these U.S. officers felt it appropriate to meet in a hotel for this conference illustrates their adherence to conventional social behavior that regarded hotels as public buildings where people would congregate publicly or hold private meetings. This reference indicates that the configuration of the Hotel Inglaterra adhered to the basic configuration of the modern American hotel type in which particular rooms could be closed off for private meetings, or guestrooms were large enough and appropriately decorated to accommodate a meeting. The U.S. military officers’ selection of this hotel also suggests that the Hotel Inglaterra was not a public space associated with pro-Spanish sentiment.³⁰

The war brought an influx of people from the United States to San Juan, not just as soldiers and military men, but also an entire supporting cast typical of military campaigns, such as journalists, writers, photographers, politicians, businessmen and entrepreneurs. In his *Puerto Rico: Its Conditions and Possibilities* (1899), American journalist and writer William Dinwiddie suggested the number of U.S. visitors that came to San Juan put a strain on hotels when he related the events of October 18, 1898, the day Spain formally turned Puerto Rico over to the

²⁹ “Meet To-Day in San Juan,” *The Washington Post*, 10 September 1898, 1.

³⁰ Hotels, by virtue of the politics of their owner or patronage, often became associated with certain political leanings. For example, see the discussion of the role of the Havana’s Hotel Inglaterra in the Cuban fight for independence from Spain in Chapter 2.

United States. “Two days before the ceremony, every hotel in the town was crowded to its utmost capacity, and on the night before the evacuation, strangers slept three and four together in the tiny, dark rooms, whose only source of light was the stained-glass doors opening into a central rotunda, suffering all night long from an infestation of humming, insatiable mosquitoes.”³¹ Dinwiddie’s unflattering description of this unnamed hotel reflects the failure of the establishment to function on par with the standards of a modern hotel. However, Dinwiddie’s subpar experience at this particular locale may have been the result of the stress that this tumultuous time put on Puerto Rico and its hotels.

The year 1898 marked the beginning of significant changes in the relationship between the United States and Puerto Rico that ultimately affected the island’s development as a U.S. tourist destination.³² During the early years after the end of the war, the United States established its complicated juridical status with Puerto Rico. The Foraker Act of 1900 replaced the temporary military government with a civilian government that was appointed by the U.S. president. The president appointed the insular governor and executive council, which was composed primarily of individuals from the United States.³³ The Insular Cases (1901-1905), a series of Supreme Court cases that addressed the status of U.S. territories played an important

³¹ William Dinwiddie, *Puerto Rico: Its Conditions and Possibilities* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1899).

³² The Treaty of Paris, signed on August 13, 1898, ended the Spanish-Cuban-American War. Spain relinquished control of the former Spanish colonies of Puerto Rico, Cuba, Guam and the Philippines to the United States. In general, the United States had an interest in developing strategic coaling and naval stations in the Caribbean, which would also serve as strategic points of defense as part of a larger concern of developing a stronger U.S. naval presence. In particular, the United States had strong commercial interests in Cuba and Puerto Rico because they both produced sugar, a valuable commodity. Under the terms of the treaty, the United States annexed Puerto Rico and the United States quickly established a military government on the island.

³³ President McKinley appointed Charles A. Allen as first governor of Puerto Rico. For the Executive Cabinet, McKinley appointed six U.S. citizens and five Puerto Ricans. The insular government of Puerto Rico is also composed of a House of Representatives of thirty-five elected members, a judicial system with a Supreme Court, and a non-voting Resident Commissioner in Washington D.C.

role in codifying the purgatorial status of Puerto Rico.³⁴ In explaining Puerto Rico's status as an unincorporated territory, the Supreme Court declared Puerto Rico's relationship to the United States as, "not part of it and not *not* part of it." This status ultimately influenced U.S. citizens to consider Puerto Rico as an attractive vacation destination. As a place considered outside of the United States, it was alluring as international, foreign, or exotic. However, its status as a territory of the United States rendered it more safe and familiar than other locations.

In 1898, Puerto Rico underwent a process of Americanization that defined the context within which the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was built. In the broadest sense, the term Americanization was often employed during the period as a synonym for modernization, the result of the tendency to consider the United States as at the forefront of technological, organizational, and economic innovation. In this case, Americanization specifically refers to the adoption of American systems, technologies, values, and attitudes. For example, projects for roads, bridges and other transportation infrastructure were part of a larger goal of modernizing the island. The changes that took place in Puerto Rico were, at the core, very much directed at furthering U.S. interests, even if couched in the rhetoric of paternalism.

Puerto Rico had undergone programs to improve sanitation, health, transportation, and other infrastructure while a colony of Spain, but U.S. publications about Puerto Rico made little mention of the positive initiatives that had already occurred on the island. Dinwiddie's survey of the island (*Puerto Rico: Its Conditions and Possibilities*) was geared to a U.S. audience and meant to provide "a comprehensive grasp of the administrative problems which confront us, and

³⁴ This series of cases revolved around whether or not United States territories were subject to the protection and provisions of the United States Constitution. One case, *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901), was concerned with whether or not oranges coming into New York from Puerto Rico would be subject to import duties. Since the Constitution provided that all import duties shall be uniform throughout all of the United States and since there were no duties on oranges from other parts of the United States, the contention was that there should be no duty on oranges from Puerto Rico. However, the court's holding was that the Constitution does not necessarily apply to territories and that Congress had the jurisdiction to create laws within territories in certain circumstances.

the possibilities for the embarking of American business enterprises.”³⁵ Discussing the water works of San Juan, Dinwiddie eloquently summarized the general U.S. conception of modernity in Puerto Rico: “The awakening to the needs of modern life and the possibilities in the direction of mechanical comforts has come only in the last few years, and then principally through the instrumentality of progressive Americans.”³⁶ Dinwiddie’s volume was typical of others published during this period that endeavored to present to the U.S. public information and images related to the United States’ new territories. Almost all claimed to present a “realistic” account of present conditions and extolled the opportunities for U.S. citizens in these territories. All smacked of paternalism and U.S. superiority, the predominant attitude of the time, and promoted the notion that the United States was the harbinger of progress and modernization. This attitude towards Puerto Rico was neatly summed up in *Picturesque Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines*, “Here is the opportunity for American capital, and within a few years, it is safe to say, the unprogressive and ignoble past will be completely swallowed up and forgotten in the new prosperity and just government brought to the island by the United States.”³⁷

³⁵ Dinwiddie, *Puerto Rico*, iii.

³⁶ Ibid, 185.

³⁷ *Picturesque Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines* (Springfield, OH: Mast, Cromwell & Kirkpatrick, 1898), 39. U.S. publications from this period conveyed the impression that modernization was a form of progress, something that was faithfully accepted as good and right. Representative of concurrent U.S. attitudes about the relation between racial evolution and progress, these publications cast Puerto Ricans as an inferior people, and claimed a backwardness and lack of progress in Puerto Rico that they blamed on bad Spanish government combined with the perceived inferiority of a mixed race population. U.S. publications promoted the idea that through a commitment to progress through modernization and betterment, Puerto Ricans would be able to some day adequately achieve the evolved state of Caucasians from the United States and Europe. However, contemporary beliefs about race held that it was impossible for these darker skinned Puerto Ricans to ever achieve the same level of social evolution as white people from the United States and Europe because this concept of evolution was based on a fixed hierarchy of race that related to skin color. These publications generally did not recognize that there was a lot of skin color variation amongst Puerto Ricans, including very light-skinned people. For discussions on beliefs about race and social evolution during this period see, for example, Gail Bederman, *Manliness and Civilization: Debates about Race and Culture, 1880-1917* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995). For more specific discussions related to Puerto Rico see, Kristin L. Hoganson, *Fighting for American Manhood: How Gender Politics Provoked the Spanish-American and Philippine-American Wars* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1998); Amy Kaplan, *The Anarchy of Empire in the Making of U.S. Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2002); and Amy Kaplan and Donald Pease, eds., *Cultures of United States Imperialism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

Projects such as improved transportation infrastructure were not just an avenue for the progress of Puerto Ricans, they were also a means for U.S. business interests, especially those in the sugar, tobacco, and coffee markets, to have the framework necessary to profit. Many of these projects wrought significant changes to the Puerto Rican landscape. For example, when Spanish rule ceased there were only 254 kilometers of road, and by 1919, after six years of U.S. occupation, 1179 kilometers of macadam roads had been laid down. Establishing a network of roads was not just beneficial for businesses to transport goods, but also for promoters of tourism to sell Puerto Rico as a modern, navigable island, especially during the expansion of automobile touring (Figure 4).³⁸

Americanization included a program for better health conditions across the island through a commitment to public health measures. These initiatives were meant to improve the lives of Puerto Ricans and also played a part in convincing U.S. citizens that their health was safe on the island.³⁹ Changing concepts about disease meant more acceptance of germ theory, and society became more focused on how they could prevent the spread of dangerous microorganisms, such as yellow fever through mosquitos.⁴⁰ With the realization that dirty urban conditions contributed to health issues and that improved sanitary infrastructure stymied the spread of sickness and disease, the insular government undertook sanitary reforms. For example, in 1878 there was only one sewer system in San Juan, but because of the increased value placed on sanitation, between

³⁸ Paving roads was just one of many projects that commenced after 1898. It is difficult to characterize these projects as either or Puerto Rican or U.S.-driven as the two were so enmeshed. A certain number of directives regarding improvement programs came from the U.S. government in Washington D.C., but others were developed through the local government that did have Puerto Rican representatives. Likewise, some of the funding for these projects came directly from the U.S. government, while in other cases taxes levied on the island covered the costs.

³⁹ U.S. citizens and the U.S. government were probably also concerned with the threat of disease and sickness spreading from Puerto Rico to the mainland.

⁴⁰ Previously, miasma theory, which held that diseases were spread through bad air that came from rotting organic matter, was the generally accepted theory. It was believed that noxious air infected people, rather than contact with infected individuals. This propelled an attention to hygienic conditions that continued throughout the acceptance of germ theory, as public campaigns stressed that dangerous microorganisms, such as cholera, often thrived in unsanitary environments.

1898 and 1918 six more sewer systems were built, followed by thirty-one more between 1918 and 1933.⁴¹ Ultimately, upgrades to roads, sewer systems, and other infrastructure developments made the construction of a modern American style resort possible.

Through their discussion of Americanization, publications such as *Picturesque Cuba*, *Porto Rico*, *Hawaii and the Philippines* and William Dinwiddie's *Puerto Rico: Its Conditions and Possibilities* assured U.S. readers that Puerto Rico was safe enough for U.S. citizens. Furthermore, these publications lauded the beauty of the island. The U.S. interest in Puerto Rico, combined with concurrent developments in the tourism industry in the United States, in particular the growing popularity of warm weather destinations created conditions that positioned the island to become a tourist destination.⁴²

B. **The World of Resort Hotels—Precedents for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt**

The Gran Condado Vanderbilt was a part of a well-established tradition of resort building and vacationing in the United States. U.S. practices, in turn, had their roots in the traditions of the European elites who traveled in search of health and wellness.⁴³ While colonists were settling in North America, Europeans were establishing the practice of resort vacationing. The European nobility and the rich would travel to health resorts, often located where there were springs, as water therapy was very popular. Well-known destinations such as Wiesbaden, Spa, Bath, and Saint Moritz were well equipped to handle the influx of visitors that would come to stay for a period of time.

⁴¹ These various of projects were sometimes initiated in the United States and other times on the island by the insular government.

⁴² Golf and tennis were two widely popular, fashionable sports in the United States in the early twentieth century.

⁴³ There were two parts to this. The first was the desire to escape from epidemics such as cholera and yellow fever, which routinely hit cities and more populated areas in the summer. The second was to seek a specific area that was considered conducive to health, according to contemporary attitudes about health.

Across the Atlantic, North American colonists found that Native Americans enjoyed mineral springs and displaced indigenous groups so that they could emulate the seasonal trips fashionable in Europe.⁴⁴ These trips were more than just for wellness, they were also for socializing, and the resort hotels in these locations were built to accommodate this aspect of vacationing. Besides springs, U.S. citizens soon became drawn to two other types of natural destinations, the seashore and the scenic landscape (usually mountains). For example, the Jersey shore first began attracting summer visitors in 1790 and as more and more people flocked there, transportation networks improved. Grand resort hotels became the center of social life at these destinations. For instance, the Catskill Mountain House, located near Palenville, New York, became the center of social life for tourists who went to wonder at the majestic wilderness of nature.⁴⁵ The luxurious resort offered guests bathing facilities, a billiard hall, bowling alley, and hiking and riding trails, as well as teas, dinners, dances and galas. As U.S. cities grew throughout the nineteenth century, citizens came to see a seasonal vacation as a means to escape the debilitating effects of modern urban life and to reconnect to nature as an antidote.⁴⁶ While these types of vacations were ostensibly focused on nature, it was only through a built environment that could support these practices that they were possible.

As the supply of rooms surpassed demand, resorts had to aspire to be more than just a place to sleep and eat in order to compete. Resort owners focused on the level of guestrooms, as well as the quality and variety of food and activities that they could advertise to guests. Rural resorts had to take leisure activities into account even more than urban hotels, as often there was

⁴⁴ Colonists soon started visiting spas throughout the northeast and some sites became more fashionable than others, and certain resorts developed a reputation for attracting a particular type of clientele. For a brief history of practices that led to the growth of resorts in the United States see Jeffrey Limerick, Nancy Ferguson, and Richard Oliver, *America's Grand Resort Hotels* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1979), 17-21.

⁴⁵ *Ibid*, 31.

⁴⁶ However, at this point in time, a vacation to a resort was primarily reserved for the upper class. Although vacationing was meant to be a respite from everyday life, the stressful strictures and expectations of social conventions were transplanted to the resort.

no other source of entertainment outside of the resort. The design of these hotels reveals the social customs of the times. Large banquet halls and ballrooms provided spaces for dining and dancing. Various other parlors and rooms were dedicated to certain activities, often segregated by sex, such as sitting rooms for women to take tea and club rooms for men to smoke cigars and drink scotch, and large open verandas or porches were areas for conversing. Other rooms and facilities on the grounds were dedicated to popular entertainment and recreation, such as billiard rooms, bowling alleys, and tennis courts. Resort owners kept guests amused with scheduled activities, such as teas, lectures, dances, music concerts, and various recreational tournaments. The hotelier's ultimate goal was to have guests enjoy themselves at the hotel, which would encourage their continued consumption of more activities and services, often at a supplementary cost.

The network of railroads and steamships that grew throughout the United States facilitated the development of vacation destinations in locations that travelers previously considered too remote. Travelers who lived in the northeast and heretofore may have limited their travel to a resort in Virginia could now consider traveling to Florida, California, and the Southwest. Resorts quickly grew alongside railroads because oftentimes the railroad developers were also responsible for building the hotel. These astute businessmen realized that the one relied on the other—railroads made it possible to reach these areas, and hotels allowed these places to become destinations. For example, both Henry Plant and Henry Flagler, two businessmen largely responsible for tourism development in Florida, were as involved in hotel building as they were in railroad development. Steamships, which were also a dominant form of modern, fast transportation in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, had a relationship

with hotels similar to that of railroads, and allowed for places like the Gran Condado Vanderbilt to become a destination for U.S. travelers.

Grand resorts were built in a variety of styles. As eclecticism became the norm in nineteenth-century architecture, hotel designers used style as a means to create a specific ambiance, as different architectural styles carried different connotations. For example, early resort hotels, such as Catskill Mountain House (1824, near Palenville, New York), Grand Central Hotel (1858, White Sulphur Springs, Virginia), and Congress Hall (ca. 1812, Saratoga Springs, New York) were designed in the Federal Style, which was a prevalent style of architecture in the Early Republic period (Figure 5). This style helped reinforce the idea of a cohesive nation, especially important in peripheral areas where some of these resorts were located. As the century wore on, different revival styles became popular for resort design. Most often the style of a resort hotel was meant to remind vacationers that they were in a place and having an experience that was different from their normal life. Hotel builders commonly commissioned certain styles to evoke the idea of a romantic past and an exotic otherness.⁴⁷

Resort destinations developed further south in the United States with the extension of rail lines. The railroad came to Asheville, North Carolina in 1881 and tourism in the area quickly grew, especially after some of the richest families in the United States showed a preference for building there. Edwin Wiley Grove, a millionaire tonic inventor, saw the potential for a hotel in Asheville that took advantage of the alleged curative powers of the air.⁴⁸ He bought a tract of land and his son-in-law, F. G. Seeley, acted as designer and contractor for the Grove Park Inn (1913) (Figure 6). Seeley employed the rustic simplicity of the popular Craftsman Style.

⁴⁷ However, when California was just starting to become a destination for easterners, some resorts utilized styles that were prevalent in the east. For example, the Hotel del Monte (1880) in Monterey, California, whose design was an amalgam of the Stick Style and Queen Anne, was meant to reassure guests with architecture that was prevalent on the East Coast, and thus familiar, even though they were thousands of miles from home.

⁴⁸ Indeed, he came to Asheville himself to help remedy his bronchial ailments.

Utilizing his knowledge of current experiments for fireproof construction, Seeley built all of the exterior walls in reinforced concrete. He faced these walls with rocks and boulders from a nearby mountain, creating the effect of a rustic, hand-hewn cottage, but on a monumental scale, with red ceramic tiles intended to recall thatch. The interior design was as thoughtful as the exterior appearance of the hotel. Concrete blocks were part of the interior wall construction, which created nearly soundproof walls, and water, steam, and electric lines were hidden in conduits behind the walls. In addition, all the lighting was indirect; not one light bulb was visible in the hotel. All of these design details were meant to create the appearance of a rustic structure, one that harkened back to a simpler time, or a simpler way of life outside of the modern city. But hidden behind this veneer were the modern conveniences guests expected, even if they did not wish to see them.

The furniture in the Grove Park Inn also spoke to this contemporary tension between notions of modernity and a simpler past. The copper chandeliers and lamps were manufactured by Roycrofters, a reformist community of artists and craftsmen founded in 1895 in East Aurora, New York. Influenced by the writings of William Morris and the ideals of the Arts and Crafts Movement in England, Elbert Hubbard, the founder of Roycroft, proposed that tasks should be done with a mixture of work and play so that artisans and craftsmen could once again work in a healthy and happy environment. The interest in design that was concerned with social reform and the well being of workers paralleled society's attentiveness to the alleged curative powers of the air in rural Asheville. The design presented the idea of a movement away from the ill effects of modern life and consumerism to a simpler environment where U.S. citizens could recuperate their vital energy.⁴⁹

⁴⁹ Likewise, the Arts and Crafts Movement believed that its designs would present a new kind of industrial consumerism, one in which individuals could live more rationally and harmoniously with one another. The

Some resort hotels promised not just escape from modern life, but also from the familiar world of the United States to a foreign, exotic environment. One way resort hotels achieved this was through the use of architectural styles that were exotic or foreign to the average visitor, exemplified by the Tampa Bay Hotel in Tampa, Florida (1891) (Figure 7).⁵⁰ The hotel was one of the many projects of Henry Plant, who was dedicated to extending his railroad and steamship enterprises down Florida's west coast in the late nineteenth century. Plant's railroad reached the tiny community of Tampa in 1880 and within a decade it was a booming town. Recognizing the reciprocal relationship between railroads and hotels, Plant purchased land in Tampa Bay to build a resort hotel. Town merchants were disappointed that Plant did not build in the center of town, but architect John A. Wood felt the waterside location was more appropriate for his design of a new "Alhambra."⁵¹ The Tampa Bay Hotel was a grand, exotic design based on an iteration of a Moorish-Mediterranean style meant to recall Florida's romantic Spanish past. Details such as silver-roofed minarets, keyhole windows, and wooden tracery with Islamic motifs firmly declared the foreignness of the red brick hotel. Although it was not the first hotel in Florida to draw upon a Moorish influence, when it opened in 1891 the Tampa Bay Hotel was certainly the most audacious in its exoticness.⁵² Furthermore, it was not strictly Moorish. Like so much of the architecture of the period, the Tampa Bay Hotel displayed a blend of elements from various sources; for example, the onion domes are more characteristic of Islamic architecture of the Middle East. Moreover, the interior was not a faithful continuation of the exterior style of the hotel. It was filled with antiques from Plant's personal collection, and the variety and richness of

simplified, basic form of Craftsmen furniture that decorated the Grove Park Inn embodied this ideal, but was actually only possible because of the force of modernity and progress and the perceived threats these held.

⁵⁰ For a thorough history of early twentieth century Florida resort hotels see Susan R. Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure: Resort Hotels of Henry Flagler and Henry Plant* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2002).

⁵¹ Limerick, Ferguson, and Oliver, *America's Grand Resort Hotels*, 91.

⁵² Ibid.

these objects from different periods and regions of the world certainly reminded guests that they were outside of their normal environment.

While Plant concerned himself with the west coast of Florida, Henry Flagler, the Standard Oil millionaire, concentrated on spreading his railroad and hotels down the eastern side of Florida. Flagler started as a tourist himself when he first went to Saint Augustine, Florida, but quickly recognized the business opportunity to add to the one extant modern hotel in town. He enlisted the firm of Carrère & Hastings to design a luxurious Spanish palace in concrete (Figure 8). At this point the young firm had not yet designed any major projects and Flagler's hotel was an important step in this Beaux-Arts firm establishing its reputation. Although the Ponce de Leon Hotel (1888) was meant to recall the Spanish conquistador and his quest for the Fountain of Youth, it was a modern hotel underneath its historicist façade.

Before construction began in 1885, the marshy location of the building had to be filled in with sand and hundreds of pine pilings in order to support the foundations. The cast concrete hotel was built with iron reinforcing, and earned the title of first large cast concrete building in the United States. Reinforced concrete became a popular construction technique for hotels because of its resiliency to fires. Its use in the construction of the Ponce de Leon signals the interest in employing the most modern building techniques as a consideration of guests' safety and a means to protect the building as an investment.⁵³

Examples such as the Ponce de Leon Hotel demonstrate how hotels and leisure travel helped advance technology and innovation in the architectural world. In addition, rather than building impressive, record breaking buildings outside of traditional urban centers where their exposure was guaranteed, tourism development encouraged construction in peripheral areas as a

⁵³ The first widespread use of reinforced concrete for building construction was by French builder Francois Coignet, who built several large houses out of reinforced concrete in England and France in the latter half of the nineteenth century.

way to attract more attention to these lesser-known locales. But as much as the modern features, such as the four Edison dynamos and cutting edge electrical lighting system, set the Ponce de Leon Hotel apart as a modern building, the style of the architecture simultaneously reinforced its otherness. What it announced to guests was the ability of modern architects to take architecture from past times or from seemingly exotic civilizations and transform it into something that could meet the needs of modern society.

The interior decoration of the Ponce de Leon Hotel invited guests to leave their everyday life behind and enter into a different world. The interiors included the Lion of Leon, the symbol of Ponce de Leon, dolphin details that referenced the River of Dolphin, and countless other decorative elements that referenced marine life, Florida, and the Muses, among other things (Figure 9). It was not just the exoticness of the hotel that impressed guests but also the sheer luxuriousness of the interior design, which included Tiffany chandeliers, carved wood paneling, marble stairs, and furniture carved from precious hardwoods.

Before the Ponce de Leon opened for the 1888 winter season, Flagler was already working to ensure the success of his hotel by buying and improving the rail line that served Saint Augustine. Flagler's efforts paid off and for more than half a decade he was the owner of the most exclusive winter resorts in the nation.⁵⁴ However, the economic depression of 1893 combined with the capriciousness of the fashionable elite resulted in a decline in travel to Saint Augustine. The town, which some visitors thought was boring and lacked sophistication, soon became a brief stop on a trip further south to Palm Beach and later Miami and Fort Lauderdale.

Flagler himself was one of the businessmen looking to invest in developing land in Southern Florida. He extended his railroad even further south, building a railroad extension and a hotel in Palm Beach at the same time 1893. Flagler built a bridge across Lake Worth so that the

⁵⁴ Limerick, Ferguson, and Oliver, *America's Grand Resort Hotels*, 89.

railroad could deliver guests right to the hotel's entrance, a strategic move that also discouraged people from staying in other locations. When it opened in 1894 the Royal Poinciana was an impressively large, six-story wooden structure with more than three miles of corridors (Figure 10). Flagler's shift from concrete construction in Saint Augustine to wood frame construction provided a number of advantages, most notably that a work crew could construct a wood frame building more quickly than a concrete hotel and that the clapboard exterior gave Flagler the opportunity to color coordinate with his Florida East Coast Railway cars and buildings, tying together hotel and railroad in the U.S. public's mind.⁵⁵ The hotel was Georgian Revival, which was not considered particularly exotic, but the profusion of tropical gardens and vegetation reminded guests that they were in a foreign setting, as did the name of the hotel, which referenced a wild flowering plant found in Florida.⁵⁶

Miami also became a tourist destination in the late nineteenth century. Julia Tuttle, local landowner and booster, convinced Flagler that Miami's climate was more ideal for fruit and vegetable production than parts of Florida further north.⁵⁷ Flagler built the railroad to Miami in 1895 and constructed the Hotel Royal Palm in 1897. Flagler employed the architects who designed the Royal Poinciana to design the Hotel Royal Palm, and the two hotels were fairly similar in style.⁵⁸ Other hotels sprang up in Miami in the late 1890s and 1900s. In the 1910s a strip of land was filled in, developed, and incorporated as the city of Miami Beach. Tourism

⁵⁵ Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure*, 201. Wooden architecture was also probably attractive because it could be constructed more quickly than cement or masonry and this promised a faster return on the investment of building a hotel, even if it meant a greater risk of fire.

⁵⁶ Also known as Flamboyant, this tree has fern-like leaves and when in bloom it is covered with vibrant colored flowers. Originally endemic to the western forests of Madagascar, the tree has since been introduced to other parts of the world and grows in tropical and subtropical regions, including Florida, Texas, Arizona, California, and much of the Caribbean. The Royal Poinciana was noted for its wealthy guests and the average stay at the hotel was normally a couple of weeks. Limerick, Ferguson, and Oliver, *America's Grand Resort Hotels*, 95.

⁵⁷ Braden, *The Architecture of Leisure*, 230.

⁵⁸ The most notable difference is that the Hotel Royal Palm has a Second Empire style mansard roof.

continually increased in the Miami area, culminating in a huge tourism boom in the 1920s.⁵⁹ The continued southward march of the resort hotel industry provides the foundations for understanding the development of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in Puerto Rico.

Unlike Flagler, Vanderbilt did not create parallel transportation and lodging ventures that economically benefited and reinforced one another, but the hotel did develop a symbiotic relationship with the Porto Rico Steamship Company. Up to this point, travel to the Caribbean was reserved for the elite, who had the necessary time and money to travel. As mobilities scholar Mimi Shiller has noted, the network of tourism in the Caribbean that developed in the late nineteenth century was based on the fast steamship routes that the fruit trade developed and that travelers used as the major means of transportation to get to and from the Caribbean islands.⁶⁰ Headquartered in New York, the Porto Rico Steamship Company was the major steamship to Puerto Rico, conveying passengers in as few as four or five days in 1917. The steamship company's interest in the hotel project was so strong that it invested between \$40,000 and \$50,000 in the construction of the hotel.⁶¹ The Gran Condado Vanderbilt relied on the Porto Rico Steamship Company to deliver visitors to the hotel and so it allowed the steamship company to advertise the hotel in publicity materials as the port of call for the steamship. By being able to advertise the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as its port of call, the Puerto Rico Steamship Company had the built manifestation of luxury and good repute that it needed to present Puerto Rico as a

⁵⁹ Jean-François Lejeune and Allan T. Shulman, *The Making of Miami Beach, 1933-1942: The Architecture of Lawrence Murray Dixon* (Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2000), 10. The tourism boom occurred in tandem with a land and construction boom in Florida. The Great Florida Land Boom ended in 1926 when a hurricane ravaged the state.

⁶⁰ Mimi Shiller, *Consuming the Caribbean: From Arawaks to Zombies* (New York and London: Routledge, 2003), 60.

⁶¹ As noted in a letter from May 22, 1934 from lawyer Charles Hartzell to Governor Blanton Winship as part of his efforts to convince the governor that the insular government had to take action regarding the ownership and operation of the hotel.

worthy destination and encourage more U.S. vacationers to cruise its ships to this Caribbean island.

At the time it opened, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt's primary competition was the hotel industry in Palm Beach and Miami. Although there is a lack of documentation explaining exactly why Vanderbilt decided to build a hotel in Puerto Rico, it was a logical choice given the mindset of the time. Puerto Rico was a natural extension further south from Florida to a place that was part of the U.S. empire and was promoted as ripe for development opportunities. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt offered its financial backers the opportunity to get in on the ground floor of the next big vacation destination for U.S. travelers.

C. **First Glance: A Vanderbilt Project in the U. S. Empire**

For many years, Frederick William Vanderbilt (1856-1938) was director of the New York Central Railroad and his life speaks of the Gilded Age glory of the Vanderbilts as railroad magnates. He was involved in the construction of Grand Central Terminal in New York City (1913), one of the most amazing feats of modern building of the period. He also privately supported the architectural world through the various residences he kept in New York City, the Hudson River Valley, and New England. Yet, like many wealthy men of his time, Vanderbilt looked beyond the northeast for business opportunities. Part of his legacy is the Gran Condado Vanderbilt.

Histories of both the Vanderbilts' building projects and Warren & Wetmore's architectural works tend to focus primarily on built works in the United States. In particular they concentrate on projects in New York. Scholars also discuss what they consider more iconic works, such as the Vanderbilt's Biltmore in Asheville, South Carolina, but they often only

mentioned in passing, if at all, projects they deem more peripheral. These practices are unfortunate, as they fail to acknowledge the important ways in which the Vanderbilt family and Warren & Wetmore had an impact on international cultural and architectural dialogues.

Why would Frederick Vanderbilt be interested in a hotel project in Puerto Rico? The Gran Condado Vanderbilt was a building project of a type entirely novel to Puerto Rico and it was new for Vanderbilt to build outside of the United States. Ensnared in the world of railroad transportation, Vanderbilt was well aware of the effects increased transportation technologies and networks were having on tourism. Vanderbilt may have also started thinking about a resort hotel in San Juan at the prompting of John E. Berwind, whose family had owned the New York & Porto Rico Steamship Company for a short time. Though Berwind had sold the company to Charles Morse's Consolidated Steamship Lines in 1907, he may have used this experience to talk up Puerto Rico as an untapped market. Indeed, Berwind was no minor character in the history of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt; he was a major partner with the Vanderbilt Hotels Company and fought to see the project constructed.

Both John Berwind and Frederick Vanderbilt probably understood the value of building a resort hotel for the upper class in this specific moment. In the 1910s the temperance movement was gaining ground in the United States and talk of a prohibition on alcohol had businessmen thinking of alternative ways they could profit from alcohol consumption. Vanderbilt may have considered how much more attractive a resort in Puerto Rico would be if alcohol consumption were forbidden at resorts in the United States.⁶² In addition, the U.S. elite no longer felt safe making their annual trips to vacation on the French Riviera or other places in the temperate Mediterranean with World War I raging in Europe. Puerto Rico presented a safe, yet still foreign,

⁶² This point is only relevant during the initial stages of the project. The Jones Act of 1917 expanded Puerto Rican autonomy and U.S. citizenship. Immediately after the act was passed, a referendum on the prohibition of alcohol in Puerto Rico went up for vote in July 1917 and the Puerto Rican people overwhelmingly ratified it.

alternative to Europe that offered the Old World charm and warmer climate that was associated with trips to the Mediterranean, but well removed from the war zone.

D. **Locating the Hotel and Tourism in the Modern City**

The relationship the Vanderbilt Hotels Company and John Berwind had with the Behn brothers informed the location of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Sosthenes and Hernand Behn had invested significant time and money into making Condado an upper class residential neighborhood during the early twentieth century and were active boosters of this zone of the city. Bordered by the Atlantic Ocean to the north and the Condado Lagoon to the south, the Condado area is a small peninsula that juts out to the west from the mainland and reaches toward, but does not touch, San Juan islet (containing Puerta de Tierra and San Juan Viejo [Old San Juan]), to the west (Figure 11). The Gran Condado Vanderbilt was the first grand, non-residential structure to be built in Condado and was fundamental to the development of this area.

At the time the hotel was built, San Juan islet was connected to the mainland by four major roadways with bridges. Three of these roadways connected by bridge to the mainland south of the Condado Lagoon. The other major thoroughfare to the mainland connected to Condado via the Puente Dos Hermanos, built by and known in English as the Behn Brothers Bridge. The bridge fed into Ashford Avenue (at that time known as Avenida de las Nereidas), Condado's main thoroughfare and contributed greatly to the area's development and the construction of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt.

In 1908, the Behn brothers were simultaneously involved in building the bridge and in developing a residential park in Condado along the streetcar line (Figure 12).⁶³ During this period, streets were laid out and lots were parceled out and sold. The bridge allowed the Behn brothers to run telephone cables from San Juan islet to Condado, and Condado probably received telephone service earlier than other elite neighborhoods of San Juan, such as Santurce and Miramar, located to the south of Condado.⁶⁴ The Behn brothers enticed the social elite to purchase land in Condado by offering a level of amenities commensurate to other major urban areas: rainwater drainage systems, a streetcar line, wetland infill, three acres of parks, an Esplanade, the Kiosk, three new boulevards, and, of course, telephone service. The character of the development resembled contemporary suburban development in the United States. By the end of 1909, local publications advertised that the upper class Condado residences of M. Rodríguez Serra, F. Ramírez de Arrellano, Ralph Swigget and José Llompart had been completed and the value of the lots had more than doubled in the first year (Figure 13).⁶⁵ Condado residences such as these were centered along Ashford Avenue. This year also marked the incorporation of the Borinquen Park Company, which operated pleasure parks, as well as eating and drinking establishments. The company oversaw Borinquen Park in Condado, which provided amusements to Condado residents that echoed what was fashionable in Europe and the United States. The park became a social venue for *sanjuaneros* to dress up and parade—to see and be seen.

⁶³ The brothers acquired a tiny telephone company in 1914. By 1917 they were installing telephones throughout Puerto Rico and Cuba, and in 1920 their company was formally known as the International Telephone and Telegraph Corporation.

⁶⁴ “Grand Condado Vanderbilt,” (San Juan: State Historic Preservation Office, United States Department of the Interior, 2009), 50.

⁶⁵ Anibal Sepúlveda Rivera, *Puerto Rico Urbano, Atlas Histórico de la Ciudad Puertorriqueña*, vol. 3 (San Juan: CARIMAR), 392.

The Behn brothers, foreigners who, through their business interests, positioned themselves as part of San Juan's elite society, laid the groundwork for urban development in Condado.⁶⁶ Even though a few residences were constructed as early as 1909, Condado remained largely unbuilt until ten years later when the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was built. The hotel established an approach to building that was copied throughout the area and cemented the reputation of Condado as a place of sophistication and luxury. The prominent position along Ashford Avenue made the hotel a visual focal point, gave the hotel access to the infrastructure of the Condado Residential Park, and provided guests access to attractive natural and manmade amenities. While the hotel was located on a plot of land on the north side of Ashford Ave and its north façade butted up against a rocky outcropping touching the Atlantic Ocean, its property also extended south of Ashford Avenue to the more tranquil waters of Condado Lagoon. Designers converted this area into gardens and spaces for other guest activities, such as tennis.

Besides access to two bodies of water, the Condado area offered the hotel more spacious grounds to build upon. While San Juan Viejo was an area of interest to tourists who wanted to discover the old colonial city, or go shopping and dining, there was not much space within the walled city to build a grand hotel with resort amenities, such as outdoor gardens and tennis courts. However, after the construction of the Behn Brothers Bridge, access to San Juan Viejo from Condado was easy. Condado offered hotel developers the opportunity to plan for more expansive grounds, while still being conveniently located near the city center. In fact, when the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was first built, areas to either side of the hotel were populated with only palms and conifers, offering the ambiance of nature and seclusion that one expected to find at a grand resort hotel.

⁶⁶ The Behn brothers came to Puerto Rico via the Virgin Islands, though their parents were originally from Europe.

E. **Historical Style, Modern Amenities**

The New York firm of Warren & Wetmore received the commission for the Vanderbilt hotel project in San Juan. This was not an unusual choice as Warren & Wetmore was already informally established as the architectural firm of the Vanderbilt family. Charles Wetmore and Whitney Warren founded their firm in 1898. Warren had studied at the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Paris and his approach to architecture in his practice in the United States reflected the program's emphasis on studying classical architecture and incorporating historical styles in design. After Warren designed a country house for Charles Wetmore, during the construction of which the two became friends, Wetmore decided to abandon his job as an attorney, commence architectural training, and form an architecture firm with Warren. In 1908, the firm had designed a guesthouse for the Vanderbilt family at 49 East 52nd Street and gained extensive experience designing hotels when they were contracted for the Grand Central Terminal project.

In 1904, Warren & Wetmore started working on the Grand Central Terminal project with Reed & Stem, the firm that had won the competition for the design of the terminal. Although Reed & Stem had already submitted a design for Grand Central Terminal in the competition, when Warren & Wetmore became involved in the project, Warren proposed alterations to the original concept.⁶⁷ Warren's additions added more of the monumentality and grandeur typical of Beaux-Arts design to the façade of the Terminal building. After the terminal's completion, Warren & Wetmore were responsible for designing three of the four terminal complex hotels, which defined the standards of a modern urban luxury hotel (Figure 14). These hotels were the

⁶⁷ For a history of Grand Central Terminal see for example, John Belle and Maxinne R. Leighton, *Grand Central: Gateway to a Million Lives* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 2000); Kenneth Powell, *Grand Central Terminal* (London: Phaidon Press, 1996); and Peter Pennoyer and Anne Walker, *The Architecture of Warren & Wetmore* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006).

Biltmore (1914), the Commodore (1919) and the Ambassador (1921). Some of these projects occurred simultaneously to the development of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt and these numerous hotels projects undoubtedly influenced one another. Warren & Wetmore's terminal complex hotels brought sophistication and grandeur to the urban environment of New York just as the Gran Condado Vanderbilt did for Condado and San Juan.

Warren & Wetmore's work on the Grand Central Terminal complex provided the firm with experience in modern planning and designing. While they undoubtedly applied all of this knowledge to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt project, the Puerto Rico resort required them to rethink typical urban hotel design and adapt it to the needs of the island. The hotels around Grand Central Terminal, while pleasant in atmosphere, were conceived more in terms of a business hotel or a hotel to meet the temporary lodging needs of the vast amount of people that would pass through this part of New York. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt was to be a destination in itself, therefore Warren & Wetmore had to design a hotel that was comparable to the technological sophistication of modern urban hotels but also offered the guest an ambiance of luxury, relaxation, and escape from everyday life.

The Gran Condado Vanderbilt was meant to add to Frederick Vanderbilt's prestige, just as the Grand Central Terminal and all of its hotels were meant to create a symbol of the power and largesse of the Vanderbilt family. While Vanderbilt business ventures in transportation and auxiliary services, such as hotels, were first and foremost projects conceived in terms of profit, they were also opportunities for the Vanderbilt family to create a material legacy of the achievements of their family. The built manifestations of their business ventures would have resonated at the time with the social belief that these were projects of progress that were ensuring a more modern and civilized society in the United States. This was certainly true for the Grand

Central Terminal project as it was a feat of modern engineering that benefitted the masses. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt, as a destination for the elite, was probably not thought of in these same terms. At the time of its creation, it was most likely understood in relation to other social spaces built by and for the U.S. elite, such as Henry Flagler's Ponce de Leon hotel in Saint Augustine.

Warren & Wetmore's 1917 design for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt unquestionably achieved the goal of creating a grand resort that reinforced the power and prominence of the Vanderbilt family. One of the firm's drawings of the projected hotel and grounds illustrates how Warren & Wetmore intended to create a sense of grandeur and monumentality through the restrained use of decoration and the creation of expansive, carefully designed gardens that would spread from the hotel's main façade south across Ashford Avenue to Condado Lagoon (Figure 15). The similarity between the Grand Condado Vanderbilt's building and grounds and Mediterranean villas and landscape architecture evoked the grandeur and refinement of these luxurious properties of the European nobility.

The structure that was completed in 1919 was built out of reinforced concrete with a hipped terracotta tile roof, which was a popular feature for Mediterranean Revival style buildings. The Mediterranean flavor was reinforced underneath the roof overhang, where wood support beams imitated those of Spanish architecture in Spain and in its colonies, such as Puerto Rico and Cuba. The smooth plaster cement finish of the exterior and interior walls, the decoration, and the fenestration and openings that reinforced openness to the temperate climate all referenced Mediterranean architectural traditions.

Warren & Wetmore's Beaux-Arts architectural education and the tendency of this school to favor eclecticism undoubtedly informed the Mediterranean Revival style of the hotel. Their

Beaux-Arts education predisposed them to a primary concern with program, symmetry, and grandeur achieved through the use of historical styles from which architects freely borrowed, combined, and adapted. Architects, and society in general, considered Beaux-Arts design a modern building approach during the earlier part of Warren & Wetmore's architectural practice.

The vast amount of architectural and building publications that were printed in the United States during this period served as a forum and material sourcebook for contemporary architects. Although published about ten years after Warren & Wetmore first conceived of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt's design, architectural historian Rexford Newcomb's explanation of the Mediterranean Revival would have held true in the 1910s. In describing the style and its appropriateness for warm climates he states: "Spanish, Italian, Moorish, Byzantine—all Mediterranean types generally—instead of being archeologically segregated, are under the orchestral process merged, as were those golden threads long ago, into a new, sun-loving style which, while eminently American in its plan and utilities, is never-the-less distinctly Mediterranean in its origins and spirit."⁶⁸ Newcomb clearly defines this contemporary style as one that combines the best of both worlds—the attention to functionality and efficiency associated with U.S. practices and the architectural richness of blending historical styles.

The restrained Mediterranean Revival hotel was composed of a major central hall with two flanking wings. The main façade was positioned parallel to Ashford Avenue and the wings aligned parallel to the main hall and set back. The symmetrical and ordered composition of the main hall and wings proposed a balanced solution to the distribution of space, and the openings and fenestration of the edifice referenced the rational organization of the interior space (Figure 16). The organization of the openings and fenestration on the main façade served the purpose of

⁶⁸ Rexford Newcomb, *Mediterranean Domestic Architecture in the United States* (Cleveland: J. H. Hansen, 1928), iv.

reinforcing the style of the hotel and the interior layout. The division between the two first floors, which were dedicated to the public spaces of the hotel, and the three upper floors, which held all of the guest rooms, was clearly demarcated by a stringcourse that was integrated into a decorative balcony that ran along the central portion of the main hall.⁶⁹ Consistent with European villa and palace design, the grandest floor of the hotel, the *piano nobile*, was located on the second floor. This was echoed in the façade, wherein the nine double-height arched openings located above the rectangular openings of the first floor marked the importance of the second floor. Though marked at either end by a pedimented window, this series of arched openings on the main hall is echoed on the same level on the east and west wings. These perforations were not merely a visual device; they were part of a gallery that ran around the perimeter of the second floor that allowed for cross ventilation. The concrete balustrades on the outer six openings, which doubled as balconettes that connected the guest to the outside, further underscored the functional purpose of these openings, as well as the openness of the design.

The few decorated windows projected the Mediterranean Revival character of the hotel. Perhaps the most striking of these are the two neo-Plateresque windows on the third floor whose decoration continues upward to the windows above on the fourth floor (Figure 17).⁷⁰ Elaborate detailing surrounds the simple rectangular window openings, and this cast concrete ornamentation is the most extravagant feature of the entire façade. Starting from the bottom, the balcony under the third floor window is decorated with a floral motif with a coat of arms in the center flanked by dolphin-like creatures. This balcony is capped at the end with pilasters that appear to be supported by the heads of two cherubs placed under each pilaster. Above the

⁶⁹ This balcony was clearly meant to be decorative, as there were no doors or openings to allow access to it, there were only windows located above the balcony.

⁷⁰ Plateresque was a style of architecture that developed in the late Gothic and early Renaissance period in Spain and its territories. Plateresque architecture is characterized by the eclectic mix of a variety of decorative components and is visually recognizable by decorative facades covered by a profusion of ornamentation.

window is another coat of arms flanked by infant mermen. Above this is another frieze with a shell in the center bordered by adult mermen. The area is contained by classical elements: fluted engaged columns with Corinthian capitals, projecting cornice, egg and dart and beaded molding. The projecting cornice acts as a base for scrolled consoles topped with fruit-bearing urns. Moving inward, the fourth floor window opening is framed on the bottom half by curving fish forms and is topped by another coat of arms flanked by unfurling scrolls.

Another focal point of the main façade is a large ornamental coat of arms design that appears to be hanging from the molding between the fourth and fifth floors (Figure 18). To either side of a large central coat of arms that is crowned with a seashell, floral garlands drape outwards in a swag fashion and connect to two smaller coats of arms.⁷¹ These two coats of arms contain anchor designs in the center, adding another maritime reference to the hotel's decoration. The maritime details—anchors, fish, seashells, and mermen—have multiple interpretations. They could be a reference to the hotel's proximity to the ocean, a point on all visitors' minds as they would have come to Puerto Rico by ship, and could also be a reference to the Vanderbilt family, who amassed their first fortune in international maritime shipping.

The north façade was designed to have a unique relationship to the sea. The arched openings on the second floor of the north façade provided expansive vistas of the Atlantic Ocean. In the main hall, these archways opened up to a patio with a central hexagonal garden that was surrounded by a colonnaded gallery, which culminated in a covered pavilion at the point closest to the sea (Figure 19 & 20). Through this colonnaded gallery, like the arched openings on the second floor, Warren & Wetmore positioned views of nature within an architectural framework. The guest's view of the ocean always included some form of architectural element, such as columns or the roof, and conversely when viewing the hotel, the guest's vision also always

⁷¹ The coat of arms is now inscribed with a CV, but at the time of construction this lettering did not exist.

included nature to complement the architecture. The design of the colonnaded gallery was very open, allowing guests to feel connected to the ocean, whose waves crashed up to the rocky shore just below the building. An assortment of wicker furniture decorated the gallery, encouraging guests to relax there, while still maintaining an openness that facilitated uninterrupted ambulation in this area (Figure 21). The architecture connected to the ocean through the views it provided and a staircase physically linked it to the oceanfront.

In the interior spaces of the hotel, Warren & Wetmore designed a layout conducive to an efficient hotel that also projected the grandeur of Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage. Guests first entered through an unassuming entrance under the *porte cochere* on the south façade. This perforation in the structure was downplayed as the main entrance in favor of presenting movement up the staircase from the first to second floor as the main entrance to the hotel (Figure 22). The dramatic effect of this double lyre-shaped flying staircase, which makes the area seem larger and grander than it actually is, is due to the narrower steps at the bottom that expand as one moves up them and culminates in a grand opening up as one arrives on the second floor and faces out toward the front (south façade) gallery hall. Created out of reinforced concrete, the staircase was surfaced with black terrazzo, which complemented the other terrazzo floor designs of the first and second stories.⁷²

Besides the initial loggia and entrance lobby, the first floor provided services and amenities that guests may have desired. The variety of services included ladies' and men's rooms, a barbershop, a restaurant, a billiard room, and a bowling alley. In addition there were

⁷² This staircase was part of a tradition of grand staircases in hotel design. They were more than just a means for transporting guests between floors; their grandness and often opulent design was meant to project the status of the hotel. Likewise guests who paraded these stairs, a social act of being seen and watching others, took on this status.

services on the first floor that guests would have never seen but were vital to the operation of the hotel, such as trunk storage, kitchens, pantries, and a stewards' department.

The spaces of the second floor, dedicated primarily to social functions, were divided in a rather symmetrical pattern by loggias that ran around the perimeter and delineated different areas. Utilitarian services, including office, telephones, and ladies' parlor, were located to either side of the lobby area. Beyond this front area, which revolved around the grand staircase, the rest of the floor was divided into three other spaces: dining room, lounge, and patio (Figure 23). The network of loggias provided access to all of these spaces and created an interesting approach to circulation in the hotel. Main rooms did not have to attach to a shared central area or connect via dark hallways. The loggias provided a functional means for getting from one place to another as well as fostering a form of leisure entertainment where guests could stroll around the loggias to take in fresh air and the views outside, socialize, and see what was happening in the rooms if the doors were open.

Arched openings in the loggia, which paralleled the arched openings to the interior, led to the second floor lobby, dining room and lounge. These openings were topped by wooden transoms and glass transom windows and had wooden louvered doors that could fold open. If opened all the way, the doors allowed for a cross breeze to ventilate the area, though they could be closed off for privacy or protection from the elements. Like the ground floor, the second floor was covered with terrazzo flooring and different patterns were employed to delineate different areas. Some of the loggias and rooms on the second floor contained traditional Spanish style ceilings, with exposed wooden beams that were either plain or intricately carved with classical decoration and human figures. Other sections of the loggia and rooms had pointed cross vaults with electric lamps that looked like candle lanterns hanging from the center (Figure 24).

An image of the public space near the grand staircase in the second floor illustrates how the interior design of the hotel conjured notions of the historic, tropical and modern (Figure 25). The space was equipped predominantly with wicker furniture, which was considered particularly appropriate for warm climates. Since the nineteenth century Europeans and Americans talked about wicker as a more sanitary option to upholstered furniture, and especially in the United States in the 1900s and 1910s, scores of popular magazines and domestic guides touted wicker as naturally hygienic because it was airy, vermin-free, and thoroughly sanitary.⁷³ The advantages of wicker were especially valuable in the hot, humid climate of Puerto Rico, because wicker did not absorb moisture, allowed air to circulate freely, and could be cleaned easily. The wicker furniture referenced the tropical climate, which was reinforced by the incorporation of potted tropical plants in the interiors. Visually prominent furniture, such as centrally located tables surrounded by chairs, were wood Mediterranean Revival style pieces that engaged with the theme of the historic. Recalling a European-rooted historic past, perhaps real or imagined, the table pictured in the postcard conjures notions of a romantic Spanish colonial past, and the type of furniture with which the Spanish nobility would have furnished their residences in the New World. The interior referenced modernity through its attention to creating a hygienic interior. In contrast to grand hotels further north in the United States, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was not filled with plush carpets, thick drapes, and stuffed furniture. The restrained decoration of the public spaces indicated not only notions of a simpler past, but also an approach to interior design that considered ease of cleaning and the attention to issues of sanitation in a modern civilization, which was a necessary counterpoint to references to the tropical and historic that, on their own, may have reminded guests too much of an underdeveloped or unsafe place.

⁷³ Jeremy Adamson, *American Wicker: Woven Furniture from 1850 to 1930* (Washington, D.C.: National Museum of American Art, Smithsonian Institution; New York: Rizzoli International Publications, 1993), 120.

Above the first two floors, the third through fifth floors were devoted to guestrooms (Figure 26). A floor typically contained thirty-three bedrooms (for a total of 100 in the hotel) and many could open to other bedrooms to create suites. Organized along a double-loaded corridor, each room had a window with a view outside. At the end of the wings on these floors, a salon between two rooms allowed for the possibility of a large suite of rooms. Many rooms had a private American-style bathroom, which contained a toilet, sink, and shower with tub, as was customary in the United States. The bathrooms were decorated with the white fixtures popular in United States at the time and, wherever possible, bathrooms were located next to one another. This was a common approach to designing hotels efficiently because it required the installation of less plumbing as pipes could be shared for a longer distance and split only at the very end. Other bedrooms, most commonly those in the outer wings, had a shared bath. In almost all instances, rooms that shared a bath had connecting doors to the rooms to either side, allowing the room to share a bath with either lateral room. This would have allowed the management greater flexibility in locating guests based on what rooms were already occupied. For example, a party that wanted to rent two rooms and share a bath were not limited to a specific set of rooms, but could be placed in any two adjacent rooms that had a connecting door.

F. **The Gran Condado Vanderbilt, Warren & Wetmore and the Mediterranean Revival Style**

The Mediterranean Revival actually encompasses a variety of styles. From the very basic rammed earth structures of the U.S. Southwest, to the Mission revival popular in California, and other structures that drew variously on Spanish Baroque, Mexican, Byzantine, Roman, Renaissance, and Moorish elements, Mediterranean Revival was a general term that could refer

to quite different types of architecture. Some were more faithful to a specific historical moment and style, while others were highly eclectic in their borrowing. Depending on the context, Mediterranean Revival design conveyed notions of a romantic past or warm agreeable climate.⁷⁴

Many scholars differentiate between Spanish Revival and Mediterranean Revival, though I believe this is a rather tenuous practice, stylistically speaking, as all of these structures drew from the same variety of sources. In particular, scholars who write about Florida architecture tend to differentiate the two as a means to separate architecture designed from the late 1910s through 1920s from previous architecture. This “shift” in styles seems largely informed by the fact that the 1910s and 1920s marked a period of a great amount of construction in Florida in which wealthy clients commissioned large mansions that were styled after Mediterranean villas. Of course, designs are all different and one can be more Italian Renaissance or Spanish Baroque or Moorish than another design, but I prefer the term Mediterranean Revival as I feel that Spanish Revival erroneously suggests the style is informed by Spanish architecture and this was not always the case.

This analysis is most concerned with Mediterranean Revival architecture that was informed by Beaux-Arts ideals and used various decorative elements that were associated with Spain. These buildings were not meant to be copies of Spanish or Mediterranean architecture, although iconic elements were sometimes designed into buildings, but were seen as emblematic of U.S. architecture in which the architects freely incorporated motifs as they pleased.⁷⁵ In an architectural atmosphere dominated by the Beaux-Arts system of design, the approach to style

⁷⁴ In some instances, various iterations of Spanish-inspired design were employed to make a pointed reference to the Hispanic roots of the United States. This type of reference was often made in locations where there was a Spanish or Mexican precedent, such as the Southwest, California and Florida. Mediterranean Revival style architecture was particularly popular in warmer climates, as the implementation of this style encouraged comparisons between the temperate climate of the Mediterranean and the warmer zones of the United States.

⁷⁵ For example, Seville Cathedral’s Giralda Tower was a popular icon that was commonly employed in Mediterranean Revival designs.

was aptly summed up by Whitney Warren himself, who claimed that new styles could not be invented, but rather evolved from the architect's borrowing from established styles.⁷⁶

The restrained Mediterranean Revival style of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt warrants comparison with other aspects of Warren & Wetmore's practice. The firm's reference files contained a number of photos and reproductions of architecture in Puerto Rico, Cuba, and Spain. Much of the Spanish architecture in the files is highly ornamented Moorish architecture, including numerous photos of the Alhambra Palace. However, images of Puerto Rican architecture in their files may have influenced the more reserved design of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. These photographs depict architecture of generally basic design with simple lines and little to no decoration, including many images of simple wooden houses with tiled roofs. In addition, the colonial architecture in San Juan was, in general, rather plain and did not have as much Renaissance and Baroque ornament as that found in Spanish colonial architecture in other locations in Latin America. Warren & Wetmore may have been thinking of their design in terms of the context of extant architecture in Puerto Rico, as the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was a relatively undecorated building, save for the neo-Plateresque windows and ornamental swags.

Warren & Wetmore designed a number of hotels and grand buildings for locations outside of the United States, most of which were territories or under heavy U.S. influence. Many of these designs seem to post-date the Gran Condado Vanderbilt project and are much more ornamented. Sometime around 1919, the firm designed an extension for the Sevilla-Biltmore in Havana that was never built because the owner ultimately commissioned another firm for the project (Figure 27).⁷⁷ It seems as though Warren & Wetmore's design proposed the demolition

⁷⁶ "Is There an American Architecture?" *New York Times*, 18 April 1909.

⁷⁷ The Sevilla-Biltmore is more thoroughly discussed in chapter two. An undated drawing for an unspecified hotel project in Havana contains details of the surrounding area that suggest it was their proposal for the Sevilla-Biltmore project.

of the existing hotel structure and other extant structures on the block in order to build a massive, fourteen-story hotel with roof garden.⁷⁸ Decidedly Spanish Revival in style, the design has a strong Moorish flavor, which is completely absent from the Grand Condado Vanderbilt.

Warren & Wetmore also proposed a project for a new presidential palace in Havana (Figure 28). A sprawling, three-story structure, the proposed palace had a strong neoclassical character, with Corinthian capitals, pedimented windows, floral swag ornamentation, and a balustrade topped with urns. A design such as this was not completely out of place in Havana. Not only was the classical style probably meant to lend an air of sophistication and status to the palace; it was visually similar to other neoclassical designs in Havana. In particular, it shares a number of decorative elements with the iconic neoclassical Hotel Inglaterra, of which the firm had a photograph in their reference files.⁷⁹

Warren & Wetmore also developed a design for a hotel in Mexico City that was never realized (Figure 29). The project probably dates to somewhere between 1917-1924 based on a comparison with other hotel projects and Spanish Revival style projects they were working on in this period. Similar to the proposal for the Sevilla-Biltmore and typical of urban hotels in this period, the proposed hotel is a massive rectangular structure that appears to take up at least a quarter of the city block and dwarfs the buildings around it. Projects such as this show just how prominent urban hotels were in the city landscape as beacons of modernity and good living.⁸⁰ This hotel design, as well as the Sevilla-Biltmore proposal, contained landscaped roof patios that included the incorporation of a profusion of vegetation, usually in the form of potted plants. The integration of a roof garden with vegetation was meant to highlight the temperate or hot climate

⁷⁸ Their proposal to demolish so much extant architecture may have been why the owner decided to hire another firm that composed a design that incorporated the existing hotel.

⁷⁹ For a more extensive analysis of the Hotel Inglaterra see chapter two.

⁸⁰ A large structure such as this, as well as the Sevilla-Biltmore proposal, may have contained an atrium or open central core to allow more light into the building.

of these locations and provide views of the city. Because Warren & Wetmore had a larger plot to design on for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt they did not need to place gardens on the roof. Instead, we see the equivalent to a roof garden in the colonnaded gallery with garden on the north side of the building. The Spanish Revival style of the Mexico City hotel proposal was more subdued than that of the Sevilla-Biltmore design. The design incorporated fewer Moorish details and focused more on the classical vocabulary that was used in Spanish Renaissance and Baroque architecture.

We can assume, based on the external appearance of the Mexico City and Havana projects, that the architects were following an established hotel design practice of putting public spaces on the first two floors, similar to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt design, and on top floors, which were usually dedicated to banquet halls and ballrooms. Of the three hotels Warren & Wetmore designed for Latin American cities, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt is the most visually subdued in terms of ornamentation. Given the island's status as a territory of the United States, and the fact that it was not yet established as a vacation destination for the elite, the more restrained use of architectural elements that reference Spain or other exotic locations reinforced Puerto Rico as not too foreign.

The Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the firm's experience designing country clubs and hotels also helped Warren & Wetmore gain commissions for projects in other parts of the Caribbean. In 1922, British steamship company Furness, Withy and Company hired Warren & Wetmore to design the Bermuda Golf Club in Tucker's Town. Warren & Wetmore complemented the club in 1925 with the Hotel Bermudiana, which was part of a later phase of the development plan of Bermuda's Trade Development Board.⁸¹ Located in the town of

⁸¹ Warren & Wetmore scholars Peter Penroyer and Anne Walker describe the Bermuda Golf Club as an "undercooked Mediterranean design." Penroyer and Walker, *The Architecture of Warren & Wetmore*, 212.

Hamilton, the Hotel Bermudiana contained 247 guest rooms and was one of the three largest hotels in the country. The six-story stucco hotel was designed in an Italian Renaissance style, and European and U.S. travelers may have read the retrained and austere decoration as a simplified design commensurate with their understanding of Caribbean islands as less progressed. Architect Peter Pennroyer and historian Anne Walker suggest as much in their valuation of the firm's design for the Constant Spring Hotel of 1931, located just outside of Kingston, Jamaica. In describing the design of the hotel, they claim: "In the tradition of the invention of appropriate styles in new colonies, the architects looked to the heritage of Europe and simplified the language of the architecture to achieve a rudimentary classicism appropriate to the islands."⁸² While this supposition may be true, it is important to remember that despite external stylistic appearance, the modern aspects of these hotels would have conveyed something completely different to the guest. To compete in the world of modern hotels, and to effectively attract U.S. tourists, Caribbean hotels had to be designed with the latest in modern amenities. Therefore, guests had to negotiate their confrontation with a seemingly contradictory environments—one that represented a romantic past while also epitomizing the most modern in technology, services, and operating systems.

Another well-known Mediterranean Revival style hotel by Warren & Wetmore is the Royal Hawaiian on Waikiki Beach in Honolulu, Hawaii (Figure 30). Designed in 1925 and completed in 1927, the Royal Hawaiian was built to fashion Waikiki into an upper-class resort and residential community and to accommodate the hordes of U.S. tourists that were arriving by steamship.⁸³ Historian Christine Skwiot has analyzed the manner in which guests could

⁸² Ibid, 213.

⁸³ Christine Skwiot, *The Purposes of Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Cuba and Hawai'i* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 103. Skwiot traces the history of attempts by Castle & Cooke and Matson Navigation Lines, as well as other interested parties, to support the "production of narratives of

understand the Royal Hawaiian as simultaneously luxuriously modern and associated with the perceived primitive simplicity of the residences of Hawaii's native chiefs and chieftesses. The property grounds were supposedly royal grounds of the kings and queens of Hawaii and the pink stucco of the hotel made an allusion to the coral house of King Kamehameha and Queen Ka'ahumanu.⁸⁴

Otherwise, the style of the hotel offered little in the way of a reference to Hawaii and its traditions. The architecture was a Mediterranean Revival style with Moorish details and some Orientalist décor, though as Skwiot points out, Persian rooms were a popular theme in hotel design in that period.⁸⁵ It shared other interior design motifs popular in current U.S. hotel design such as Egyptian revival rooms.⁸⁶ The themed rooms demonstrate that conveying an overwhelming sense of Hawaiian-ness was not the main goal of the hotel.

The fact that Warren & Wetmore designed the Royal Hawaiian in a Mediterranean Revival Style is a point worth considering. Four factors may have influenced the firm's use of this style, even though Hawaii did not have a Spanish or Mediterranean legacy. First, the popularity of the Mediterranean Revival style in U.S. architecture in this period may have influenced Warren & Wetmore. Second, the Mediterranean Revival style already had a tradition of being exported to other areas outside of the continental United States. Warren & Wetmore and other architecture firms may have considered the Mediterranean Revival style as appropriate for

Waikiki as a place reserved for royalty, once Hawaiian, now Anglo-Saxon, [which] proceeded in tandem with the construction of the Royal Hawaiian Hotel," 96.

⁸⁴ Ibid, 103-104.

⁸⁵ Ibid, 104.

⁸⁶ The practice of theming rooms in hotels dates to the nineteenth century and served two main purposes. The first was to have the public rooms of the ground floors emulate the spaces of a residence, such as the parlor and drawing room, turning the domestic into something to be played out in the communal spaces of the hotel. Themed public spaces followed popular nineteenth century trends in domestic interior design and in particular Oriental themed rooms were popular. Even after the popularity for Oriental home decoration had died out in the early twentieth century, hotels continued with themed rooms. This helped serve the other purpose of themed rooms, which was to visually distinguish between different parts of the hotel, such as restaurants, bars, lobbies, and lounges.

the territories of the United States. This may have been because more than half of the territories had a Spanish past (Cuba, Puerto Rico, the Philippines, the Panama Canal Zone, and Guam). Third, there was a well-established association of the Mediterranean Revival style with temperate and warm climates. Fourth, the Mediterranean Revival offered a means to create a sense of history in areas that were fairly newly acquired by the United States. Architect and curator Michael McDonough has discussed the advantage of using the Mediterranean Revival in creating a sense of permanence and history in Florida and this theory could also be applied to Hawaii and the other U.S. colonies.⁸⁷ This is not to suggest that established histories of these locations did not already exist, but it allowed builders to control this sense of history, stability and longevity based on the idea of historic architecture.⁸⁸

These four factors influenced Warren & Wetmore's decision to use the Mediterranean Revival style in Puerto Rico. Furthermore, for projects in territories with a Spanish history, such as Puerto Rico, Cuba and the Philippines, a Mediterranean Revival style probably seemed like an obvious choice, perhaps the only choice. Moreover, the proximity of the Caribbean to Florida and the building practices in this state may have influenced Warren & Wetmore. Florida had a legacy of constructing all types of buildings in the Mediterranean Revival style that dated back to the nineteenth century. Like Puerto Rico, Florida was once a possession of Spain and the two shared a similar climate. Warren & Wetmore were undoubtedly aware of design practices in Florida and may have drawn connections between Florida and Puerto Rico.

Some scholars who study Puerto Rican architecture are quick to point out that the Mediterranean Revival style in Puerto Rico was not a local development, but was, in fact,

⁸⁷ Michael McDonough, "Selling Sarasota: Architecture and Propaganda in the 1920s Boom Town," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 23 (1998), 11.

⁸⁸ Ibid, 18. Furthermore, the building techniques often used in Mediterranean Revival styles, such as solid masonry (or the appearance of) and stucco suggested substantial structures.

imported into Puerto Rico from the United States as a means to define a national or authentic Puerto Rican architecture.⁸⁹ I do not wish to suggest that U.S. dominance in Puerto Rico did not exist, but scholarship that claims that the Mediterranean Revival architecture in Puerto Rico was simply imperialist architecture ignores larger global trends and diminishes alternative ways of understanding this architecture. This point of view tends to focus primarily on the visual or ornamental characteristics of the architecture and usually fails to acknowledge the broader definition of design as it relates to architecture.⁹⁰ Analyses often fail to take into account that much of the significant Mediterranean Revival structures built in Puerto Rico in the early twentieth century, whether civic or social buildings or residences of the elite, were Beaux-Arts buildings, and as such they were part of a larger hemispheric trend in the Americas in which Beaux-Arts design was the modern building approach.

At the core of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt is the fact that it was a Beaux-Arts design, which was the most popular method of designing in the western hemisphere in this period and represented a modern approach to building. Its roots were ultimately not in the United States, but in Europe. Likewise, in other countries in Latin America, Beaux-Arts design was the preferred method of designing for large civic and commercial buildings.⁹¹ For example, in downtown Rio de Janeiro a large number of grand, monumental buildings were built as a way to develop the city and increase its prestige. In 1905, the Avenida Central (now Avenida Rio Branco) was

⁸⁹ For example, see John B. Hertz, "Authenticity, Colonialism, and the Struggle with Modernity," *Journal of Architectural Education* 55, no. 4 (May 2002): 220-227.

⁹⁰ For example, in an extensive collaborative study on the Hispanic roots in Puerto Rico, project members focused on how iterations of the Mediterranean Revival shaped the Puerto Rican built environment. In their analysis of the Mediterranean Revival style they noted that "Like all revivals, the Spanish revival is a mythified vision in which the glow of a splendid, poetic past seems to halo Spain." Their explanation of the Mediterranean Revival accounts for the architectural style and why this style may have been seen as desirable or appropriate for Puerto Rico, but not architectural concerns broader than style. *Hispanofilia: El revival español en la arquitectura y la vida en Puerto Rico, 1898-1950* [Hispanophilia: The Spanish Revival in Architecture and Life in Puerto Rico (San Juan: Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 1998), 16.

⁹¹ On the influence of Beaux-Arts planning and design in Latin American cities see Arturo Almandoz, ed., *Planning Latin America's Capital Cities, 1850-1950* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

inaugurated, which created an air of the Belle Époque in Rio de Janeiro. Grand Beaux-Arts buildings, such as the hotels, the *Biblioteca Nacional* (National Library), *Teatro Municipal* (Municipal Theater), *Senado Federal* (Federal Senate), and *Caixa de Amortização* (Amortization Chamber) lined the wide boulevard. Designed by architects trained in the Beaux-Arts approach, their buildings were part of an effort to make the city a modern metropolis based on the model of Paris. A variety of architects designed these buildings and many were French or from other countries in Europe, such as Spain and Italy. Buenos Aires also underwent a period of urban modernization in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that was visually symbolized through the construction of monumental Beaux-Arts architecture in the city center. Professionals from France and Italy came to supervise the program and foreign architects, some of whom never went to Buenos Aires, designed many of the grand Beaux-Arts buildings.⁹² Foreign architects did not have a negative impact on discourses of nationalism in these Latin American cities, but, in fact, through their work modern identities were formed through a connection to the modern building practices of established modern cities in Europe and the United States. While it may be tempting to read Warren & Wetmore's presence in San Juan as wholly imperial, the understanding at the time was not so simple. Despite contested relations that may have existed between Puerto Rico and the United States, it was very common for foreign architects to practice in Latin America and was not normally viewed negatively.

G. **Selling the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as the Puerto Rican Vacation**

The Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the experience it offered shaped the way Puerto Rico and tourism in Puerto Rico was portrayed to U.S. citizens in the late 1910s and 1920s. The large amount of promotional hotel material printed while the hotel was under operation by John

⁹² For example, Frenchman René Sergent designed the Errazuriz Palace having never visited Buenos Aires.

Berwind and Vanderbilt Hotels until Berwind's death in 1928 played an influential part in this. During this period, no organized tourism commission existed on the island, only an association of hoteliers and restaurateurs. The natural beauty, richness, and fertility of the land were often cited as the alluring characteristics of Puerto Rico that had charmed visitors from Christopher Columbus to Theodore Roosevelt. Indeed, Roosevelt's description of Puerto Rico as the "Switzerland of the Tropics" was widely used in promotional literature in the interwar period (Figure 31).

Manmade features were also highlighted in promotional materials, which frequently invoked the more established walled city of San Juan as a sightseeing must. The bustling historic center of Puerto Rico boasted beautiful colonial buildings in an array of colors, the result of city ordinances that prohibited buildings from being painted white as a countermeasure to the sun's strong rays. The pro-imperialist literature that was published after 1898, such as Dinwiddie's *Puerto Rico: Its Conditions and Possibilities*, promoted a dual image of San Juan. While these publications espoused the modern qualities of the city found in architecture, commerce, and culture as integral to the island's progress, they also embraced the old characteristics of the city as quaint and charming.

In addition, these publications consistently highlighted the roads of Puerto Rico as an attraction through claims that Puerto Rico had the best road system in the Caribbean, and thus was an ideal island for automobile tours. The road system was marketed in conjunction with the variety of scenery throughout the island and the manageable size of the island for driving tours. During this period one of the main attractions outside of San Juan was Coamo Springs, advertised as the oldest known mineral springs in the Americas and only three and a half hours

by car from San Juan.⁹³ Brochures claimed that expert analysis showed the waters of Coamo Springs to contain “chemical substances of unusual benefit in the treatment of gout, rheumatism, neuralgias of all kinds, gastric disturbances, spinal diseases, and all ailments which yield to radio-active substances.” The promotion of overnight or short trips to Coamo Springs in its brochures was of economic value to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as it also managed the Coamo Springs Hotel. The Grand Condado Vanderbilt even invested in a fleet of Packards and Hudsons that guests could rent.

Coamo Springs and the historic city center were some of the few attractions that would entice a visitor to leave the grounds of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt, for the hotel offered almost everything a guest could possibly imagine or desire. Guests could enjoy the restaurant, café, bowling alley, manicure parlor, and other public areas that offered a variety of food, beverage, and activities to consume (Figure 32). This was key as the activities and entertainment found in the historic center were not within walking distance.

The hotel operated on the European plan, by which all meals and services were paid for *à la carte*.⁹⁴ The service was repeatedly referred to as “exclusively American” in promotional literature, which was a means of reassuring guests that they would receive customer service consistent with that of hotels in the United States, and likewise would be expected to tip in a manner similar to the custom in the United States. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt publicized that a French chef ran the kitchen and that meals were prepared in part by the dairy products, fruit, and vegetables that came from the hotel’s farm. The modern technology for cleaning or storing

⁹³ The allure of Coamo Springs had its roots in the tradition of tourism to places with therapeutic waters in the United States, such as White Sulphur Springs in Virginia.

⁹⁴ This is in comparison to the American plan, so named after the practice in the United States of hotels charging one fee that included room and board, regardless of whether or not the guest took his or her meals at the hotel.

and preparing food found in hotels, was important factors that allowed Americans to consider the idea of a tropical destination.

Guest rooms also met tourists' demands for comfort and amenities. Rooms were finely appointed with modern bathrooms outfitted with white fixtures considered fashionable during the period. Images show that the guestrooms were decorated quite simply, with plain painted walls decorated with a minimal amount of art, and did not convey a particular theme (Figure 33). Furniture was basic and chairs and lounges were predominantly wicker. A desire to keep costs down was most likely the biggest factor in deciding how to furnish the rooms.

While the hotel building housed many amenities and activities, the grounds of the hotel offered an abundance of outdoor activities for guests. One of the major selling points was the golf course owned and operated by the hotel. Though located five miles to the east of the hotel, the course was attended by a professional who was available for lessons. It seems as though it was not possible for Vanderbilt to purchase sufficient land immediately adjacent to the hotel to build a golf course. Tennis courts were located across Ashford Avenue on the lagoon side. A variety of water sports were possible because of the hotel's access to both the lagoon on the southern side and the Atlantic Ocean on the northern side. Yachting, motor boating, and fishing were possible on both the lagoon and ocean side, and canoes and kayaks could be used on the calmer bay side. On the Atlantic side there was a private bathing beach for guests with bathhouses with freshwater showers. This side also offered a small still-water pool for children and sheltered anchorage for yachts. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt's ability to accommodate yachts was a means to offer wealthy U.S. boaters to the hotel.

As is fairly clear from the list of activities and amenities, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt catered to a certain type of tourist. Like other Vanderbilt hotels, it appealed to upper class

tourists who had the means to rent cars and boats or bring their own cars on the steamships. Furthermore, the location of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was the most appropriate for the type of clientele it endeavored to attract as the modernization of the Condado neighborhood afforded up-to-date amenities and technologies and the area was designed to be populated by the grand homes of the Puerto Rican elite. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt solidified the type of tourist that would go to Puerto Rico—wealthy U.S. elite—and this did not change much until after World War II, when modern mass tourism to the island became more affordable.

The hotel's activities did cause some conflict with the local population. As recounted in Puerto Rico's State Historic Preservation Office's report on the Gran Condado Vanderbilt, the activities on the hotel grounds redefined the local population's concept of leisure. The practice of recreational swimming in the ocean was a previously unfamiliar activity that U.S. visitors introduced to Puerto Ricans.⁹⁵ This practice was met with resistance and criticism by the conservative Puerto Ricans but the Gran Condado Vanderbilt eventually changed their opinion and shortly thereafter the Escambrón Beach Club, which offered sports, swimming and dancing to elite Puerto Rican society, opened in the nearby area of Puerta de Tierra. The change in thinking was not just about what leisure was, but where it should take place, shifting from establishments located in the city, such as El Casino de Puerto Rico in Plaza Colon, to the coastline.⁹⁶

H. **Beyond Birth and Infancy: The Life of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt**

⁹⁵ "Grand Condado Vanderbilt," 75.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 76.

In a letter to Governor Blanton, Winship, Henry L. Hartzell, a lawyer who practiced in Puerto Rico, recounted the history of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as a precursor to his earnest call for the local government to spearhead the development of tourism on the island and purchase the hotel.⁹⁷ When Hartzell penned the letter in 1934, Puerto Rico was reeling from the impact of the Great Depression and Governor Blanton Winship was looking for ways to rehabilitate the island's economy. The insular government focused on the recovery of established industries and markets, but Winship was also open to new revenue options and saw the value in developing U.S. tourism to Puerto Rico. The 1930s was also a time of great unrest in Puerto Rico, as the independence movement was popular and agitating for change.⁹⁸

The economic prosperity of the years following World War I up to the Great Depression was certainly partially responsible for what Hartzell recounts as the golden age of the hotel. After the stock market crash of 1929, the economic situation of the hotel changed. By 1930, the U.S.-based San Juan Hotels Corporation was operating the hotel as the Condado Hotel. In 1931, Manuel González Martínez acquired the hotel for \$300,000, the golf course was sold off separately, and the lease of the Coamo Springs Hotel was cancelled. In his letter, Hartzell noted that the decline of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt was largely a result of the onset of the Great Depression. Because of the decrease in visitors, the result of economic hard times, the hotel could not afford the normal upkeep and maintenance, which forced "economies of management."

⁹⁷ Henry L. Hartzell, San Juan, to Governor Blanton Winship, San Juan, 22 May 1934, box 286, Archives of the Office of the Governor, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

⁹⁸ This period is marked by the Ponce Massacre of March 21, 1937. Initially meant to be a peaceful civilian march in protest of the U.S. government's imprisonment of Pedro Albizu Campos, leader of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party, it turned into a deadly event in which police killed nineteen Puerto Ricans and injured more than two hundred others. Earlier, in October of 1935, the Río Piedras massacre occurred. The event took place on the campus of the University of Puerto Rico in the San Juan suburb of Río Piedras. Four Nationalist Party supporters and one police officer were killed when local police officers opened fire on supporters of the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party.

This in turn further decreased patronage, and, according to Hartzell, these two factors continued to negatively impact one another from that point on.⁹⁹

All of Hartzell's history is a prologue to the ultimate goal of his letter—to convince Governor Winship that the government in Puerto Rico should become involved in the fate of the hotel. Hartzell was concerned with developing the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as a symbol of Puerto Rico—a Puerto Rico that was part of the U.S. empire, rather than using the hotel as a representation of insular identity.¹⁰⁰ He also underscored his opinion that the level of tourism of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt could be maintained only if the hotel was under U.S. management or ownership.¹⁰¹ Ultimately, Hartzell felt the best course of action was for the Puerto Rican government to acquire the Gran Condado Vanderbilt with federal aid. Governor Winship was in agreement with Hartzell that this option promised the insular government the maximum amount of control over the fate of the hotel.

In 1934, Winship retained an option for the purchase of the hotel at the price of \$300,000 and was very interested in obtaining the hotel but was still searching for funding.¹⁰² In a telegram

⁹⁹ The Gran Condado Vanderbilt attracted the type of tourist that Hartzell clearly favored, the social elite, who responded favorably to the hotel's high level of service and accommodations under Berwind's management. Hartzell attributed the influx to Puerto Rico of the upper class over lower socio-economic classes to Prohibition. Although U.S. citizens were inclined to travel outside of the United States to "wet" islands in the Caribbean, Hartzell seemed unaware that the non-elite often traveled to these other islands over Puerto Rico not because these islands offered drinking, but because they had tourism programs and prices that were specifically geared to middle and working class U.S. vacationers. Therefore, Puerto Rico developed a reputation as a destination for the social elite. Hartzell continued by expressing his opinion that upon undertaking a program of tourism development, the local government should remain focused on targeting a higher class of tourist, as he maintained that Puerto Rico could never compete with the "less desirable attractions of Havana."

¹⁰⁰ From his letter, it is clear that Hartzell saw the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as a business opportunity and as a symbol of the U.S. control in Puerto Rico that should be kept up. He was from the United States, and the tone and wording of his writing clearly indicates that he believed that U.S. politicians should be ruling Puerto Rico (substantiated by an obvious subscription to the idea that U.S. citizens were superior to Puerto Ricans).

¹⁰¹ Hartzell certainly was not alone in his thinking that the island and its businesses were best managed by U.S. citizens; since 1898 and up until that point Puerto Rico had a local government that was appointed by the U.S. president and was composed primarily of U.S. citizens, and always headed by a governor from the United States.

¹⁰² This is based off of a document in the government archives that was most likely written in the summer of 1934, as there are other documents from this period that document Winship's intention to obtain the hotel and the federal funds he needed to facilitate the acquisition. Whether or not Hartzell's letter was the first time anyone proposed that the Puerto Rican government purchase the hotel remains unclear.

from Governor Winship to the Bureau of Insular Affairs in Washington DC from July 1934, the governor expressed his hope that the proposition be put to the Emergency Relief Administration with the idea of receiving the funds from the Civil Works Administration. Winship concluded by expressing his belief that the development of the tourism industry in Puerto Rico was dependent upon the government purchase of the hotel.¹⁰³

Despite Winship's devotion to the cause, the insular government never purchased the Gran Condado Vanderbilt due to lack of financial support from the U.S. government. The hotel continued under the ownership of González and experienced a rather unremarkable history until the post-World War II tourism boom. A ballroom was added to the first floor, as was an addition known as the East Wing, which provided more guestrooms in the 1940s. In 1962, a new West Wing created even more rooms. In 1976, the Condado Convention Center was built, and this Toro and Ferrer design connected to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt where the now-demolished East Wing once stood. Later, in the 1990s and 2000s, the Condado Convention Center and West Wing were demolished, returning the hotel to practically its original form.

Although the now-outdated Gran Condado Vanderbilt never quite found a way to compete with the new modern hotels that were popping up in Condado in the 1950s, it was fundamental in laying the foundation for the tourist landscape that would develop in San Juan throughout the twentieth century. The appeal of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt to the U.S. elite defined the trajectory of postwar tourism. Even before World War II was over, other new hotel projects in San Juan were designed to attract a wealthy clientele. The Hotel Normandie, inaugurated in 1942, was the next modern luxury hotel to be built in San Juan after the Gran

¹⁰³ To further convince the Bureau of the positive possibilities of the hotel, Winship mentioned that Colonel Byoir, head of Doherty Hotel interests in Miami and Palm Beach, was intrigued by tourist development in Puerto Rico, and suggested that Byoir might be a potential operator for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt hotel. Winship's reference to a U.S. company's interest in operating the hotel was undoubtedly meant to instill even more faith in a U.S. government decision to invest funds in the hotel.

Condado Vanderbilt (Figure 34). Conceived and financed by Félix Benítez Rexach, a wealthy Puerto Rican engineer, the Hotel Normandie was an homage to the luxury ocean liner, and the hotel carried all of the connotations of the modernity and opulence of this magnificent vessel. The building's exterior, with its reference to ocean liners, conjured notions of transnational travel, cosmopolitan society, and a world made smaller and more accessible through technological advancements in ocean liner design. Like the interior decoration of the SS Normandie, which featured works by such famed Art Deco designers as René Lalique, Jean Dupas and Jean Dunand, the Hotel Normandie's interiors were spared no expense. Benítez commissioned artists and craftsmen from as far as France and Spain to create the sumptuous interiors of the hotel.¹⁰⁴ The Hotel Normandie functioned as a bridge between the historicist Beaux-Arts Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the International Style-inspired hotels that would be built in San Juan after World War II. The hotel displayed Art Deco's interest in the historic and the sleek lines of the hotel were a preliminary gesture of the way modernity could be displayed in the style of the hotel.

The proposal that the Gran Condado Vanderbilt become a property of the state and symbol of the U.S. empire was innovative in Puerto Rico at the time. While it was not unheard of for hotels to be owned or operated by the government, this happened almost entirely on the municipal level. For example, the city of Tampa acquired the Tampa Bay Hotel in 1905 for \$125,000. Similar to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt's situation in the 1930s, the Tampa Bay Hotel was struggling as a business and the municipal government was interested in preserving it as an economic asset of the city. A notable difference here is the interest in local boosterism in the case of the Tampa Bay Hotel versus the imperial overtones of the acquisition of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt.

¹⁰⁴ In the end, the Hotel Normandie cost an estimate \$2 million, not an insignificant amount for that time.

The Puerto Rican government's interest in owning a hotel that represented the government resonates with contemporaneous hotel projects in other parts of the Caribbean. For example, as will be discussed in the following chapter, Cuba had embraced the idea of developing a government-initiated hotel project, which resulted in the opening of the Hotel Nacional de Cuba in 1930. While the economic prosperity of the times encouraged the conception of the Hotel Nacional project in 1928, the depression that plagued Puerto Rico in the 1930s was the primary impetus to get the insular government to seriously consider an investment in tourism as a means to end immediate fiscal problems and create a path for a prosperous financial future for the island. The Hotel Nacional may have served as an inspirational model of the possibilities of a state-owned hotel for the Puerto Rican government.

The Gran Condado Vanderbilt firmly established Condado as a place of tourism, evidenced by the numerous hotels, motels, and tourist apartments built in Condado in the 1950s and 1960s. Unfortunately, the residential neighborhood that the Behn brothers had designed gave way to a strip of land crowded with hotels and motels. As the anchor of this expansion in temporary lodging, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt persisted; its Beaux-Arts design a reminder of the hope and vision many had in the early part of the twentieth century of fashioning Puerto Rico into a modern island.



Figure 3. Postcard circa 1920s of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt Hotel (Warren & Wetmore, 1919) showing the Condado Lagoon and south façade of the hotel. Collection of the author.



Figure 4. Page from a promotional brochure circa 1920s for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt showing road routes in Puerto Rico. This map was reproduced in other promotional publications. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 5. John Rubens Smith, Catskill Mountain House, 1830, hand-colored print. Courtesy of the Marion S. Carson Collection, Library of Congress.



Figure 6. Photograph of the Grove Park Inn (F. G. Seeley, 1913) in Asheville, North Carolina from year of hotel opening. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Figure 7. Photograph by William Henry Jackson of the Tampa Bay Hotel (John A. Wood, 1891) in Tampa Bay, Florida, circa 1902. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Figure 8. Photograph circa 1900-1915 of the Ponce de Leon Hotel (Carrère & Hastings, 1888) in Saint Augustine, Florida. Courtesy of Library of Congress.

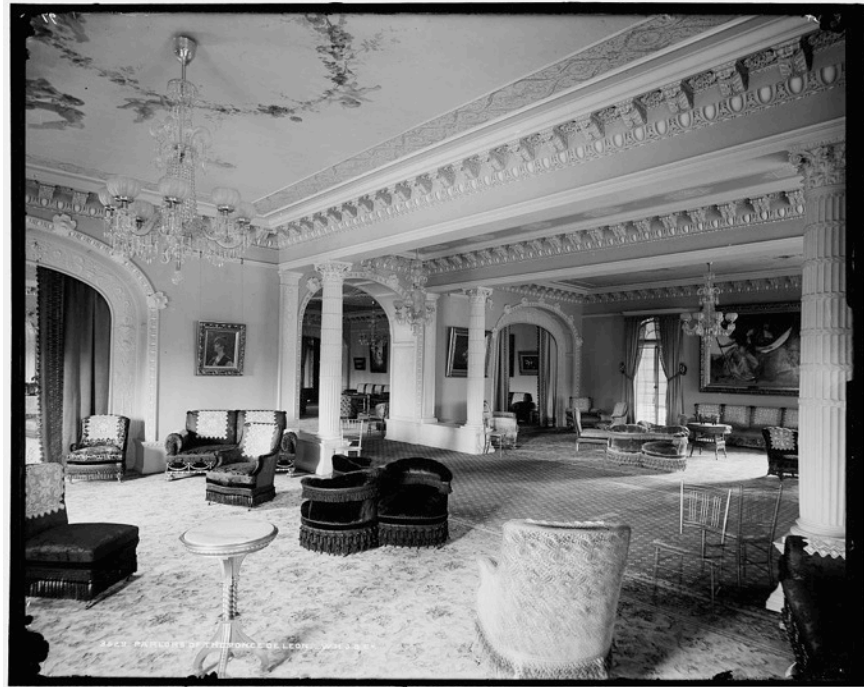


Figure 9. Photograph by William Henry Jackson of interior Ponce de Leon Hotel (Carrère & Hastings, 1888) in Saint Augustine, Florida, circa 1880-1897. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Figure 10. Photograph circa 1900 of the Royal Poinciana Hotel (James McGuire and Joseph McDonald, 1894) in Palm Beach, Florida. Courtesy of Library of Congress.



Figure 11. Detail of 1982 map showing Condado and bridges connecting various parts of the city. Courtesy of United States Geological Survey Data.



Figure 12. Panoramic photograph of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt Hotel with streetcar line running along Ashford Avenue visible in the foreground. Photograph undated though probably circa 1920s. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 13. Photograph of the fine residences built in Condado on clearly demarcated plots. Photograph undated but probably circa 1908-1930. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

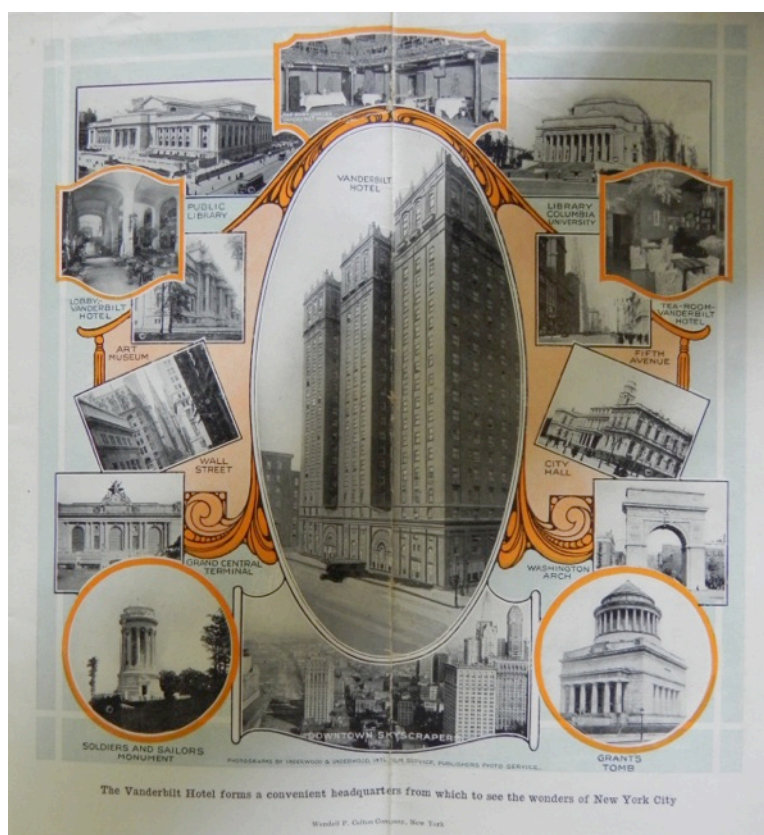


Figure 14. Page from a circa 1920 promotional brochure for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt Hotel promoting travel to New York and showcasing the Vanderbilt Hotel by Warren & Wetmore. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.

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Figure 15. Proposal from 1917 by Warren & Wetmore of the Grand Condado Vanderbilt and surrounding landscape design. Courtesy of International Hospitality Enterprises, The Condado Vanderbilt Office Archives.

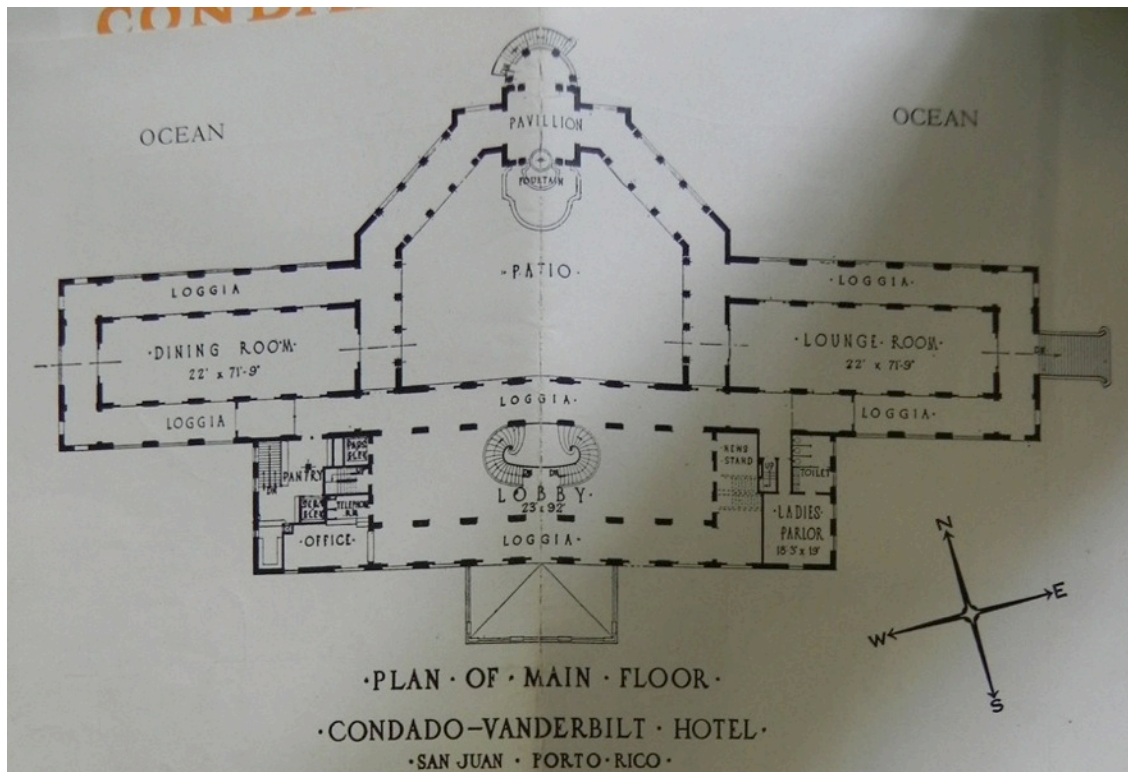


Figure 16. Plan of the main floor (second level) from a circa 1920 brochure for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 17. Detail of ornamented window on the south façade. Photo by the author, 2011.



Figure 18. Detail of coat of arms design on the south façade. Photo by the author, 2011.

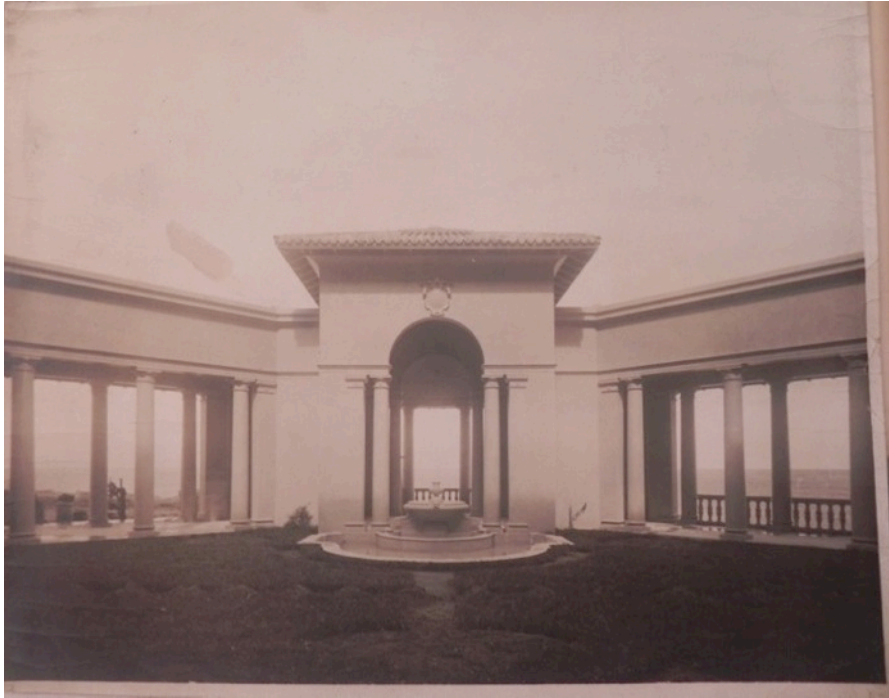


Figure 19. View of the colonnaded gallery and garden on the north façade. Photograph taken shortly after the completion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in 1919. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 20. View of the colonnaded gallery and garden on the north façade. Photograph taken shortly after the completion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in 1919. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

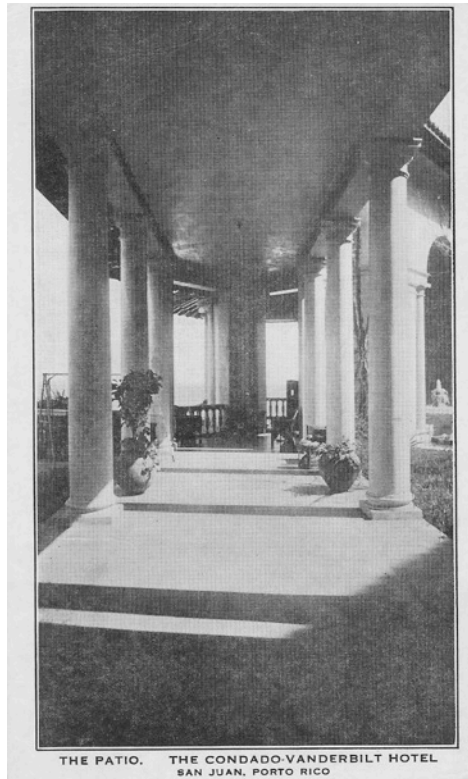


Figure 21. View of colonnaded gallery with furniture and potted plants, from a circa 1920 brochure for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 22. Top landing of the grand staircase. Photograph taken shortly after the completion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in 1919. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 23. One of the main public halls on the second floor. Photograph taken shortly after the completion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in 1919. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 24. View of the loggia in the central portion of the second floor near the grand staircase. Photograph taken shortly after the completion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in 1919. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 25. Postcard showing the original interior of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Collection of the author.

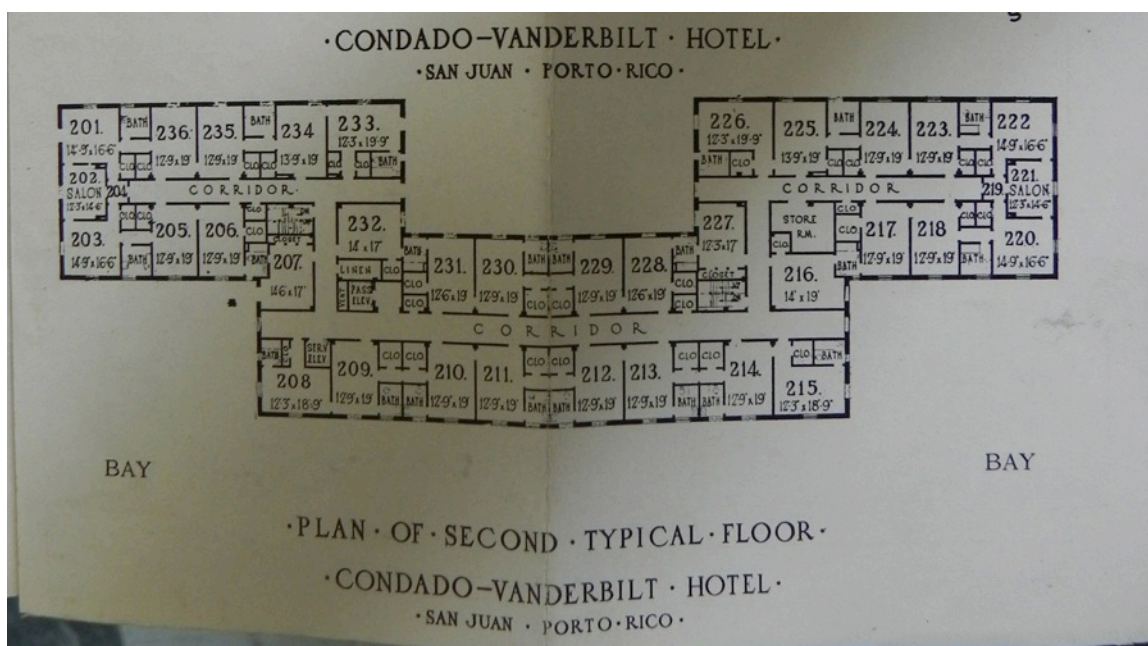


Figure 26. Plan of a typical floor of guestrooms from a circa 1920 brochure for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 27. Warren & Wetmore, circa 1919 proposal for Havana hotel, most likely the Sevilla-Biltmore. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 28. Warren & Wetmore, undated proposal for Cuban presidential palace in Havana. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.

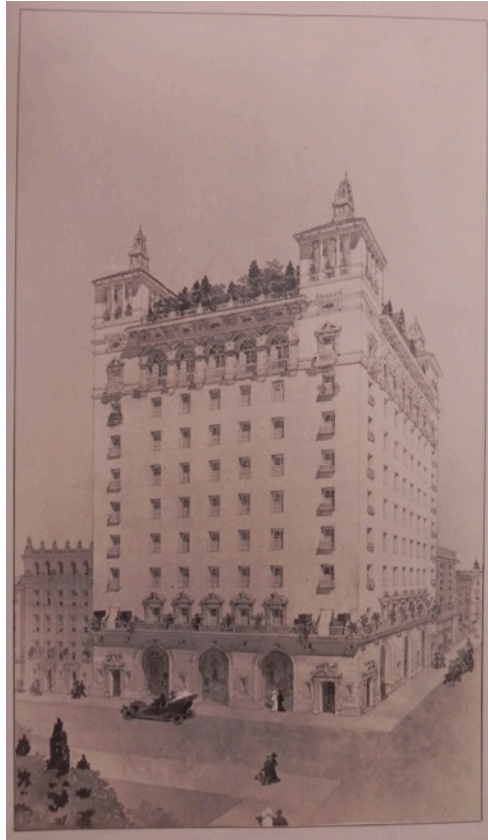


Figure 29. Warren & Wetmore, undated proposal for hotel in Mexico City (probably circa 1917-1924). Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 30. Postcard of Warren & Wetmore's Royal Hawaiian Hotel (1927) in Honolulu, Hawaii (undated but probably circa 1927-1940). Collection of the author.



Figure 31. Brochure for the Gran Condado Vanderbilt billing Puerto Rico as “The Switzerland of the Tropics,” circa 1930s. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 32. The bowling alley at the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Photograph taken shortly after the completion of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt in 1919. Courtesy of Avery Architectural and Fine Arts Library, Columbia University.



Figure 33. Images of the living room of a guestroom suite from a circa 1920 promotional brochure. Courtesy of Archivo General de Puerto Rico.



Figure 34. Félix Benítez Rexach (designer) and Raúl Reichard (engineer), Normandie Hotel, 1939-1942, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Contemporary photograph courtesy of Javier Rodríguez Galarza.

III. THE HOTEL NACIONAL DE CUBA: PROJECTING NATIONAL LUXURY AND MODERNITY

On October 2, 1933 canon fire rained upon the Hotel Nacional de Cuba in Havana as an insurgent group of the Cuban armed forces attempted to overthrow military leaders sympathetic to President Gerardo Machado's government. The large metal balls ripped through the building, giving a pockmarked appearance to the massive edifice. Blasting through walls, ceilings and doors, and destroying furniture and bathroom fixtures, the canon fire inflicted significant damage to some of the guest rooms. A series of photographs chronicling the damage of the attack are disturbing in their portrayal of the peaceful calm in the aftermath of violent assault (Figures 35 & 36). The hotel appears eerily still, the spaces devoid of the activity that defines a busy modern luxury hotel. Outside of these static representations the Hotel Nacional became a sightseeing destination after the bombardment. A *New York Times* article reported that six days after the attack, around five thousand people visited the Hotel Nacional in one day to view the wreckage.¹⁰⁵ To deal with the onslaught of visitors, hotel management established daily sightseeing hours in the afternoons.

The attack would have been all the more disturbing to U.S. visitors at the time, who had come to envision Havana as the "Paris of the Caribbean." Their experience of Cuba was one that revolved around luxury and entertainment, and was part of an image of Cuba as a playground of the United States that tourism promoters had carefully cultivated for nearly two decades. However, the very conditions and means that created this image and built the Hotel Nacional

¹⁰⁵ "Cuban Hotel Battlefield Sets Sightseeing Hours," *New York Times*, October 8, 1933.

contributed to a large portion of the Cuban population's deep dissatisfaction with the Machado government and ultimately led to his overthrow in 1933.

To understand the Hotel Nacional we must look beyond the parameters of the Machado government to also consider the broader context of Havana in this period and the form it took during the first three decades of the twentieth century. As authoritative and influential as the Machado government was, other significant factors also shaped this period. This chapter first looks at the years leading up to the Hotel Nacional project through the lens of two other hotel case studies presented on a smaller scale. By considering a larger historical arc of hotel building in Havana in relation to the specific history of the Hotel Nacional, this chapter demonstrates how the Hotel Nacional was one of the key building projects in the first half of the twentieth century that was meant to embody the quest for a government defined national identity, which was manifest and publicized through the built environment (Figure 37).

A. **Establishing Precedence: Hotels, Urbanism, and Nationalism**

The extant environment of hotels in Havana provided the foundation for the Hotel Nacional de Cuba. One of the earlier purpose built hotels, the Hotel Inglaterra exemplifies the evolution of modern hotels in Havana and their relationship to urban growth, foreign visitors and the political landscape (Figure 38). An analysis of the Hotel Inglaterra demonstrates how urban development and national independence—two issues inextricably bound to the concept of modernity in Cuba at the time—were tied to hotels. The Hotel Inglaterra's architectural design combined the contemporary penchant for neoclassicism, the exotic otherness of Moorish interiors, and elements that I argue can be read as prototypes for the category of tropicity. The

mixture of these designs signaled to international travelers their location in a foreign or exotic location.

The emergence of modern hotels in Havana in the nineteenth century signaled a moment in which U.S. visitors no longer considered acceptable the previous forms of lodging. Many U.S. and European travelers who visited Havana in the nineteenth found accommodations in *casas de huéspedes*, or guesthouses, which were residential buildings with a number of rooms available for rent.¹⁰⁶ While at times their name bore the word “hotel,” such as Hotel West’s, they were more akin to boarding houses than a modern hotel. Interestingly, Hotel West’s was the operation of a Mistress West, a woman from North America, and some scholarship has documented that *casas de huéspedes* with North American proprietors had the reputation of being the best run.¹⁰⁷

Some historians cite the Perla de Cuba, built in 1835, as the oldest hotel in Havana, while others cite the Hotel Telegrafo, purpose-built in 1835. The Hotel Inglaterra was located between the two of these and built almost twenty years later when the extant Escauriza Café was merged with a new building to form a hotel.¹⁰⁸ Located in a city block commonly known as the *Acera del Louvre* (Sidewalk of the Louvre), the block references the history and sophistication of France, just as the name of the Hotel Inglaterra also draws upon the Old World stature of England, as well as its very modern condition at the time the hotel opened.

The owners of the Hotel Inglaterra recognized the value of the geographic location. The three hotels were situated in an area called *Las Murallas* (the Walls), so named for its location

¹⁰⁶ The manager of operations was most usually the owner of the building and ran relatively small-scale hospitality operations.

¹⁰⁷ Arturo A. Pedroso Alés, “Las hospederías habaneras en el siglo XIX,” *Palabra Nueva* no. 210 (September 2011). Accessed August 19, 2013, http://www.palabranueva.net/contens/1109/contens/pag_sociedad3.html.

¹⁰⁸ Some historians contest the Perla de Cuba’s claim as the oldest hotel because some cite that it was originally designated as military lodging. The nearby by *Campo de Marte*, now *Parque de la Fraternidad* (Fraternity Park), was where military exercises and parades took place. See Evaristo Villalba Garrido, *Cuba y el Turismo* (La Habana: Editorial de Ciencias Sociales, 1993), 11.

just outside and including the city fortifications (Figure 39). The walled area of the city was cramped and built up and its narrow streets caused much congestion, and by the time the hotel was created the city had long been expanding outside of the walls.

Advantageously located just outside of the Monserrate gates, the hotel provided guests with easy access to the walled city (Figure 40). Just to the south of the hotel was the railroad station (where the *Capitolio*, or Capitol Building, now stands), which also helps explain why so many hotels were situated in this area. Hotels and guesthouses were often located near train stations and other transportation centers in order to tap into the large number of travelers who moved through these areas.¹⁰⁹ The original railroad station, Villanueva Station, a neoclassical structure built in the 1830s, stood just outside of the walls for the same reason that these new hotels did—the congested walled portion of the city did not have enough space for these large structures. However, only ten years after the hotel was built, the government ordered the demolition of the city walls and this process reconfigured the urban space in this area.

The fashionable area of Paseo del Prado, where the social elite would promenade, was just to the north of the hotel and outside of the gates (Figure 41).¹¹⁰ Based on the European tradition of promenading, the Cuban practice focused especially around young unmarried females. Cuban customs prohibited this segment of the population from appearing in public except during the daily promenade, in which it was stylish to appear along Paseo del Prado in a two-wheeled carriage. Prominent buildings, such as *Teatro Tacón* (Tacón Theater), sprang up along this avenue after it was remodeled and expanded in 1834 under the government of Miguel

¹⁰⁹ The introduction of the railroad in Cuba in 1836 was vital in supporting the growth of the sugar industry in the country by providing a means for products to come from rural areas to the port city in order to be shipped out to the rest of the world. Transportation was vital to the economy of Cuba.

¹¹⁰ The Paseo del Prado is now officially Paseo de Martí, but is still commonly referred to as Paseo del Prado.

Tacón, who endeavored to make Havana a symbol of urban modernity as a means to reinforce Spanish sovereignty amidst a period of revolution throughout Latin America.¹¹¹

Engineer Mariano Carillo de Albornoz proposed the *Plano de Ensanche* (Expansion Plan, 1849-1850) shortly after Tacón's reform program for this area of Havana.¹¹² The emphasis these two initiatives placed on expanding city life outside of the walls contributed to the demolition of the old city walls that began on August 8, 1863. Influenced by the tearing down of the old walls in Vienna (1858) and Barcelona (1859-1860) and the modern urban planning that ensued, the Spanish crown ordered the development of two parallel streets, Monserrate and Zulueta, each fifteen meters wide, where the walls once stood.¹¹³ After the demolition of the city walls, the portion of Prado Street located near the Monserrate gate was reconfigured as *Parque Central* (Central Park) in 1877 (Figure 42). Decorated with modern lighting and ornamentation from New York, the park was a beautiful site to behold and there was no better spot to take in the view than from a balcony at the Hotel Inglaterra.

Despite Tacón's attempt to solidify Cuba's standing as a Spanish colony through urban development and the fact that the majority of the new urban spaces were built by men from Spain, architectural historian Jean-Francoise Lejeune has documented how this new area of the city ultimately became associated with a pro-independence spirit.¹¹⁴ Many of the Creoles, those born in Cuba and who considered themselves distinctly different than those from Spain, were the successful businessmen and entrepreneurs responsible for the wealth and progress of Cuba. The

¹¹¹ For a brief discussion of the impact of the Tacón government on the built environment of Havana see Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 32-37; or Roberto Segre, "Havana, from Tacón to Forestier," in *Planning Latin America's Capital Cities, 1850-1950*, ed. Arturo Almandoz (New York: Routledge, 2002): 193-213.

¹¹² Jean-Francoise Lejeune, "The City as Landscape: Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier and the Great Urban Works of Havana, 1925-1930," trans. John Beusterien and Narciso G. Menocal, *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 22 (1996), 157.

¹¹³ Currently, the buildings that run along the east side of Paseo del Prado are where the former walls once stood.

¹¹⁴ Lejeune, "The City as Landscape," 157. According to Lejeune, apparently many erroneously believed that the buildings constructed by Spaniards were built by Creoles.

new growth beyond the walls, such as the railroad station, factories, theaters and cafes, came to symbolize the power and accomplishments of the Creoles. As an area associated with Creole society, it is no surprise that the Hotel Inglaterra was a key site in the long fight for Cuban independence.

The owners of the Hotel Inglaterra strove to maintain the hotel's reputation of excellence through continuous upgrades and renovations. The hotel was extended and rebuilt in 1891 and in 1915 underwent another revitalization and the addition of a top floor. The irregular floor plan of the hotel reveals the expansion of the hotel into the space of surrounding buildings. The main block, which was the original construction, contained a total of four floors (originally three), while the two secondary blocks, located to the back of the building, were of one and two stories. The secondary blocks were later acquired in the late-nineteenth century and contain storerooms, kitchens, and guestrooms. The hotel offered everything that guests expected from a modern hotel. The first floor contained restaurants and dining rooms, bars, stores (jewelry and tobacco), lecture halls, and lounge areas. Typical of nineteenth century hotel culture, the populace regarded these spaces as more public and communal than we consider them today—guests and locals were welcome to partake of what the hotel had to offer on the first floor as long as they appeared to belong to a respectable social class. For example, finely dressed white men could easily enter and order drinks and relax in the hotel, while poorly dressed peasants or dark-skinned slaves would not have been welcome to mix with the polite society that inhabited the hotel's spaces.

The upper floors were dedicated to the guestrooms, which numbered one hundred after 1915. Publications consistently described the rooms as some of the most comfortable in the city, undoubtedly the result of constant remodels and upgrades. During that period, comfort, as a descriptor for a hotel, correlated to the level of modern amenities of the hotel. Since its

construction in 1853, all of the guest rooms in the Hotel Inglaterra featured private bathrooms, and later other amenities were added, such as telephones and bell service.

As of the 1915 remodel, the modern amenities complemented luxurious interiors that featured many materials imported from Spain. Floor tiles were imported from Andalucía and areas on the first floor, especially the enclosed interior courtyard, were decorated in a Sevillian style that displayed the strong Moorish influence on that part of Spain (Figure 43). For the U.S. guests the Moorish interiors conjured notions of the historic and tropical through reference to the influence of Islamic culture in Spain and the connotations of a warm climate that this type of style evoked.

Scholar Juan de las Cuevas has described the exterior of the hotel as eclectic, in which creole elements of the time, such as cast iron balconies, *guarda vecinos*, and *vitrales*, are visually predominant.¹¹⁵ The balconies and vitrales were part of the original construction and the *guarda vecinos* were added during the 1915 expansion. Traditional Cuban architectural elements, *guarda vecinos* are decorated metal components, often cast or wrought iron, which are located between two balconies in order to prohibit movement from one balcony to another.¹¹⁶ *Vitrales* are arcuated stained glass windows located above doors. These elements, though perhaps developed out of Spanish traditions, had become key elements of Cuban architecture. For example, *vitrales* were considered characteristic of creole architecture, as the colored glass was a means to filter the strong Caribbean light so that the interiors would remain cooler.

U.S. visitors would have certainly viewed these vernacular elements as foreign and I would argue that we can consider them as prototypical elements that reference tropicality. While not all of these elements were meant primarily to address climate issues, they were all designed

¹¹⁵ Juan de las Cuevas, *500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba* (Madrid: D.V. Chavín, 2001), 91.

¹¹⁶ Thus the literal translation “saves neighbor” refers to the way in which they preserve peace between neighbors by maintaining separation.

with climate in mind. Vitrales are the one of the three elements that served primarily to address climate. Designers could have certainly left the transoms as open spaces to let in light, but they incorporated vitrales, which address two key points. First, rather than an open space above to let light in, the implementation of glass separates interior and exterior so mosquitos cannot enter. Second, as previously mentioned, the colored glass lightened the interior spaces, but in a more subdued manner than clear glass, filtering the harsh Caribbean sunlight and preventing interiors from becoming too hot. Balconies and guarda vecinos did not serve a primarily climatic purpose, but their designs in the Cuban setting reveal an attention to climate. Through intricate open metalwork, the two architectural components allow breezes to pass through. They answer the call for ample ventilation as a necessity for living in the hot, damp tropics.

Besides these Cuban elements, the architecture reveals the popularity of the neoclassical style in Cuba during the mid-nineteenth century. An interest in neoclassical architecture was initiated in 1828 when a small Greco-Roman inspired temple was built in Plaza de Armas.¹¹⁷ After 1828, the Spanish academy's preference for the neoclassical as well as the general popularity of the style in Europe and the Americas in this period encouraged the boom in the construction of neoclassical buildings. The Hotel Inglaterra exemplifies how Cuban neoclassicism incorporated creole architectural elements. This trend also included the tradition of building structures with porticos. The portico, a predominant motif in Cuban architecture, especially in the central urban area of Havana, was an important part of the Hotel Inglaterra. The 1861 Ordinances of Construction stipulated the construction of tall arcades in buildings on major streets and this law was responsible for the porticos that lent a uniformity and cohesiveness to

¹¹⁷ Known as *El Templete* (the Temple), this structure was built on the site where the city was founded and the first mass was held, according to popular belief.

Havana's built environment.¹¹⁸ In the case of the Hotel Inglaterra, the columns are composed of a cluster of semi-detached Doric columns. Neoclassical elements graced other parts of the hotel's structure. The original 1853 three-story construction had more ornate pedimented windows on the second floor, and rather austere projecting pediments on the third floor windows. With the remodel in 1915 each successive floor from the ground up was rendered more ornate than the one previous. Projecting stringcourses clearly delineated separate floors, and comprehensively the floors boasted the full spectrum of neoclassical elements—pilasters, pediments, swags, and cartouches—culminating in a balustrade on the roof level that was topped with decorative urns and an arched pediment that served as the sign for the hotel.¹¹⁹

The destruction of the old city walls, the development of Parque Central, and the construction of buildings such as the Hotel Inglaterra did much to make this a fashionable area in the city. Just as the hotel underwent remodels, so too did the area around the Hotel Inglaterra develop and evolve. Adjacent to the hotel to the south was the respected Teatro Tacón, a popular spot for evening entertainment and the oldest theater in Havana.¹²⁰ In 1906 the Galician Society obtained the Teatro Tacón and they built a new structure around the original interior of the theater in an eclectic and intricate neo-baroque design. Designed by Belgian architect Paul Belau and built by the U.S. construction company Purdy & Henderson, buildings such as the Centro Gallego, as it became known, reveal the international draw to Cuba. Architects and builders were lured to Havana because of the anticipated building boom that would ensue as Cuba shifted from

¹¹⁸ Gina Rey, ed. *Centro Habana: un futuro sostenible* (La Habana: Facultad de Arquitectura de la Universidad de La Habana y Centro de Estudios Urbanos de La Habana, 2009), 23.

¹¹⁹ The balustrade and pediment decoration in the roof level were the same in the 1915 construction as the original 1853 design.

¹²⁰ Diagonally across the intersection from the Teatro Tacón was the *Teatro Payret* (Payret Theater), which opened in 1877.

Spanish colony to independent nation.¹²¹ For example, Purdy & Henderson, a U.S. contracting and construction company, established an office in Havana in 1901 as a local iteration of a parent corporation that was born in New York in 1893.¹²² Likewise, many U.S. and European foreigners were initially drawn to Havana primarily to investigate business opportunities, and became casual tourists secondarily. It was difficult for visitors to come to Havana and focus entirely on business as the city offered much in the realm of culture and entertainment.

Besides functioning as a cultural center, the Parque Central area also developed as a commercial retail center of the city during this period. Across the park from the Hotel Inglaterra was the *Manzana de Gómez*.¹²³ The size of an entire city block, the structure was named after Don Andrés Gómez Mena, the man who ensured the completion of the project. Finished in 1894, the building was dedicated to shops and offices. Architect Pedro Tomé seems to have been looking less at traditional Cuban design and more at the modern shopping arcades that were being built in Europe and the United States. At each of the four corners of the building entry portals opened into two interior pedestrian streets that crossed diagonally through the block. The structure contained retail stores on the ground level and the additional four floors constructed between 1916 and 1918 were filled with offices for professionals, such as lawyers, notaries, businessmen, and doctors. The *Manzana de Gómez* was well situated near the end of Calle Obispo, a main retail thoroughfare through *Habana Vieja* (Old Havana), and helped extend this retail area out into the Murallas area.

¹²¹ On U.S. architects in Cuba during the first three decades of the twentieth century see José A. Gelbert-Navia, "American Architects in Cuba, 1900-1930," *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 22 (1996): 132-149.

¹²² While there were local construction companies, Purdy & Henderson obtained contracts for many important works in the city, perhaps because of their ties to the United States, which provided them with the latest in building techniques and relationships with U.S. material suppliers.

¹²³ *Manzana* means block in Spanish.

The owners of the Hotel Inglaterra were not the only ones to recognize the advantages of locating a hotel in this part of the city and the combination of cultural, retail, and transportation conveniences, as well as hotels and what they offered to the public, made this a vibrant part of the city. Besides the nearby Hotel Telegrafo and the Perla de Cuba, the Hotel Pasaje (1876), the Hotel Roma on Calle Teniente Rey between Calles Monserrate and Zulueta, and the Hotel Saratoga (1879-1880), which was run out of the second floor, were located in this part of the city (see Figure 40). The Hotel Pasaje was built to function as a hotel, and was famed for its modern attributes, such as the first hydraulic elevator in Havana and an iron and glass interior gallery. These three hotels were located further south on Prado, closer to the Campo de Marte. Other hotels in the Murallas area located north of the Hotel Inglaterra were the Hotel Brooklyn near Paseo del Prado, Hotel Carabanchel at the corner of Calles San Miguel and Consulado, and Hotel Fornos, at the corner of Calles San Miguel and Neptuno. Across the square from the Hotel Inglaterra was the Hotel Plaza, which opened in 1906. A U.S. Army captain obtained the building, which was originally built as a residence and was then used as the headquarters of the *Diario de la Marina* newspaper, and decided to turn it into a hotel after the U.S. occupation in the first decade of the twentieth century. He completely remodeled the interior so that it could function as a modern hotel, and it subsequently gained a roof garden in 1919. The most esteemed hotels in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth century were those in the Murallas area near Parque Central, notably Hotel Inglaterra, Hotel Telegrafo, and Hotel Plaza. Many of the other hotels located nearby tried to profit off of their proximity to these highly regarded hotels.¹²⁴

¹²⁴ Hotels existed in other parts of the city as well. There were a number of hotels in Habana Vieja, such as the Hotel Florida, Hotel Buffalo, Hotel La Unión, Hotel Boston, Hotel Santa Isabel and Hotel del Comercio. There were also some hotels beyond the Murallas area, such as the Hotel Manhattan on the Malecón, Hotel Belvedere, Hotel Trotcha, Hotel Maison Royale and the Hotel de Cerro.

Of course, hotels are only successful if people rent the rooms and it is important to understand what made visitors initially come to Cuba and how that evolved over time to support the large number of hotels in the city.¹²⁵ During the nineteenth century, U.S. citizens visited Cuba for three main reasons: health, business and vacation. In all cases, the notion of modernity was desirable, and tropicality was a requisite upon which health and vacation travel was premised, and oftentimes business travel too.¹²⁶ Notions of the historic were most important for vacationers and health seekers.

A large portion of U.S. citizens visited Cuba because of the positive effects the climate was believed to have on health.¹²⁷ Visitors with tuberculosis, fevers, and other ailments flocked to Cuba and other places with similar climates, such as Florida, to let the warm air help nurse them back to health. But it was not just the climate that promised a remedy to the stress of living a modern life in the United States. As scholar Louis A. Pérez has chronicled, during the nineteenth century Cuba entered the U.S. imagination as the “tropics,” which conjured notions of time as much as place. Traveling to Cuba promised curative effects, partly by being “transported back to a simpler time, less rushed and more contemplative.”¹²⁸ Despite their desire for a respite from modern life in some respects, U.S. travelers still wanted access to the positive features of modern life, especially when it came to their accommodations. Indeed, even if they were enchanted with the idea of “simpler times,” visitors insisted upon up-to-date lodging environments. Modern hotels assured visitors that they were connected to spaces that could ensure their health through hygiene and sanitation.

¹²⁵ During the nineteenth century visitors coming to Cuba were primarily from the United States and Spain.

¹²⁶ The tropics were associated with fecundity and this aspect was important in the agricultural enterprises as well as businesses based on extracting natural resources from the land.

¹²⁷ Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999), 22.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 22.

As the nineteenth century progressed, more and more U.S. citizens came to Cuba to explore potential business investments or to consider the possibility of starting a new life there. Thousands of U.S. citizens moved to Cuba in the nineteenth century in search of prosperity and a better life, especially in the 1890s when the United States suffered a serious economic crisis. Concurrent tumultuous changes after the Spanish-Cuban-American War meant that many Cubans had to forfeit their businesses, farms, and lands and U.S. opportunity seekers snapped them up for pennies on the dollar.¹²⁹ Besides business opportunities in Havana, U.S. entrepreneurs established a great number of companies that obtained large tracts of land and then sold them to U.S. citizens as a business opportunity to run a farm or some other type of business in Cuba, most commonly within the framework of establishing “American towns,” which were large tracts of land that were laid out like a U.S. town and marketed to U.S. citizens.¹³⁰

U.S. citizens often became acquainted with Cuba as a travel destination through published travel diaries and logs. Companies interested in increasing travel to Cuba also invested in selling the island. For example, the Munson Steamship Line, which offered service to Havana from various ports in the United States, published *The Cuba Review*, an illustrated magazine geared toward U.S. audiences that reported on a wide variety topics related to Cuba.¹³¹

¹²⁹ Ibid, 107.

¹³⁰ For example, The Cuba Land and Improvement Company of Grand Rapids, Michigan purchased a large tract of land, laid out an “American town” called Magnolia and sold various sized plots to individuals in order to establish an U.S. colony there. Another American town in Cuba, La Gloria, boasted over one thousand residents from the United States in 1908, and lands were developed in larger plantation size acreage dedicated to orange and pineapple cultivation. In total, more than thirty-five American towns were set up across the islands.

¹³¹ The publication’s point of view was one interested in profiting from the island in some way; indeed, the main focus of the journal was to promote investment and colonization on the island. Therefore, topics such as politics were addressed vis-à-vis U.S. interests in relation to Cuban government, economies were discussed in terms of benefit to U.S. investors, and topics related to Cuban culture and customs were largely ignored except when it was something U.S. tourists also had an interest in, such as horse racing, automobile culture, and baseball. Published from 1903 until 1934, *The Cuba Review* were less concerned with enticing U.S. tourists to come visit Cuba for a week or two and more focused on promoting long-term investment in the island.

The Cuba Review was one of the countless publications that cast Cuba in a positive light and encouraged thousands of U.S. citizens to come to Havana every year, whether for a short stay or on their way to establishing permanent residency on the island. Other publications, such as the 1898 *Picturesque Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines*, were targeted at a broader popular audience and offered an introductory overview of the various new insular possessions of the United States. Clearly written for a white, middle and upper class U.S. audience, the publication presents Havana as a city open and agreeable to U.S. travelers by highlighting the large number of “non-colored” residents, and suggesting they were of a respectable social class by discussing the inhabitants in close proximity to comments of the city as a place of wealth, commerce, and luxury.¹³²

In general, the book paints a colorful and positive image of the city and although not strictly a tour book, it offered the potential tourist information on transportation, noteworthy sites, restaurants and hotels. According to the publication, “Good hotels...are numerous, as are all details and arrangement for good living.” But only the Hotel Inglaterra is mentioned by name, singled out because it is presented as the largest hotel whose “luxurious appointments and elegant service...are seldom surpassed in America.”¹³³ The book continues by pointing out the noteworthy points of interest near the hotel and underscores the value of the hotel as an architectural structure through the inclusion of two photographs: one that has a caption as a view of Central Park taken from the Hotel Inglaterra and the other that is a view of the Teatro Tacón and Hotel Inglaterra taken from the other side of the park. Through image and text the

¹³² When discussing the capital city of Cuba, the author notes that of the 200,000 inhabitants of the capital, about 50,000 are colored and then notes “the remainder being Americans, Spaniards and various European nationalities.” *Picturesque Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines*, 7.

¹³³ Ibid, 8.

publication situates the Hotel Inglaterra as a key component of the urban landscape, undoubtedly encouraging many travelers to stay there while in Havana.

Picturesque Cuba, Porto Rico, Hawaii and the Philippines was only reiterating the widely held belief that the Hotel Inglaterra was the hotel of choice in Havana. This reputation had developed as important businessmen, politicians, military men, and the social elite traveled more and more to Cuba and as interest in the island grew.¹³⁴ The interest in the island ultimately encouraged and justified U.S. involvement in Cuba's struggle for independence from Spain in 1898. The Hotel Inglaterra, a popular place for U.S. visitors to stay, was, in fact, an important site for Cubans in their struggle for independence and as such is an significant example of the role hotels played in local politics.

While the fighting took place primarily on the eastern end of the island, Havana was an important place to foment political agendas because it was the country's capital. In the 1890s the Acera del Louvre, the city block within which the Hotel Inglaterra is located, was a known place for pro-independence youths to meet and discuss ideas. These meetings allowed these young agitators to establish contacts and to plan acts against the colonial government. The favored location for these meetings was the Hotel Inglaterra, whose rooms provided the setting for subversive lectures that took place amidst the normal hustle and bustle of the hotel.¹³⁵ The Hotel Inglaterra was also the hotel of choice for U.S. military leaders and political leaders who were involved in the Spanish-Cuban-American War and the site of controversial meetings of these

¹³⁴ U.S. news articles from the nineteenth century always mentioned when a member of the elite was lodging at the Hotel Inglaterra.

¹³⁵ Villalba, *Cuba y el Turismo*, 11-12.

men, and even the site of the shooting of a Cuban by one of Theodore Roosevelt's Rough Riders.¹³⁶

The Hotel Inglaterra became all the more important as a site associated with the independence movement when independence leader Antonio Maceo stayed in the hotel for five months in 1890. Maceo had joined his brothers and father in the fight for independence from Spain that had started in 1868 with the revolt led by Carlos Manuel de Céspedes. During this first attempt at independence, known as the Ten Years' War, Maceo moved up the ranks of the Cuban army and was later involved in the other two wars for independence.¹³⁷ Maceo stationed himself in the Hotel Inglaterra for this period in 1890 as a means to further the independence cause. During his time in Havana he held interviews with journalists, connected with important men of the city, and swayed the views of labor leaders to support independence.¹³⁸

Maceo's stay at the Hotel Inglaterra points to the importance of hotels as sites for politics and as symbols of politics. Typical of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the public nature of the modern hotel made the Hotel Inglaterra's communal spaces a likely venue for political activity. Besides the big public speeches with stages and bunting, important political activity also took place during informal meetings in a hotel bar over drinks, in a hotel café over coffee, or in a hotel lobby amidst newspaper reading. Organizing, lobbying and other political campaigning all took place amidst the comings and goings of hotel guests, locals, and porters and bellhops. Perhaps Maceo stayed at the Hotel Inglaterra simply because of its location in the Acera de Louvre, where pro-independence activity was strong. Or perhaps he favored it because

¹³⁶ For example, see "Lee is on His Mettle," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 27 May 1897, 3, and "Rough Rider Shoots a Cuba," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 21 March 1899, 1.

¹³⁷ The Ten Years' War (1868-1878) was ended with the Pact of Zanjón, which did not provide independence from Spain nor universal emancipation, the two major concerns of the independence movement. The Cuban quest for independence really spans a period of decades in which, after the Little War (1879-1880), independence from Spain was only finally achieved with the Spanish-Cuban-American War of 1898, which Cubans often refer to as the Necessary War that was fought from 1895-1898.

¹³⁸ Villalba, *Cuba y el Turismo*, 12.

many considered it the most modern hotel in Cuba, a choice that may have been meant to express the modern nature of the Cuban independence movement. Or maybe he chose it because modern hotels provided the public spaces conducive to politicking. But most likely he chose the Hotel Inglaterra for all of these reasons.

The example of the Hotel Inglaterra offers us a glimpse at the rich context and foundation of modern hotels in Havana. Its location indicated the inevitable spread of construction further out from the historic center and helped create and consolidate new popular areas in the urban environment.¹³⁹ Born out of the need to have modern accommodations to offer to the increasing number of U.S. travelers that were visiting the island primarily for health, vacation and business reasons, the Hotel Inglaterra, as a modern luxury hotel consistent with U.S. standards, also helped establish Havana as a modern metropolis. Moreover, it also served as an important space for locals, a place within which Cubans defined and fought for their identity.

B. The Sevilla-Biltmore: Growing U.S. Tourism and Investment in Cuba

The U.S. travel of the nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries evolved into the full-fledged tourism of the 1920s as Cuba's tourism trade flourished, transportation improved, and U.S. citizens had more spending power and vacation time (Figure 44). Manuel López and Urbano González, Cubans and proprietors of the Hotel Inglaterra and Hotel Pasaje, respectively, recognized that despite the large number of hotels in Havana, there was still a demand for more accommodations.¹⁴⁰ They commissioned the Cuban architect José Toraya to design a hotel for

¹³⁹ There was already development and construction outside of Habana Vieja and the Murallas area, notably in Centro Habana (which at that time lacked an official name), Cerro, and later in Vedado. However, this building was predominantly of a residential type. Houses were on larger plots, were spread out from one another, and had a more suburban feel than an urban one.

¹⁴⁰ Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island: Tourism and Temptation in Cuba* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1997), 22.

them and Compañía Cubana “El Guardián” to construct it. Striving to build the best and most modern hotel in the city, the two proprietors succeeded in building what was considered the ultimate in hotel design for its time when the Sevilla Hotel opened in 1908.

The main façade and entryway to the hotel were located on Calle Trocadero less than a block from the intersection with Paseo del Prado (Figure 45). Located where the walls or the *glacis* just outside of the walls originally were, the hotel was built on prime land that was sold off after the fortifications were demolished in 1863.¹⁴¹ Its location in this area, near the fashionable Paseo del Prado and just three blocks from the Parque Central, added to its attraction.

Composed of five floors, the hotel contained an impressive two hundred and fifty guestrooms, which were all outfitted with their own private baths. Indeed, after the Hotel Inglaterra installed private baths in all rooms, any hotel that wanted to compete had to do the same. The Sevilla had the typical list of features necessary to advertise itself as a fine luxury hotel—private baths, quality imported furniture, the finest building materials, and modern technology to ensure efficient hotel operations and the guest’s enjoyment. To set itself above the rest, the Sevilla Hotel utilized the most reputable brands and companies for furnishings. For example, all of the mattresses were imported from the United States, the leader in mattress manufacturing, which was surely a means to assuage U.S. travelers’ fears of the notorious reputation Havana had for uncomfortable beds. The hotel also looked to cash in on the reputation of European materials. Furniture was imported from France and German marble was used for the staircase. This was not a novel approach. The creole elite had long been using imported European goods as a measure of status and taste. Finally, the owners outfitted the hotel with

¹⁴¹ A *glacis* is the sloping bank located just outside of military fortifications that would keep potential assailants exposed so defenders could fire against them.

elevators, a marker of modern construction, which made it just as pleasant to lodge on the fifth floor as on a lower floor, and allowed the management to charge similar rates for all floors.¹⁴²

The style of the façade and decoration of the public spaces certainly gave the U.S. visitor a taste of exotic architecture. Rich with decoration, the central portion of the façade was designed in a style that was clearly inspired by the Moorish architecture of Andalucía and by Spanish *modernismo*. Modernismo was an artistic movement in Spain during the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries that had its counterparts in the Art Nouveau of Belgium and France, Jugendstil in Germany, and Liberty Style in Italy. Lluís Domènech i Montaner, Josep Puig i Cadafalch and Antoni Gaudí were prominent architects of modernismo who were concerned with expressing a particular Catalan spirit through this new style of architecture. Indeed, modernismo was particularly tied to the region of Catalonia, and based on the large number of Catalonians who immigrated to Cuba in this period, it is no surprise that this style entered into the built landscape of Havana.

Various parts composed the facade, which indicated a typical approach of the period in which it was acceptable to combine different styles or create hybridizations in order to make new styles, symbolic of the modern, and making them more familiar to Cubans. In the case of the Sevilla Hotel, the central portion of the façade was a modern interpretation that clearly looked at such iconic historic works as the Alhambra Palace in Spain. While the central portion of the façade had a vertical emphasis, the portions to either side of the center area conveyed a horizontality emphasized by stringcourses that delineated the four guest room floors of the building. The interior design conveyed a Spanish style as well as Cuban traditions, such as the incorporation of an interior courtyard. This recreational space was complemented by other public

¹⁴² Before the incorporation of elevators in hotels, rooms on higher floors were often rented at lower rates to compensate for the fact that the guest had to ascend and descend a greater number of stairs whenever coming and going.

lobby areas that relied heavily on Spanish-style tiles, arcades, and *persianas* (wooden window louvers), elements of Spanish-influenced Cuban traditions.

In 1919, two U.S. businessmen, John McEntee Bowman and Charles Flynn, purchased the hotel. This was an astute business investment, as the United States redefined its legal attitude toward alcohol with the Volstead Act this same year. Prohibiting the production, sale, and transportation of alcohol, the Volstead Act was expected to put a damper on drinking in the United States. Just as Frederick Vanderbilt had hopes of people flocking to Puerto Rico to escape a dry United States, so did many from the United States and Cuba envision Havana as the future bar for U.S. citizens. Cuba was only ninety miles from the United States, already had a nascent tourism history, and was heavily Americanized by the time the new amendment went into effect in October 1919. Prohibition in the United States had a profound effect on tourism in Cuba—not only in terms of the number of tourists but also on the type of tourism. The Munson Steamship Company had announced in 1903 that Cuba would be the next tourist mecca and tourism had continued to grow, but it was Prohibition that sealed Havana's fate as a destination for pleasure seekers and partiers.

Before Prohibition, the type of tourist that went to Cuba was fairly similar to that of Puerto Rico, as discussed in the previous chapter. The wealthy elite was the group who had the time and money to make the long and expensive journey to the Caribbean. However, because of Prohibition in the United States, U.S. citizens of all classes wanted to travel to Cuba. The travel industry met their demands by offering various levels of transportation and lodging that were accessible to the working and middle classes. This diversification in the tourism industry resulted

in huge increases in the number of tourists throughout the 1920s. For example, 50,000 U.S. travelers went to Cuba in 1920 and by 1928 the number of U.S. tourists topped 90,000.¹⁴³

Tourists arrived primarily by steamship and had choices of the level of transportation and route of travel.¹⁴⁴ Numerous ports in the United States, including New York, Baltimore, Charleston, Philadelphia, and New Orleans, offered steamship service to Havana. For example, the Ward Line offered round trip service from Manhattan to Havana for \$160 in 1928.¹⁴⁵ If this sixty hour boat ride from the northeast to the Caribbean was too much, one could also take a train to Key West, where the P&O Steamship Company's *SS Florida* crossed to Havana in six hours for a round trip ticket price of \$30. Or, for tourists interested in bringing their automobile with them, the Florida East Coast Ferry offered service to Havana.

Throughout the first decades of the twentieth century, advertisements and magazine articles linked travel to Cuba with notions of adventure, entertainment, romance and indulgence. In 1919, the *New York Times* featured a major article focusing on the future of Havana in the face of Prohibition in the United States. Favorable conditions on the island, such as the weather, cheap drinks, and proposals to distribute more gambling licenses had spurred many to flock to Havana. The article proclaimed that "the Pearl of the Antilles deems the present an auspicious occasion to establish herself as the Monaco of America—a playground at the doorstep of a puritanical nation."¹⁴⁶ The early 1920s saw the establishment of a number of Cuban institutions, such as the Dos Hermanos Bar, Ballyhoo, and Sloppy Joe's, which all became requisite stops for

¹⁴³ Dennis Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise: U.S. Tourism and Empire in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 107.

¹⁴⁴ Airline service did not start until 1928 and was only the wealthy could afford it for some time afterwards.

¹⁴⁵ Ibid. Merrill's figures are derived from *Terry's Guide to Cuba* (1928).

¹⁴⁶ Brown and Dawson, "Cuba, Refuge of the Frivolous and Thirsty," *New York Times*, 31 August 1919, 69. Shortly after Prohibition started in the United States, bars and drinking establishments became greater in number and focus in Cuba. Many U.S. bar owners packed up and moved down to Cuba, where they reopened their business and catered to U.S. tourists. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 168.

U.S. tourists visiting the city. Sloppy Joe's, located only one block from the Sevilla, was the most famous of these bars at the time. The slogan of the bar "First port of call, out where the wet begins" captured the popular image of the drinking frenzy that ensued as soon as U.S. tourists stepped foot on Cuban soil. A promotional postcard from the mid-1920s visually reinforced this image (Figure 46). Fashionably dressed tourists crowd the establishment, sipping drinks, chatting, dancing, and enjoying the festive atmosphere of Sloppy Joe's Bar.

The romantic and wild image of a Cuban vacation helped solidify Cuba as the most popular destination in the Caribbean for U.S. travelers. In 1920, 50,000 of the roughly 73,400 U.S. citizens that traveled to the Caribbean chose Cuba over all other Caribbean islands. This trend continued throughout the decade and in 1928 Cuba captured approximately 90,000 of the 116,500 U.S. travelers in the Caribbean. Cuba was by far the most popular destination for U.S. tourists in this decade, and it continued to seize the majority of the Caribbean-going U.S. tourist market well into the post-World War II period.¹⁴⁷

That Bowman was lured to establish hotel operations in Cuba in the face of Prohibition was no surprise. As early as July 1918, he had started publicly voicing his opposition to the Volstead Act in newspapers. He felt the proposed amendment was a "denial of a personal right" and one that was rushed into under the shortsighted atmosphere of World War I with no consideration for the economic impact it would have on the country.¹⁴⁸ As Prohibition threatened to drastically reduce hotel profits, combined with higher taxation of hotels as a means to pay for

¹⁴⁷ All figures on tourist numbers to Cuba and the Caribbean from Villalba, *Cuba y el Turismo*, 21.

¹⁴⁸ John McEntee Bowman, "The Voice of the People: The Prohibition Amendment," *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 30 July 1918, 6.

the war effort, Bowman could have very well seen the Sevilla as the only hope left in his hotel empire.¹⁴⁹

When Bowman purchased the Sevilla Hotel, he already had more than five years of experience running the Biltmore chain of hotels. Bowman had helped open the New York Biltmore in 1913 as vice-president and with the president's sudden death a few months later, Bowman took over and began to build the Biltmore chain. In fact, the Sevilla-Biltmore was one of Bowman's earlier hotel projects, the majority of which he built in the 1920s in the United States. The fact that Bowman's sole foreign venture was in Cuba was testament to the general U.S. attitude that Cuba was an appendage or natural extension of the United States.¹⁵⁰ Prior to the Sevilla, most of Bowman's hotel projects were in New York; in particular he acquired some extant hotels in the Grand Central Terminal area and built the Commodore Hotel, and as a result Bowman oversaw all 5,000 rooms in the Grand Central Terminal area. In 1919, Bowman was also developing the Westchester-Biltmore, a five million dollar hotel and country club near Rye, New York meant to meet the ever-growing demand for outdoor recreation.

Bowman was first introduced to Cuba by Charles Flynn, who was already fairly well established there.¹⁵¹ Flynn chose to leave his native New England and worked in Florida until he left for Cuba in 1914. In Havana he used his construction experience, a trade learned from his father, to secure the position of construction supervisor of Oriental Park, a horseracing track in the western Havana area of Marianao. He then managed operations at the racetrack until he quit in 1919.

¹⁴⁹ "Bowman Sees Ruin Facing Hotel Men," *New York Times*, 2 February 1919, 23. In this article Bowman also stated that the hotel industry was the fourth largest in the country.

¹⁵⁰ On the metaphor of Cuba as a neighbor of the United States or within the national territory of the United States see Louis A. Pérez, *Cuba in the American Imagination: Metaphor and the Imperial Ethos* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), especially chapter 2.

¹⁵¹ Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 45.

Bowman announced the acquisition of the Sevilla Hotel on October 29, 1919, only one day after the Volstead Act became law. He reported that a representative of the architectural firm of Warren & Wetmore had accompanied him on the trip, and that he planned to turn the Sevilla into “a modern hotel in every respect.”¹⁵² Ultimately, Bowman did not employ Warren & Wetmore to do the renovations and additions to the hotel that took place over the next five years. He first hired Flynn to oversee half a million dollars worth of renovations in 1920 and launched the hotel as the Sevilla-Biltmore in 1920. In 1923 Bowman announced that he had hired Schultze & Weaver, whom he had already commissioned to design his Atlanta and Los Angeles hotels, to plan a ten-story addition to the Havana hotel (Figure 47).

A number of the addition’s features made the hotel such a success in the 1920s. The new addition effectively repositioned the main entrance from Calle Trocadero onto the fashionable Paseo del Prado by orienting the imposing tower to that side. Set perpendicular to the old building, the soaring new addition had a commanding presence on Paseo del Prado and its rooftop patio offered impressive views of the city from above. The Italianate style of Schultze & Weaver’s Beaux-Arts design did not seem to concede much to Cuban architectural heritage and critics thought the addition clashed with the architectural character of Paseo del Prado.¹⁵³ However, the ground floor arcade along the Paseo del Prado did adhere to the tradition of building porticos. The visitor entered into a vaulted foyer from the new entrance on Paseo del Prado and then into an interior courtyard. Shops on the ground floor of this area provided guests and the general public with services and goods. Departing from the Italianate style of the exterior of the addition and more consistent with the style of the original portion of the hotel, the Palm Garden (interior patio café), the foyer of the roof garden, and other public places were decorated

¹⁵² “Bowman Buys Cuban Hotel,” *New York Times*, 30 October 1919, 25.

¹⁵³ De las Cuevas, *500 Años de Construcciones en Cuba*, 218.

with Spanish tiles, persianas, and other details that referenced Cuba's colonial heritage (Figure 48). These areas were also decorated with such furnishings as wicker chairs and settees and potted palms—typical of Cuban interior decoration.¹⁵⁴

Leonard Schultze and S. Fullerton Weaver established the architectural firm of Schultze & Weaver in New York in 1921, and within a few years they were widely regarded as one of the leading firms in luxury hotel design.¹⁵⁵ Schultze had joined the firm of Warren & Wetmore in 1903, and during the time he worked for the firm he dedicated two decades to working on the firm's Grand Central Terminal complex. As the executive in charge of the complex project, he oversaw the design and construction of Bowman's hotels: the Biltmore and the Commodore.¹⁵⁶ Schultze officially left the firm of Warren & Wetmore in 1921 to partner with S. Fullerton Weaver, who was a real estate developer and engineer. The firm was decisively planted in the Beaux-Arts tradition and their designs were very modern in the way they incorporated modern building techniques and modern technologies into their schemes.

When Bowman hired Schultze & Weaver for the Sevilla-Biltmore project, the firm was also working on two other Biltmore hotels in the United States: the Nautilus Hotel in Miami Beach and the Miami Biltmore in Coral Gables. The general layout of the Nautilus Hotel was similar to Bowman's Westchester-Biltmore Country Club, which Leonard Schultze worked on while employed by Warren & Wetmore. The portico over the hotel's entrance makes a strong reference to the Spanish Baroque, similar to the fountain in the Sevilla-Biltmore's patio café (Figure 49).

¹⁵⁴ Since the nineteenth century wicker and rattan furniture had come to be accepted as appropriate furniture for tropical climates and had a long tradition in Cuban interior decorating.

¹⁵⁵ All of their hotels were in the United States except the Sevilla-Biltmore.

¹⁵⁶ He also designed the Providence Biltmore Hotel in 1922 under the name of Warren & Wetmore.

Apparently pleased with their work on the Sevilla-Biltmore, Bowman then commissioned Schultze & Weaver to design the Miami Biltmore in Coral Gables (Figure 50). Interestingly, the Miami Biltmore was conceived in a Mediterranean Revival style with a very strong reference to Spanish architecture in particular, while the Sevilla-Biltmore was not, despite its location in a place that had a stronger Spanish heritage. In fact, parts of the Miami Biltmore were inspired by real architecture in Spain. The firm modeled the tower after the Giralda tower from the Cathedral of Sevilla. Interestingly, Schultze & Weaver's design for this hotel in Florida, a place that had weak ties to its Spanish past, was more Spanish in style than the their hotel in Cuba, a country that had much stronger ties with Spain, politically and culturally. We could propose a few hypotheses as to why the Miami Biltmore is more Spanish in design than the Sevilla-Biltmore. The first has to do with the chronology of their projects. They designed the Miami Biltmore after the Sevilla-Biltmore and perhaps the familiarity they gained with Spanish architecture while working in Havana on the Sevilla-Biltmore project informed the subsequent Miami Biltmore project. The second hypothesis has more to do with the relationship between notions of place and architectural styles in connection to tourist expectations. By virtue of leaving the United States and entering Cuba, a different country, the U.S. traveler assumed a certain level of foreignness. On the other hand, Florida is still in the United States and playing up Spanish qualities was a way to remind guests that they were leaving behind their everyday world, even if they did not leave their country. Similar to Warren & Wetmore's approach to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt, Schultze & Weaver did not render the design of the Sevilla-Biltmore too foreign for U.S. visitors. Finally, the Sevilla-Biltmore was an urban hotel while the Miami Biltmore was conceived in the tradition of the removed luxury resort. As an urban hotel, the Sevilla-Biltmore would have been understood in relation to its metropolitan setting as opposed the resort in Coral

Gables, which had to be a destination in itself because of its remote location. For the Sevilla-Biltmore, Schultze & Weaver may have been thinking of the booming, modern construction that defined the urban area where the Sevilla-Biltmore stood, in comparison to the bucolic landscape in which the Miami Biltmore was situated.

The Sevilla-Biltmore was the first of many building and land development projects for Bowman in Havana. In later projects Bowman came to rely on the tourism and land development legislation that was supported by the Machado government. In 1925, Bowman assumed operations of Oriental Park Racetrack. The racetrack that Charles Flynn helped open in 1915 had changed hands a few times and deteriorated until then owners Carlos Miguel de Céspedes and his two cronies, one of whom, Carlos Manuel de la Cruz, was president of the tourism commission, turned it over to Bowman. Bowman's established reputation with horseracing, due to his strong connections with the racetrack in Saratoga, helped him masterfully turn the racetrack around and he made it once again a fashionable spot for U.S. tourists and the local elite. Bowman profited from the Machado government in other ways. In the mid 1920s, Bowman was developing the Havana Biltmore Yacht and Country Club in Miramar, a more suburban area, and the public works project that connected the Biltmore to Quinta Avenida, the main thoroughfare that connected Miramar to the Malecón, funded by the government, was completed just in time for the opening of the yacht club and golf course in 1928. The Gran Casino Nacional, built in 1919, also underwent major renovations in 1926 when Bowman obtained the operating rights of the casino.

Throughout the first half of the 1920s the *New York Times* ran periodic articles announcing successive record-breaking numbers of tourists to Havana. These articles always ended with a list of the social elite who were staying at the Sevilla-Biltmore. Accounts of new

high numbers intimated that Havana was *the* place to visit, and headlines such as “Havana’s New Year’s Eve is of Pre-Volstead Style: Wine Flows Freely in Cafes and Cow Bells Aid Noisy Celebration” underscored the gaiety of a vacation in Cuba. In this period, Cuba seemed wide open to the United States for tourism and for business development, as exemplified by Bowman, his business interests in Cuba, and the popularity of the Sevilla-Biltmore in the climate of growing tourism. As hordes of U.S. citizens flocked to vacation in Havana, so too did others pounce on business opportunities, especially land and building development. Averse to missing out on potential profits, the Cuban government looked for ways to benefit, collectively as a nation and as individuals working within the political system.

C. The Hotel Nacional de Cuba

The Hotel Nacional was the culmination and symbolic image of Havana’s development in the first three decades of the twentieth century and it was *the* national hotel of the country, the first of its kind in Cuba (Figure 51). As such it was meant to display the island’s arrival in the modern world through its ability to impress its guests with a first class, luxury hotel that rivaled all others throughout the world. After watching private interests profit from development on the island the Cuban government wanted a piece of it too, and the Hotel Nacional was conceived as a government-sponsored hotel. The financial arrangements and government actions behind the Hotel Nacional made it, in many ways, a forerunner to the later hotel projects discussed in the following chapters. Through this hotel project we can gain a greater understanding of just how interwoven the efforts and desires for urban modernization were with tourism development and of the robust relationships, primarily business, between the United States and Cuba.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ The U.S. interest in Cuba was multifaceted and it was composed of both official policy and unofficial plans and practices. The U.S. government’s longstanding concern with maintaining Cuba as a friendly neighbor

Although the Hotel Nacional was built by private interests and run as a private business, the Machado government made certain it was also a government project in the terms of the contract and in the way they announced that they would be receiving bids for the project. Although apparently a foregone conclusion that the government would award the project to the conglomerate that it went to, the open competition format of the bidding process established the Cuban government as the patron of the hotel project.¹⁵⁸ As a government sponsored project, the Hotel Nacional provided the Cuban government with an opportunity to benefit from, and perhaps even control, the rampant land and building speculation in Havana. By controlling the development of the city, the government had the opportunity to shape the appearance and dynamics of the city, and profit financially from this lucrative and vigorous part of the Cuban economy. Under the aegis of building national identity and civic pride through architectural projects, the Cuban government found another way to benefit from the corruption and kickbacks that were part and parcel of the Cuban land and building sector.

1. The Hotel Nacional: Locating Havana's Grand Suburban Resort

The expansions and renovations to the Hotel Inglaterra and the Sevilla-Biltmore were part of a larger history of urban development in the early twentieth century. Improvements to urban infrastructure greatly increased between 1898 and 1902, when the U.S. administration introduced at least five major public works in Havana that included: the construction of a network of water mains, the establishment of comprehensive sewage and garbage collection,

went beyond goodwill to include interest in molding the island into a source of wealth for the United States. Cuban leaders who wanted to thrive in this environment had to cater to U.S. interests and political leaders who just wanted to survive still had to bow to U.S. demands to avoid ousting. Since the triumph of the revolution in 1959, this era has often been described as the period of neo-colonialism or the pseudo-republic because the U.S. influence in Cuba was so strong that many believed Cuba had no real autonomy. The United States was a dominant force in commerce, had an increasing influence in the real estate market, and was a looming authority ready to intervene if political matters ran contrary to U.S. interests.

¹⁵⁸ The McKim, Mead & White archives at the New York Historical Society have drawings for the Hotel Nacional dating back to 1925.

extensive street paving, the implementation of electric streetcars in Vedado, and the expansion of electric streetlights, telephone and natural gas systems.¹⁵⁹ In an effort to make the city healthier and more modern, the Cuban government spent approximately fifty-five million dollars between 1907 and 1919 on urban improvements, funded by the taxes the government collected on sugar exports.¹⁶⁰ These improvements included highway maintenance, road paving, sewer system improvements, port upgrades, and the construction of new roads, highways and bridges.

As historian Rosalie Schwartz has documented, much of the money that these public works produced in the form of contracts, kickbacks, and payoffs provided the capital for investments in other industries, such as tourism. For example, a scandal erupted in the 1910s over the Ports Company, which had the contract to maintain various Cuban ports in exchange for a percentage of customs revenues. Millions of dollars worth of stocks and bonds were sold, great quantities of money went between the government and the company, and financiers who held Cuban government notes backed by customs revenues accused President José Miguel Gómez of turning these customs revenues over in the form of overpayment to supporters. The next president cancelled the contract, and the government took on the company's debts while many who invested at the beginning had already gotten out with much financial gain. One such investor was Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, who would go on to become the Secretary of Public Works. In her research, Schwartz has tied the profits gained by such men as Céspedes to concurrent investments in other moneymaking schemes tied to tourism development.¹⁶¹ Other aspects of the Cuban economy fed into tourism development as well. For example, many who profited from the wartime sugar boom, invested their returns in real estate development geared

¹⁵⁹ On the impact of the U.S. administration on the urban environment of Havana see Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 52.

¹⁶⁰ Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 19. Sugar exports increased greatly, thus increasing the tax revenue of the government.

¹⁶¹ For a full account of the Ports Company scandal see Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 20-21.

toward foreigners and tourism.¹⁶² When the sugar market crashed after World War I, those who had shifted their sugar investments into tourism and real estate stood poised to profit from the oncoming travel boom.

In deciding where to invest in real estate, many looked west of the city to the municipality of Marianao, which up to that point was dotted with the stately summer residences of Cuban officials and sugar growers. While the majority of hotel growth before World War I was focused around the city center, Marianao was important in the plans for tourism development after the war. Marianao was a desirable location for its geographical merits alone; views of bucolic pineapple and coffee plantations, rolling green hills, and the blue ocean surrounded the area. In addition, during the U.S. occupation from 1906 to 1909, U.S. military headquarters were located in Camp Columbia in Marianao, and utilities, such as water and electricity, were extended to this area. With beautiful vistas and modern infrastructure, Marianao was poised for development.

Interested parties wasted no time proposing development schemes. Speaker of the House Orestes Ferrara proposed a bill granting a thirty-year concession to *Compañía Fomento del Turismo en Cuba* (Tourist Development Company of Cuba), of which Carlos Miguel de Céspedes was an owner, to run all gaming and amusements in Marianao. This bill included provisions to build a casino in Marianao. The U.S. public's widespread opposition to gambling spurred elected officials and ultimately President Taft to use his political standing to convince President José Miguel Gómez to see that the proposal was not passed.¹⁶³ Various proposals went up for legislation until a bill was passed in 1919 that allowed Casino de la Playa, a company

¹⁶² Ibid, 34.

¹⁶³ Ibid, 26.

owned by Céspedes and two of his cronies, to run games of chance.¹⁶⁴ An article that stipulated the establishment of a committee drawn from the public and private sectors to promote tourism indicated the bill's purpose in developing tourism in a bigger scale. President Mario García Menocal gladly signed the bill into law because its provisions granted his family the concession to operate jai alai games. In truth, the differentiation between public and private sectors was often hard to ascertain.

Located amidst the sinuous curves of the streets that delineated the Country Club neighborhood of Marianao, the Gran Casino Nacional was the major project in the area when it was built (Figure 52).¹⁶⁵ A majestic neoclassical façade greeted visitors as they drove up in their cars past a large sculptural fountain of dancing nymphs, which was lit dramatically during the night.¹⁶⁶ The bill that allowed the casino also provided financing for a new bridge to cross the Almendares River, connecting Marianao to the eastern part of Havana. The casino was fairly removed from the majority of the city's hotels, which were located in and around the historic center, and the construction of the bridge was a means to better connect various parts of the expansive city. The tourism commission tried to turn the distance into a positive attribute. In a promotional pamphlet they published around 1920, the trip from downtown to the casino is described as the "perfect distance to provide a nice motor ride" in which visitors could take in more of Havana's scenery. The pamphlet described all that the casino had to offer, from dining

¹⁶⁴ They were the sole benefactors of the bill because they were the only company that met the bill's stipulations that authorization would be given only to those who had already obtained permission and had invested at least \$1.5 million in creation of high-class residences, amusement parks, and bathing establishments.

¹⁶⁵ Eduardo Luis Rodríguez has described the urban layout of Country Club as a reinterpretation of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City in which notions of the rural are imagined in a way that vegetation predominates over the constructed. He also sees the influence of Frederick Law Olmsted in the design. See Rodríguez, *La Habana: Arquitectura del Siglo XX* (Barcelona: Blume, 1998), 39.

¹⁶⁶ The original casino was not neoclassical in design but in 1926 John Bowman hired Schultze & Weaver to remodel it. The casino is most known for its neoclassical form, as the original design only lasted seven years, while the neoclassical design persisted until the casino closed decades later.

and dancing, to the best orchestras on the finest dancing floors, to “tempt[ing] the goddess Fortune” by partaking in games of chance.

Perhaps in response to the lack of hotels in this part of the city, the Hotel Almendares opened January 1, 1921 in Marianao (Figure 53). At a construction cost of more than two million dollars, the hotel was advertised as one of the world’s most elegant resort hotels. Its design was similar to other resorts of the period, and the U-shape of the hotel provided all rooms with views of the verdant landscaped grounds. The hotel boasted all of the amenities U.S. tourists expected of a hotel, including private baths in all of the two hundred rooms and a golf course.¹⁶⁷ The Hotel Almendares was a tropical resort hotel in the vein of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt and its owners conceived of and promoted the Hotel Almendares in terms of its proximity to other sites of interest. Marketing materials touted the hotel as only a two-minute car ride to the beach, the Havana Yacht and Country Club and the Gran Casino Nacional, and only five minutes to Oriental Park racetrack. To satiate U.S. tourists’ desire for the familiar and ensure that the hotel operated according to U.S. standards, the Cuban owner hired Henry Albert, formerly of the Homestead Hotel in Hot Springs, Virginia, to manage the hotel.¹⁶⁸ The hotel instantly became popular amongst U.S. travelers for a number of reasons. Spurred by real estate development companies that targeted the U.S. elite to build Mediterranean style villas in Cuba as second homes, the hotel was located in a zone that was an enclave of U.S. citizens and it offered the amenities and activities that U.S. citizens desired.

The Hotel Almendares was the first true modern resort hotel in Havana, and as such it needed to be located outside of the urban center in order to have the space for the amenities of a resort hotel. The 1924 Havana Biltmore, also located in Marianao, followed the same pattern of

¹⁶⁷ Golf had become a popular sport in the United States but was not that popular in Cuba and Havana only acquired golf courses in response to the presence of U.S. citizens and their desire for them.

¹⁶⁸ Pérez, *On Becoming Cuba*, 171.

building. When we consider these two examples in comparison to the Hotel Nacional, we can better understand the urban significance of the Hotel Nacional. While it was not the first modern resort hotel in Havana, the Hotel Nacional was the first to be integrated into a zone close to the historic center. Located between the historic center and Marianao, between the urban core and the edges of the city, the Hotel Nacional's suburban location helped make it the best of both worlds; it was at once a resort oasis yet still closely connected to the city.

Concurrent with land speculation and development in Marianao, the area of Vedado, closer to the historic center, was also undergoing a period of development in the 1910s and 1920s. Upper-class Cubans were developing Vedado largely as a residential area in comparison to the foreigners who were building second homes in Marianao. Just as the Cuban government was profiting from tax revenues from the booming sugar industry, so too were many Cuban sugar kings and other businessmen reaping the benefits of the "Dance of the Millions," the period in which sugar prices and profits soared during World War I.¹⁶⁹ The Cuban elite experienced an unprecedented period of wealth, culminating in what are known as the "Fat Cow" years, which peaked in 1920. Thanks to advances in transportation and shipping, as well as larger scales of production, the colonial tradition of business owners living in the historic center in a structure that was simultaneously home, office, and warehouse was no longer fashionable or feasible. These elites could now detach their residences from their places of business and they looked to move outside of the city center where they could find more land to build grand villas that announced their wealth. They looked to Vedado, an area that, though conceived of in the nineteenth century, only became more inhabited in the early twentieth century.

¹⁶⁹ The war crippled Europe's beet-sugar industry and caused the greater demand for cane sugar and subsequent rise in sugar prices.

The interest in developing Vedado in this period and land speculation and building in Marianao, especially as related to foreigners and the tourist economy, are important for understanding how Vedado was an advantageous spot for the Hotel Nacional (Figure 54). The two areas referred to as El Carmelo and El Vedado originally made up the area that came to be known as Vedado. In 1858 and 1859 the *Ayuntamiento de La Habana* (City Council of Havana) gave approval to the owners of these areas to parcel up the land and sell it. The architect Luis Ybleon Bosquet imposed a systematic grid scheme on the land, the first of its kind in the city, and used a rational system of numbers and letters to name the streets.¹⁷⁰ Bosquet divided the area from Calzada de Infanta to the Almendares River into approximately four hundred city blocks with one hundred meter sides. He designed the area with consideration of ventilation and cleanliness by situating streets to benefit from ocean breezes. He incorporated vegetation in the landscape with trees, such as ceiba and flamboyant, which lined the streets in rows between the sidewalk and curb. In addition, regulations regarding building setbacks, usually five meters, encouraged property owners to landscape in front of their house.¹⁷¹ Vedado was not populated rapidly; in 1870 there were still only twenty houses in the neighborhood and it was not until the 1910s that a significant amount of building occurred when it became the favored neighborhood for the wealthy. Vedado remained predominantly residential, defined by detached villas that were often in revival styles, akin to the eclectic villa designs of the United States of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

The Hotel Nacional and other major hotels of the period that were built in Vedado were invaluable in strengthening the urban network of tourism in Havana. The Hotel Presidente (1927)

¹⁷⁰ On the history of urban regulations in Vedado see Jorge Pavez Ojeda, *El Vedado, 1850-1940: de monte a reparto* (Bogotá: Editorial Linotipia Bolívar, 2003), 55-65.

¹⁷¹ This was new for Cuba and different from the typical urban layout, especially when it came to residences, in which landscaping was traditionally focused to the rear of the house around the patio, while street facades usually reached right to the sidewalk, sometimes covering the sidewalk with a portico.

and the Palace Hotel (1928) were two other noteworthy hotels were also built in Vedado in the late 1920s. These three structures are evidence of the focus on Vedado as a newly developing area (Figure 55). Their location in Vedado helped reinforce more expansive urban growth and more cohesive ties between municipalities. They justified previous efforts to create a better transportation network in the city in the form of roads, tunnels, bridges, and trams, and incited further development of transportation infrastructure. Not only did they spread the movement of tourists further out from the city center by creating places for them to stay, but they also encouraged the spread of hotel construction outside of the city center. The Hotel Nacional adroitly connected Vedado, an area that was receiving much attention in the sphere of urban design, to the historic center and to the more peripheral areas such as Marianao.

The hotel was also noteworthy in that it was a grand resort in Vedado. While the large tracts of land available in Marianao and other areas west of the Almendares River made possible the construction of resorts like the Hotel Almendares and Havana Biltmore, Vedado had long been carved up into smaller plots for development. That a luxury resort on thirteen acres of land was constructed in Vedado was exceptional, and really only possible because it was a government project. The government had the power to obtain this vast swath of land in the name of a project meant to improve the city. In particular, the Hotel Nacional was an integral component in a grand master plan known as the *Plano del Proyecto de La Habana* (Plan of the Project of Havana), which highlighted Vedado as a new center of the city.

The Plan del Proyecto de La Habana is known more commonly as Jean Claude Nicolas Forestier's plan for Havana.¹⁷² In 1925, Carlos Miguel de Céspedes invited J. C. N. Forestier to come to Havana to collaborate with a Cuban team to “embellish and plan the expansion of the

¹⁷² On the legacy of Forestier's work in Havana see Lejeune, “The City as Landscape,” 150-185.

city of Havana.”¹⁷³ At this point Forestier was an accomplished landscape architect and self-taught city planner who had developed plans for Morocco, Lisbon, Paris, and Buenos Aires. Forestier firmly believed in public parks as a vital element of modern expanding cities. He was associated with the Société Française de Urbanistes, which looked to develop an art, science and philosophy of urban planning inspired by the works of Camillo Sitte, Raymond Unwin, and the approaches of the City Beautiful Movement and Haussmannian rationality.

While Forestier was formally invited to run the project, he and his team worked closely with a group of Cuban architects, engineers, and urban planners. The resultant master plan for the city was informed by a profound understanding of the urban environment of Havana and its history, complemented by knowledge of contemporary urban planning trends in Europe and the United States. Forestier’s plan, mostly designed between 1925 and 1926 and revised in 1928, was a comprehensive scheme that linked the dispersed areas of metropolitan Havana.¹⁷⁴ The plan took into consideration work and studies done by other Cubans, especially Pedro Martínez Inclán, whose publication *La Habana Actual* (*Havana Today*, 1922) outlined grand avenues connected by a system of axes and monuments, with an emphasis on large amounts of public art and gardens. Forestier used this and other studies to determine the extant principal nodes in the urban fabric, propose new nodes, and connect them all through a system of roads designed to facilitate the functional needs of the city and to highlight prominent landmarks. His emphasis on traffic circles and spoke-like road networks accounted for extant buildings and he strategically placed anticipated projects, such as the *Plaza Cívica* (Civic Square).¹⁷⁵ The plan identified some

¹⁷³ Quoted in Lejeune, “The City as Landscape,” 164.

¹⁷⁴ Forestier was by no means the first to develop a master plan for Havana. Other plans had been proposed including those by Raúl Otero (1905), Camilo García de Castro (1916), Walfrido de Fuentes (1916), and Pedro Martínez Inclán. Many of these Cuban designers ended up working with Forestier on his plan. On these plans see Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 54.

¹⁷⁵ This square is now called *Plaza de la Revolución* (Revolution Square).

of the key sites in the city—the shipping terminal in Habana Vieja, the Central Train Station, Plaza Cívica, and the Hotel Nacional—and situated them as nodes in a system of diagonal streets. The sites he selected as nodes reveal the values in urban design of the time. The shipping terminal and train station demonstrate the desire for transportation efficiency by connecting major streets to other sources of transportation. The Hotel Nacional made a neat connection to these points of arrival/departure to meet the need for temporary lodging. However, the incorporation of the Hotel Nacional as a node in this network could not have been a decision based solely on practical concerns for functional efficiency. The network was also meant to highlight national landmarks and the Hotel Nacional functioned as a symbol of the Cuban nation as much as the Plaza Cívica.

2. The Hotel Nacional: Balancing Private Interests and Government Plans

Much urban development had already taken place when Gerardo Machado became president in 1925. Under Machado a number of renovations to extant buildings and public works took place, as well as the commencement of a number of new projects. Most of these were done in the name of civic betterment and national pride and were also a means for the government to profit. The Hotel Nacional is one of the shining examples of this.

Though the idea for a national hotel was surely bandied about behind closed doors beforehand, President Machado made it an official project on October 30, 1928 when he released Decree No. 1867. This presidential decree called for bids to lease government lands for the purpose of “the erection of a magnificent national hotel.” The terms of the project determined the location of the hotel and called for the hotel and grounds to exist “in perfect harmony” with the *Plaza del Maine* (Maine Square), the area that commemorates the explosion of the USS Maine

and that was conceived by Forestier in his plan as a node that marked an entrance into Vedado.¹⁷⁶

The bid was not for a contract to build and own a hotel, but to build a hotel and have the right to lease it for thirty years. This lease had an option to extend for an additional thirty years, and while the lease was free of rent the entire time, after these sixty years the hotel would fall into the hands of the state, including all of the furnishings. While the Cuban government would have to wait some time to obtain the hotel, they surely had hopes that the elapsed time would mean they were acquiring a well-run hotel operation with a well-established reputation.

In general, the terms of the contract ensured that Cuban interests were represented in the project. The terms stipulated that the hotel must be grand and extravagant, requiring a minimum investment of \$300 million in the construction of a hotel with at least 400 guestrooms. In addition, the contract specified that the hotel must include a deluxe apartment of no less than six rooms for guests of honor of the Republic of Cuba to be used free of charge whenever the Cuban government desired. The terms also endeavored to look out for local business interests to a certain extent, requiring the contractor to use, whenever possible, “materials and products coming from the soil and from the industry of Cuba.” The decree charged the Department of Public Works with the responsibility of overseeing these guidelines. The importance the Cuban government attached to this hotel was clearly expressed in the presidential decree, which required the submission of plans, especially of gardens and exteriors, so that the government could be sure that the project was of “greatest beauty, in this way becoming a public ornament to this city.” In a final attempt to control the project, the terms required the construction and opening of the hotel in less than two years.

The Cuban government awarded the contract for the new hotel to a group called the National Cuba Hotel Corporation, which was established expressly to build and operate the

¹⁷⁶ Forestier originally designed this square with small gardens, streetlamps, and benches.

hotel. The syndicate was composed of National City Company of New York, Purdy & Henderson, United States Realty Company, George A. Fuller Company, Plaza Operating Company of New York, and McKim, Mead & White. This group, along with the Cuban government, provided all of the constituents necessary to realize the hotel project. All of the parties on the contract were a veritable who's who in the world of U.S. finance, architecture, building and hotel operations.¹⁷⁷

Based on archival documents, correspondence, and dated architectural plans, McKim, Mead & White seem to have been involved in the project since its inception years before the release of the presidential decree. One of the most famed architectural firms of the Gilded Age, McKim, Mead & White built extensively throughout the United States since 1879 and had gained a reputation as the leading firm in shaping the built form of many U.S. cities.¹⁷⁸ The firm adhered strictly to Beaux-Arts principles, often preferring neoclassical styles.¹⁷⁹ By selecting McKim, Mead & White, the Cuban government was certainly choosing a well-established, competent firm, even if they were no longer considered progressive or avant-garde.

Purdy & Henderson, mentioned previously in terms of their involvement with the Centro Gallego, established an office in Havana in 1901. They first developed in New York as a structural engineering firm that was also involved in construction, and gained a reputation for their work on skyscrapers and other buildings that involved modern building techniques. Their projects in Havana included the expansion and renovation of Hotel Plaza and Hotel Inglaterra;

¹⁷⁷ Although George A. Fuller was listed on the contract, this Boston-based contractor did not seem to have much involvement in building the Hotel Nacional. Likewise, the United States Realty Company had nothing to do with ownership of the land or building, as the Cuban government ultimately owned it. The two may have been involved merely as investors.

¹⁷⁸ Though Charles Follen McKim and William Rutherford Mead had already been working together since 1872, the firm was not established until 1879.

¹⁷⁹ The firm later produced designs that were not Beaux-Arts, but this was long after all of the founding architects had died and after the Hotel Nacional was built. The earliest drawings for the hotel date to 1925, five years after the last of the founding partners had retired, although the firm continued for some time after in the same architectural manner as the founding principal architects.

finishing the Lonja de Comercio, Capitolio, and the railroad station; and building the Centro Asturiano, Centro Gallego, Havana Yacht Club, Royal Bank of Canada, and Banco Nacional de Cuba. They were also responsible for building some of the grandest residences in Vedado in the 1910s. Purdy & Henderson's quality construction, reputation for using the latest in building technologies, and relationships with U.S. materials suppliers most likely explains why it was the favored construction company in Cuba, especially by high level government officials.¹⁸⁰

The National City Company, part of the National City Bank of New York, was the major financier of the project.¹⁸¹ The first U.S. bank to establish a foreign department in 1897, its history of business in Cuba was already established by the time the Hotel Nacional project was underway. In fact, National City Bank had already hired Walker & Gillette to design their impressive neoclassical headquarters in Habana Vieja in 1925. National City Bank expanded rapidly under the chairmanship of Charles E. Mitchell, bringing the bank to more than twenty-three countries outside of the United States. Furthermore, National City Bank would become heavily involved in the tourism industry as part owners of the Sheraton hotels, Avis car rental, Pan American airlines and its subsidiary Inter-Continental hotels, Ramada Inns, and as producers of its own brand of traveler's checks.¹⁸²

After the contract for the hotel was signed and the project was underway, the National City Company announced the sale of shares in the hotel through the National Cuba Hotel Corporation in 1929. To entice the U.S. public to buy the 62,500 shares of common stock at one hundred dollars a share, the National City Company played up the project as a U.S. venture in its

¹⁸⁰ They may have also offered kickbacks or enticing incentives to obtain contracts. As Schwartz has thoroughly documented in *Pleasure Island*, the land speculation and building market in Cuba during this period was defined by a culture of kickbacks and favors. Schwartz suggests that there was perhaps no building project that was not touched by this type of corruption.

¹⁸¹ The National City Bank of New York is now Citibank.

¹⁸² On National City Bank and their business in Cuba see Villalba, *Cuba y el Turismo*, 40-41.

advertisement. The Cuban government was portrayed as being involved only insofar as providing “favorable terms” for the project. Otherwise, the advertisement stressed the National Cuba Hotel Corporation’s incorporation in the state of Delaware, highlighted that the architects were a U.S. firm, and underscored the fact that the U.S. company that ran New York’s Hotel Plaza and Plaza Savoy would operate the new Cuban hotel.

The original idea, imagined long before the presidential decree called for bids, was to build a hotel the size of half of a city block at the corner of Paseo del Prado and Calle Carcel in the Murallas area, which would place it close to the ocean and on the principal street of the theaters, banks, and embassies. However, the government had already reserved the area for a new Ministry of Justice, and although the government usually showed preference to U.S. investments, in this case the location had to be abandoned.¹⁸³ Carlos Miguel de Céspedes, involved in the project since its inception, then proposed that the hotel should be located in the promising neighborhood of Vedado, which would place it away from the noise of the city center but still within easy access to it. He presented U.S. investors with the alternative site of *Loma de Taganana* (Taganana Hill), a rocky rise in the neighborhood that was situated close to the ocean. This rocky promontory was the location of the *Batería de Santa Clara* (Santa Clara Battery), the higher perspective offering an advantage over unfriendly forces that may approach by sea. The battery had been used most recently during the Spanish-Cuban-American War, after which some U.S. troops constructed barracks and were billeted there. By the time planning for the Hotel Nacional was underway the site had become a dump, more specifically it was the site where excrement from Camp Columbia in Marianao was brought to be processed into fertilizer.

¹⁸³ For an anecdotal history of the site selection of the Hotel Nacional see, Luis Báez and Pedro de la Hoz, *Hotel Nacional de Cuba: Revelaciones de una Leyenda* (La Habana: Editorial Capitán San Luis), 2011, 13.

Céspedes had the area cleaned up the best he could and despite the strong smell that still lingered, the investors could appreciate the positive qualities of the location.

Construction of the Hotel Nacional began in 1928 and continued along smoothly until the hotel's inauguration on December 30, 1930. Built upon the highest point of the more than thirteen acres that composed the plot, the hotel offered guests amazing views in all directions of the city and ocean (Figure 56). Urban views were pleasant because the large acreage of the grounds provided a buffer between the hotel and other buildings, creating better-framed, more picturesque views. The acreage also created a more tranquil atmosphere than at hotels such as the Inglaterra, which were more densely packed into the built environment. In this respect the Hotel Nacional was a unique hotel. The expansive grounds allowed guests to feel they could retreat from urban life, and the hotel offered almost all of the amenities of a grand resort like the Hotel Almendares. However, unlike the Hotel Almendares, guests were located a short distance to the historic center, with streetcar lines located just outside of the hotel grounds. Unlike the Hotel Inglaterra and Sevilla-Biltmore, guests did not exit the main doors into the bustling streets of downtown Havana. Guests approached the hotel from a grand driveway flanked with royal palms that ran off of Calle O. The rest of the grounds were dedicated to desirable amenities: a swimming pool, tennis courts, and tropical interpretations of romantic English gardens. The gardens could be experienced by walking along the meandering paths or simply observed from the open patio in the back of the hotel that looked out over the grounds and the Malecón and sea beyond.

The topography of the grounds and the hotel's place within them conjured and reinforced notions of exclusivity (Figure 57). The hotel was its own independent oasis, separated from the rest of the city by the large amount of land on which it was located. In this respect, the grounds

encouraged guests to think of the Hotel Nacional within the definition of a grand resort of the same category as the Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the Hotel Almendares. Unlike other urban hotels that had main entryways that opened onto city streets, the Hotel Nacional was fashioned more after the idea of a country club or rural resort where the guest's removal from everyday life was symbolically represented in the physical retreat into the hotel. Through the movement down the palm-flanked drive to the front door, the palms rhythmically flashing past, the guest left the city and everything else behind.

Images of the hotel reinforced notions of the Hotel Nacional as a retreat or bastion of elite luxury. Brochures and stationary often represented the hotel through drawings, which took liberties in the depiction of the hotel (Figure 58). The hotel was always rendered realistically, but the grounds were often manipulated. Images almost exclusively depicted the hotel's ocean façade, rather than the façade on the side of the main entryway. Often these views were from the ocean, showing the Malecón running along the water's edge and the Hotel Nacional rising up behind it. The topography was exaggerated, envisioning the hotel as much higher above the Malecón than it was in reality, an effect that reinforced the notion of the hotel as exceptional entity in the urban fabric. Tiny cars zipped along the Malecón, their diminutive size highlighting the awesomeness of the hotel. Vegetation was often downplayed to underscore the hotel's majestic rise from the rocky promontory, a castle on the hill, as it were.

McKim, Mead & White, working in conjunction with Purdy & Henderson, endeavored to design and construct the finest and most up-to-date hotel. The basic plan of the hotel was similar to hotel designs in the United States and other parts of the world. The hotel was composed of a long central hall that was crossed by two shorter wings on either end, set back from the end of the central hall (Figure 59). It was quite fortuitous that the government could build such an

expensive freestanding hotel so close to the city center. Even the other two hotels built in Vedado in this period, the Hotel Presidente and Palace Hotel, had their designs restricted by the lot sizes that composed the Vedado grid. The resulting layout allowed for a central, double-loaded corridor of rooms that on both ends became three wings that were also double-loaded corridors. This multiplicity of wings allowed for a greater number of guestrooms and ensured that each guestroom had a view looking out into the city or ocean, a contrast to other types of layouts, such as a doughnut shape, in which some guestrooms only had inward facing rooms. This layout also provided a multiplicity of wings in which the flexibility of the design allowed for the rooms to be utilized separately or any one of the wings to be closed off to create a larger suite of rooms.

The hotel projects an interesting iteration of a Mediterranean Revival style that reveals the apparent comfort McKim, Mead & White felt in freely borrowing from various styles and periods and amalgamating them into a design meant to convey the highest in architecture in Cuba, in effect creating an ambiance that combined a Beaux-Arts approach, eclecticism, and Art Deco. The design did not look to one particular location or time period for inspiration, and in so doing suggests an attitude toward style that rejected the notion that certain styles were geographically specific. The firm had long held this approach to style, as did other Beaux-Arts firms discussed in this study, such as Warren & Wetmore, Carrère & Hastings, and Schultze & Weaver. Highly flexible in its approach toward style, the Beaux-Arts attitude permitted this freedom in decoration and ornamentation, while allowing concerns with program, symmetry and monumentality to drive the evolution of project designs.

The descriptive specifications of the hotel that were jointly put forth by McKim, Mead & White and Purdy & Henderson outlined the proposed design of the hotel. The hotel was to be “a

magnificent building in the Spanish Colonial style of architecture, embodying all the features of a cosmopolitan resort hotel of the highest class” with interior public rooms “decorated in a style recalling the glorious days of the Spanish Renaissance, in accordance with the Cuban Colonial tradition.” The majority of the exterior is stucco, with certain areas treated to appear as ashlar masonry. The flat roofs were of Azotea tile “in the manner customary in Havana.” More traditional Renaissance and Baroque details, such as architectural swags and cartouches, and the two towers on the top of the structure were more faithfully historicist, while other details, such as the marine themes that decorated the keystones in the arches in the courtyard patio, were of a decidedly Art Deco stylized aesthetic (Figure 60). That the Hotel Nacional was an eclectic mix of multiple sources was summed up in a valuable memoir recorded years later by Cuban architect Marco Antonio Díaz Blardonis. In describing the parts of the hotel he recounted, “ceilings from Ancient Roman provenance; Sevillian patios that you see in nineteenth century Cuban architecture, especially in domestic architecture; exterior arcades in California Mission; readaptation of architecture from South Florida and California; gargoyles from French Gothic; granite floors with Art Deco influence.”¹⁸⁴

A sense of national spirit or place distinctiveness was conveyed in the exterior decoration. Most visually apparent was the inclusion of escutcheons and flags of Havana and Cuba in the design (Figure 61). Ornamental cast stone details at the tympanum depict the Cuban flag on a shield form, flanked by cornucopias and topped with a folded banner form that bears the word “CUBA.” In fact, the contract stipulated that the hotel convey a national spirit.¹⁸⁵ As specified in the government proposal for the project, Cuban materials had to be used when

¹⁸⁴ Báez and de la Hoz, *Hotel Nacional de Cuba*, 15-16. Translation by the author.

¹⁸⁵ There was a clause that declared that only the Cuban flag could fly over the hotel, and when this was excluded from the final version, Céspedes refused to stamp the document, which raised his public profile as a patriot of the republic. Báez and de la Hoz, *Hotel Nacional de Cuba*, 14.

possible, and the hotel design incorporated precious Cuban hardwoods, fine stone from Jaimanitas (a town just outside of Havana), clay tiles, and other natural and manmade insular products.

Besides requiring the use of Cuban materials and Cuban companies whenever possible, the terms also required the National Cuba Hotel Corporation to indirectly purchase a parcel of Cuban land, which was, without a doubt, part of the efforts to make the hotel a symbol of the Republic of Cuba. The contract stipulated that the syndicate pay for the land owned by the Havana Automobile Company, a little more than 3,500 square meters located in part of the area where the hotel complex was to be built. However, rather than having the National Cuba Hotel Corporation buy the land outright, the payment was referred to in the contract as a lease. The presidential decree required that all bid submissions were accompanied by a payment of \$141,940, referred to as a lease payment, which the Cuban government used to buy the land from the Havana Automobile Company. By imposing these requirements and referring to the payment as a lease, the Cuban government ensured that neither the syndicate nor anyone else could lay claim to the plot of land after the sixty-year lease term was over.

McKim, Mead & White vigilantly monitored any changes to the building process and scrutinized any additional costs to the project. They did not unthinkingly accept alterations to the building when it affected the budget, even if they came from the Cuban government. A letter from Purdy & Henderson reported additional costs to the \$4,000 estimate given by the Department of Public Works for running water and sewage pipes from the hotel to the street. The correspondence suggests that the contractors knew that the architectural firm would balk at the cost overage of \$800. Other correspondence suggests the architectural firm's sense of entitlement that they should be able to do as they please with design and construction, which was grounded

in the firm's opinion that the project should be exempt from local building codes because the hotel was a national building. As part of the National Cuba Hotel Corporation, the architectural firm was charged with and invested in maintaining the pre-approved budget for the construction of the hotel. All overages would have to be covered by the National Cuba Hotel Corporation even though the project was intended to eventually become property of the state.¹⁸⁶

As outlined in the proposal, the Hotel Nacional was to display its character as a modern hotel not only through the decorative aspects of its architecture, but also through the modern technologies incorporated in its design. It utilized a building approach very modern in Cuba at the time—reinforced concrete. In addition, the proposal envisioned the hotel to be filled with modern technologies, such as high speed elevators, electric lighting, modern laundry machinery, a central vacuuming system, modern garbage destruction, refrigerating plant with drinking water system, internal telephone system, the most modern of kitchen equipment, and electric dumbwaiters. While cost issues prohibited some of the modern devices and technologies on this ambitious list from becoming a reality in the hotel, such as the central vacuuming system, many were included and upon completion commentators exclaimed the modern technologies of the hotel. The inclusion of these modern technologies placed the Hotel Nacional on par with, if not above, the most modern hotels of New York.

¹⁸⁶ All invoices and costs had to be reported to McKim, Mead & White. Purdy & Henderson corresponded the most with the architectural firm's office in New York about construction concerns. The back-and-forth in correspondence preserved in the firm's archives suggests that McKim, Mead & White saw itself working against Purdy & Henderson as much as it did with the contractor. The firm may have sensed that the contractor felt more inclined to work in favor of the Cuban government than the hotel project syndicate. Purdy & Henderson had to account for any difference in cost from what was agreed upon in the preapproved budget. An extensive amount of correspondence in the archives chronicles how detailed all of this reporting was. Whenever Purdy & Henderson needed or wanted to stray from what was planned, they had to generate a form letter into which they had to enter all of the details of the changes. While the interiors were being finished there was a great quantity of changes to the plans, mostly in favor of cutting costs. Small changes, such as cutting crown molding from the guestrooms, substituting cheaper tiles in some places, and opting for brass chromium plated fixtures instead of the proposed white metal fixtures saved thousands of dollars in decorating costs.

In the end, some of the modern technologies that were promised in the proposal, such as a central vacuuming system, were cut due to cost concerns, but others that were unplanned were included. For example, while building the hotel, McKim, Mead & White decided to include a pneumatic tube system and telautograph system, which was a precursor to the fax machine that reproduced writing or drawing from the sender to the receiving end through electrical impulse transmissions. In spite of some changes to the proposed design and decoration of the hotel, the final product was every bit as luxurious and modern as promised.

The list of businesses that Purdy & Henderson subcontracted for work on the Hotel Nacional was extensive. One list of subcontractors written toward the end of the construction period named sixty-three companies, of which forty were based in Cuba. While the contract required the employment of as many Cuban businesses and materials as possible, a closer look at some of the Cuban businesses reveals the way Cuban and U.S. business interests were already mingled to a great extent. For example, Purdy & Henderson contracted themselves to construct the swimming pool but they subcontracted a Cuban company, Gerard Jansen y Cia, to install the filtering and sterilizing equipment that Purdy & Henderson bought from them. This equipment included pumps and an Ozonator. The Ozonator ultimately came from the United States Ozone Co. of America, located in Scottdale, Pennsylvania. Gerard Jansen y Cia received the profits for this contract but upon closer examination the intertwining of Cuban and U.S. business is clear. Examples such as this reveal how complex and enmeshed Cuban and U.S. markets and economies were.

Purdy & Henderson subcontracted two types of U.S. companies. One type was a company located in in the United States that sent people, materials or products to Cuba for the express purpose of the hotel project, such as the John Van Range Company of Cincinnati, which

provided much of the kitchen equipment for the hotel, or Robert E. Locher of New York, which provided artistic paintings that decorated the hotel. The other type was a U.S. business that had satellite offices or shops or subsidiaries in Cuba, such as the Otis Elevator Company, Crane Company of Cuba, General Electric Company of Cuba, American Steel Company of Cuba, and of course, Purdy & Henderson. Oftentimes the materials or products that these entities supplied ultimately came from the United States as well. The largest differences between the two were the legalities and financial implications of being either a foreign or local business. U.S. businesses based in their home country had their own set of customs concerns when exporting their goods to Cuba for the project, and perhaps work visa issues as well, while businesses that were ensconced in the local setting perhaps had an easier time importing products they would sell but had a host of different local and national tax concerns to consider.

The interiors of the Hotel Nacional were designed to offer the guest the most modern amenities in a luxurious setting. While the architecture incorporated modern design elements, such as the details that revealed an Art Deco influence, the public interior spaces were decorated in a more decidedly Spanish colonial theme that was injected with references to the Cuban republic (Figure 62). For example, the small decorative cement tiles that were designed to create a type of basket pattern were Spanish colonial in overall aesthetic appearance, but the specific images contained in these tiles referenced Cuba in particular. One tile that was used had a five-pointed star in the center, iconography often used in depictions related to the Republic of Cuba as the star held a prominent position in the Cuban flag. Another image was a small fortress or castle, similar to the three castles depicted on the coat of arms of Havana, and references colonial fortresses that were considered iconic of the island.

Five hundred thousand dollars was budgeted for furnishings of the hotel, and final costs were reported at just over \$406,000.¹⁸⁷ According to correspondence, the “greater part” of the hotel furniture was contracted for in Cuba. The interiors reflected general Cuban furnishing tendencies, which were still strongly reminiscent of colonial decorating approaches. These tendencies favored caned wood furniture and wicker furniture, because of their ventilation characteristics; mahogany furniture; and potted plants, especially in patios and spaces open to the outdoors. Furniture in public areas included fern stands, palms, and stick willow furniture, not unlike that in the Sevilla-Biltmore. In general, wicker was widely incorporated throughout the hotel, the majority of which was provided by the Cuban company Casa Mimbre. In addition, a large amount of beechwood Thonet furniture was purchased due to its ability to withstand local insects, a fact that had already merited its installation during renovations to the Sevilla-Biltmore, Casino Nacional and Jockey Club.¹⁸⁸ The caning of the Thonet furniture referenced Cuban traditions of incorporating caned wood furniture into interiors.

Mahogany furniture filled the lounge. Two Cuban companies, Meras y Rico and Theodore Bailey & Co., provided the majority of the mahogany furniture for the hotel. In contracts for the furniture, McKim, Mead & White made it very clear that they expected nothing less than the finest materials and best craftsmanship and Cuba had a long tradition of fine mahogany furniture and quality furniture craftsmanship. While the lobby lounge had a Spanish Colonial theme, the furniture was rather plain, with only a few focal pieces of more complex design, such as a mahogany table with spiral double legs made by Theodore Bailey & Co.

Typical guestrooms were decorated in a similar manner and contained a fair amount of wicker and mahogany furniture as well (Figure 63). Invoices indicate that all of the beds, tables,

¹⁸⁷ In today’s terms, this would be the equivalent of around \$5.5 million.

¹⁸⁸ The furniture made a circuitous route to Havana, going from Europe first to New York, where the unassembled furniture was then assembled before being shipped to Cuba.

and mirrors were mahogany. Besides these items, a typical guestroom included an armchair, dressing table, chiffonier, chair, night table, and valise stand. While rooms contained the same furniture pieces, they were often arranged differently in each room, especially when the room layout diverged from the standard. Bathrooms were designed in accordance with U.S. expectations of modern bathrooms. Tubs, toilets, sinks and fixtures were supplied by Crane Company of Cuba (a local iteration of a U.S. business) and Kohler.

While the regular guestrooms were decorated in a similar manner, the Suite of the Republic was handled as an independent project. In fact, a separate budget was earmarked just for the decoration of the Suite of the Republic, which, as per the contract, was required to have the most sumptuous rooms in the hotel (Figure 64). Located on the ground floor in one of the wings that jutted out alongside the main entry, the Suite of the Republic was composed of six rooms that were built and outfitted with the finest of materials and furnishings. Archival documents show that furniture for the Suite of the Republic was commissioned from Meras y Rico, but the mahogany furniture for the Suite of the Republic was much more elegant than the other furniture they provided for the regular guestrooms. Fittingly, the theme of Cuba was strongly suggested in the suite's decoration. An ornamental cartouche over the entrance resembled the decoration in the hotel tympanum—a Cuban flag in the shape of a shield flanked by two cornucopias. On the one hand, the suite was a financial concession for the National Cuba Hotel Corporation, for they had agreed to let the Cuban government use these rooms for free whenever they desired them. However, the inclusion of such a luxurious suite helped raise the overall status of the hotel in public opinion, something the U.S. companies may have considered a fair exchange for the monetary expenditure necessary to decorate the rooms.

The Suite of the Republic provided another means for the Cuban government to project the Hotel Nacional as a symbol of the Republic of Cuba. Such sumptuous apartments at the Cuban government's disposal basically guaranteed that all visiting important heads of state would be staying at the Hotel Nacional, positioning the hotel as a key space in diplomatic exchange. The Cuban government could also offer the Suite of the Republic to important foreign businessmen, creating a way for the government to publicly endorse certain people. And of course, the Hotel Nacional played a vital role in conveying a high image of the country to those visiting businessmen and dignitaries.

The Suite of the Republic begs us to consider the Hotel Nacional as one of a number of building projects taken up by the Machado government. These projects were meant to promote an image of Cuba as a modern republic, all thanks to the Machado government. Another structural icon that was a major node in Forestier's plan was the Capitolio. Perhaps the grandest building project undertaken by Machado, at least undeniably the most costly, the Capitolio's construction was finalized between 1925 and 1929 (Figure 65). The Capitolio was built around the same time as the Hotel Nacional, but it took much longer to build, which resulted in exorbitant cost overruns. In fact, at a cost close to seventeen million dollars, the Capitolio project stretched the limits of the coffers of the Cuban government. A project to build a presidential palace in the Murallas area where the old train station was located commenced in 1910, but in the 1920s the government decided to make this the legislative seat of the government and locate the presidential palace somewhere else. Over the years the design went through a number of changes, all by Cuban architects, and Purdy & Henderson were responsible for construction during the final phase.

This is not to suggest a comparison between the Capitolio and the Hotel Nacional, two very different types of buildings, but to draw attention to the fact that they were part of a larger, comprehensive political agenda manifest in the building program of the Machado government. Many Cubans were critical of the Capitolio and in its construction saw the problems of the Machado government.¹⁸⁹ While the Cuban government may have hoped its projects, such as the Capitolio and Hotel Nacional, conveyed the greatness of the Republic of Cuba, many Cubans found them a slap in the face, disturbing reminders that the Machado government was not committed to improving the lives of Cubans as a whole.¹⁹⁰ The celebrated first historian of the city of Havana, Emilio Roig de Leuchsenring, lambasted the Capitolio, calling it a “display of exaggerated magnificence, a foolish waste” in a country filled with poverty, illiteracy, sickness and hunger.¹⁹¹ Roig de Leuchsenring was particularly devoted to the built environment of the city (the major focus of the city historian) but even a devotee of urban architecture and member of the elite such as he could not overlook the pomposity and cost of Machado’s projects in the face of the suffering of so many Cubans.¹⁹² The Capitolio allows us underscore this distinction between the local opinion of Machado’s projects and the U.S. tourist attitude that viewed these as symbols of the Cuban republic with a less critical eye.

¹⁸⁹ Analyses of the Capitolio have pointed to the strong design similarities between the structure and the Capitol Building in the United States, and have extrapolated this similarity as a symbol of the strong ties between the Machado government and United States.

¹⁹⁰ Though Gerardo Machado ran on a platform that challenged the U.S. involvement in the Cuban economy and politics, upon taking office his government continued to support foreign investors and critics questioned the headway he made on workers’ rights.

¹⁹¹ This is my translation of a quote cited in de las Cuevas, *500 Años de Construcciones*, 259.

¹⁹² It should be mentioned again that the Hotel Nacional de Cuba was funded by private U.S. funds and the Cuban government did not pay for the construction and furnishing of the hotel. However, the Cuban public probably believed the Cuban government was paying for the hotel as all of the billboards for the construction listed only the Cuban government as the sponsor of the project.

3. The Hotel: Promoting Tourism, Defending Politics

The material reality of the hotel provided a basis for the experience promised in promotional material. Brochures of the Hotel Nacional show us how the hotel was represented and what this indicated to guests about a stay at the hotel. These brochures differed from other hotel brochures of the time in how much the brochure focused on the hotel itself (Figure 66). This might seem like an odd statement, but in fact countless other hotel brochures focused more on textually and visually representing the city of Havana than they did on the hotel they were trying to promote. It was not uncommon to find hotel brochures that appeared more as general brochures for Havana, with images of the noteworthy sites, such as El Morro, colonial churches and palm trees, and the majority of text dedicated to describing the enjoyment to be had in a place filled with stimulating entertainment or relaxing activities in an ideal climate. The description of the hotel was often relegated to a paragraph that presented facts about meal plans and amenities and simply stated that a stay at that particular hotel would make the trip complete.

Admittedly, the brochure for the Hotel Nacional follows this textual approach though it integrates the hotel more fully into the projected experience of the tourist. Descriptions of the hotel are woven into explanations of the activities in and allure of Havana, positioning the hotel as a key factor in an enjoyable vacation in Havana (Figure 67). It promotes the popular activities of Havana, such as Oriental Park, yachting and beach bathing, but then suggests parallel complementary options at the hotel, such as tennis courts and the swimming pool. Likewise, urban outings to theaters, music venues and open-air cafés are juxtaposed with the outdoor dancing and dining, bars, galas and fiestas, and shopping offered at the Hotel Nacional. The Hotel Nacional was not relegated to something separate from the true purpose of traveling to

Havana. Rather, the Hotel Nacional was presented as a destination in itself, one of many experiences not to be missed if one wanted to truly experience Havana.

To reinforce the idea of the Hotel Nacional as the destination just as much as Havana, the majority of the images in the brochure depict the hotel rather than representations of other parts of the city. Of the nine images in one brochure, only two are of locations other than the hotel, highlighting the hotel as an important space to be experienced. In this respect, the brochure encouraged foreigners to develop their understanding of Havana and Cuba via the Hotel Nacional as much as any other image, or perhaps more. The cover image conveys the tropical atmosphere with gracefully tall royal palms filling the foreground and middle ground while the hotel occupies the background. Depictions of tropicality reinforced notions of the foreign and were important for promoting travel to Cuba. Rather than incorporating a separate image of a palm grove to represent tropicality, a common device in hotel brochures, tropicality was bound to the hotel itself in this image. Otherness was also reinforced through images of the interior public spaces, whose decoration made reference to the strong Spanish heritage of Cuba. The brochure also conveyed notions of luxury and elegance through images of the hotel that expressed both the monumentality of the hotel and its picturesque moments. The brochure staked out the importance of the hotel by underscoring its key geographic location and by doing so proposed the Hotel Nacional as a key element in urban life in Havana with the outright claim that “the National Hotel is the very heart of Havana’s abundant life.”

Indeed, from the opulent interiors decorated in a traditional Cuban style to the American-style guestroom bathrooms, the Hotel Nacional invited U.S. visitors to experience the best of both worlds, or better yet, it suggested the new modern Cuba as grounded in Americanization while still retaining its unique character. Likewise, the hotel presented the Machado government

as committed to developing and improving Havana to position it as a great global city and displayed the power of U.S. business interests in building impressive modern architecture in Cuba. The Hotel Nacional, as a symbol of a joint effort between the Cuban government and private U.S. business, proposed the rich future of continued strong relationships between the two countries.

The symbolic nature of the Hotel Nacional makes the bombardment of the hotel in October 1933 all the more significant when we consider it today. Of course, the hotel was a logical choice for the military elite to isolate themselves within, not only because it provided ample accommodations, but its prime location allowed the officers to easily watch the movement of other troops for miles around and the cliff running along the ocean-side of the hotel made an armed approach from this side very difficult. The identity of the Hotel Nacional proved fluid in this moment. The hotel borrowed from the history of the site on which it was located and was envisioned as part of the struggle. In the popular press the structure was no longer recognized as a tourist hotel, but was referred to as the “fortress” that the enlisted men were trying to force the officers to surrender.¹⁹³ Writing to Lawrence G. White at McKim, Mead & White in New York to report that there was no significant damage, Will Taylor, manager of the hotel, reported that the Hotel Nacional “certainly proved to be a Second Santa Clara Battery and the building certainly did its part to withstand the onslaught.”¹⁹⁴

In the same year as the bombardment, the National Cuba Hotel Corporation undertook renovations to the hotel, adding a dance pavilion with pergola and a second swimming pool, among other updates. This says something about the popularity of the Hotel Nacional and perseverance of its owners despite the global economic hardship of the period. The number of

¹⁹³ “When the Smoke of Battle at National Hotel Cleared Away,” *Newark Evening News*, 5 October 1933.

¹⁹⁴ Will Taylor, Havana, to Lawrence G. White of McKim, Mead & White, New York, 28 October 1933, New-York Historical Society.

tourists steadily grew throughout the 1920s and even during the tourist season that followed the Wall Street Crash in October 1929, there were 86,270 tourists to Cuba, up from 62,547 the year before.¹⁹⁵ Tourism did eventually feel the effects of the economic crisis and by 1934 the number of tourists dipped to 20,677.¹⁹⁶ Despite the overall lag in tourism, the National Cuba Hotel Corporation's confidence in spending money to expand the hotel suggests that the Hotel Nacional did not experience a decrease in visitors relative to the overall decrease in tourists to the island.¹⁹⁷

Visitor numbers increased steadily after 1934, only to decrease again during World War II. Troubling economic times during a period of war only made Cuba work harder to attract tourists, and perhaps stirred even more U.S. desires to travel and escape during the hardship of wartime. In the context of Franklin Delano Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, Hollywood promoted a positive image of Latin America. Whether the images Hollywood produced of Cuba during this period were positive is debatable, but it was certainly represented as desirable. The representations drew upon and amplified the perceptions of Cuba established in the 1920s, conveying Cuba as a place of romance, adventure, exoticism, and, thanks to the Hotel Nacional, a place of luxury as well.¹⁹⁸

In 1941, Fox released *Week-end in Havana*, a musical film starring Alice Faye, Carmen Miranda, John Payne and Cesar Romero. Through its storyline and characters the movie

¹⁹⁵ Villalba, *Cuba y el Turismo*, 44.

¹⁹⁶ Ibid, 50.

¹⁹⁷ However, the owners may have been interested in appealing to a broader economic range. During the expansion in 1933 there was inquiry into the cost of adding kitchenettes in guestrooms, a move that would allow guests to cook on their own and thus travel on a smaller budget.

¹⁹⁸ Under President Franklin Roosevelt's Good Neighbor Policy, the United States adopted a non-interventionist position toward Latin America with the hopes of increasing economic exchange with these countries. One aspect of this policy was to change the way U.S. citizens perceived Latin Americans, a job President Roosevelt tasked to the newly created Office of the Coordinator of Inter-Hemispheric Affairs. The Motion Picture Division of this program sought to change perceptions by encouraging filmmakers to produce movies that cast Latin Americans in a positive light. This campaign continued throughout World War II. In the climate of war, the U.S. was particularly concerned with making sure that Latin American countries remained aligned with allied interests for political and economic reasons.

reinforces stereotypes of Cubans and Cuban vacations. Nan Spencer (Alice Faye), a Macy's shop girl, finds herself on a grounded McKracken steamship on her way to vacation in Havana. Nan refuses to sign the release forms and insists that McKracken Steamship Company pay for a vacation at that moment, as she cannot change her vacation time. McKracken, fearing a lawsuit over the grounded ship, agrees to send her on a vacation to Havana immediately. Jay Williams (John Payne), McKracken Steamship Company employee and fiancé to Mr. McKracken's daughter, is sent along to make sure that Nan enjoys herself and signs the release form at the end of the vacation. Predictably, Nan's desire for adventure, exoticism, and a good time are satiated by her vacation in Havana, and topped by a romance with Jay Williams that provides a happy ending to the film.

Promised the finest vacation in Havana that money can buy, Nan stays at an unnamed luxury hotel in Cuba and the movie shows her entering a grand guestroom. The rooms are the apartments from the Suite of the Republic at the Hotel Nacional, and the camera sweeps across the room to show the luxurious accommodations. Nan inspects the rooms upon entry, including the bathroom, which is an impressive feat of marble construction. Presumably, the Hotel Nacional goes unnamed because the hotel portrayed in the movie is an amalgam of different sets and locations. When Nan enjoys the view from her room she looks out at the Capitolio, a view impossible from the hotel and probably realized by placing a painted screen outside of the window. In addition, the lobby is in an Art Deco style, and most likely a Hollywood set. The amalgamation of hotel settings combined with the other views of the island reveal the image of Cuba that the movie producers wanted to convey. Nan's view from her hotel window shows Havana to be a city of impressive architecture, the lobby conveys the modern nature of the city, and the sumptuous hotel rooms convey the luxurious experience one could have in Havana.

In this sense, we can see the Hotel Nacional as representative of the culmination of tourism and hotel development in Havana in the interwar period and the standard to which U.S. tourists and the Cuban tourist industry looked as they advanced into the next phase of tourism. Films such as *Week-end in Havana* helped retain Havana's place as a desirable destination during World War II, ensuring its popularity in the postwar period. Through its architecture, design, and placement within the urban environment, the Hotel Nacional was a national icon that defined interwar Havana and that significantly contributed to the shape and popularity of tourism in the postwar period.



Figure 35. Photo of the Hotel Nacional after the October 1933 bombardment. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 36. Photo of interior of the Hotel Nacional after the October 1933 bombardment. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 37. Photograph of McKim, Mead & White's Hotel Nacional de Cuba (1930) in Havana, Cuba, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

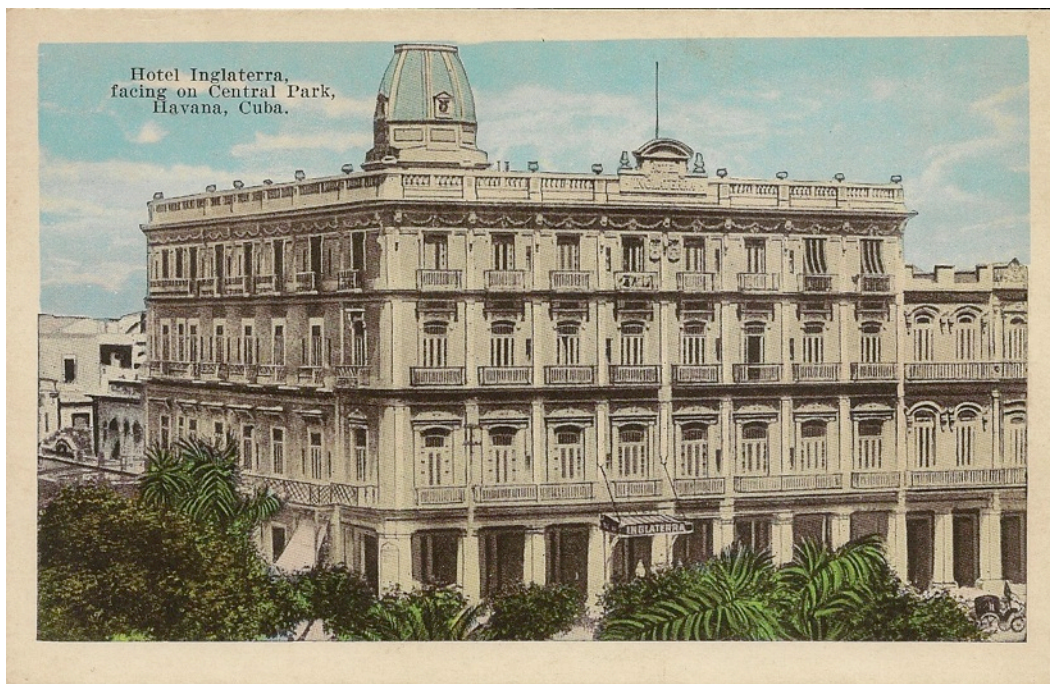


Figure 38. Postcard of Hotel Inglaterra, 1853 (renovations in 1891 and 1915), Havana, Cuba (undated but probably circa 1915-1935). Collection of the author.



Figure 39. Map of Havana. Map by José Luis Quevedo.



Figure 41. Postcard circa 1925-1930 of Paseo del Prado. The tall building on the right is the Sevilla-Biltmore addition by Schultze & Weaver. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 42. Postcard showing Parque Central, circa 1907. The building on the left is the original Teatro Tacón and to the right of this is the Hotel Inglaterra before the 1915 renovation. Collection of the author.



Figure 43. Photo of the interior courtyard café at the Hotel Inglaterra. Photo by the author in 2012.

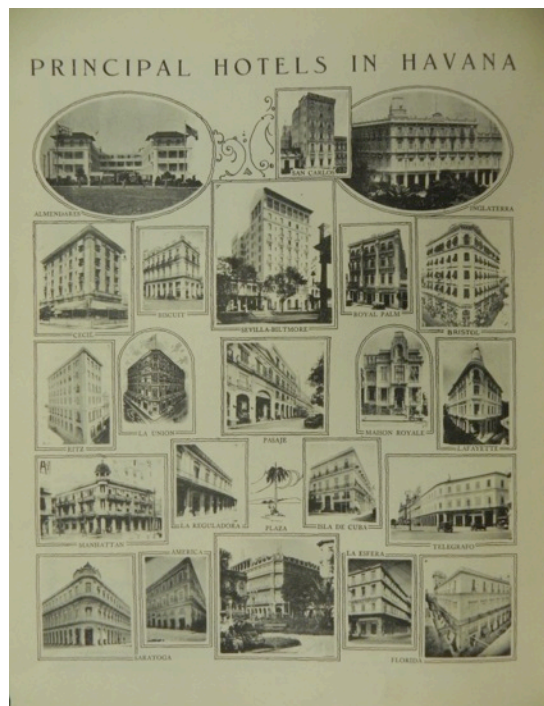


Figure 44. Page showing the principal hotels in Havana from the promotional brochure *Cuba: The Loveliest Land That Human Eyes Have Ever Seen*, ca. 1925. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 45. Original façade of the Hotel Sevilla by José Toraya, 1908, Havana, Cuba.
Photo by the author in 2012.



Figure 46. Promotional postcard for Sloppy Joe's Bar, circa 1925. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.

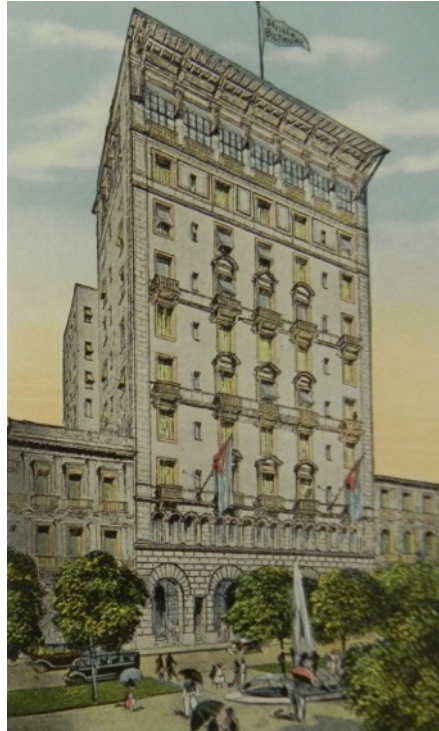


Figure 47. Postcard circa 1925-1940 showing the new façade of the Hotel Sevilla-Biltmore designed by Schultze & Weaver in 1924. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 48. Postcards of the interior courtyard of the Sevilla-Biltmore Hotel, circa 1925-1940. Collection of the author.



Figure 49. Undated photograph of the Nautilus Hotel (Schultze & Weaver, 1923-24) from Biscayne Bay, Miami Beach, Florida. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 50. Schultze & Weaver, Miami Biltmore, 1924-26. Coral Gables, Florida. Photo by the author in 2011.



Figure 51. Photograph of the Hotel Nacional with electric tram in left foreground, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 52. Postcard of the Gran Casino Nacional, after remodel by Schultze & Weaver in 1925. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.

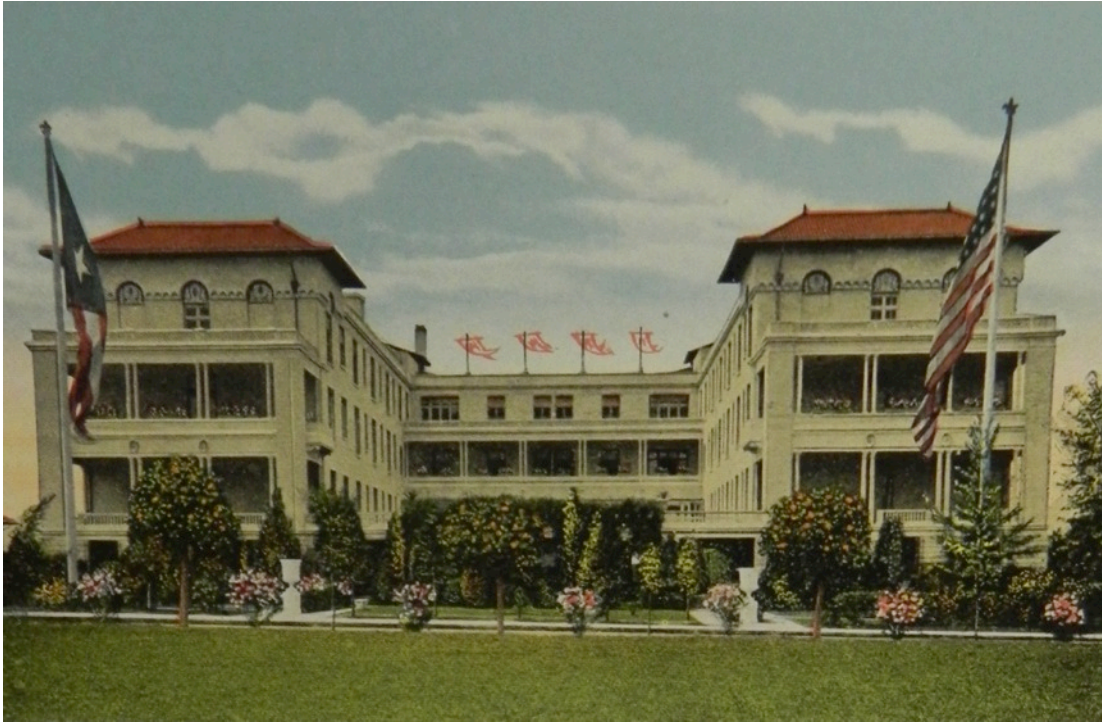


Figure 53. Postcard of the Hotel Almendares (1921), undated probably circa 1921-1940. Collection of the author.

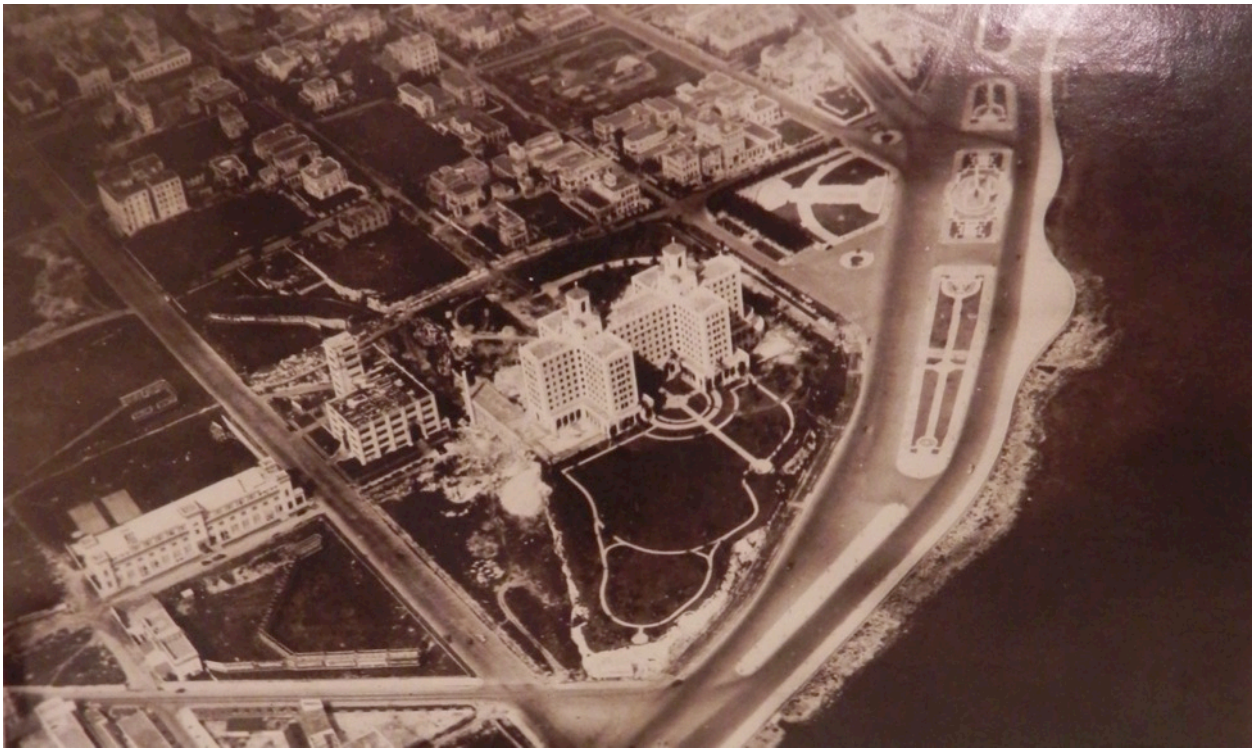


Figure 54. Photograph of the Hotel Nacional in Vedado that shows how much of the surrounding land has not been built upon, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 55. Map of Vedado with hotels indicated. Map by José Luis Quevedo.

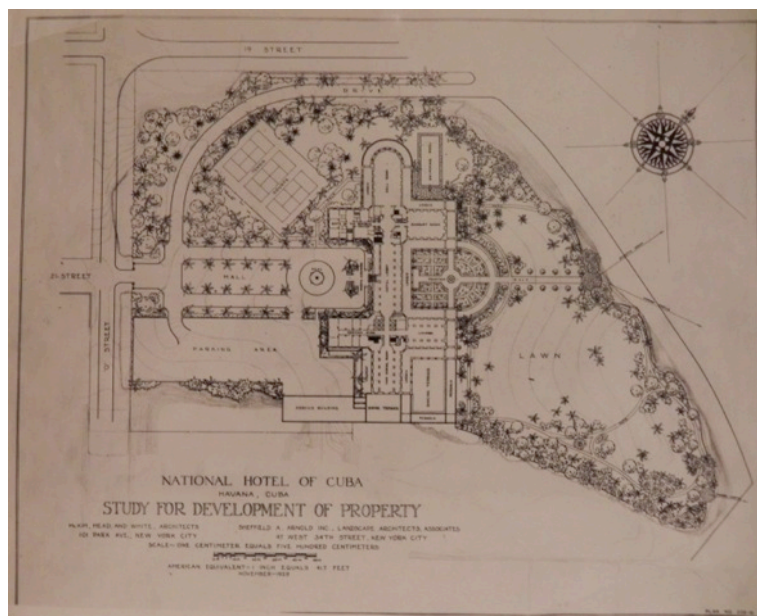


Figure 56. Plot layout for the Hotel Nacional property, ca. 1928. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 57. Photograph of the Hotel Nacional and Maine Monument, looking east along coast, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 58. Drawing of the Hotel Nacional, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

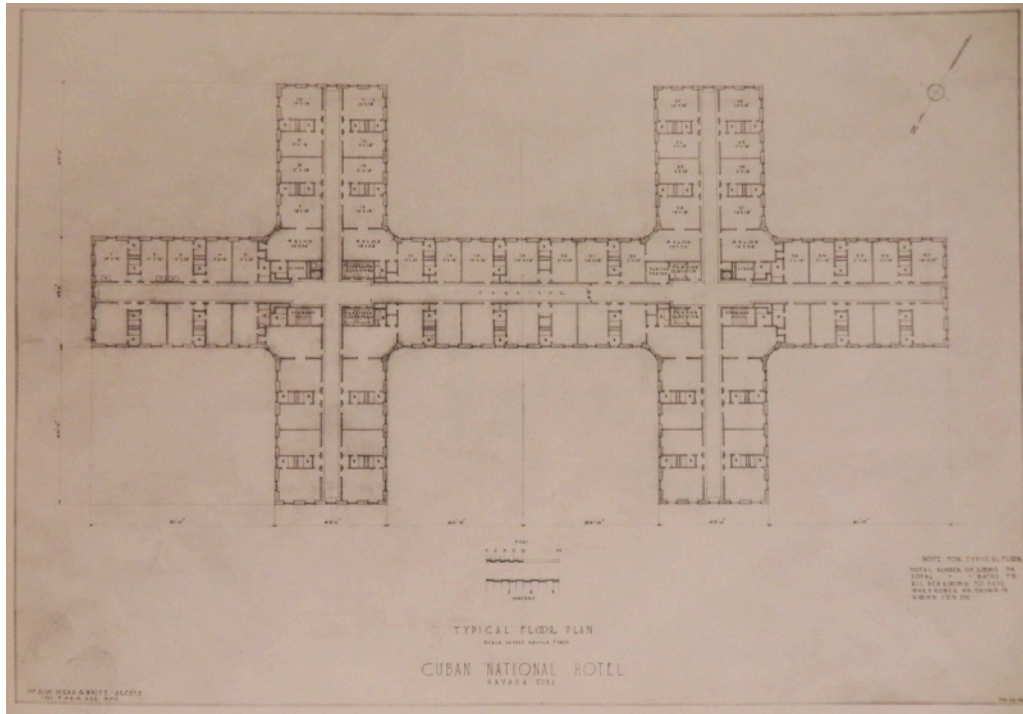


Figure 59. Typical floor plan of the Hotel Nacional, circa. 1928. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 60. Photograph of Hotel Nacional with lobster keystone over main arch. Photo by the author in 2014.

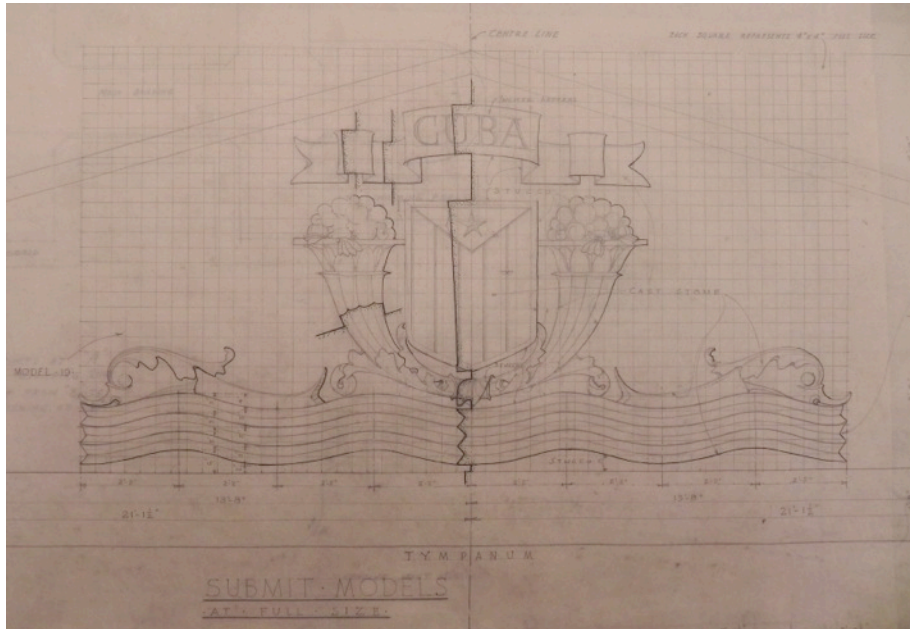


Figure 61. Architectural drawing of tympanum design, circa 1928. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 62. Photograph of the lobby of the Hotel Nacional, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 63. Photograph of interior with wicker furniture at the Hotel Nacional, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.



Figure 64. Photograph of the dining room in the Suite of the Republic at the Hotel Nacional, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

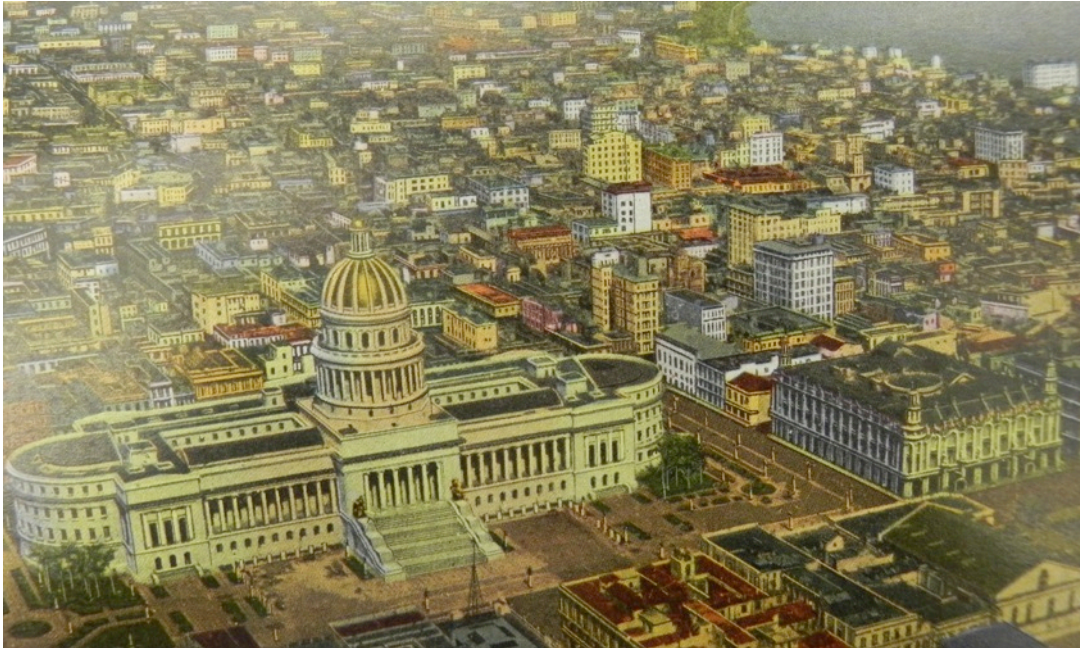


Figure 65. Postcard of the city of Havana highlighting the Capitolio in the left foreground, undated probably circa 1925-1940. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.

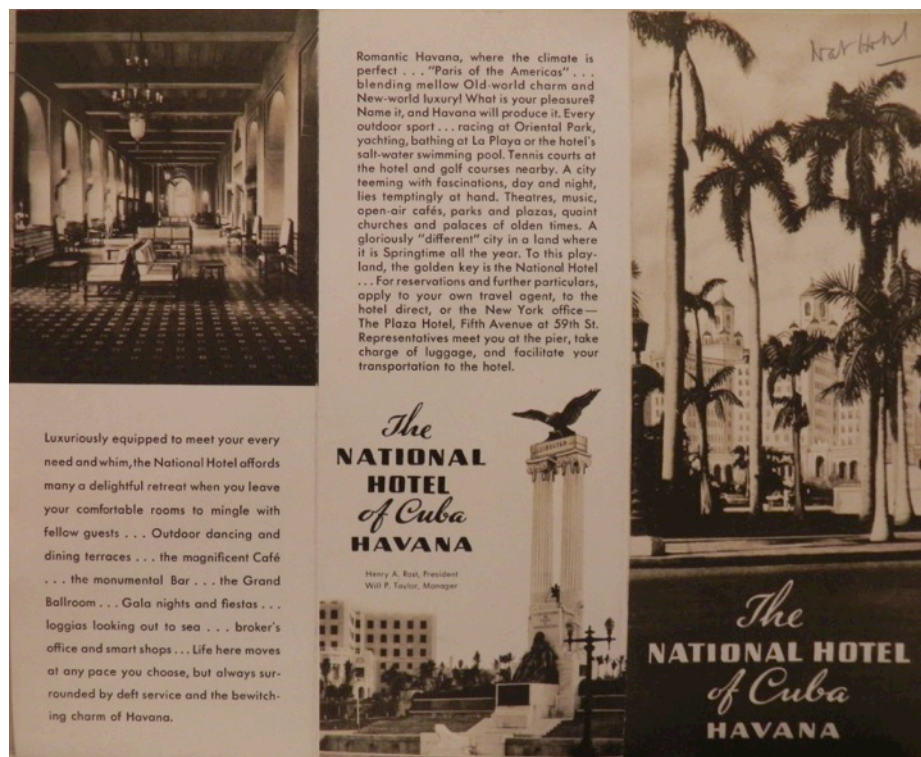


Figure 66. Outside of brochure for the Hotel Nacional, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

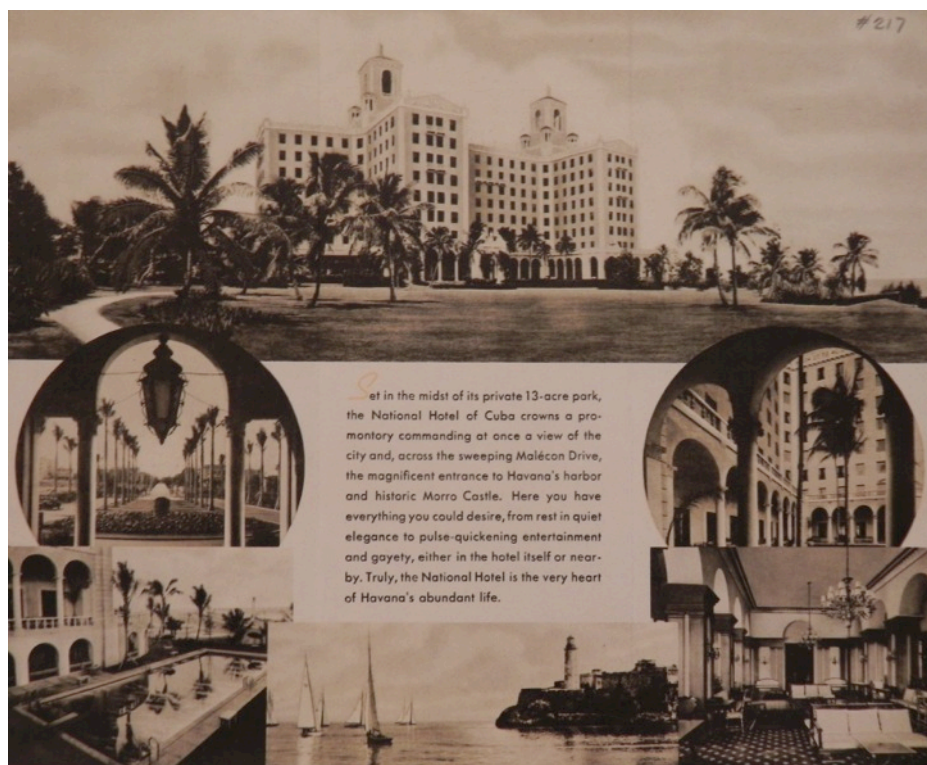


Figure 67. Inside of brochure for the Hotel Nacional, circa 1930. Collection of the New-York Historical Society.

IV. SELLING SAN JUAN: THE CARIBE HILTON AND POST-WORLD WAR II TOURISM

When the Caribe Hilton was built in 1949, *Architectural Forum* exclaimed, “This is the kind of hotel which should be built in Florida and California, but never has been” (Figure 68).¹⁹⁹ Only a year before the Caribe Hilton was built, Miami Beach was still building their high-rise hotels in Art Deco and Streamline Moderne styles. Developers and architects in Florida and the Caribbean heeded this call, and after the Caribe Hilton was built, new hotel architecture in Florida and the Caribbean increasingly utilized an iteration of modernism derived from the International Style to create designs that focused on function and efficiency and highlighted the natural climate. Reviews of the Caribe Hilton in architectural journals and hotel trade publications extolled the virtues of urban resort hotels that offered “functional luxury,” nomenclature for design that successfully meshed efficient design that was attentive to building and operating costs with the guest’s desire for an unforgettable experience of an unfamiliar place, without resorting to kitsch design or unmitigated ornamentation. The luxury of the new ultra-modern hotel, as proposed by the Caribe Hilton, was to be defined by the comforts that expressed modern living, such as air-conditioning and efficient planning, rather than lavish decoration.

By incorporating discussions of architecture that was located in what would be defined as the periphery of the avant-garde architectural world, architectural publications encouraged

¹⁹⁹ “Spectacular Luxury in the Caribbean: the Caribe Hilton Hotel at San Juan, Puerto Rico,” *Architectural Forum* 92 (March 1950), 97. A number of scholars have written on various aspects of the Caribe Hilton and to varying degrees. Architectural analyses of the hotel include Wharton, *Building the Cold War*; and Torres, “La Invención de los umbrales del Eden: imágenes, arquitectura y contexto en el desarrollo hotelero de San Juan” [The Invention of the Gates of Paradise: Images, Architecture, and Context in the Development of Hotels in San Juan].

readers to view architectural modernism as something that could be successfully adapted to a range of conditions and climates. The Caribe Hilton offered the opportunity for modernism to expand the more strict ideology that was promoted by such influential architects and instructors at the time, such as Walter Gropius and Mies van der Rohe. In fact, the criticism that functionalist driven architecture was to garner in the decades after the Caribe Hilton was built revolved around the ideology's failure to address cultural, spiritual and emotional needs.²⁰⁰ The incorporation of projects such as the Caribe Hilton into the professional press encouraged readers to recognize a larger global architectural community and the variety of responses to architectural problems that architects could invent that included a thoughtful consideration of cultural and geographic identity. Most notably, the treatment of the Caribe Hilton in the professional and popular press highlighted the power of architecture to shape an understanding of identity and place. Indeed, this characterization reinforced the goals of the Puerto Rican government, who was largely responsible for the hotel project. The Puerto Rican government conceived of the Caribe Hilton as a project to not only increase industry and tourism on the island, and thus promote the insular project of modernization, but it recognized the potential of modern architecture to project ideas of national identity within the island and to the rest of the world. Upon opening, the Caribe Hilton was hailed as a great example of tropical modernism.²⁰¹ But the way the term was used indicated that it was loaded with conflicted meanings that, in many ways, represented the multiple faces of the Caribe Hilton itself. The accepted, most basic definition of tropical modernism is the use of architectural modernism to create a design that

²⁰⁰ Joan Ockman, ed. *Architecture School: Three Centuries of Educating Architects in North America* (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2012), 117.

²⁰¹ Architectural historian John Hertz refers to it as *tropicalismo*, though divested, he claims, of the radical politics that were attached to the style in other countries such as Mexico and Brazil, see Hertz, "Authenticity, Colonialism, and the Struggle with Modernity," 223. I have found no other sources that use this term and to avoid the possible confusion with the literary movement I refer to it as tropical modernism. Primary sources refer to it with a number of different names: tropical modern, tropical modernism, architecture for the tropics (in publications so entrenched in modernism that they assumed the modern aspect of it).

sensitively addresses local climate and conditions.²⁰² In this sense, tropical modernism was part of a larger discourse of regional modernism, which took from the International Style and other modern architectural movements dating back to the 1920s and adapted architecture to meet local conditions and needs—social, cultural, and economic, as well as climatic. The time during which the Caribe Hilton was built marked the period in which the most prominent local architectural firms committed themselves to an International Style-inspired modernism that was driven by a preoccupation with the tropical climate. According to architectural historian Jerry Torres, the architectural discourse of Puerto Rican modernism was propelled and defined by the quest to articulate the tropical environment through architectural forms.²⁰³

If Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa, the architects of the Caribe Hilton, had a desire to design a pure, locally inspired modernist architecture for the hotel project, it was necessarily mitigated by the fact that their design also had to meet the needs and expectations of foreigners. While it was meant to symbolize Puerto Rico as defined by the government's program of modernization, it was not meant to be a space primarily for Puerto Ricans. The young architects undoubtedly wanted to create an innovative modern design, but still had to account for tourist expectations. They could work with the latest in modern technology and in theories of efficient planning, but they also had to satiate the U.S. desire for tropical ambiance. The desire for the tropical is apparent in some U.S. articles and advertisements for the Caribe Hilton that focused on the "tropical" in "tropical modernism," reducing Puerto Rico to simplistic visions of palm trees and piña coladas and undercutting earnest, more objective discussions of the hotel's architectural

²⁰² Liane Lefaivre and Alexander Tzonis, "The Suppression and Rethinking of Regionalism and Tropicalism after 1945," in *Tropical Architecture: Critical Regionalism in the Age of Globalization*, eds. Alexander Tzonis, Liane Lefaivre, Bruno Stagno (Chicester, England: Wiley-Academy, 2001), 14.

²⁰³ Torres, "The Invention of the Gates of Paradise," 152.

merits.²⁰⁴ However, the representation of tropicality at the Caribe Hilton was not thoughtlessly churned out kitsch design. The guest's desire to experience the local, which was equated with the tropical, was met with Puerto Rican design that fused concepts of tropicality with modernism, working to redefine Puerto Rico as a place of modernity.

When Puerto Rico emerged as a major tourist destination in the postwar period, the new, modern Caribe Hilton served as the site and symbol of a new era of tourism and modernization on the island. The design of the hotel shaped locals' and foreigners' understanding of self and other. Upon its opening in 1949, the Caribe Hilton quickly became symbolic of many issues that were debated and contested in the postwar period, many of which were related to questions of Puerto Rican identity. As this chapter will show, discussions and understandings of the Caribe Hilton revolved around notions of the modern, the historic, and the tropical—key elements that were utilized by Puerto Ricans and U.S. citizens to negotiate national and cultural identities.

A. **“The Crossroads of the Americas”**

In the postwar period, the Puerto Rican government's tourism office, the U.S. government, and private interests carefully cultivated the image of Puerto Rico as an exotic, tropical vacationland made safe and enjoyable through modernization in order to promote tourism. Of course, U.S. citizens did travel to Puerto Rico in the nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries, as discussed in chapter one, and there had been previous efforts by the government in Puerto Rico to develop tourism. However, it was only in the postwar period that tourism increased significantly when the Puerto Rican government, inspired by the tourism

²⁰⁴ Almost all advertisements include a picture of a palm tree, piña colada, or other object meant to evoke tropicality. For an example of these types of articles see Frank George, “Southern Isles Improved,” *New York Times*, March 5, 1939, XX6. The constant use of the term “tropical” and the tendency toward tangents that waxed poetic on the tropical landscape consistently underscored notions of difference, undermined serious consideration of Puerto Rico, and perpetuated traditional colonial discourse.

revenue other countries were bringing in, decided to purposefully develop tourism. The Office of Tourism studied data on other Caribbean and tropical destinations, such as Jamaica, Hawaii and Mexico, to determine what type of image to cultivate to appeal to tourists and how and what kind of tourism initiatives to implement. Coupled with the economic boom of the postwar years, the tourism program that developed under Governor Luis Muñoz Marín significantly expanded tourism in Puerto Rico.

In order to cultivate U.S. tourism to a greater extent, tourism promoters had to erase or diminish the negative associations U.S. citizens had of Puerto Rico and its people. The Puerto Rican government's postwar program of modernization and the modern buildings it financed, such as the Caribe Hilton, helped reassure U.S. citizens that the Puerto Rico of the past had given way to a bright future made possible through technological progress. Even before the big post-World War II push for tourism, positive representations of Puerto Rico helped promote the island, often by highlighting a picturesque colonial past, an enticing tropical climate, and its unique geographical and political relationship with the United States.

Persuasive tourism promotion was not solely responsible for increased tourism to Puerto Rico prior to the postwar period. Equally important were the general conditions in the United States and around the globe that prompted increased travel in general and to San Juan in particular. As Europe became more volatile in the late 1930s, more U.S. travelers considered the Caribbean a safer vacation destination.²⁰⁵ And while some predicted that the United States' entry into the war would curb an interest in traveling, a *New York Times* article in 1941 noted a fifteen to twenty percent increase from the previous year in travelers to such places as Hawaii, the

²⁰⁵ See "Islands' Lure at Record," *New York Times*, April 30, 1939, 46.

Philippines, Panama, the Virgin Islands, and Puerto Rico.²⁰⁶ It is noteworthy that all of the destinations were at some point U.S. territories, except Panama, though the United States controlled the Panama Canal Zone. As the war continued and fears grew concerning its spread into the western hemisphere, travel to other islands in the Caribbean was more closely regulated and most islands required passports for visitation after January 15, 1942. However, entry into Puerto Rico remained easy for U.S. travelers, as passports were not required for United States citizens.²⁰⁷

The promotional materials created after the establishment of the Tourism Bureau are representative of the manner in which Puerto Rico was presented to the U.S. public. Produced under the Works Progress Administrations, they signal U.S. government approval of the representations of Puerto Rico that they depict. We can trace these types of representations back to the nineteenth century and they persist, in many ways, to this day. Until the construction of modern hotels, tourist literature and posters primarily stressed the Puerto Rican landscape as defined primarily by the historic and the tropical (Figures 69 & 70).²⁰⁸

Both posters present Puerto Rico as outside of the United States and part of it, a common approach used to appeal to U.S. tourists. The “U.S.A.” is a comforting reminder that one is still in the realm of US sovereignty, while the phrase “where the Americas meet” suggests Puerto Rico as a place on the border of, or just outside of, the US—offering enticement through the suggestion of the foreign. This also echoes the definition of Puerto Rico in *Downes v. Bidwell* (1901) as “foreign in a domestic sense,” discussed more fully in chapter one. Just as the Supreme

²⁰⁶ See “Random Notes for Travelers,” *New York Times*, Feb. 9, 1941, XX8.

²⁰⁷ See “Caribbean Travel Rapidly Changing,” *New York Times*, Dec. 28, 1941, XX1.

²⁰⁸ These two tropes were established much before these two posters were created. They are very similar to the postcards and photographs taken by tourists that date as far back as the late nineteenth century.

Court case defined Puerto Rico as both not part of the United States and not *not* part of it, so do these posters suggest the liminal limbo of Puerto Rico both geographically and politically. One presents a view of San Juan from the vantage point of San Felipe de Morro Castle with the sentry box serving as the focal point of the image, giving the viewer a vision of the island's Spanish colonial past. The image encourages the viewer to contemplate the exciting period in San Juan's history when the threat of invasion or attack was ever-present. Besides conjuring thoughts of canon fire from an attacking English fleet or pirate ships bedecked with gnarly, peg-legged troublemakers, the image of the Spanish colonial past was also intended to stress the Europeanness of Puerto Rico. In fact, tourism promoters utilized Puerto Rico's Spanish heritage and the relative antiquity of San Juan to align it more with European culture and history than, say, that of the United States in order to promote the island as a closer and cheaper travel alternative to Europe.²⁰⁹

While the other WPA poster also boasts colonial architecture in the background, the main subject is tropical vegetation. A giant century plant (*Agave americana*) forms the focal point of the image, flanked by palms. The image presents the viewer with exotic flora that serves to signify the tropics to the North American viewer. The tropical climate is represented not only through the presence of vegetation, but also in the bend in the palms, which besides functioning as a framing technique, insinuates ocean breezes.²¹⁰

Histories of Caribbean tourism have recounted that after World War II the combination of postwar prosperity, advancements in air travel, and the growing Cold War climate meant more

²⁰⁹ The promotion of Puerto Rico as an alternative, or even equivalent, of Europe was prevalent throughout travel advertisements throughout the twentieth century.

²¹⁰ Krista Thompson establishes the palm tree as a visual signifier of the tropics in *An Eye for the Tropics*, 100-102.

U.S. citizens were traveling and were being encouraged to travel to specific destinations.²¹¹

There was a general increase in expendable income for U.S. citizens and vacations were now a fact of life for many.²¹² And while certainly numerous U.S. citizens chose to take their vacations within the confines of the continental United States, advances in air travel spurred an explosion of international travel. After World War II commercial air travel became faster and more affordable, making it more feasible for a greater number of U.S. citizens to travel by plane.²¹³ Before the onset of jet travel in the later years of the 1950s, Europe still remained rather distant, not to mention war-torn, and the Caribbean was promoted as a close, yet still international, destination. With the introduction of daily, nonstop flights between New York and San Juan in 1946, a getaway to Puerto Rico was now only six hours away. This travel time was further reduced in the 1950s with the introduction of jet airliners into commercial aviation. In 1948 Pan Am reduced their fares, offering tickets for as low as seventy-five dollars each way.²¹⁴

Puerto Rico had its own unique air travel conditions. In 1951 Puerto Rico received authorization from the U.S. Bureau of Civil Aviation to allow Eastern Airlines to land in San Juan, which broke Pan Am's monopoly and spurred competition through lower airfares. This seems to have been done in an effort to achieve two results. The first was to get more U.S. tourists to Puerto Rico by appealing to a wider economic base. The second was part of a larger U.S. government strategy to promote Puerto Rico as a symbol of the greatness of the Point Four Program in the face of communism. As part of this, the U.S. government needed lower amounts

²¹¹ In discussing the growth of international tourism by U.S. citizens in the postwar years, Dennis Merrill reports that "by the early 1960s Americans alone spent \$3 billion per year traveling overseas," in Dennis Merrill, "Negotiating Cold War Paradise: U.S. Tourism, Economic Planning, and Cultural Modernity in Twentieth-Century Puerto Rico," *Diplomatic History* 25, no. 2 (Spring 2001), 180. See also Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise* and Ward, *Packaged Vacations*.

²¹² For an account of the increasing affordability of vacations for U.S. citizens and the incorporation of vacation time into the work sphere, see Cindy S. Aron, *Working at Play: A History of Vacations in the United States* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

²¹³ Aron, *Working at Play*, 10.

²¹⁴ Diana Rice, "Field of Travel," *New York Times*, September 5, 1948, pg. X11.

of poverty and unemployment on the island so they encouraged the poorer sectors of Puerto Rico to immigrate to the United States. Lower airfares encouraged this mass migration and encouraged more U.S. travelers to consider Puerto Rico an affordable vacation destination.²¹⁵

Airline companies promoted their services by selling destinations through the presentation of ideal or fantastic scenes of places the airline carrier could take them and further reinforced notions of Puerto Rico as a tropical paradise just waiting for U.S. tourists. In a promotional poster for Pan American World Airlines, the artist Jean Carlu enticed the potential traveler to fly Pan Am to the Caribbean by drawing on the established tropes of the tropical and the historic (Figure 71). The sunny, warm tropical climate is suggested through the breeze that moves the woman's sundress and the sunglasses and straw hat used to protect her from the bright sun that illuminates half of her body. The natural beauty of the Caribbean is further indicated by the lush greens used to denote islands and the bright blues that depict inviting Caribbean waters. Marked with a characteristic skull and crossbones flag, the pirate ship represents the colorful history of this area of the world. Minus the pirate ship, which functions as a symbol of the past, the Caribbean is represented as a vacant land, just blue ocean and green jungles, seemingly uninhabited. By erasing any indication of a local population, the image presents the Caribbean as an open land, free for U.S. citizens to do with as they please. Of course some viewers could have read the sheer size of this U.S. woman in comparison to the small Caribbean islands she uses as stepping-stones as a reference to U.S. intervention and imperialism in the Caribbean. Indeed, the contrast of the red and white striped with the blue sea evoke the U.S. flag. In addition, the shading of the woman's body, which results in a white foot planted in Puerto Rico and a black foot in Jamaica, has racial connotations. This certainly could be read in terms of race and a

²¹⁵ On reduced airfares, the Point Four Program and Puerto Rican immigration to the United States see Ramón Grosfoguel, *Colonial Subjects: Puerto Ricans in a Global Perspective* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2003), 109.

common understanding and promotion of certain islands as more white than others, and thus more appealing to some U.S. tourists. Puerto Rico, for example, was presented in terms of its European ancestry, downplaying the presence of the black population on the island, while other islands, such as Jamaica, were cast as black islands.

The U.S. government's active promotion of leisure travel to countries that were committed to capitalism as a means of development enhanced the lure of Puerto Rico.²¹⁶ The U.S. government encouraged U.S. citizens to view the development and modernization of Puerto Rico as a direct reflection of the power and greatness of American-style capitalism and consumption, typical of the developing Cold War rhetoric of the period. There was truth to fuel this rhetoric, though perhaps not everyone at the time would have agreed with it. The growing tourist industry did increase the quality of life for many Puerto Ricans. For example, hotels such as the Caribe Hilton created jobs that offered Puerto Ricans good wages in comparison to other types of employment on the island, raising the standard and quality of living for many.²¹⁷ Traveling to Puerto Rico was a way average U.S. citizens could help fight communism; by injecting their dollars into the local economy, they were investing in the democratic future of that island, and setting an example for other developing nations who may have been flirting with the idea of communism.

²¹⁶ Merrill, "Negotiating Cold War Paradise," 181.

²¹⁷ This also applied to all of the U.S. industries that opened factories on Puerto Rico. The role of the United States, both in terms of the actions of the government and businesses and the Puerto Rican government's adoption of what critics consider a "U.S. mentality" in the 1940s and 1950s is a contested topic. While some saw modernization programs as creating jobs and higher standards of living, others saw the commitment to industrialization as a rejection of the agricultural sector, which forced many rural residents to abandon their livelihood and relocate to cities, or emigrate to the United States for job opportunities. Nevertheless, there was an air of paternalism in U.S. literature, which in some cases presented the United States as Puerto Rico's savior. It suggested that the United States first had to invest in the island, and more than just financially, before Puerto Rico would be able to "lift itself up by its bootstraps."

It was because of these many reasons that Puerto Rico was promoted as the “crossroads of the Americas.”²¹⁸ Puerto Rico was at the same time both part of the U.S. and outside of it, and it geographically tied together the northern and southern portions of a western hemisphere that seemed to be rapidly shrinking in the age of air travel. It was simultaneously an exotic new frontier for U.S. tourists, rendered safe through U.S. involvement in the island and its status as a U.S. sovereign state. By mid-century, it was increasingly seen as a place where Latin American traditions and history met North American modernity, a reputation firmly established by the island’s official program of modernization, known as Operation Bootstrap.

B. Building the Modern

1. Drastically Changing Landscape, Drastically Changing Travel

While it was one thing for Puerto Rico to be promoted as the “crossroads of the Americas,” it was quite another to actually be that. In order for the island to live up to its constructed image, it had to address the built reality of the touristic landscape. Just consider what tourists would have encountered if they visited Puerto Rico in the immediate years after the war, versus what they would have met with just a mere five years later, or an even more profound difference fourteen years after that:

1946. World War II has just ended and a tourist finds him or herself on a plane to San Juan, perhaps on one of the new direct flights from New York that just started that year. The plane starts its descent heading west along the northern coast of the city in order to land at Isla

²¹⁸ San Juan was repeatedly promoted as the “crossroads of the Americas” in articles and promotional materials. For example, see “1950 Hotel Accommodations at the Crossroads of the Nation” *Hotel Monthly* 58, no. 683 (February 1950), 27-40.

Grande Airport.²¹⁹ This approach would have revealed the main options in accommodations in San Juan as the plane swooped in along the coast: the Condado Beach Hotel (formerly the Gran Condado Vanderbilt) in Condado, the Pan American Guesthouse and the Hotel Normandie, both in Puerta de la Tierra. These were the three finest hotels in San Juan at the time, and offered the visitor a limited range of accommodations in a variety of architectural styles.

This traveler may have been stopping in San Juan for a layover, perhaps for a day or two, a very common component of a journey to a destination in South America in that period. If this was the case, the Pan American Guesthouse, affiliated with Pan American Airlines, was a good option. The hotel offered affordable, short-term accommodations to travelers who were only in San Juan for a day or two, often the case for travelers with a layover. In fact, guests were not permitted to stay for more than a few days. If San Juan were the final destination, whether for business or pleasure, the tourist most likely would have chosen between the Condado Beach Hotel and the Hotel Normandie.

The tourist may have found the options for accommodations disappointing. East of the city on the strip of land known as Condado, the Condado Beach Hotel, once a symbol of modern and luxurious accommodations, had lost its luster. It had changed hands a few times and was in desperate need of a renovation. More than a quarter of a century old, the Condado Beach Hotel had yet to see any major renovations and could not offer U.S. guests much in the way of the modern amenities and services they expected in this period.

The other option was somewhat closer to the historic city center and not far from the Pan American Guesthouse. The 1942 Hotel Normandie would certainly have been the most modern and luxurious hotel a traveler could have chosen (see Figure 34). The hotel's exterior, through

²¹⁹ The Isla Grande Airport was also known as the Naval Air Station Isla Grande for the U.S. Navy constructed it. It served as the main international airport in Puerto Rico until 1955.

its modern ocean liner form, referenced the sea voyages of the elite. This cosmopolitan lifestyle was complemented in the interiors, where opulent Art Deco designs were a parallel to the raucous bohemian parties of the rich that were said to take place there.²²⁰ The limited selection of hotels in San Juan in the postwar period was indicative of the relatively limited number of U.S. tourists who came to the city. This would quickly change in the years after World War II, thanks to the efforts of the Puerto Rican government under the leadership of Luis Muñoz Marín to grow the tourist industry.

1950. The U.S. tourist returns to San Juan for a vacation. As the plane approaches San Juan, he sees all of the familiar hotels from before, but with one striking addition—the Caribe Hilton, the product of a government project that was realized with the participation of Hilton International Hotels Corporation. Luis Muñoz Marín, the first popularly elected governor of the island, embraced and encouraged the development of tourism, though wanted it carefully cultivated in order to maximize government profit and ensure that possible negative effects could be controlled. Tourism development was part of a larger program of modernization on the island, of which one key aspect of this program was to get U.S. industries to set up businesses on the island.

The traveler's choice to stay at the Caribe Hilton signaled the selection of the most modern and luxurious hotel in San Juan. The Puerto Rican government intended for the hotel to function as a symbol of Operation Bootstrap and as the face of the new modern Puerto Rico. The way architectural modernism was employed to suggest the taming and framing of the tropical environment signaled the Puerto Rican mastery of nature, indicating its path of progress and movement toward first world status.

²²⁰ Torres, "The Invention of the Gates of Paradise," 139.

1960. This same tourist decides to return once again to San Juan. This time he takes a jet, and arrives in roughly half the time it used to take.²²¹ In addition, he could expect to pay much less for the airline tickets. For example, round trip fares dropped from \$128 in 1952 to only \$90 by 1958.²²² And as the plane descends toward San Juan he is shocked to see the changes to the coastline as the plane heads east of the city and lands at the new international airport in Isla Verde. Once home to only the Condado Beach Hotel and some private residences, the area to the east of the Caribe Hilton is now full of new, large hotels. The tourist now has numerous options for accommodations, and at a greater variety of prices. Looking forward to sun, sand and surf, and a little history too, he plans to check out the recent preservation efforts that have polished up Old San Juan.

These three scenarios show the how greatly San Juan changed over a relatively short amount of time. The construction of the Caribe Hilton was the clarion call to hotel development on the island and the way the Puerto Rican government controlled the design of the Caribe Hilton ensured the subsequent growth of hotels in San Juan were to their liking. Indeed, the Caribe Hilton was not just a reflection of what Puerto Rico was in 1949, but was also meant to serve as a symbol of the future path of the island.

2. A Modernization Project of the Puerto Rican Government

The construction of the Caribe Hilton and the massive growth in tourism in Puerto Rico after World War II were the result of the efforts of Operation Bootstrap (Operación Manos a la Obra). With its connotations of U.S. gumption and self-sufficiency, the name referred to the program of modernization and industrialization in Puerto Rico overseen by Fomento, a division of the Puerto Rican government dedicated to promoting industries on the island that was

²²¹ You could now fly from New York City to San Juan in under three and a half hours in comparison to the previous six to eight hour flight.

²²² Merrill, "Negotiating Cold War Paradise," 191.

supported by the Puerto Rico Government Bank and PRIDCO (Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company).²²³ In 1948, Luis Muñoz Marín was democratically elected Governor of Puerto Rico. As the first Puerto Rican to serve in this position, Muñoz placed great emphasis on using Operation Bootstrap as a means to encourage and define a new understanding of *puertorriqueñidad* (Puerto Rican-ness).

Leading Fomento throughout the 1940s and 1950s was Teodoro Moscoso, a visionary politician who guided the agency in establishing over five hundred manufacturing plants on the island in those two decades. After witnessing the lack of success of the state-owned factories that were set up as an early initiative, Moscoso shifted toward private business. He worked to privatize all of the state-owned factories and looked to U.S. companies to invest in building and operating factories in Puerto Rico.²²⁴ The vast majority of these plants that were subsequently established were built and run by U.S. firms that Moscoso had lured to Puerto Rico with incentives such as lower wages and tax exemptions for eight to twelve years, which made manufacturing in Puerto Rico very lucrative.²²⁵

²²³ A. W. Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso and Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997), 25-30. Fomento was officially created on May 11, 1942 with Bill 188, signed by Rexford Guy Tugwell, the last U.S.-appointed governor of Puerto Rico who was from the United States. Formally titled the Administración de Fomento Económico (Economic Development Administration), Fomento was supported by the Puerto Rico Government Bank and PRIDCO (Puerto Rican Industrial Development Company). Fomento, and its implementation of Operation Bootstrap, had its roots in the New Deal-esque initiative of Governor Tugwell, who oversaw the establishment of a number of state-owned factories. When Luis Muñoz Marín was popularly elected in 1948 he reorganized government agencies. Muñoz retained PRIDCO as public corporation but took away its board and placed it under the power of the EDA administrator. After the reorganization it was effectively a public corporation that acted primarily as Fomento's real estate arm. Many of the goals of Operation Bootstrap complemented the aims the Point Four Program that the United States was implementing in Puerto Rico at the same time.

²²⁴ In fact, Operation Bootstrap did find industrialization and modernization largely through U.S. businesses operating on the island. In the first iteration of Operation Bootstrap the Puerto Rican government built and financed a number of factories with the idea that they could create their own businesses. Unfortunately, these factories did not prove very successful and Moscoso realized that private businesses, which had more capital and a better understanding of their product, would be more successful. Operation Bootstrap then shifted its focus to attracting foreign companies, primarily those in the United States, to come open factories in Puerto Rico.

²²⁵ Ayala and Bernabe summarize the conditions well: "The Industrial Incentives Act of 1947 granted private firms exemption from insular income, property, and other taxes and the payment of fees for licenses until 1957. Since U.S. corporations operating in Puerto Rico paid no federal income taxes, this offered them an almost

The Office of Tourism also fell under the jurisdiction of the head administrator of Fomento. Moscoso felt there was great opportunity to expand and develop the tourism industry in Puerto Rico, and he extolled tourism development as necessary for the cultivation of other industries on the island. Businessmen needed adequate accommodations when they traveled to Puerto Rico, he argued, a sentiment that was echoed in the U.S. press as well.²²⁶ Moscoso maintained that San Juan needed a world-class luxury hotel to attract industrial development, and in the mid-1940s he proposed a government-sponsored hotel as one part of a larger tourism development project to be carried out by the Office of Tourism. The plan aimed to attract sixteen percent of the Caribbean tourist market, which would bring in estimated annual revenue of \$15 million.²²⁷ This was part of a larger program of tourism that aimed to develop the industry, but only to a certain extent, with the government controlling the growth by keeping a close eye on transportation and accommodation infrastructure, as well as promotions and marketing. Although it was not the first edifice built by Fomento, the hotel promised to be the most important building project as it would be the physical manifestation of Operation Bootstrap most experienced by visitors, undoubtedly influential in shaping their perception of the new, modern Puerto Rico.

Moscoso and the Office of Tourism determined that San Juan needed a new hotel not only to address the shortage of hotel rooms in the city, but also because none of the existing hotels conveyed the image of the modern Puerto Rico that Operation Bootstrap wanted to convey.²²⁸ When this was first being discussed in the mid-1940s, the Condado Beach Hotel and the Hotel Normandie were the only two grand hotels in the city (see Figures 3 & 34). Both of

tax-free environment. Moreover, federal minimum wage laws were not automatically applicable to the island.” Wages were thus considerably lower than in the U.S. César J. Ayala and Rafael Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century: A History Since 1898* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 189.

²²⁶ For example see Paul J. C. Friedlander, “Island for Tourists,” *New York Times*, December 8, 1949, X17.

²²⁷ Lee E. Cooper, “Puerto Rico Opens a \$6,000,000 Hotel,” *New York Times*, December 10, 1949, 29; Torres, “The Invention of the Gates of Paradise,” 145; and Merrill, “Negotiating Cold War Paradise,” 191.

²²⁸ Market research had determined that a three hundred-room hotel was needed to accommodate the businessmen and their families that were expected to come to San Juan. Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso*, 123.

these private projects were funded by wealthy men, operated as private businesses and in the postwar period neither offered a vision of the modern Puerto Rico that the government wanted to project. The styles of the hotels pointed to the past—the Spanish theme of the Condado Beach Hotel held connotations of Puerto Rico’s colonial past and the reference to a cruise liner and the opulent interiors of the Art Deco Hotel Normandie flaunted the inappropriate excesses of a previous time.²²⁹

In addition to not adequately representing modern Puerto Rico, none of the extant hotels offered the government any means to profit. To create this opportunity, Moscoso configured a plan in 1946 for a hotel that would be entirely financed, built, and owned by the government. The Puerto Rican government’s monetary investment in building the hotel was a show of good faith that the Puerto Rican government was committed to tourism. While the project would cost the government a significant amount up front, it promised a substantial long-term return as the terms dictated that two thirds of hotel profits would be turned over to the Puerto Rican government. To attract an U.S. hotel company to run the establishment, the legislature passed a measure that officially declared tourism an industry, making the tax exemption law applicable to hotel investments.²³⁰ Governor Muñoz then sent letters to seven different hotel companies inviting them to run the government-sponsored hotel.

When Conrad Hilton received a letter asking if he would be interested in operating the hotel, he jumped at the opportunity. Hilton had built a hotel empire in the United States, largely by acquiring existing hotels and renovating and remodeling them to extract maximum profit.²³¹

²²⁹ The opulent hotel quickly became known for the bohemian and eccentric activities that were rumored to take place there, a complement to its lavish interiors. See Torres, “The Invention of the Gates of Paradise,” 134.

²³⁰ Oscar E. Bowline, “Bustling Caribbean,” *New York Times*, December 5, 1948, XX18.

²³¹ For an entertaining overview of the history of Hilton’s U.S. hotel empire see Conrad Hilton, *Be My Guest* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1957). He started by building a few hotels in the Southwest and Texas, and weathered the Depression and World War II. In fact, he profited from these tough economic times, as he

Besides his empire of hotels in the United States, Hilton already had some experience in functioning as an operating company outside of the United States, for example, the Palacio Hilton in Chihuahua, Mexico.²³² Undoubtedly the proposition that Fomento had sent him seemed like a small risk compared to building a hotel entirely on his own. The board of the Hilton Corporation approved the creation of a separate company, Hilton Hotels International, specifically for the purposes of this business venture.²³³

According to the proposition put forth by the Puerto Rican government, Hilton was to be responsible for staffing and covering all of the operating costs. The original proposition stipulated that the operating company was to be responsible for interior decoration, however, Hilton convinced Fomento that they should pay for it. In the end, Hilton only had to invest \$195,000 in the hotel project. The relatively small financial investment required of Hilton made this venture an attractive first step into the world of international hotels.

Therefore, it is most useful to look at the Caribe Hilton less as a Hilton hotel and more as a project of the Puerto Rican government. As will be discussed later, the Caribe Hilton was fundamental in shaping the nature of the subsequent Hilton Hotels International chain of hotels. However, during the process of conceptualizing and realizing the Caribe Hilton, the Puerto Rican government was primarily dictating the terms and parameters of the hotel project. Because of this, and the Puerto Rican government's commitment to publicly promoting the hotel as a state project, or more accurately, as a symbol of the positive attributes of private business agreeing to

acquired hotels from desperate hotel owners during the war years for a very good price. When the economy boomed after World War II, so did Hilton's business, and he used his profits to build his prestige by purchasing the entire Statler chain of hotels as well as the exclusive Waldorf-Astoria in New York and Mayflower in Washington D.C.

²³² The extant hotel was dubbed the Palacio Hilton when Hilton came in to operate it. Hilton later pulled out of the hotel, however, the owners continued to operate it with the Hilton name attached, even though there was no affiliation. Although his experience in Mexico did not end well, it did not seem to hinder his engagement in the Caribe Hilton arrangement.

²³³ Ward, *Packaged Vacations*, 26. The board of the Hilton Corporation only gave Conrad Hilton \$500,000 to start Hilton Hotels International. They were nervous about global expansion with memories of World War II fresh in their minds and because of rising inflation.

work with the Puerto Rican government, it is important to consider the ways in which the state was utilizing modern architecture as a visual manifestation of their political agenda.

3. A Modern State Through Modern Architecture

Decisions surrounding the design of the hotel reveal how much stock the Puerto Rican government put into the hotel project as a projection of Puerto Rico. While Hilton Hotels International was allowed substantial input in the location and design of the hotel in some respects, the Puerto Rican government was uncompromising in others, especially when it came to the architectural style of the hotel. Indeed, Fomento's new attitude toward architectural modernism and their commitment to it marked a pivotal shift not only in architecture in Puerto Rico but also in hotel design around the globe. Fomento invited five architectural firms to submit proposals in a competition to determine the design of the hotel. It saw this competition as another opportunity to make a statement about the new, modern Puerto Rico that was being built through Operation Bootstrap. Two of the firms were from the United States, one of which submitted a Mediterranean Revival design that Conrad Hilton favored. The other three submissions were by local Puerto Rican firms and the Puerto Rican government favored the young firm of Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa's design proposal, which they convinced Hilton to accept.²³⁴

That Hilton was drawn to a Mediterranean Revival style speaks to the way in which historical styles were often employed to appeal to romantic notions of Puerto Rico as a place of the past and exotic to the U.S. visitor. As discussed in the previous two chapters, the Mediterranean Revival style found in Puerto Rico and Cuba was actually developed in the United States and exported to the Hispanic Caribbean. The Puerto Rican government's insistence

²³⁴ A. W. Maldonado, who recounts the Caribe Hilton project in his biography of Teodoro Moscoso, reports that Hilton employed architects to design a hotel in a Spanish Revival style but when the design was presented to Fomento the plans were soundly rejected by Puerto Rican officials on the grounds that architecture funded by the government should be modern in appearance to represent the modern nature of the island, forcing Hilton to accept the modern proposal by Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa "with misgivings." See Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso*, 124.

on modernism indicated their unwillingness to engage with and perpetuate representations of Puerto Rico as a place of the past, as the Mediterranean Revival style was no longer considered a modern style. Modernism was the means to show the world that Puerto Rico was modern, progressive, and forward-looking. While the Puerto Rican government was primarily interested in utilizing architectural modernism to project national identity, the great success of the hotel had the additional effect of encouraging the use of architectural modernism in hotel design around the world.

Toro, Ferrer & Torregrosa was a young Puerto Rican firm composed of Puerto Rican architects Osvaldo Toro and Miguel Ferrer, and structural engineer Luis Torregrosa. All three went to the United States for their education, a practice not uncommon at the time, and in fact necessary if one wanted to study architecture as the School of Architecture was not established at the University of Puerto Rico until 1966. Osvaldo Toro studied architecture at Columbia University, where he became friends with Charles Warner, who worked with Toro on the Caribe Hilton project. Miguel Ferrer received his degree in architecture from Cornell University. After their studies in the United States the three returned to Puerto Rico. Toro and Ferrer worked for seven years in a number of local and federal government agencies in Puerto Rico before establishing a firm with Torregrosa in San Juan in 1945.

The Puerto Rican government viewed its rejection of historical styles, such as the Mediterranean Revival style, in favor of this new ahistorical idiom as a vital step in defining their nation and culture on their own terms.²³⁵ The selection of Puerto Rican architects reinforced the idea of national self-definition, and the modernist vocabulary they worked with

²³⁵ Torres, "The Invention of the Gates of Paradise," 147. For this attitude in the fine arts see Silvia Álvarez Curbelo, "The Modernization Project"; Marimar Benítez, "The Fifties: Affirmation and Reaction"; and José Antonio Torres Martino "The Graphic Arts of Puerto Rico" in *Puerto Rico: Arte e Identidad* [Puerto Rico: Art and Identity], 2nd ed. San Juan, PR: La Editorial de la Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2004.

was evidence of their training and understanding of avant-garde architectural practices. While the government advertised the fact that the architects had been educated in the United States, it also highlighted the fact that the architects were native Puerto Ricans in order to promote two main ideas: The first was that Puerto Rico could be self-sufficient and rely on its own citizens to shape cultural identity. The second was that local architects were somehow more attuned to address local conditions.²³⁶ Writing at the inauguration of the Caribe Hilton, the local press presented the Caribe Hilton as the face of the new, modern Puerto Rico.²³⁷ After the Caribe Hilton was constructed, modernism became synonymous with Operation Bootstrap, and in many ways the architecture symbolized an embrace of manufacturing, technology, capitalism, and consumption.

When the Caribe Hilton opened in 1949, it was hailed by professional journals and the popular press as a shining example of “ultra-modern” design, an important contribution to the development of architectural modernism in Puerto Rico, and an exemplary design approach for hotels. According to a review in *Architectural Forum* in 1950, the “highly refined, inventive form” of the Caribe Hilton ultimately signaled “the island’s awakened ambition” because it broke from the more typical approach of building resorts “in some pompous colonial style, charm-conditioned by a posh decorator, or in a kind of bleak Miami Beach *moderne*.”²³⁸ Located on a fairly empty tract of land that jutted out into the ocean, the Caribe Hilton’s relatively simplified form was rendered in abstract, geometric shapes derived from the

²³⁶ An assumption like this completely disregarded the fact that Toro and Ferrer had just spent years in New York where their education, given the location, probably did not focus much on building in tropical climates. This rhetoric was presented in publications produced in Puerto Rico that discussed topics such as the program of modernization, modern architecture in Puerto Rico, and tourism, which all clearly toed the official government line. It was also largely incorporated into U.S. publications as well, where developments in Puerto Rico were presented as the result of help from the U.S. and the adoption of a U.S. attitude toward modernization, industrialization, labor, and progress.

²³⁷ “Inauguración del Hilton,” *El Mundo*, December 10, 1949, 6.

²³⁸ “Spectacular Luxury in the Caribbean,” 98-99.

International Style (Figures 72 & 73). The major division of spaces by function—public spaces versus private guest areas—was visually apparent in the cubic forms of a horizontal pedestal and vertical tower. The two lower floors, which contained public areas such as lobbies, bars, restaurants, and casino, were spread out horizontally, sprawling out across the land perpendicular to the guest rooms (Figure 74). A large, rectangular slab that contained the three hundred guest rooms, the surface of which was broken up by the angled balconies and windows that covered both sides, topped the transparent, open ground level. Using materials associated with architectural modernism, such as plate glass, steel, and concrete, the architects designed a hotel that was unmistakably modern in appearance.

The architectural modernism of the hotel came to mean many things to many people as the hotel effectively became the symbol of Operation Bootstrap, its modern design signaling the changes Puerto Rico was experiencing through modernization. Presented as the face of the modern Puerto Rican state, architectural modernism was a tool that could be used to tame the tropical environment and make it enjoyable, and a method of design that epitomized functionality and efficiency. To the proponents of a modern, industrialized Puerto Rico, modernism was not simply a style of architecture; it provided a powerful symbol of the modernization of Puerto Rico, its movement toward becoming a first world state and its participation in the global marketplace.²³⁹ During this period politicians, businessmen and academics advocated modernism through much of Latin American as a way to shed colonial pasts and firmly announce a commitment to modernity and progress.²⁴⁰ One of the most notable

²³⁹ The use of architectural modernism to represent the modern state is a phenomenon that has been thoroughly documented by architectural historians. For a general discussion see Fernando Kusnetzoff, "Architecture, History, and Society in Latin American," trans. Andrew Gordon, in *Latin America in Its Architecture*, eds. Roberto Segre and Fernando Kusnetzoff (New York: Holmes & Meier Publishers, Inc., 1981), 12.

²⁴⁰ Roberto Segre traces the rejection of colonial and ornamented architecture for a rationalist design approach in the Caribbean in "Antillean Architecture of the First Modernity: 1930-1945," in *Latin American*

examples of this was the way President Getulio Vargas embraced modern architecture as the new form for Brazil under his leadership. He invested in avant-garde architects to design works he wanted to symbolize the Brazilian state, typically buildings that identified the government's commitment to its people, such as social housing. Perhaps the most iconic of these is the Ministério da Educação e Saúde (Ministry of Education and Health, 1936-42, Rio de Janeiro), in which Lucio Costa led a team of the brightest Brazilian architects in designing the building, and even convinced the government to agree to have Le Corbusier consult on the project (Figure 75).

More generally, across Latin America the adoption of an architectural modernism that was sensitive to local conditions symbolically referenced the state's understanding of how to embrace the new and modern in a way that respectfully considered the unique situation of that particular nation. Postwar modern architecture's emphasis on rationalism and functionalism were highlighted as the means to allow man to control the tropical environment, symbolically representing mastery over the backward or primordial, and the continued march of progress. By extension it signified the government's commitment to responsibly building a modern state in the broader sense and therefore most of these projects were for public housing, schools, hospitals, and other buildings that were connected to the social welfare of the populace. In this context, it is interesting that the Puerto Rican government's first big architectural statement was a hotel. Not only does it indicate the unique relationship that Puerto Rico had with the United States, and Puerto Rico's commitment to capitalism (because it was bound to the U.S. economy), but it also points to the Puerto Rican government's astute understanding of the power of contact zones to spread ideas around the globe. The Caribe Hilton was not simply a building that the Puerto Rican government hoped some people around the world might view in images, but one they used to

deliver information to the international community through its function as a contact zone in which guests interacted with its thoughtful design that celebrated tropicality and modernism.

4. Critics of Operation Bootstrap and “Moscoso’s White Elephant”

Despite the government’s firm belief that modernization was the key to the island’s success, other Puerto Ricans questioned the good that would come out of Operation Bootstrap. Critics saw the program as an elite government project that was compromising the island by positioning itself as a place ripe for U.S. plunder through numerous tax incentives and by promoting a new form of colonialism.²⁴¹ They were also critical of the emphasis on manufacturing and tourism and the inattention to failed agrarian reforms, which resulted in the mass exodus of Puerto Ricans from rural areas to Puerto Rican and U.S. cities in search of work.²⁴² While the Caribe Hilton certainly created jobs and paid good wages, as did the factories that were built, many Puerto Ricans, especially those who were formerly involved in agriculture, had little say in determining their livelihood; they had to take whatever job they could find and wherever they could find it.

Teodoro Moscoso’s commitment to tourism caused many Puerto Ricans to further question the future of Puerto Rican agency and the preservation of Puerto Rican culture. Not only was the Puerto Rican government encouraging U.S. businesses to come to the island, businesses whose presence would undoubtedly hold sway in future policymaking, but also many saw the growth of the tourist sector as a threat to Puerto Rican culture. To them, tourism meant pandering to U.S. visitors, from having to serve them in hotels and restaurants to having to

²⁴¹ For an overview of a more critical reception of Operation Bootstrap, especially in the arts, see *Puerto Rico: Art and Identity* and Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 211-218.

²⁴² Between 1941 and 1945, these regulations stipulated the dissolution of large farms, which had control over the majority of the land, the redistribution of this land as *parcelas* (small parcels) for cultivation by landless laborers, and limited farms to five hundred acres. Although the measures were meant to provide laborers with emancipation from landlord power, and by 1959 more than 52,287 families had been relocated to a parcela, the small farms component of the reform never took off. Ayala and Bernabe, *Puerto Rico in the American Century*, 185.

compromise and adapt cultural traditions to meet U.S. expectations.²⁴³ They looked to the gambling and prostitution that had come to define tourism in Havana and feared this would end up their fate as well. Moscoso had to counter these fears by implementing highly controlled conditions and regulations for gambling.²⁴⁴ Despite Moscoso's efforts, critics dubbed the hotel, with its boxy, modern design, "Moscoso's white elephant" and "Moscoso's folly" and for them the modern architecture of the Caribe Hilton, meant to represent the new Puerto Rico being built by Operation Bootstrap, conveyed negative associations.²⁴⁵

5. Designing Efficient Luxury

Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa's modern architecture was complemented by interior design that was meant to create functional spaces that allowed the hotel to operate efficiently and treat guests to the most up-to-date in modern living.²⁴⁶ Reviews focused on the unpretentious luxury that the Caribe Hilton offered.²⁴⁷ In contrast to luxury in older hotels, which was often defined by ornateness and excess, the concept of luxury as redefined in discussions of the Caribe Hilton was based on understated simplicity and attention to efficiency and functionality. This was partially predicated on the notion that an efficient hotel makes guests happier, and partly on the premise that it also makes for a more profitable hotel, an idea that had existed since the birth of the modern hotel in the nineteenth century. What differentiated this concept in the postwar period was the way notions of efficiency were meant to be achieved through functionalist design.

²⁴³ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 187.

²⁴⁴ The fear of the effects of casinos and gambling was produced by the proposal of a casino for the Caribe Hilton. In order to lessen the negative view many Puerto Ricans had of tourist-aimed casinos, Moscoso drafted laws that stipulated very strict guidelines for opening and operating a casino, ensuring that the government would be able to exert substantial control over them and profit from them, the proceedings of which were to be funneled into social programs for Puerto Ricans.

²⁴⁵ Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso*, 124.

²⁴⁶ Osvaldo Toro had been a friend of New York-based architect Charles Warner since their time together at Columbia University's School of Architecture. They collaborated on the winning design according to Wharton, *Building the Cold War*, 188. However, in all primary materials Warner-Leeds is only given credit as consulting architect and for the interior design.

²⁴⁷ For example, see "Spectacular Luxury in the Caribbean."

An attention to functional design would provide the setting in which guests could have an enjoyable experience full of all of the creature comforts they desired. Not all of this design was visible to guests, and this raises an important point about functionalism in the hotel, which had to be conceived with both the owner and guest in mind. Articles on the Caribe Hilton discussed the care that had gone into the location and layout of the kitchens to ensure that they could run as efficiently as possible. Not only did this mean lower food costs and thus a higher profit for the hotel, but suggested that guests received their food more quickly and at the proper temperature. However, it was the design that guests interacted with that most powerfully conveyed modern architecture's role in providing functional luxury. The public spaces of the hotel had an openness and flexibility to them, thanks to the use of pilotis. Because the pilotis allowed for the minimal presence of load bearing walls, hotel managers could manipulate the spaces in order to address the changing demands of business, such as employing moveable screens and walls (Figures 76 & 77). This open plan also encouraged guests to move freely; they could easily migrate from lobby lounge to gift shop area to pool lounge without having traditional walls and doors in their way. The lack of walls also meant that certain spaces, such as lounge areas and bars, bled from the inside to the outside (Figure 78). In discussions of the ground floor, reviews stressed the positive effect of functional planning on the guest—they were not overwhelmed with soaring ceilings, rather they were greeted with architecture sensitive to the human scale.²⁴⁸

Openness and transparency also characterized the main staircase in the lobby, which was assembled out of open tread stairs that turned on a landing set upon a giant, sawhorse-like concrete base (Figure 79). Playing off of the traditional grand stairs that one would find in a high-end hotel, the Caribe Hilton's stairs were decidedly modern, conveying a sense of lightness and openness that echoed the general feel of the entire ground floor. Rather than a traditional

²⁴⁸ "Spectacular Luxury in the Caribbean," 98.

hotel grand staircase that was often ornate and oversized, the Caribe Hilton's staircase underscored its functional nature through its smaller proportions and the use of concrete for its base. The staircase was topped with a modern chandelier made of metal rods pointing in all directions that were capped with light bulbs (Figure 80). While traditional hotel elements, such as a main staircase and chandeliers, were present in the Caribe Hilton, their modern treatment reminded guests that they were part of a truly modern hotel experience.

The rooms were all contained in a rectangular slab hovering over the ground and were efficiently organized on each floor along one central corridor. Both sides of the slab were covered in a grid of balconies (Figure 81). The architects cleverly angled the balconies and the large plate-glass windows and doors leading out to them at fifteen degrees from the wall so that every room had an ocean view, a feature that helped Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa secure the commission. The vertical partitions running between the balconies not only created a unique honeycomb visual effect but also sheltered guests from potentially nosy neighbors. This groundbreaking scheme of angled balconies was reportedly the first of its kind and was subsequently adopted quite often in hotel design and continues to be utilized today. An article in *Interiors* noted the way these permanent partitions obscured the relationship of one balcony to another “in a permanent, architectural way, dispensing with awnings, plants, and other growing or collapsing protection.”²⁴⁹ This language is consistent with modernist rhetoric of the time that promoted modern design that was devoid of unnecessary ornaments or fixtures that required maintenance, making modern design easy and unfussy.²⁵⁰

²⁴⁹ “The Caribe Hilton: An Object Lesson in What You Can Do with \$7,000,000” *Interiors* 109 (April 1950), 79.

²⁵⁰ Many sources touch upon the postwar rhetoric of modern design as simple, flexible, and easy. By the postwar period this attitude was so accepted and normalized that it can be found in sources ranging from architectural journal to housekeeping magazines. An excellent primary source that conveys these ideas as they relate to domestic space is Mary and Russel Wright's *Guide to Easier Living* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1951).

The design of the guestrooms reveals a subscription to the notion of modern living and the ease at which that could be achieved through modern design (Figure 82). The Caribe Hilton was, in reality, a showcase for modern design. For many U.S. guests this was their first experience of the new mantra of “modern living through modern design” that was being promoted after World War II. Each room was equipped with a Carrier Corporation air conditioning unit, allowing guests to personalize their room climate according to their taste with the push of a button. The air-conditioning units are often discussed in terms of their “push-button” technology, a popular trend in the postwar period that promised to make life easier and was promoted as the future of design. This was a very modern feature for a hotel; in fact, the Caribe Hilton pioneered the trend of individual, guest-controlled air-conditioning units in every guest room.²⁵¹ Fomento had requested that the design include air-conditioned rooms, which they used to attract U.S. tourists and to proclaim the technological advancements present in Puerto Rico.²⁵²

Rooms and furnishings were designed to create spaces that functioned as living areas during the day and then maids would come turn the convertible couches into twin beds in the evening. The flexible space and multi-purpose furniture reinforced postwar preoccupations concerning modern design.²⁵³ The desk could transform into a vanity, with a lid that would swing up to reveal a mirror, fluorescent light, and shelf. Other furniture pieces, such as chairs, had a modern aesthetic to them and were made out of materials that were easy to clean in

Thanks are due to Robin Schuldenfrei for sharing her ideas concerning this topic and for shaping my understanding of this period in the seminar she taught on postwar living in Fall 2008 at the University of Illinois at Chicago.

²⁵¹ “1950 Hotel Accommodations at the Crossroads of the Nation,” 39.

²⁵² Henry Klumb, a German immigrant who had trained with Frank Lloyd Wright and settled in San Juan, was one of the other local architects invited to participate in the competition. One of the reasons why the Puerto Rican government did not select his design was his refusal to incorporate air-conditioning in the design. Instead he designed all guest rooms with systems of screens and louvers to naturally cool rooms with cross ventilation of ocean breezes.

²⁵³ Obviously, this was attractive for hotel design, wherein a rather small room had to meet the needs of the various activities and actions the guest would wish to perform therein.

addition to being easy to disassemble. Overall, Warner-Leeds designed the rooms to meet the needs of the guests while providing them with some extra luxuries, all the while considering how to create spaces that would efficiently maximize Hilton's profits.

Articles written at the time of its opening highlighted the modern design of the hotel, from the guest rooms to the public spaces, as responsible for the comfort guests could enjoy and the profitability of efficient hotel operation. Indeed, this was a requirement of hotels in general, but was particularly desirable in a hotel located outside of the familiarity of the United States. The Caribe Hilton championed notions of the modern through contemporary architecture and current interior design, which referenced the efficiency of a modern approach to hotel operations and modern living configurations.

C. **Creating and Framing Tropicality**

For U.S. tourists, the experience of San Juan was, above all, defined through notions of tropicality. While the Caribe Hilton's design stressed tropicality, it did not provide a wholesale adherence to traditional notions of the tropics and, in fact, complicated these notions. Out of necessity some of the constructions of tropicality related to the hotel's design reinforced traditional understandings. However, the design's commitment to using the tropical environment as a theme shared amongst Puerto Ricans that could express a cohesive national identity promoted new understandings of tropicality, and thus Puerto Ricanness. This identity was rooted in the design itself in the way the design suggested the idea that modernism and tropicality could be blended harmoniously.

A review of the Caribe Hilton in the New York Times suggests the hotel's role in producing a vision of the tropics for guests:

Throughout the hotel there is a sense of making the most of the natural drama of the sea and of the view of old Spanish forts and walls, green coastal strip and spiny, blue-hazed fertile mountains. There are constantly and surprisingly new architecturally framed vistas of the spectacle—you see one as you walk in, before you turn by a bamboo-screen wall to the registration desk; another as you walk to the long cocktail terrace; another as you mount the stairs to the dining room, and, when you enter the dining room, the whole magnificent panorama is spread before you.²⁵⁴

Through architectural framing, the natural landscape was transformed into a spectacle to be consumed by guests at every turn and contributed to the construction of tropicality as a design motif. For guests at the Caribe Hilton, tropicality was constructed in all aspects of the hotel, from the landscaping and architecture to the guestroom decoration and guest services.

The picturesque scenes framed by the Caribe Hilton's modern architecture were highly constructed assemblages of nature. Local landscape architect Hunter Randolph designed the grounds to offer guests an enjoyable tropical environment (see Figure 73). Photographs of the hotel taken shortly after completion show coconut palms dotting the lawn, planted to inject some tropical flavor to the grounds immediately surrounding the dining room, which projects off of the south façade of the building (see Figure 68). But the highlight of the vegetation on the grounds was an area dubbed the "Garden of Eden," which contained native plants as well as many non-native plants—such as yellow hibiscus trees, breadfruit, and almond trees—undoubtedly incorporated for their tropical associations.²⁵⁵ The name of this area highlights the tendency to conflate tropical environments and vegetation with the primeval past. It was part of a discourse that considered tropical environments as untouched by time, representing a lack of civilization and progress.²⁵⁶ Of course, these associations ignored the fact that these "timeless" landscapes

²⁵⁴ Aline B. Louchheim, "Bold New Design for San Juan Hotel," *New York Times*, October 23, 1949, XX3.

²⁵⁵ For an excellent study on the history and significance of the landscaping of colonial land see Jill Casid, *Sowing Empire: Landscape and Colonization* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004).

²⁵⁶ In particular, Katherine Manthorne, in *Tropical Renaissance: North American Artists Exploring Latin America, 1839-1879* (Washington DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1989), has traced the association of the

were actually the products of global exploration and trade and were, in fact, very *unnatural* in terms of representing indigenous flora. Since the late fifteenth century different types of flora had been transplanted all over the world. By the twentieth century, many of the species of vegetation seen as characteristic of the island were originally from some other part of the world.

The warm ocean water of the Caribbean was also part of the attraction and was incorporated into the landscape of the hotel for guests to enjoy. A free-form pool was carved into the coral rock, its organic shape meant to blend more naturally into the outdoor landscape, and was filled with salt water that was pumped in fresh every four hours (Figure 83).²⁵⁷ An inviting beach that was completely manmade capped the “natural” landscape of the grounds; it was blasted out of a coral reef and filled with imported sand guaranteed not to stick to clothing. The seemingly natural landscape of the beach and highly artificial nature of the sand point to the construction of tropicality as mediated by the desire for comfort. Though one was meant to feel they were plopped into a natural tropical paradise, it was, in fact, a carefully composed environment. The presentation of nature as neat and contained also signaled to guests man’s mastery over the environment, assuaging any fear that the environment was dangerous.

The Caribe Hilton was celebrated for its seamless blending of indoor and outdoor spaces based on an attention to transparency, visible flexibility of space, and the incorporation of nature into the design, all of which contributed to a sense of the tropical pervading the space. Attention to climate, vegetation, and picturesque framing shaped the guests’ experience as they moved through the public spaces of the hotel. Guests alighted from their cars and followed a covered walkway to the lobby of the hotel, with no clear moment in which they felt as though they went

tropical environment with notions of primordial, primitive, and uncivilized, as well as the connection of the tropical environment with depictions of the Garden of Eden.

²⁵⁷ Organic, amoeba shapes were a trend in modern design in the postwar period and could be found in such other objects as coffee tables, landscape designs, fabric patterns.

from the outdoors to the inside of the building (Figure 84). This experience was reiterated by the very thin columns and concrete roof, which visually suggested that the architecture did not cut the guest off from the outdoors. In fact, as they followed the path they could see straight through the building to the pool area and sea on the other side.

The design's ability to keep guests connected to the outdoors points to a very important way in which tropicality was invoked through climate. Warm weather is a vital part of the idea of the tropics and can be visually referenced in some ways, for example, tropical vegetation. However, the architects had to find other ways to promote the Puerto Rican climate as ideal through their design.²⁵⁸ The lack of walls or doors in some areas suggested that Puerto Rico had an ideal natural environment—that temperature outside was perfect for the indoors and thus the two spaces did not need to be separated from each other.

The lounge area by the entry and reception desk boasted natural elements such as a fishpond surrounded by a circular bench with cushions for sitting, and a bamboo divider, which allowed guests to see through to the adjacent area. In many areas of the main level, demarcation between interior and exterior was only marked by ceilings, screens, or floor-to-ceiling glass walls, all of which deemphasized separation (Figure 85). Modern design techniques, such as pilotis and large glass walls, created an open plan that highlighted the outdoor environment. The introduction of warm breezes, views of nature, and exotic flora into the interiors heightened the tropical feel and further dissolved a sense of separation between interior and exterior. This effect is perhaps no more successfully achieved than through the incorporation of a pool that flowed easily between the interior and exterior underneath a divider (Figure 86). Located near

²⁵⁸ Whether the climate was ideal is another point. For example, the incorporation of air conditioning in all of the guest rooms suggests that visitors might have found it too hot, and I have heard anecdotes about how some open areas had to be enclosed because the “soft ocean breezes” were actually overly strong winds and rainstorms complicated matters as well.

the grand staircase, this pool was carefully placed so that all visitors would come in contact with it. The pool contained stepping-stones and a handrail, inviting guests to interact with the nature in the hotel. An article from *Interiors* also noted that the pool was meant to have an authentic feel by making sure that it was “kept scrupulously muddy and disreputable, in conformance with the outdoor world it represents” so that the guest could experience the tropical world without having to go outside.²⁵⁹ Therefore, the architecture not only framed the tropical nature that was outdoors, but also brought it indoors, signaling architectural modernism as an effective tool in taming nature for the guest’s enjoyment.

While designs had to meet the guest’s desire for the tropical, some worked to redefine notions of tropicality and national identity through the marriage of modernism and tropicality, two concepts that were traditionally at odds with one another. Guestrooms were accented with elements meant to impart a local flavor to the space (see Figure 82). Often, these elements were not specifically Puerto Rican, but were vague references meant to remind guests that they were in a foreign place. Potted plants were incorporated into the rooms to reinforce the notion of tropicality through exotic flora, continuing the trope that was established in public spaces. Chairs designed by Jens Risom, a Danish designer who had immigrated to the United States, boasted modern forms and had cushions covered with fabric with strong geometric patterns and bright colors that U.S. tourists most likely associated with local folk traditions. At first Risom designed for others, such as Knoll, but in 1946 he had established his own firm that designed, manufactured, and distributed furniture to contract and residential clients in the United States and abroad. However, Risom’s chair was anything but unsophisticated and revealed the Scandinavian design values in which he was educated. The chair were representative of a global trend in modern design toward simplicity and functionality, whose aesthetic projected sophistication and

²⁵⁹ “The Caribe Hilton: An Object Lesson,” 77.

refinement. By incorporating this fabric, Risom's design demonstrated that traditional elements and progressive design were not mutually exclusive.

But perhaps no other aspect of the guestrooms exhibited the adept fusion of notions of the modern and the tropical than the bedside console. The console housed modern devices, a telephone and radio, and had speakers covered with a rough, locally produced fabric meant to impart a local flavor to the piece. The incorporation of details that were understood as local, however inaccurate or unspecific, with modern designs or technologies challenged the notion of tropicity as primordial or timeless, instead pointing to the constructedness of tropicity as something that could be shaped and applied as desired.

Though much of the furniture was imported from the United States, the designers prominently displayed chairs and benches by ARKLU in the public spaces of the hotel (Figures 87 & 88). ARKLU was a local furniture company founded by German émigré architect Henry Klumb and Taliesin fellow Stephen Arneson in 1944.²⁶⁰ Drawn initially to Puerto Rico to run the Committee on the Design of Public Works, Klumb and Arneson were driven by a social consciousness to adapt the architectural concepts of European and U.S. modernism to the particularities of Puerto Rican culture.²⁶¹ They used available local materials and techniques to create an iteration of modern furniture that was sensitive to local conditions. The natural materials they used to create furniture that could be placed anywhere demonstrated their interest in the possibility of blurring the lines between interior and exterior, a tradition in tropical climates. Obfuscating the distinction between indoor and outdoor was central to Klumb's architectural practice as well. For example, he designed his residence walls to fold open to such

²⁶⁰ The name of the firm was derived from the combination of the first letters of their last names.

²⁶¹ On Klumb's career in Puerto Rico see, Enrique Vivoni Farage, ed., *Klumb: Una arquitectura de impronta social* [Klumb: An Architecture of Social Concern] (San Juan, P.R.: La Editorial, Universidad de Puerto Rico, 2006).

an extent that the living room was little more than a space with a roof. Klumb also placed the same pieces of ARKLU furniture that were in the Caribe Hilton in the outdoor areas around his home.

The ARKLU furniture certainly did not go unnoticed in the Caribe, and its incorporation in the hotel helped it gain recognition in other parts of the world. An advertisement for ARKLU furniture printed in the United States announced that: “designed with striking simplicity, these pieces reflect the timeless beauty of simple, uncomplicated living.”²⁶² The materials of ARKLU furniture that referenced the climate in which it was made, and conveyed the connotations of simplicity or simple living associated with the tropical region. Records from the ARKLU studio indicate that Klumb received a number of commissions for pieces as a result of the strong impression they left on people who stayed at the hotel, as well as from advertisements and a 1949 article that featured ARKLU furniture in *House and Garden*. Unfortunately, Klumb never filled many of these orders; he could not procure sufficient raw materials or labor for furniture production. However, the failure of ARKLU as a business does not diminish the importance of its role in promoting modern Puerto Rican design, which advanced the government’s goal of building a modern nation that respected local traditions. Rejecting notions that to be tropical was to be simplistic, ARKLU furniture suggested that the tropical could be a valuable tool to guide the design world toward simplicity and functionality.

Lobbies, lounges, bars, and restaurants were the true public face of the hotel, featured in promotional materials and articles that defined the Caribe as an innovative form of “tropical

²⁶² Advertisement located in the Henry Klumb archives at Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, University of Puerto Rico, Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. While the archive is rather extensive in terms of Klumb’s architecture, the amount of materials related to ARKLU and his furniture design are quite small.

modernism.”²⁶³ Promotional material represented the interior decoration of the lobby, which was defined by comfortable modern furniture integrated with elements of nature that were incorporated into the hotel. One brochure for the hotel includes a drawing that contains Eero Saarinen’s Womb Chair, which had only been on the market for a year, placed next to the little indoor-outdoor pond. Countering narratives that modern life had alienated man from nature, images of the Caribe Hilton’s interiors were a utopic vision that demonstrated how humankind had reconciled nature and modern life.

Also found in the public spaces of the hotel were artworks commissioned by local artists that depicted local culture and history but in modern, abstract styles. These included two prominently-placed murals: one above the main stairs by J. Torres Martino and another in Club Caribe by Rosando del Valle, which both depicted Puerto Ricans festival scenes (see Figure 80).²⁶⁴ The two artists, both Puerto Rican, were selected through a competition that was held to produce the pieces. Although only thirty-three years of age at the time he painted the Caribe mural, Martino had already studied in New York with Mexican artist Rufino Tamayo and had traveled in Europe. When questioned about the piece he submitted to the competition, called *Fiesta*, which forms the basis of the mural he then executed, Martino referred to Puerto Rican tradition. He cited inspiration from the festivities that were held in his village when he was young, and focused on their roots as an amalgamation of Spanish and African traditions, though he underscored how these practices were dying out and how his work was an effort to ensure they were remembered.²⁶⁵ Rosando del Valle also studied in New York and traveled to Europe

²⁶³ The Caribe Hilton’s style was consistently referred to as “tropical modernism” and while this does reveal the architect’s attention to climate, I find that this term was also be employed as a way to promote difference as it was sometimes used in publications in the U.S. to describe a type of modernism somehow less pure or diluted from European and U.S. modernism because of its necessary concerns with climate. The very word “tropical,” when used in U.S. publications, implied an otherness to U.S. citizens.

²⁶⁴ “The Caribe Hilton: An Object Lesson,” 85; and “The Key Man,” *Time*, December 12, 1949, 89.

²⁶⁵ Aline B. Louchheim, “Art Interest Stirs in Puerto Rico,” *New York Times*, October 16, 1949, X9.

and, like Martino, del Valle practiced in a style heavily influenced by the European and U.S. avant-garde.

Guests were also encouraged to consume the tropical in various ways throughout their stay. Guests quite literally consumed the tropics upon arrival at the hotel, where they were met with the Caribe Hilton's welcome drink—a concoction of coconut water, coconut milk, rum, lime juice and sugar with an apricot brandy floater, all served in a fresh coconut. According to popular history, in 1954 the hotel manager enlisted bartender Ramón Marrero to invent a cocktail that would satiate the U.S. thirst for tropical drinks.²⁶⁶ The result was the piña colada, consisting of a blend of Puerto Rican rum, local invention Coco López (cream of coconut), and pineapple juice. Guests were also encouraged to buy locally produced goods at the hotel. In the hotel gift shop, they could buy versions of the lampshades and placemats made of native natural fibers found throughout the hotel to take home with them. These souvenirs allowed guests to bring a little bit of Puerto Rico back home, a material trace of their vacation that authenticated and domesticated the experience.²⁶⁷ In this case, tropicality is embodied in such objects as woven grass placemats, which tourists would have then incorporated and displayed in their homes to substantiate the travel experience. The souvenirs would function as reminders of the bountiful tropics they experienced at the hotel.

The notion of the tropical was a paradox in many ways. On the one hand it was a part of local identity, but on the other it was something that could be easily manipulated for tourist consumption in a way that reflected negatively on local culture. Its presence was necessary in

²⁶⁶ There are other claims for the invention of the piña colada. For example, Barrachina, a restaurant in Old San Juan, has a plaque mounted outside of their establishment that claims the piña colada was invented there in 1963.

²⁶⁷ Susan Stewart, *On Longing: Narratives of the Miniature, the Gigantic, the Souvenir, the Collection* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1993), 134. For an extended discussion of the souvenir see chapter 5, "Objects of Desire."

order to satiate guests' desire to escape to the exotic and foreign. On a basic level, the way tropicality was conveyed, the way it was woven in with notions of the modern, provided guests with assurance that tropicality had been sufficiently tamed. However, in the case of the Caribe Hilton, the fusion of the motifs of tropicality and the modern in design invited a reexamination of some of traditional stereotypes and proposed new avenues as a means of defining a modern cultural identity.

D. Contrasting the Historic

Now that designers stripped new hotels of historical revival styles, they had to find other ways to reference the tropical and historic. This study has already examined how tropicality was handled in these modernist hotels. Rather than referencing tropicality through notions of exoticness conveyed in architectural style from past and foreign places, modern architecture focused on expressing tropicality through reference to environment (weather and climate) and proposing new fusions of elements associated with tropicality and modern design. However, modern architecture's emphasis on a lack of historical reference was a conundrum, especially because the historic served as a tourist draw and was a tool of comparison that could further underscore the modernity of the Caribe Hilton.

Comparison to historic sites reinforced the striking quality of tropical modern design and was connected to larger debates about Puerto Rico's history and its physical manifestation in San Juan. Not only did the historic underscore the modernity of the hotel, but the modern qualities of the hotel also emphasized the age of the city, particularly in the area of Old San Juan. For tourists, Puerto Rico's past was defined by the Spanish colonial project. The Caribe Hilton, which symbolized the new Puerto Rico, was a key element in the juxtaposition of old and new.

The historic was a tool used by the Puerto Rican government to clearly delineate contemporary Puerto Rico as decidedly modern and liberated from the past, to appease critics that believed modernity meant the death of Puerto Rican culture, and to provide guests with the opportunity to experience the old, colonial culture of San Juan.

The Puerto Rican government was not the first government in Latin America to address the concept of the historic within larger programs of modernization. In the 1930s Brazilian President Getulio Vargas and his government undertook a program of national identity construction that revolved around notions of Brazil as modern (as reviewed in the discussion of the MES building), but was also concerned with preserving the country's colonial heritage.²⁶⁸ In 1933 the government issued a decree to preserve the colonial mining town of Ouro Preto as a "national monument," which was further underscored by the creation of the federal agency SPHAN (Serviço do Patrimônio Histórico e Artístico Nacional, or National Historic and Artistic Heritage Service) in 1936 to oversee historic preservation. As scholar Leonardo Castriota has elucidated, SPHAN initially supported the construction of new structures in historic areas in a modernist idiom because of a negative opinion of copying past styles and a belief that besides the architecture of the mining period of the eighteenth century, the only other authentic Brazilian architecture was that of the contemporary moment.²⁶⁹

As a result, the historic preservation efforts in Ouro Preto, which involved readying the town for an anticipated tourist market, included the construction of Oscar Niemeyer's modernist Grande Hotel. SPHAN's attitude, as scholar Hugo Segawa has noted, permitted the organization

²⁶⁸ Brazil was not the only country to think about modernization's relationship with the use of the historic in national identity. On Mexico, see Dina Berger and Andrew Grant Wood, eds., *Holiday in Mexico: Critical Reflections on Tourism and Tourist Encounters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) and James Oles, ed. *South of the Border: Mexico in the American Imagination, 1914-1947*, with an essay by Karen Cordero Reiman (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993).

²⁶⁹ Leonardo Castriota, "Living in a World Heritage Site: Preservation Policies and Local History in Ouro Preto, Brazil," *TDSR* X, no. 2 (Spring 1999), 12.

to create a context in which “new” could occur inside of the “old,” allowing the new structures to exist in a way that encouraged the acknowledgement of the authenticity of historic architecture.²⁷⁰ This was also the case in Puerto Rico, where the Muñoz government’s distaste for revival styles was based on a belief that they were inauthentic through their “imitation” of older architecture. This was generally true of all modernist thinking of the time, though what they saw as imitation, the Beaux-Arts architects who created these buildings probably would not have described in those terms. However, unlike the case of the Grande Hotel in Ouro Preto, the Puerto Rican government did not locate the Caribe Hilton within the historic center, but just outside of it, where they geographically and visually coupled it with a colonial fortification.

Whether the Hilton executive who pointed his finger at that spot of land and demanded it for the hotel realized it or not, the site was very strategic for the success of the hotel and for reinforcing the notions of the modern and historic. The windswept plot of land on which the hotel was situated was a short distance from historic San Juan, located to the west, which was developing its identity as Old San Juan. J. Stanton Robbins, a man with a long career in Latin American Foreign policy and the travel industry, came to Puerto Rico to work in the Office of Tourism. Moreover, Robbins had also worked on the reconstruction of Virginia’s Colonial Williamsburg and when he started his new job in San Juan in 1948 he quickly realized that the historic center of San Juan was one the island’s greatest resources for tourism.²⁷¹ In the postwar years the historic city center was filled with run-down buildings, some of which were abandoned, while others, which were meant to house two or three families, were bursting with ten or more families. Robbins invited a group of colleagues from Colonial Williamsburg to examine the potential of the historic center, characterized by the blue cobblestones that paved the narrow

²⁷⁰ Hugo Segawa, *Architecture of Brazil, 1900-1990* (New York: Springer, 2013), 106.

²⁷¹ Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso*, 131.

streets and delineated by the fortresses and defensive walls that surrounded much of it, for restoration. Robbins organized his ideas into a proposal for restoration that would turn the walled area of the city into a clean, safe historic zone for the enjoyment of locals and tourists alike and succeeded in getting the local government to pass a law declaring Old San Juan an “ancient and historic zone.”²⁷²

However, the restoration project did not move forward until the formation of the Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña (Institute of Puerto Rican Culture) in 1955, which the government endowed with a small budget and outfitted with a team of restoration architects. The establishment of the Institute of Puerto Rican Culture was a move by the government to reassure the populace that it did care about the preservation and continuance of Puerto Rican culture. The restoration program was fairly limited, and was primarily comprised of restoration architects advising property owners on how to fix up their structures. Many of these projects could be very expensive, and Fomento encouraged private individuals to undertake these costly restoration projects by offering tax incentives and getting the government bank to issue loans. Not only did the ICP oversee the restoration project in Old San Juan, but under the leadership of Ricardo Alegría, the organization also started the movement in the late 1950s to recover and preserve the history and traditions of the indigenous Taíno culture, which was largely destroyed through Spanish colonization of the island.

When the Caribe Hilton was built, the relationship of the location of the hotel to Old San Juan was advantageous. Even if the restoration project had not yet commenced, the colonial buildings and fortifications were already long-established points of interest on every tourist’s

²⁷² For a brief history of the restoration of Old San Juan see Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso*, 131-132; and Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 202.

itinerary. Travelers could stay at the hotel and enjoy its modern amenities and take a quick trip into Old San Juan during the day to experience its historic charm.

To the east of the Caribe Hilton was Condado Beach, which at that point only boasted the Condado Beach Hotel and a number of lavish private residences. The Caribe Hilton was connected to Condado by the Dos Hermanos Bridge, which crossed the lagoon that separated the two pieces of land. The Caribe Hilton effectively worked as a node to connect Condado and Old San Juan in the network of the city, enticing passersby to stop to play some games in the hotel's casino, or enjoy a meal or drink at one of the hotel's bars and restaurants. The location of the Caribe Hilton between Old San Juan and Condado supported the spread of tourism infrastructure outwards, ensuring that the Condado beachfront area to the east would develop through the stronger connection to Old San Juan via the Caribe Hilton.

The most prominent contrast between the modern and the historic was the hotel's location next to the colonial Fortín San Gerónimo. The fourteen-acre piece of land on which the hotel was situated included this fort built by the Spanish in the seventeenth century as part of San Juan's line of defense against attacks and invasions. Thus, a little piece of Puerto Rican colonial history was conveniently located a stone's throw from the hotel. Guests could enjoy historic San Juan without having to venture too far from the hotel. In fact, many guests did not even need to leave their air-conditioned abodes, as the colonial structure was visible from many rooms. Photos from the time, printed in both the architectural and popular presses, as well as postcards, consistently boasted compositions that treated the hotel and the fort as a unified entity (Figure 89). Striking comparisons such as these highlighted the tourist's experience of the historic and the modern; indeed the hotel was still probably new, and rather exotic, to the typical U.S. tourist. One review of the hotel claimed, "it is so modern that it makes Frank Lloyd Wright's grandest

architectural projects look like mid-Victorian monuments.”²⁷³ Compositions were also often carefully arranged to cut out an existing hotel that was located close to the Caribe Hotel, the Pan American Guest House.²⁷⁴ The exclusion of this hotel and the inclusion of Fortín San Gerónimo in images worked to locate the Caribe Hilton as *the* hotel on the island, discounting the existence of other accommodations and highlighting tourism to San Juan as a truly modern act through contrast to historic aspects of the setting.

The contrast of the modern and the historic was not just experienced first hand, but was represented in travel literature as well. After the construction of the Caribe Hilton and other subsequent modern hotels, many brochures added a section that presented the modern accommodations available in San Juan. These brochures highlighted the historic and the tropical, an established approach, but also presented the reader with images and text highlighting the cutting-edge accommodations in Puerto Rico. The contrast of the Caribe Hilton as symbolic of the modern with other historic areas helped establish a dual experience for tourists, a dual identity for Puerto Ricans, and supported the packaging of historic Puerto Rico for tourist consumption.

E. **Immediate Success and Lasting Influence**

1. **Effect within Puerto Rico**

December 9, 1949 marked the kickoff of a weekend-long opening ceremony for the Caribe Hilton personally hosted by Conrad Hilton. The inaugural event exemplified many of the influences the Caribe Hilton would have on the future of tourism in Puerto Rico and the

²⁷³ Clipping of Mel Heimer’s, “My New York,” from an unidentified publication, box 6, folder 1, Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.

²⁷⁴ Shortly after the Caribe Hilton was built, it acquired the Pan American Guest House and demolished it to make way for an extension that was completed in 1955.

Caribbean. Hilton chartered Eastern Airlines to bring planeloads of U.S. guests to the opening and thank you letters to Hilton note the excitement of flying and the relative ease of getting to Puerto Rico.²⁷⁵ A number of activities and performances during the weekend reinforced conceptions of the island and appropriate tourist behaviors. For example, a troupe of “pirates” revealed a treasure chest full of Puerto Rican rum on the hotel’s beach, and a party of beautiful bikini-clad young women were enlisted to frolic in the water and demonstrate the proper way to have fun by swimming up to the floating bar and ordering a drink.

Without a doubt, the reports of all of the inaugural fanfare helped with the immediate success of the Caribe Hilton. Newspapers, magazines and radio programs in Puerto Rico and the United States furnished glowing reviews of the hotel. The establishment of a luxury hotel that bore the Hilton name along with the promotional efforts of the Puerto Rican Office of Tourism helped to greatly increase tourism to Puerto Rico; the number of tourists and tourist dollars coming to Puerto Rico steadily increased throughout the decade following the opening of the Caribe Hilton.²⁷⁶ The Caribe Hilton could not accommodate the great influx of tourists to the island and as a result a number of other hotels stepped up to cash in on the growing tourist industry.

The two extant luxury hotels in San Juan, the Normandie and the Condado Beach Hotel, were remodeled and updated in an effort to meet current tourist expectations.²⁷⁷ The Condado Beach Hotel invested one million dollars into a new eighty-eight-room annex, new lobby, cabana club, air conditioning and artwork. The owners of the Condado Beach Hotel also commissioned

²⁷⁵ Hilton chartered four planes to transport celebrities and key figures in business and politics to the Caribe Hilton for the opening celebration, guaranteeing the media’s attention and coverage of the event in the United States. The correspondence I refer to is located in box 6 at the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.

²⁷⁶ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 197. Also see, Maldonado, *Teodoro Moscoso*, 128. A promotional pamphlet published by the Puerto Rican government sometime between 1956 and 1958 reported that 85,000 tourists came to Puerto Rico in 1950 and by 1955 that number had jumped to 150,000.

²⁷⁷ Friedlander, “Island for Tourists,” X17.

Spanish artist Hipólito Hidalgo de Caviedes to paint a mural in the hotel.²⁷⁸ The Hotel Normandie also undertook extensive renovations and constructed a sixty-four-room annex. Both hotels endeavored to modernize their establishments by offering guests modern amenities, even if they did not physically alter the appearances of the edifices.

Of the spate of new hotels that opened along Condado Beach, La Concha was one of the architectural highlights (Figure 90). Like the Caribe Hilton, this hotel was designed by Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa and funded by PRIDCO.²⁷⁹ San Juan's La Concha Hotel was, in many ways, a continuation of hotel building that was inaugurated with the Caribe Hilton in 1949. Like the Caribe Hilton, La Concha was representative of the insular government's heavy involvement in developing, controlling, and benefitting from tourism. Similar to the financial scheme behind the Caribe Hilton, the Puerto Rican government developed La Concha as a project built and owned by the government but operated by a private company. Fomento, the branch of the government in charge of the island's program of modernization, used tourism to promote a new identity of Puerto Rico as a place of progress and modernity, which was visually represented to visitors through the ultra-modern hotels Fomento financed. The architecture of La Concha made a potent statement about the modern nature of Puerto Rico and functioned as a proclamation of the high degree of architecture Puerto Rico was capable of producing.

Besides La Concha and other new hotels offering more hotel rooms in San Juan, the Caribe Hilton announced an expansion to the hotel in 1956. By this time, critics were bemoaning the massive growth of the tourist industry and its effects on San Juan in general and Condado in particular. They started to compare San Juan to Miami in order to convey their concerns that

²⁷⁸ The artist would then go on to paint murals in the Havana Riviera hotel.

²⁷⁹ The success of the Caribe Hilton and growing popularity of San Juan as a vacation destination spurred the construction of hotels for all price ranges, from the expensive, such as La Concha, to a variety of hotels and motels for more budget-conscious travelers.

what they saw as a modern, faceless urbanity was killing Puerto Rican culture.²⁸⁰ The new airport in Isla Grande allowed Condado to witness such incredible growth in tourism. The new airport was located to the east of the city, versus the old airport that was located south, and slightly east, of Old San Juan. Completed in 1955, the \$15 million airport could accommodate around five hundred flights a day, and longer runways ensured large jet planes could land in Puerto Rico. The large number of tourists that the airport could now accommodate could find lodging in such other new hotels as the San Juan (near the airport), El Imperial, the Puerto Rico Sheraton, or the Dorado Beach Hotel and Golf Club, located outside of the city to the west. Despite the hotel projects and general development of infrastructure to support tourism, the Puerto Rican government stayed true to its commitment to limit the tourist industry on the island, and to this day tourism has never accounted for more than ten percent of the gross domestic product.²⁸¹ This is a striking figure when you consider that tourism accounts for as much as eighty percent of the gross domestic product in other Caribbean islands.

2. International Reverberations

The success of the Caribe Hilton gave Conrad Hilton the confidence to take on an international chain of hotels and almost all other Hilton International hotels built in the next ten years used the Caribe Hilton as a model. Hilton believed, as he elucidated in many speeches and publications, including his 1957 memoir *Be My Guest*, that the war against communism could be fought and won through international trade and travel.²⁸² While Hilton originally favored revival

²⁸⁰ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 201.

²⁸¹ From the beginning, the Muñoz government never wanted tourism to rule its economy the way it did in other Caribbean islands, in some of which it represented more than 85% of the GDP. The government did this by controlling the development of tourism infrastructure, for example, by limiting the number of hotel rooms on the island. Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 185.

²⁸² According to his memoir, after World War II Conrad Hilton felt personally called upon to develop a chain of international hotels as a way to spread peace through trade and tourism throughout the world. Hilton equated peace with the triumph of capitalistic democracy over communism throughout the world and he felt he was

styles, the Caribe Hilton convinced Conrad Hilton of architectural modernism and subsequent hotels were designed in this idiom. As art historian Annabel Jane Wharton has persuasively argued in *Building the Cold War: Hilton International Hotels and Modern Architecture*, the architectural modernism of these hotels was meant to convey the progress of the city and country in which they were located, and the hotels suggested that modernization and technological advancement were the key to this social and economic progress. In addition, one could understand the modern aesthetic as a symbol of the modern amenities and efficiency of the hotel—no matter where they were in the world, guests could expect a certain level of comfort and standards at Hilton hotels.²⁸³ What I want to reinforce, which Wharton does not focus on, is that the Caribe Hilton was the pioneer and testing ground for all of this. The configuration of a monolithic slab of guest rooms placed over an open ground level utilized in the Caribe Hilton proved to be an efficient design and was employed in Hilton hotels around the globe, including those built in Latin America, such as the Continental Hilton (Mexico City), Havana Hilton, and the Trinidad Hilton.²⁸⁴ They are at once similar, yet also fostered the localization of modernism in various places and offered an opportunity for governments to try to shape local and national identity. While the local or national government may have seen a Hilton hotel as shaping its reputation as a modern place and society, to critics the countless Hiltons that soon dotted the globe represented growing U.S. cultural, political, and economic dominance throughout the world.

making an important contribution to the Cold War through the expansion of his international hotel chain. Hilton, *Be My Guest*, 232-233.

²⁸³ Annabel Jane Wharton examines Hilton International hotels in her book *Building the Cold War*. Wharton does not study the Caribe Hilton in depth, but does note that the basic plan of the Caribe Hilton was adopted in other Hilton hotels. I would contend that this is not just a characteristic of Hilton hotel architecture, but the path that hotel design takes in general in this period. However, as Evan Ward also points out, this architecture can conversely be seen from the point of view of the locals, what could be considered a Latin American viewpoint, which can be traced to earlier modernist architecture in Latin America.

²⁸⁴ Trinidad Hilton's design utilized an inverted pedestal base and tower configuration on account of the topography of the land on which it was built. Toro and Ferrer were hired as consulting architects for this project.

The Caribe Hilton also helped frame the Hilton attitude toward interior design. In all Hilton International hotels there was a concerted effort to evoke the local culture and environment in the interior decoration, often through murals by local artists and the use of local materials in architectural details and furniture, rather than trying to establish a uniform interior design scheme across the brand.²⁸⁵ Like the Caribe Hilton, both the Havana Hilton and Trinidad Hilton boasted modern, abstract murals depicting local history or traditions by local artists. For many guests, especially the business travelers who may not have had time for sightseeing, the representation of local culture in the hotel, whether authentic or not, was important in shaping their understanding of the foreign place in which they found themselves.

Moreover, the financial arrangement behind the Caribe Hilton fundamentally shaped Hilton's approach to financing his international chain. Wharton has traced in many of the other international hotels how the government or a government-approved entity financed the construction of the hotel and the Hilton Corporation covered the operating costs.²⁸⁶ Thus, in many countries the modern architecture of the Hilton was also meant to reflect the hard work of the government in building a modern state since they were often, and very publicly, co-sponsored by the state. As in Puerto Rico, building a Hilton was a means to define national identity, and Wharton has shown how this was the case in such countries as Greece and Turkey. Of course, this type of financial arrangement was attractive for Hilton because it required relatively little investment and therefore relatively little loss if Hilton had to pull out, no better illustrated than in the case of the Havana Hilton. Financed by the pension fund of the local

²⁸⁵ Ward, *Packaged Vacations*, 35. In the case of the Caribe Hilton the inability of Puerto Rico to manufacture the furniture needed for the hotel meant that most of it was shipped in from Marshall Field & Company in Chicago, in what was described in the press as the largest peacetime air shipment in history. See, "New Ultra-Modern Hotel at San Juan a Milestone in Campaign for Tourist Trade," *New York Herald Tribune*, December 5, 1949, 6. In other Hiltons, such as the Continental Hilton, there was a sufficient local furniture industry to supply the majority of the furniture.

²⁸⁶ Wharton, *Building the Cold War*, 189.

Gastronómico Union, the hotel was open for less than a year when it became command central for Fidel Castro's revolution in January 1959. When Hilton Hotels International pulled out of the Havana Hilton in June 1960, it only suffered from operating cost losses, not construction costs. The Hilton system of developing international hotels required little investment in terms of time as well as money. Hilton did not have to concern himself with learning the inner-workings of state and municipal departments in order to learn codes, obtain permits, et cetera.²⁸⁷ Thus, the Caribe Hilton spurred the development of a hotel chain that was at once homogenizing and varied—similar financial schemes and the use of architectural modernism were used across the board, but Hilton projects were seen by respective state governments as an opportunity to shape a particular local identity.

But the Caribe Hilton's influence extended beyond the immediate sphere of Hilton hotels and is representative of larger shifts in the world of hotel design and architectural discourse. Revolutionary in its use of architectural modernism, the Caribe Hilton was perhaps only rivaled by Edward Durell Stone's El Panama Hotel in Panama City, Panama, which opened around the same time as the Caribe Hilton. While it appears as though the Caribe Hilton was designed first, what is more important is that the Caribe also had a greater presence and therefore greater influence in the architectural world than El Panama. Shortly after the completion of the Caribe Hilton, hotel and motel construction boomed in Miami and many of these were done in a fashion similar to the Caribe Hilton. Architects derived their designs from the International Style and many mimicked the open plan ground floors of the Caribe that blurred the distinction between indoors and outdoors. However, none of these were government projects the way the Caribe was as therefore the patrons were concerned less with an adherence to an intellectual engagement

²⁸⁷ The history of the role of the Havana Hilton in the Cuban Revolution has been wonderfully detailed in Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise* and Ward, *Packaged Vacations*.

with architectural modernism and the message it could convey and more with creating a design that would attract the masses, often through the adoption of popular themes or ornament. One such example is Morris Lapidus's Fontainebleau Hotel (1954) in Miami Beach (Figure 91). At the directive of the patron to create a luxurious hotel that would draw crowds, Lapidus decorated the architectural modernism of the hotel with baroque ornaments and details. Also, as discussed in previous chapters, Florida was not as foreign or exotic as Puerto Rico and needed to provide more in the way of design to signal an escape from everyday life.

The discourse of the equation between architectural modernism and hotel efficiency was also a principal factor in the influence the Caribe Hilton had on subsequent hotel design. It encouraged hotel designers to embrace the idea that luxury could be found in functionality and simplicity, not excessive ornamentation. This is especially notable in other modern hotels in the Caribbean such as Morris Lapidus's Aruba Hotel (1955), the Hilton Trinidad (1962, Toro and Ferrer were consulting architects on this project), and various hotels in Cuba such as the Havana Riviera (1957), Hotel Capri (1957), Havana Hilton (1958), and Hotel Rosita de Hornedos (1955). Many of these, similar to the Caribe Hilton, utilized straightforward, uncomplicated designs to underscore a connection to the outdoors and to showcase nature as the primary decorative element. The Aruba Hotel is a main example of this (Figure 92). Like the Caribe Hilton, the guest rooms were all located in a rectangular slab raised off of the ground by pilotis, which allowed warm breezes to pass through the ground level public spaces. Like the Caribe Hilton, the ground level spread out horizontally and architectural planes created spaces that were both indoors and outdoors. Also inspired by the Caribe Hilton's groundbreaking use of angled balconies, Lapidus provided each guestroom with an angled balcony that delivered privacy and spectacular views.

3. Powerful Symbol of Place and Identity

The important role the Caribe Hilton played in negotiating notions of place and identity was represented by the conflicting identities that were attached to the hotel after its completion. Articles by the Puerto Rican press and promotional materials published by the Puerto Rican government attempted to establish the Caribe Hilton as the face of a modern Puerto Rico—it was made by Puerto Ricans of modern materials and goods produced in Puerto Rico.²⁸⁸ For example, goods used in the hotel were produced in factories on the island, such as those of Crane China Company and General Electric, and the general contractor was the Puerto Rican division of the George A. Fuller Company. However, many reports and commentary generated in the United States questioned the very Puerto Rican-ness of the hotel, arguing that it was a completely U.S. hotel, full of things made by U.S. companies and operated by a U.S. business.²⁸⁹ In point of fact, Crane China Company, General Electric and the George A. Fuller Company were all U.S. businesses. Comments also stressed the role of Warner-Leeds in the design of the hotel, and were quick to point to Osvaldo Toro and Miguel Ferrer's educations at U.S. institutions. These critics associated the modern aspects of the hotel, and by extension the modern attributes of Puerto Rico, with the United States, reinforcing the position that the U.S. was responsible for the progress and modernity that had come to Puerto Rico, which smacked of paternalism. The unwillingness of some to reconcile notions of modernity with tropicality does not diminish the importance of the Caribe Hilton as an object and space that fostered the negotiation and contestation of identities. And in many cases it may not have not been an unwillingness, but rather the inability of U.S. citizens to discard the colonialist mentality so entrenched in a U.S.

²⁸⁸ For example the entire issue of the *Caribe News* from December 9, 1949 was devoted to articles and advertisements about the Caribe Hilton and its inauguration.

²⁸⁹ For example, this attitude can be uncovered in the *Architectural Forum* article, "Spectacular Luxury in the Caribbean." It praises the hotel but notes that the visitor will be disappointed with the lack of "local flavor" and highlights the U.S. businesses and products that contributed to the construction and outfitting of the hotel.

culture that relegated Puerto Rico to a third world, unsophisticated place. Even the author of the *Architectural Forum* article, who offered a glowing review of the Caribe Hilton, seemed unable to completely shed stereotypes. The author claimed that many would be disappointed by the lack of “local flavor” in the hotel, save for some Spanish colonial style tiles. Though the author does not expound upon what this local flavor could be, one is left with the feeling that for the author, “local flavor” is that which references the Spanish colonial past and is decidedly not modern, revealing a failure to propose and accept a new paradigm in which Puerto Rican culture did not have to be historicized and fixed but could be considered evolving and fluid.

The Caribe Hilton shows us how hotels are so much more than merely places for tourists to sleep and the history of the hotel reveals the ways in which various other agents, from the Puerto Rican government to U.S. tourists, understood this as well. Promoted as the symbol of Operation Bootstrap, the Caribe Hilton—as a project and through its design—was meant to embody the features of the new Puerto Rico that the Puerto Rican government was trying to foment. The very advantages of using a hotel to do this, a contact zone where foreigners are introduced to the local conditions of San Juan, also proved to present disadvantages as well. The Caribe Hilton did not convey a fixed identity to all who experienced it, both U.S. visitors and Puerto Rican locals. Through discussions of its design, in particular its relation to the tropes of the modern, the historic, and the tropical, the Caribe Hilton points to the powerful role that the touristic landscape plays in allowing notions of nation, self, and other to be constantly contested and negotiated.



Figure 68. Toro, Ferrer and Torregrosa, south façade of Caribe Hilton, 1949, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.

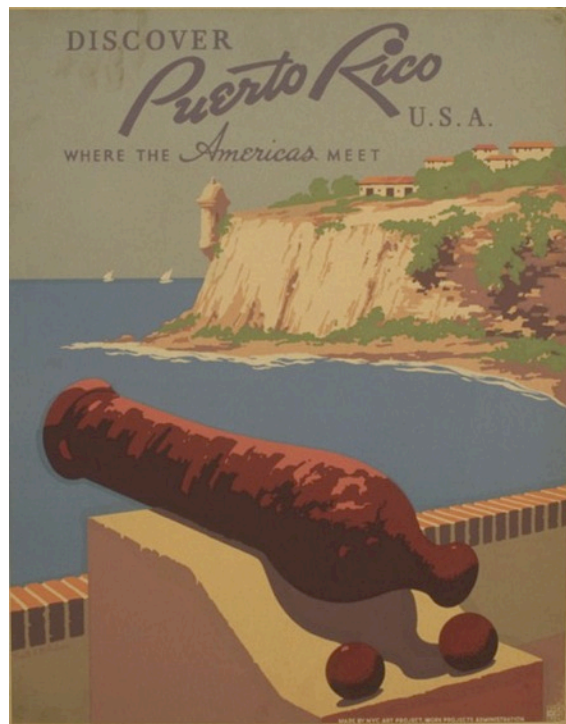


Figure 69. WPA poster, ca.1938. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Figure 70. WPA poster, ca.1938. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

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Figure 71. Jean Carlu, poster for Pan American Airlines, ca. 1945-1953.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Figure 72. Aerial view of the Caribe Hilton. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 73. Caribe Hilton, site plan, ca. 1959. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.

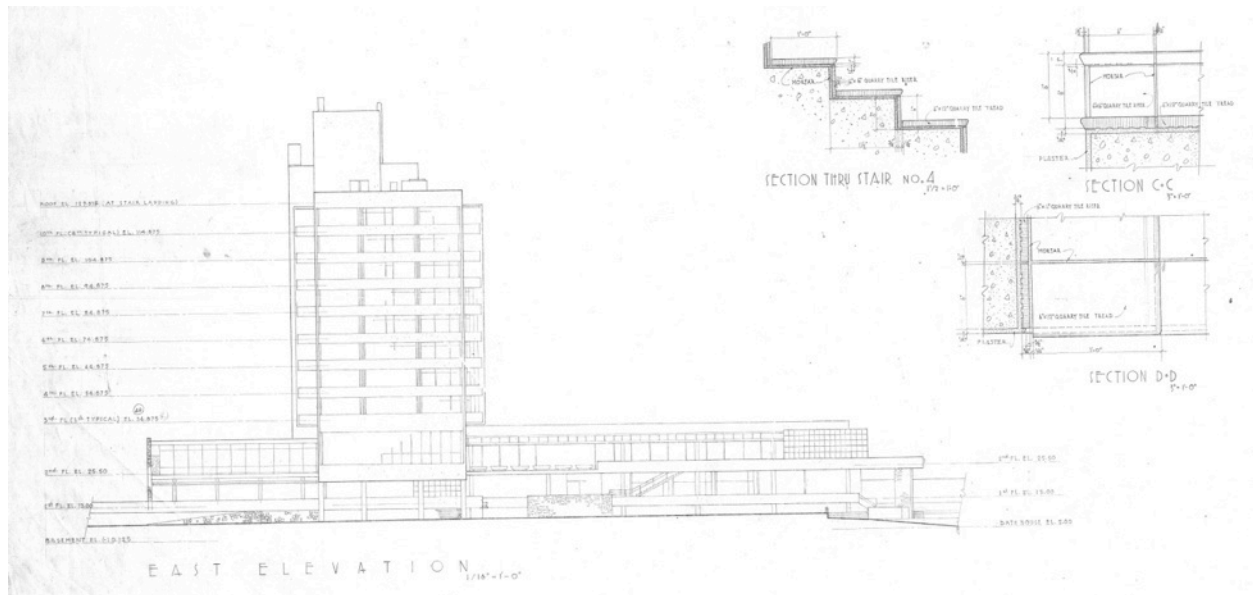


Figure 74. East elevation of the Caribe Hilton. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.

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Figure 75. Lucio Costa, Carlos Leão, Jorge Moreira, Affonso Reidy, Ernani Vasconcelos and Oscar Niemeyer with Le Corbusier, Ministério da Educação e Saúde, 1936-42, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Model in the Museum of Modern Art, New York (image from ARTstor).

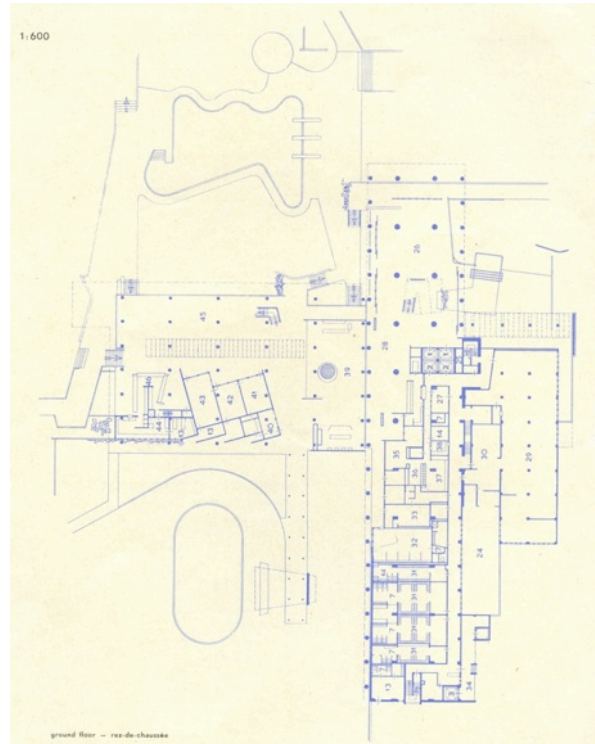


Figure 76. Plan of the Caribe Hilton demonstrating the use of pilotis and openness achieved on ground level, circa 1949. Image from promotional material on the Caribe Hilton. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 77. View of the architectural transparency and openness in the Caribe Hilton's Promenade Lounge. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.



Figure 78. The Terrace Bar spread inside and out at the Caribe Hilton. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 79. Main staircase of the Caribe Hilton. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 80. Chandelier and mural at the top of the main staircase. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.



Figure 81. View of the Caribe Hilton's balconies, overhangs, and famous guest balconies. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 82. Typical guestroom of the Caribe Hilton. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.



Figure 83. View of pool, cabanas, and ocean from second floor gallery. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 84. Walkway into the lobby at the Caribe Hilton. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.



Figure 85. Courtyard at the Caribe Hilton. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 86. Pool incorporated into the Caribe Hilton's lobby. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Hospitality Industry Archives, Conrad Hilton College, University of Houston.



Figure 87. Lounge area near reception with ARKLU chairs. Photograph circa 1950. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 88. ARKLU bench in elevator bank. Photograph circa 1950.
 Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 89. Postcard of Caribe Hilton with Fortín San Gerónimo in the left foreground and historic San Juan in the background, ca. 1950-1954. Courtesy of the Archivo Fotográfico, Archivo General de Puerto Rico, Instituto de Cultura Puertorriqueña.



Figure 90. Toro and Ferrer, La Concha Hotel, 1958, San Juan, Puerto Rico. Photography circa 1958. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.

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Figure 91. Morris Lapidus, Fontainebleau Hotel, 1954, Miami Beach, Florida.
Courtesy of the Library of Congress.



Figure 92. Morris Lapidus, Aruba Hotel, 1955, Netherlands Antilles. Collection of the author.

V. CULTURAL CAPITAL: TOURISM DESIGN IN 1950S HAVANA

While San Juan was still developing as a novel destination for U.S. tourists in the postwar period, Havana built upon its already established reputation as a popular vacation spot to lure more tourists after World War II. A very short flight from Miami, Havana was a popular choice for a weekend getaway. One option vacationers had was the Tropicana Special. Started in 1956, this promotion included a round-trip ticket with Cubana Airlines, the dinner show at the Tropicana cabaret, a night in a Havana hotel and breakfast before the return to Miami—all for only \$68.80. However, this was no ordinary flight to Havana. The aircraft was identified as the Tropicana Special and had the Tropicana logo on the headrests and curtains.²⁹⁰ Eight seats had been removed from the aircraft to make room for the installation of a stage. After takeoff, passengers were treated to a glimpse of the show that they would see at the Tropicana nightclub's Crystal Arches showroom. Roderico “Rodney” Neyra, the Tropicana's main choreographer, and Ana Gloria Varona led the show on the aircraft, backed by a band and a small acrobatic dance team from the Tropicana. Passengers even participated in the singing and dancing on this flight, no doubt priming them for the show at the Tropicana and the carefree, good times that Havana promised the U.S. tourist.

The Tropicana Special functioned as a general entrée into the world of tourism that U.S. travelers would experience in Havana and as a specific sample of the experience they would have at the Tropicana (Figure 93). Fittingly, the Tropicana Special show took place in an airplane, a symbol of the modern technology of the postwar period, for the show they would see at the Tropicana cabaret took place within a truly modern design. Both the airplane and the

²⁹⁰ Cubana Airlines provided the aircraft and air service.

modern architecture of the Tropicana served as stage sets for the world famous shows associated with the Tropicana. These shows titillated and amazed, and fulfilled the image of Cuba in the U.S. imagination as a place of sensuous rhythms and sensual, carefree people.

That the Tropicana, other cabarets, and hotels built in the 1950s followed already established trends in Cuban tourism does not detract from the unique trajectory of the growing tourism industry, which shaped the urban landscape of Havana in this period under the government of President Fulgencio Batista. Batista staged a coup d'état in 1952, suspended the Cuban constitution shortly thereafter, and led as dictatorial president until he was overthrown by Fidel Castro and his rebel forces in 1959. Greed and corruption defined Batista's approach to tourism and urban development, and consequently he was willing to subject the city to U.S. business interests and tourist desires for the sake of bringing more money in to the country and ultimately into his pockets. The Tropicana cabaret and the Havana Riviera hotel (Figures 93 & 94) were two major architectural projects realized under the Batista regime. The consequence of building codes that Batista enacted in order to make sure he could profit handsomely from the tourism and gambling industries, these designs shaped tourism practices and the understanding of Cuban culture.

This chapter presents case studies of these two important projects. I do not undertake a comparison between the two, but rather present them as separate case studies because, when considered in tandem, they allow for a more nuanced analysis of the complex politics of the design of tourist spaces in the postwar period. Their meanings were never fixed or static and were contingent upon the attitudes and experiences of the people who visited the buildings and shaped the images of them. Despite the fluid identities of the two projects, we can still identify these multiple meanings. As with the other buildings studied in this dissertation, I consider the

designs of the Tropicana and the Havana Riviera within the broader context of building in Cuba, Latin America and the western hemisphere to examine two distinct but interconnected phenomena. The first is the employment of certain design approaches that were labeled uniquely Cuban or that supported the idea of a unique Cuban identity. The display of some version of local identity was important—in an earnest attempt to assert cultural and national independence and as a way to cater to tourist expectations. The second is the pointed presentation of Cuba as thoroughly knowledgeable and engaged in a larger global discourse of modern design.

Thus, Cubans sought to project the notion of Cuba as a place that was simultaneously defined by a unique Cuban-ness, or *cubanidad*, and by the modern exchanges that indicated participation in a modern global society. These two seemingly disparate positions were possible because the notion of *cubanidad* was based on a perception of Cuban culture and heritage as something that was constantly negotiated and redefined throughout history. This understanding was justifiable because historically Cuban-ness was constantly influenced by the variety of racial and ethnic groups that arrived at its shores and contributed to Cuba's creole culture and society. Thus, compared to the other objects of analysis in this study, we can see in the designs and historical context of the Tropicana and Havana Riviera that the discourses of the modern and the historic, which were both interwoven strongly with the tropical, were conceived of as symbiotic and joined.

A. **Postwar Tourism in Havana**

Though equally modern in appearance, Cuba as a tourist destination followed a very different model than that of Puerto Rico in the postwar years. Since the nineteenth century, Cuba had led the way amongst Latin American countries in modernizing transportation,

communication, and infrastructure.²⁹¹ The postwar period was marked by President Batista's efforts to increase tourism and initiate a variety of modernization programs throughout the country. The arrangement that emerged was not something as official as Puerto Rico's Operation Bootstrap, but rather a series of deals between Batista and various U.S. investors, including mob syndicates, that involved heavy payoffs to Batista and other officials in high positions. Despite the shady deals and corruption, Batista did succeed in reinforcing Havana's identity as a modern city, which benefitted Cubans and tourists alike.

The continued growth of the tourist industry in the post-World War II period, which was particularly robust from 1952 to 1959, was the result of a combination of factors. Like that of Puerto Rico in the postwar period, the tourism industry in Cuba was not viewed independently of other business interests on the island; it was but a piece in a larger framework to develop Havana as a major metropolis of the Caribbean, and the world. The reputation of Havana was, and still is, fundamental to the definition of Cuba, as the city and country became synonymous.²⁹² The capital city functioned as the test sample for ascertaining the country's progress and status. This was at times convenient for Cubans, especially politicians, who would reference the capital city as the definition of the country, when in fact most of the rest of Cuba lacked the level of wealth, economic energy, technology, and modernity that Havana had. The constant international attention the city received meant that the government often concentrated new projects that they felt would convey a good image to the rest of the world in Havana.

²⁹¹ In 1837 Cuba was the first Spanish speaking country and sixth country in the entire world to have a railroad, it developed telephone service in 1881, and it continuously led Latin America in incorporating running water, sewage systems, electricity, and transportation infrastructure into the urban environment. Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 36. Louis A. Pérez links these developments to the extreme intervention of the US both military and business interests after the end of the War for Cuban Independence in 1898 in *On Becoming Cuban*, 97-164. See chapter two for more on this.

²⁹² This way of thinking is still present in Cuba and the popular phrase, "Cuba is Havana and the rest is just beaches," which has existed for some time, evokes this attitude.

The most powerful internal force in the tourist industry was President Batista, who yielded largely unchecked power as dictator of the island from 1952 to 1959 and was committed to increasing the profits Cuba could make from U.S. tourists.²⁹³ The initiatives he developed, both those directly part of the tourism sector and broader programs related to urban development, public works, and foreign and domestic investment in the island, heavily favored the growth of tourism in Havana over any other place in the country. His suspension of the constitution allowed him the freedom to manipulate the government in ways he saw fit. Shortly after taking power, Batista founded the *Instituto del Turismo Cubano* (ITC, Institute of Cuban Tourism) and tasked the agency with upgrading the island's tourist infrastructure, including hotels, casinos, roads, bridges and more, rather than promoting the natural beauty of the island. In point of fact, the vice-president of the ITC, Armando Maribona, had proposed that the agency focus more on playing up and promoting the natural beauty of Cuba's beaches, which would encourage tourism to more rural areas, but his opinion fell on deaf ears.²⁹⁴ Reports generated by the ITC found that restaurants and hotels in Havana had grown shabby or had closed as a result of neglect during the depression in the 1930s and World War II. During this period, hotel construction had all but ceased. Figures that revealed that Caribbean neighbors were increasing tourist numbers, causing Cuba to lose part of its share of the tourist market, inspired the Batista government to commit to making Cuba *the* Caribbean destination once again.²⁹⁵ This was done largely through urban development in Havana. Batista offered tax breaks and other incentives for new hotel

²⁹³ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 105, 111-113.

²⁹⁴ Ibid, 111-112.

²⁹⁵ Although there was growth in the tourist sector in Cuba, the island's share of the Caribbean market decreased from 43% in 1949 to 31.4% in 1954. It is a stark comparison when one considers that Puerto Rico doubled its number of tourists, Haiti quintuples its number of visitors, and Cuba only increased tourist arrivals by 30%. On statistics see Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 112 and Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 148.

construction and during his period as president for less than eight years, thirteen ultra-modern hotels were built in Havana.

The type of tourism promoted under Batista and the image of Havana that it projected was largely based on tourism practices of the 1920s and 1930s. As discussed in chapter two, one of the main social driving forces in the development of tourism in Havana after World War I was Prohibition. Prohibition in the United States encouraged citizens to travel abroad as a way to drink legally and it had a direct impact on the nature of U.S. tourism in Havana. U.S. citizens could get there quickly and easily and drink to their hearts' content. They also had easier access to drugs, prostitution, and gambling than at home. Havana became not just a place to drink, but a place to escape the strictures of everyday life in the United States. This reputation continued in the post-World War II period. Therefore, we can see post-World War II tourism as not being drastically different, even though Prohibition had been repealed by this point, and we can consider World War II as simply a pause or interlude in the growth of tourism in Havana.

Indeed, tourism in the 1950s was marked by a preponderance of U.S. travelers who viewed Cuba as a place where anything goes. An exotic, mysterious, and romantic place, Havana was where vacationers could indulge in activities that were frowned upon in the United States. Scholar Christine Skwiot has chronicled Fulgencio Batista's approach to reinvigorate the lagging tourist industry in the 1950s by cashing in on Havana's preexisting sex-and-sin reputation.²⁹⁶ Promotional materials played to and reinforced the concept of Cuba as an irresistible, fun-loving temptress (Figures 95 & 96). In both of these images, the depiction of a woman is employed as a personification of Cuba. In the postcard by Conrad Massaguer, Cuba is curvy, vivacious, maracas-yielding woman, who, through the movement conveyed in her pose, suggests the

²⁹⁶ Skwiot, *The Purposes of Paradise*, 155. This reputation was firmly established in Cuba in the wake of Prohibition in the United States.

carefree dancing and partying that U.S. tourists associated with Cuba. Her confident pose combined with low-cut blouse project a sexual assertiveness that U.S. citizens linked to Cuban society. The brochure produced by the ITC, and also designed by Conrad Massaguer, was even more explicit in its representation of Cuba as a destination for sex tourism. An attractive woman personifies Cuba and she reaches out to kiss the U.S. visitor who has just reached her shores. Leaning forward to the somewhat startled tourist, her unabashed reception of the man in the image conveys to the male tourist not just a willingness, but even an eagerness of Cuban women to cater to the desires of U.S. males.

A growing tourist economy was also possible because there were willing and able U.S. tourists. Just like tourism to Puerto Rico in the postwar period, the tourism industry in Cuba profited from advances in the technology and price of air travel and the increasing spending power and leisure time of the U.S. middle class. Daily, direct flights from New York, Chicago, New Orleans and Miami facilitated air travel and Batista encouraged airlines to fly into Havana by increasing the size of the main terminal of the Rancho Boyeros International Airport by 551 percent.²⁹⁷ A variety of airlines offered a multitude of flights to Havana, including: Cubana Airlines, Braniff International Airways, Pan American Airlines, Eastern Airlines, National Airlines and Delta.

As in the case of Puerto Rico, where low airfares that were designed to encourage low-income Puerto Ricans to leave the island also had the unintentional effect of encouraging tourism to the island, travel between the United States and Cuba was not a one-way street. As scholar Louis A. Perez has illustrated throughout his study, *On Becoming Cuban: Identity, Nationality, and Culture*, Cubans had long been traveling to the United States for a variety of reasons. Many

²⁹⁷ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 122. See also Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 434-435. This airport is now known as José Martí International Airport.

middle and upper class Cubans had family in the United States, had their children educated at U.S. institutions, vacationed in the United States, and went there to shop. This trend continued in the 1950s and flights to Miami were so affordable that it was not uncommon for Cuban women to fly to Miami for the day.²⁹⁸ By the middle of the decade Pan American offered six daily flights to Miami for only thirty-six dollars round trip.²⁹⁹ The strong connection between Cuba and the U.S. was evident in Cuban culture and society. The strong economic ties between the two countries, namely that Cuba was a major purchaser of U.S. goods, undoubtedly encouraged the U.S. government to be more tolerant of Batista despite the rumors of the indignities and atrocities the Cuban people suffered under his dictatorship. According to Pérez, twentieth-century Cuban culture was focused on a notion of modernity inspired by the US—one that was defined by “a condition of material progress based on consumption, convenience, and comfort.”³⁰⁰ U.S. businesses and goods flooded the marketplace in Cuba; in 1947 the US was supplying Cuba with 84% of its imports, valued at \$436 million and by 1957 that amount reached \$577 million annually.³⁰¹

The symbiotic relationship between the United States and Cuba in regards to culture and consumer society defined and encouraged U.S. tourism to Havana. The considerable influence of U.S. culture and consumer goods made Havana familiar enough to U.S. tourists. They could travel to Cuba in search of the exotic or foreign while knowing that at the end of the day they could also find comfort in the familiarity of a Coca-Cola and a hamburger. The presence of such

²⁹⁸ Cubans still talk today about how they, their mothers, aunts, or grandmothers would fly to Miami for the day or weekend to shop and go to the beauty parlor. Despite the bad relations between the U.S. government and the Cuban government since 1959, the memories and stories of the relationships that Cubans had with United States continue to be kept alive in oral histories. Most people I have talked to either speak fondly of this relationship if they were a part of it, or, if they are recounting what their relatives told them, speak positively of this period.

²⁹⁹ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 122.

³⁰⁰ Louis A. Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 347.

³⁰¹ Ronald Fernandez, *Cruising the Caribbean: U.S. Influence and Intervention in the Twentieth Century* (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 1994), 270 and Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 327. Likewise the United States supported the Cuban economy by receiving 92% of Cuba's exports.

things was reassuring and seemed to provide evidence of the positive effects of the United States as it sought to spread capitalist democracy, which was synonymous with progress, throughout the world.

The history of the postwar years has undergone much revision in the wake of the Cuban Revolution in 1959. While in subsequent decades the atrocities against Cubans and the mismanagement of the government and money have been brought to light, political ideologies and agendas have colored interpretations of tourism in the 1950s. When historians or regimes paint other regimes in a negative light it is quite difficult to assess any part of this culture. Therefore, there is a negative effect on the appreciation of the design of tourist spaces. Through an examination of the Tropicana nightclub and Havana Riviera hotel, this chapter aims to recover a part of the history of these two spaces that has been lost. I do not mean to suggest that the ugly realities of the Batista government's promotion of unchecked U.S. tourism are pardonable, but I do wish to recuperate the positive and innovative aspects of Cuban tourism design in the postwar period. Most significantly, the design of tourism spaces promoted modern Cuban architecture, design and art in their public spaces for all to see, and allowed architects, designers and artists to continue the established tradition of redefining and promoting notions of *cubanidad* through these cultural objects.

B. **Tropicana: Havana's Modern Cabaret**

In the postwar period many U.S. tourists were of the opinion, one that was reinforced by Cuban tourism entities, that no trip to the island was complete without a visit to one of Havana's famous cabarets. Spending some time at a casino was a priority for many visitors as well. Famous for its music and dance, Havana boasted numerous clubs of varying quality, from

questionable hole in the walls to large venues that staged extravagant cabaret shows. In his study of U.S. tourism in Havana during the Batista years, historian Dennis Merrill has surmised that the popularity of these venues—nightclubs and casinos—was largely due to the ITC's focus on fast, high returns on tourism, rather than focusing on identity formation, which projected a lower return.³⁰² Even though the government did not view these nightclubs as sites to cultivate nationalistic cultural content, culture and identity were nevertheless bound to these sites and the activities that took place there through other means.

Tourists could choose from a number of noteworthy nightclubs, such as the Sans Souci, Montmartre, and Zombie Club, which offered drinking and dancing, as well as cabaret shows. The shows included numbers inspired from other parts of the world as well as pieces that were promoted as uniquely Cuban, such as the rumba. By far the most popular and famous of these nightclubs was the Tropicana.³⁰³ It gained this reputation because its performances were considered to be of the highest caliber, and its architecture created a setting that was unparalleled. My analysis reveals the complexity of the Tropicana as a piece of modern design that revolved around notions of spectacle. On the most obvious level, the designs were meant to support the performance of spectacle, in this case the cabaret show. But Borges's projects for the Tropicana are noteworthy because of the way he conceived of the architecture as a spectacle. In the form that the modern architecture took and its relation to nature, Borges presented to all visitors a uniquely Cuban modernism, one that promoted an identity of the island as a fertile home to innovative architectural practice.

³⁰² Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 111-112.

³⁰³ The Sans Souci, Montmartre and Tropicana were the three best cabarets, with the Tropicana at the apex. The second tier included: Ali Bar, Zombie Club, Panchin, Rumba Palace, Cabaret Pennsylvania, Club Bambu, Johnny's Dream Club and many more. See Peter Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro: When Cuba was a Tropical Playground* (Salt Lake City: Gibbs Smith, 2008), 96, 103-104.

Recognized in the architectural world as a masterpiece at the time of its completion and visually disseminated to a great extent through promotional materials, the Tropicana additions from the 1950s presented an image of Cuba that was decidedly modern and tropical. Through the vision of the “exoticism, and overabundance of nature” that was constructed through the exotic shows that were framed by architecture that highlighted tropical vegetation, the Tropicana’s design gave tourists what they wanted.³⁰⁴ I contend that, like the Caribe Hilton, the Tropicana pointedly engaged with climate to create a modern idiom fitting for the tropics and, in this case, particular to Cuban culture.

1. The Beginnings of a Cuban Cabaret and Casino

Located in Marianao, one of Havana’s western suburbs, the original grounds and architecture of the Tropicana were quite impressive. The previous owner, Doña Mina Pérez Chaumont, loved to travel, and she collected plants from all over the world and incorporated them into the six acres of gardens surrounding her house. The original main structure on the grounds was Spanish colonial villa. In 1939, the Tropicana opened as an open-air nightclub and quickly gained a reputation amongst tourists and locals as having one of the most extravagant shows and being one of the great entertainment spots in Havana.

Although the Tropicana had opened in 1939, the high acclaim it achieved was largely due to innovations that were introduced through a series of design projects that were carried out in the 1950s. Martín Fox, a Cuban who had entered into the gambling business from humble beginnings in the local lottery, realized the potential of focusing his gambling business on U.S. tourists.³⁰⁵ Fox started working with the Tropicana in the early 1940s and quickly moved up the

³⁰⁴ Thompson, 98. In particular, Thompson and Katherine Manthorne, in *Tropical Renaissance*, have analyzed how the cocoa and royal palm became, and continue to function, as universal symbols of tropicality.

³⁰⁵ For a history of Martín Fox and the Tropicana see Rosa Lowinger and Ofelia Fox, *Tropicana Nights: The Life and Times of the Legendary Cuban Nightclub* (Orlando: Harcourt Inc., 2005).

ranks in management and leased the estate starting in 1943. The owners finally agreed to sell him the grounds and establishment in 1950. In this period, the Tropicana was the only cabaret and casino in the country to be owned and operated by a Cuban. Fox recognized the value of good design in creating a place that would attract tourists. Architect Max Borges, Jr., whose approach to modernism utilized the natural environment as a means to complement the architecture, designed the majority of the projects Fox commissioned for the Tropicana.

Despite its renowned stage show, the Tropicana suffered in the 1940s, largely because of a general decrease in tourism to Cuba because of World War II and because gambling was not allowed in Cuba from 1944 to 1949. Other destinations in the Caribbean basin could beat the price of a vacation in Havana, and offered better accommodations than those in Havana. For example, in 1947 Mexico opened seventeen new hotels and spent \$400,000 on publicity in the United States.³⁰⁶ The Tropicana could not survive on its cabaret show alone, and Fox was relieved of thoughts of closure when President Carlos Prío lifted the previous president's ban on gambling in 1949. Although licenses only went to three establishments, Cuba could once again market itself as a gambling destination. This coincided with the U.S. Commerce Department's official support of a campaign in 1950 that encouraged U.S. travel to Latin America in a backhanded attempt to prevent Latin America from becoming red.³⁰⁷

The Tropicana offered visitors two primary forms of entertainment—music and stage shows and gambling—and the type of venue it was in relation to its location was typical of the urban development of Havana. Like the racetracks, casinos, and other places of entertainment built in the 1910s and 1920s in the peripheral area of the city, the Tropicana's success also relied

³⁰⁶ Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 155.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid*, 115-116.

on a car culture.³⁰⁸ This was not just the case with tourist destinations. Institutions geared toward the upper-class local population, such as yacht clubs, tennis clubs, and other sports clubs, were also predominantly located outside of the city center. These sites were accessible almost exclusively by car. And cars had been an organizing consideration in Havana for some time. As discussed in the second chapter, J. C. N. Forestier's plans for the city included large avenues and boulevards that, while connecting other transportation entities like the train station, were meant to be maneuvered by automobile. Strong political and business ties between the U.S and Cuba helped ensure that U.S. automobile companies dominated the car market on the island. President Batista encouraged car culture by implementing a series of public works to widen roads and improve main thoroughfares, including projects that worked to connect the center of Havana with parts of the city west of the Almendares River (where the Tropicana was located) and east of the bay.

While in Havana, U.S. tourists found themselves in an environment in which the car was increasingly prevalent, not dissimilar to that of the United States. And to those U.S. visitors that did not have a car back home, a vacation in Havana was the perfect opportunity to splurge and rent a car. Most visitors took a taxi or hired a car service to visit the Tropicana in the postwar period. Many of the car services and taxis would stay at the Tropicana while their fares enjoyed the entertainment and gambling, and would be ready to escort them back to their hotels, or another club or venue, whenever they wanted. In fact, it was such a common occurrence for drivers to hang around that in 1953 Fox developed a second gaming area, known as the Casino Popular, for drivers to use. He manipulated transportation systems to encourage business by offering kickbacks to drivers who brought fares to the Tropicana and then provided a way to capture that kickback and more from the drivers through their use of the Casino Popular. Cars

³⁰⁸ On the development of these earlier racetracks, casinos, and pleasure locations see chapter 2.

approached the nightclub winding along paved, curving drives through the vegetation on the grounds and passed under a giant arch with “Tropicana” written in stylized font (Figure 97). They turned off the main drive into a smaller drive that curved right to the front entrance of the complex.

If guests were to continue along this drive they would glimpse the clear associations Fox made between the Tropicana and the gambling and entertainment industry in Havana, and his proclamation of the Tropicana as the future of this industry. Fox accomplished this by incorporating two sculptures on the grounds near the entrance. When the Casino Nacional closed in 1952, it marked the end of Havana’s most respected and prestigious gambling establishment. Fox capitalized on this closure by purchasing the sculptural fountain that was prominently displayed in the front of the Casino Nacional and served as the symbol of the venue (Figure 98).³⁰⁹ He relocated the fountain into the gardens on the grounds not far from the main entrance to the Tropicana. Fashioned in a style of romantic classicism by Aldo Gamba, the fountain was composed of a figural sculpture of eight muses in the form of nude women, who were holding hands and forming a ring in a frozen gesture of dance. Located in an area of thick vegetation, the sculpture was visible, but not as prominent, as the other major sculpture of the Tropicana, *Bailarina* (Figure 99). The sculpture of the ballerina at the entrance presented the new, modern image of the Tropicana. Fox commissioned Rita Longa to create this sculpture in 1950 and it soon appeared in brochures, on swizzle sticks, and even on roulette wheels in the casino.

Rita Longa was already an accomplished artist in Cuba by the time Fox commissioned her to make *Bailarina*. She had attended the San Alejandro Academy of Art in the late 1920s and started exhibiting in group shows by the early 1930s. Her first solo exhibition was at the Lyceum Lawn and Tennis Club, which was an important cultural association for women founded in

³⁰⁹ The fountain was so popular it was often the subject of postcards.

Havana in 1928 that promoted Cuban avant-garde art. The majority of her sculptures are public works or are in public spaces, and tend to be stylized, the subject reduced to a basic form defined by sinuous lines. Longa always showed a preference for the female form, utilizing the undulating curves of the woman's body to develop a modernized formal expression in the plastic arts.³¹⁰

The flowing curves and simplified form of the ballerina complemented the modern aesthetic that the Tropicana took in the 1950s with the fluid curves of Max Borges, Jr.'s architecture. Images of Longa's *Bailarina* were incorporated in a multitude of promotional materials for the Tropicana and became the *de facto* icon of the nightclub. The proliferation of images of this modern piece of art not only reinforced the idea of the Tropicana as a modern place, especially when compared to Gamba's fountain of muses, but also indirectly referenced the high caliber of performance that defined the shows at the Tropicana. Longa depicted the idea of ballet, a type of dance that involved rigorous training, was very physically demanding, had a rich history, and was the most respected form of dance among cultured society in Europe and the Americas. While shows at the Tropicana focused more on exhibitions of traditional Cuban dance or other types of dance U.S. tourists considered exotic, the symbol of the ballerina was a statement of the sophistication and worldliness of the Tropicana.

2. Spectacle of Architecture

Shortly after buying the Tropicana, Fox realized that he was not profiting as much as he could be from the establishment. Promotional material from the 1940s highlighted the outdoor setting where performances took place as one of the main charms of the venue. However, the outdoor setting that guests found so enchanting was also the potential downfall of the establishment. Rain, which was prevalent during the busy tourist months, meant the cancellation

³¹⁰ On Rita Longa see, Museo Nacional de Bellas Artes, *Guía Arte Cubano* (Sevilla: Escandón Impresores), 99, 116-117.

of shows and the loss of revenue. After a particularly bad season, Fox decided to construct a giant indoor cabaret so that at least one performance in the complex could take place every night. The ensuing project, which became known as the *Arcos de Cristal* (Crystal Arches), and subsequent projects done in collaboration with the same architect, came to define the Tropicana (see Figure 93).

Martín Fox hired Max Borges, Jr., a young architect who already had a stellar reputation as an architect of modernism, to design the performance area. Fox and Borges began their relationship in 1941 when Fox hired Borges to design a house for him in the district of Miramar. Twenty-two at the time he designed the Fox residence, Borges had just recently returned from his education in the United States. He first studied architecture at Georgia Tech and then at Harvard Graduate School of Design during the period Walter Gropius was there. Borges was one of the first generation of Cuban, and more broadly Latin American, architects to travel to the United States for architectural educations and receive training from the wave of European modernists who had fled Europe during World War II and started working in architectural departments at U.S. universities, effectively shifting the curriculum away from a Beaux-Arts program. Indeed, Borges's generation of architects was the first to really embed modern architecture in the built landscape of Cuba. Like other Latin American countries, such as Mexico and Brazil, Cuba could only claim a few rationalist or functionalist designs in the 1930s. On top of this, Art Deco gained much popularity in the late 1920s and dominated architectural practice in Havana until after World War II.

When Borges returned from his education in the United States, he worked at his father's architectural studio, which was one of the most prominent and influential firms in Cuba in that

period.³¹¹ His father's firm operated from the 1920s to the 1950s and built its early reputation on a type of two-story detached house with a mezzanine over the garage that was integrated into the main façade. Over time, this house design was simplified until it was expressed in a pure modernist idiom. Borges established his own approach to architecture suitable to the Cuban environment and culture, which he initially developed through house designs as well. This development is evidenced in the works he produced in Cuba up until the Tropicana commission. For example, some of Borges's earlier projects, such as the house he designed for Fox, display an attempt to marry a Cuban vernacular vocabulary to the International Style as a way to integrate modernism into the Cuban context (Figure 100). From there he moved further away from incorporating Cuban vernacular elements and focused more on a purity of form that does not seem as thoughtful to climate conditions. He continued this approach and engaged more in climatic issues in his design for the Medical and Surgical Center of 1948, a study in intersecting volumes that did include a fair amount of overhangs to create shaded areas (Figure 101). This work won Borges the Gold Medal Prize from the College of Architects that year, firmly establishing Borges in the Cuban architectural world.

Fox was taking a chance on a young architect when he hired Borges to design his house in 1942, but when it came to selecting an architect for the project at the Tropicana in the 1950s, Fox was hiring a visionary architect. The project Fox commissioned Borges for included a number of requirements that ultimately shaped the structure's final design, which came to be known as the Arcos de Cristal. Fox wanted a large enclosed cabaret with a stage that could be air-conditioned. This was a fairly straightforward request, except that he required Borges to cut down as few trees on the grounds as possible. Faced with the lush vegetation of the gardens

³¹¹ Eduardo Luis Rodríguez, *The Havana Guide: Modern Architecture 1925-1965* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 2000), 74.

surrounding the villa, Borges located the structure over the old tennis courts, an area already cleared of trees, and ingeniously incorporated some of the extant trees into the architectural interior design of the cabaret. The final design he proposed to Fox required the felling of only one tree. The result is a carefully situated design, nestled in amongst the trees, and includes trees on the inside as well.

The cabaret's basic structure is composed of five concrete arches that are each two and a half inches thick. Each arch closer to the stage is smaller in height and width than the one previous and they are offset from each other. The effect of the decreasing size of the vaults creates a telescoping effect that draws attention to the stage. The gaps between the vaults, caused by the varying sizes and placement of the vaults, were filled in with sheet glass. The overall design, best experienced at night, conveyed the sensation of being outside. The arches were painted black on the interior, with pinpoint lights resembling stars in the sky. Strategic lighting illuminated trees and other vegetation on the outside of the sheet glass. This outdoor feeling was enhanced by the trees that were inside the cabaret, one of which reaches out beyond the limits of the arch above it through a circular hole in the vault. While guests could visually consume the experience of being in the tropics at night through the transparency of the architecture and the allusions to the night sky, the indoor cabaret was closed off from the outdoors and kept comfortably cool and dry with air conditioning.

Borges's interest in keeping abreast of architectural trends in the Americas informed his use of parabolic arches in the Tropicana. Though trained in the United States, Borges was clearly familiar with and engaged with contemporary architecture in Latin America. Parabolic and hyperparabolic arches were popular amongst Latin American architects in the 1950s and were most commonly constructed in concrete. Ferroconcrete building predominated in Latin America

because of the lack of access to the building materials and traditions common in the United States. Unlike the Arcos de Cristal, they were often utilized to create shade, while retaining an openness that facilitated the passage of cool breezes throughout. Felix Candela, a Spanish architect who was living and practicing in Mexico and was working a lot on innovating construction with concrete shell vaults in this period, was most influential on Borges's use of parabolic arches.³¹²

The rest of the architectural world associated the experimental use of concrete and its capacity for plastic expression with Latin American architecture.³¹³ Besides Candela, Borges may have been influenced by other concrete shell vault works in Mexico, such as Enrique de la Moya's 1947 Iglesia de la Purísima in Monterrey. In Columbia, the cantilevered shell vault of the 1947 Cartagena baseball stadium was an impressive accomplishment, as well as the tile-reinforced shell vault in the workshop and bus station in Bogotá from the same year.³¹⁴ Finally, the Brazil school's use of vaults and curvilinear architectural forms in general had much influence throughout Latin America. Early works that may have influenced Borges were Oscar Niemeyer's Igreja de São Francisco in Pampulha (1943) and Affonso Eduardo Reidy's primary school and gymnasium (1948-50) in the Pedregulho neighborhood of Rio de Janeiro.

The Arcos de Cristal, along with Longa's *Bailarina*, became symbols of the Tropicana. Publicity material for the Tropicana presented viewers with an idea of what they could

³¹² Some of Candela's innovative work in concrete shell construction was also for leisure buildings, such as the restaurant at the Bacardi bottling plant in Xochimilco, Mexico.

³¹³ Henry-Russell Hitchcock, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1955), 26. However, Hitchcock does note that there is probably less ferroconcrete shell and vault forms in Latin America than the rest of the world assumed. Although Hitchcock's work comments on the extant association between Latin American architecture and plastic expression through concrete, his writing also does much to further reinforce this notion.

³¹⁴ Mesa Gabriel Solano, Jorge Gaitán Cortés, Alvaro Ortega and Edgar Burbano were the architects for the baseball stadium in Cartagena, with the work of Guillermo González Zuleta as engineer. The architects of the Bogotá workshop and bus station were Mesa Gabriel Solano and Alvaro Ortega with Guillermo González Zuleta as engineer.

experience during a night at the Tropicana. Brochures from the 1950s highlighted the Arcos de Cristal as one of the main draws of the Tropicana and they became as iconic of the Tropicana as Longa's ballerina (Figure 102). The Arcos de Cristal were described as "a dazzling crystal showcase in a setting of tropical luxury" and qualified with such adjectives as "sumptuous," "luxurious," and "glamorous." Many contain more photos of the architecture and interiors than they do of performers or shows. Publicity materials proposed that one's night was to be marked by an experience under the arches (even though this only happened during inclement weather), an experience that was prefigured when guests arriving at the grounds first passed under a large arch with the word "Tropicana." Indeed, the curves of the arches, roads, palms, and Longa's sculpture and the dance moves it implied defined tropicality.³¹⁵

3. Spectacle on Architecture

After the completion of the Arcos de Cristal, Fox decided that the outdoor stage, where shows were normally held unless it rained, needed to be spruced up. He retained Borges again for this project, commissioning him to create a large stage. Called *Bajo las Estrellas* (Under the Stars), Borges designed a multi-level metal stage that was visually impressive and added to the spectacle of the show (Figure 103). Borges in part determined the design of the stage using a mathematical formula and its dynamic form reiterates Borges's interest in creating structures out of systems of curves. The form of the stage contributed a vitality to complement the performances. As performers moved across the various levels of the Bajo las Estrellas stage, descending or ascending, they interacted with the stage, and the stage provided the opportunity for more complexity in their performances.

³¹⁵ Curves as a defining architectural feature had been recently popularized by Oscar Niemeyer in Brazil. Curves became a signature element of what became regarded as an expression of a national architecture, though curves were soon considered characteristic of Latin American architecture in general, and with that carried connotations of tropicality.

As much as the architecture shaped the visitor's experience of the Tropicana, the performances that played out in and on this architecture also informed the U.S. tourist's understanding of Cuban culture. A variety of themes informed the shows that graced the stages at the Tropicana; there were circuses and comedy routines, a Hawaiian-themed show, a show that covered European history, and numerous Afro-Cuban shows. As Dennis Merrill has chronicled, the postwar climate in United States fueled desires to escape the confines of everyday life.³¹⁶ The Afro-Cuban shows were displays of music and dance that were adapted to U.S. desires to imagine Cuban culture as sexually uninhibited and Cuba as a place where anything goes. Performances that focused on Afro-Cuban traditions in music and dance presented tourists with a vision of a culture that was in touch with its primitive roots, which visitors associated with a more base, sexual nature. Tourists wanted their shows to be sexy and raw, reinforcing popular conceptions that Cubans were an extremely sexual people that could tap into some inherent primitive nature, and satiating their desire to experience something that was considered taboo in their everyday lives. These ideas were informed by, and in turn reinforced, popular stereotypes of Cubans. With roots in African music, the son and rumba were full of syncopated rhythms and involved what many U.S. citizens found to be sensuous and lurid dancing. Many U.S. citizens assumed that Cubans had an intrinsic capacity for these rhythms and in making this assumption, they linked Cubans to a primitive past.³¹⁷

The shows that most vigorously reinforced these popular conceptions were those that supposedly represented Santería rituals. Visitors considered the shows racy and titillating, which was exactly what they wanted, and they could use them as proof to pass judgment on Cubans as well. One of the most famous of these was a piece called *Omelen-ko*. This performance involved

³¹⁶ For an excellent concise summary of the roots of the postwar desire for escapism by U.S. citizens see Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 127-128.

³¹⁷ On the U.S. response to Cuban dance see Pérez, *On Becoming Cuban*, 198-204.

musicians playing a tribal-inspired piece of music and was loosely based on a Santería *toque de santo* ceremony.³¹⁸ Erna Grabler, Chiquita as she was called at the Tropicana, played an uninitiated white woman who was visiting a *toque de santo* ceremony. When she entered the ceremonial space on stage, a spirit possessed her. Frenetically dancing to the beat, her eyes staring vacantly off into space, she appeared in a trance, and to have lost control to the music, as if guided by a primal force. After dancing her way across the stage, she divested herself of her clothes until she was clad only in her undergarments. From there she climbed the Bajo las Estrellas stage, higher and higher from one level to the next until she reached the top. At the top she suddenly awoke from her possession, screamed in shock to find herself half naked, and jumped from the top of the platform, only to be caught at the bottom by dancer John von Kralik (known simply as Johnny).

This piece embodied much of the U.S. understanding and attitude toward Cuban culture. Hypnotic and powerful, it threatened to cause respectable people to do unrespectable things—and this is precisely what was so attractive about it to U.S. tourists. However, the inherent fear in losing oneself, in the debasement of civilized people, was mitigated by the fact that it was apparent that this was all a rehearsed event. The staged character of the show, and its obvious inauthenticity at the end, made it something that the audience could find titillating and racy, but not frightening.

The performances at the Tropicana were complex and it is perhaps impossible to apply fixed readings of them. They celebrated Cuban culture in a genuine way in some respects and in other instances projected inauthentic visions of Cuban culture to pander to tourists' desires. A Cuban owned the Tropicana, and Cubans choreographed all of the shows in the 1950s. Cubans

³¹⁸ Lowinger, *Tropicana Nights*, 192. *Toque de santos* ceremonies are part of the Santería religion in which initiates dance to rhythms on drums and other instruments. In doing this they channel the spirit of their *orisha* (to whom they have been consecrated).

created the representations of their country and culture that they performed on the stages. In an era where so much of Cuba was run by U.S. interests and for U.S. profit, perhaps they felt that they should cash in on the representation of Cuba that sold as well, no matter how much it was manipulated. Perhaps they also saw their shows as bigger than that; the variety of their shows suggests that they thought of their production in an international sense, and in fact their shows rivaled the best cabaret shows around the world.

The performances at the Tropicana were not always the same, and Cubans were not the only performers to grace its stages. The biggest names in music from around the world performed at the Tropicana. The Tropicana was not only considered one of the premier places to perform at in Havana, it was esteemed throughout the world as a reputable and fashionable place to play. The contributions the Tropicana made to the music world were great. A place of cultural exchange, it allowed guests, whether tourists or Cubans, to experience music that was new or different to them. It offered an opportunity for U.S. musicians to jam informally and perform formally with Cuban musicians, both parties learning from different styles of music and playing.

In its commitment to a high level of music quality, and perhaps indicative of different attitudes toward race in Cuba than in the United States, the Tropicana challenged the U.S. practice of racial segregation. Some of the great musicians who played there were African-Americans. For example, Nat King Cole visited Cuba and played at the Tropicana in 1956. While there he had drinks at the bar with his wife, the two of them seated next to Martín Fox and his family, who were white. U.S. guests would have seen this, and while it would not have single-handedly changed the racist views of many, others may have questioned notions of racial separation. It probably shaped their opinion of Cuba—the racial mixing either a sign of the island's uncivilized standing or its progressive outlook regarding race.

The lack of racial segregation at the Tropicana was in contrast to the policy at many of the other sites of tourism in Cuba, as well as some local sites. For example, many of the local sport and social clubs were segregated, exemplified by the widely told account that President Batista was denied membership to the Havana Country Club because he was a mulatto. Many tourist places, such as hotels, observed segregation practices similar to those in the United States as a way to appeal to U.S. tourists. One documented case of this was at the Siboney Hotel. Ann Terry's American Express agent had made her a reservation there from the United States and when she presented herself at the reception desk she cited her reservation. The hotel did have her reservation but refused to honor it when Ms. Terry arrived because it was obvious that she was African-American.³¹⁹

Like hotels, the Tropicana functioned as a site of consumption for its visitors. Guests were encouraged to visually consume the architecture, the tropical vegetation, and the show. Likewise they consumed dinner, drinks, and slot machines and gaming tables. Fox counted on this environment of consumption and promoted it in every way he could, for he was running a business, and gambling was the most lucrative aspect of it.

4. The Tropicana: Cuban Modernism in the World of Modern Architecture

With the great success of the Arcos de Cristal and the Bajo las Estrellas stage, Fox hired Borges in 1954 for one last project to design a new casino area that was to be fully air-conditioned like the Arcos de Cristal (Figure 104). Creating a large, fine gambling space would allow Fox to capture as much money as possible. Borges's design for the casino was quite ingenious, and the approach he utilized still defines casino decoration today. The decoration Borges created provided a lot of visual stimulation, similar to today's casino decoration. Rather than relying on patterned wallpaper, Borges employed the modernists' predilection for plate

³¹⁹ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 124.

glass and exploited fully its potential. By creating the walls and ceilings out of glass, Borges made the richness of the tropical landscape the major design motif. Palm fronds, air plants, and other vegetation created a complex and unique type of visual wall cover for the space. The architecture constantly reminded visitors of their physical location in Cuba. And like the Arcos de Cristal it evoked the feeling of being outdoors, facilitated by lighting the vegetation from the outside.

Added to the Tropicana in 1956, the final addition of modern design was an outdoor gallery designed by Cuban architect Héctor Carrillo (Figure 105). Perhaps inspired by the thin concrete shell construction of the Arcos de Cristal, Carrillo again used curved concrete forms in his design for the gallery through the use of the parasol as the basic form. This form is composed of a central column that supports a hyperbolic paraboloid that extends outward, creating a large amount of covering while leaving a small footprint on the ground. As a module, the parasol could be repeated and combined in numerous configurations, making possible straight walkways, large covered areas, or meandering paths that snake through the landscape.

Contemporaneous to the construction of this gallery, José Luis Sert's designs for the Palace of the Palms, a new presidential palace to be located just east of Habana Vieja across the bay, evolved in a noteworthy way.³²⁰ The presidential palace was part of a larger project that José Luis Sert, a Spanish architect and city planner who promoted the modernist values of CIAM through his work in the firm Town Planning Associates, had undertaken to propose, along with Paul Lester Weiner and Paul Schulz, a new master plan for the city of Havana. The proposal called for the destruction of parts of Havana Vieja in order to build new high-rise edifices, to build an artificial island off of Vedado to be filled with hotels, casinos, and shopping centers, and

³²⁰ For a history of this project see chapter 8 of Timothy Hyde, *Constitutional Modernism: Architecture and Civil Society in Cuba, 1933-1959* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012).

to spread Havana to the east on the other side of the harbor. The new presidential palace was to be located in this newly developed area to the east of the harbor, made more accessible by a new tunnel to be constructed under the bay.

Preliminary designs show the palace roof as a folded plate raised above the building. However, in 1956 Sert recruited Felix Candela to come to Cuba to consult with him. Candela provided Sert with drawings of the parasol and photographs of a model, and Sert subsequently transformed the roof design into a series of independent parasols. As Timothy Hyde has discussed in his study of the Presidential Palace, the parasols were meant to reference the royal palm, which Sert saw as “a symbol of Cuba and a characteristic element in the landscape of the island.”³²¹ For Sert, the parasol was meant to be understood as a representation of *cubanidad*. Indeed, associations between the palm and Cuba were not original to Sert. They were already so strong in 1849, for example, that the palm was incorporated as a major component of the national seal developed that year.

A consideration of Sert’s understanding of the parasol-as-palm and its symbolism in Cuba, and his interest in participating in the representation of *cubanidad* in architecture, is useful for understanding the architectural climate of the time. Whether or not Carrillo was explicitly engaging with the concept of parasol-as-palm, we can still understand Carrillo’s design as a sympathetic incorporation of modern architecture into the natural environment. Lining the drive, they provide a smooth transition from the asphalt to the trees, and echo the lush vegetation of the palms around them. Unfortunately Carrillo’s contributions to the Tropicana complex went largely unexamined as Borges’s projects were heavily publicized and critiqued in 1953 when he received a Gold Medal Prize from the College of Architects upon completion of the first two projects, and the Tropicana received much publicity in contemporary Cuban design journals,

³²¹ Cited in Hyde, *Constitutional Modernism*, 275.

such as *Arquitectura*, during this year. It was championed for its skillful, and uniquely Cuban, adaptation of modernism to local conditions.

The Tropicana was a significant example of a Cuban modernism that was based on the general tenets of modernism and was inspired by other regional modernist approaches. Furthermore, the Tropicana was part of tendency of the time to express a form of cultural nationalism, or *cubanidad*, through the use of specific architectural forms and approaches that were promoted as symbols of something uniquely Cuban. Architects and critics outside of Cuba took notice of the Tropicana's design as well. In fact, its coverage outside of Cuba helped shape the definition of Cuban modernism for the rest of the world. It was featured in Henry-Russell Hitchcock's seminal show of 1955 at the MoMA, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945* and the related publication of the same name. While Hitchcock's evaluation does not completely avoid falling into typical colonialist ways of writing, he did express his wish to celebrate what he saw as a great quantity of quality modern architecture being built in Latin America.³²² It was one of only three works from Cuba that were highlighted in the publication, the other two being government and diplomatic structures.³²³ It also stuck out as the only building of its type in the publication. Besides mention of two hotels in the publication, the Tropicana was the only structure geared toward tourist entertainment, and has a strikingly different tone than the other spaces of entertainment, such as baseball and sports stadiums, that have a much more social tone to their creation as state projects.

³²² Hitchcock, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945*, 11.

³²³ The other works were Capablanca and Graupera's Office of the Comptroller (1952-52) and Harrison and Abramovitz's American Embassy (1952-53), both located in Havana. The publication also includes photographs of Quintana, Rubio, and Pérez Beato's Retiro Odontológico (1953-54) and Gustavo Moreno López's Edificios Misiones (1951-52) also in Havana.

Indeed the plastic qualities of Latin American architecture, expressed most impressively through the use of curved concrete forms, struck Hitchcock the most.³²⁴ While his appraisal of the “appeal to the Iberian temperament” of “lyrical forms” such as shell vaults could be read as a vast generalizing stereotype of Latin Americans and Latin American architects, Borges’s use of shell vaults in the Tropicana pioneered the use of shell vaults in Cuba.³²⁵ Borges continued to design using concrete vaults after the Tropicana, most notably in the Club Nautico, designed after the Crystal Arches (Figure 106). A space for the local population to come and dance and enjoy leisure time, Club Nautico confirms that for Borges, function and the environment played a large role in guiding his architectural practice, not whether it was a space for foreigners or locals. The vaults were functional in that they allowed Borges to create spaces that would accommodate large numbers of people and Borges also adapted the design to be sympathetic to its location. Situated along the water, the blue-painted arches mirror the color of the ocean, and the entry area has a curving room that suggests undulating waves. Beyond the entryway one can see that the arches are completely open—the space is not enclosed with glass like the Crystal Arches—so that ocean breezes can pass through the space. He continued his interest in curved forms in the Tomb of Nuñez-Galvéz in the Colon Cemetery, which he designed with his brother in 1957, and in the paraboloids he included in a 1956 addition to a house he designed in 1941.³²⁶ As the first in Cuba to investigate hyperbolic paraboloids, Borges’s work influenced later works by other architects, such as a 1958 beach hut in East Havana (Figure 107).

³²⁴ Hitchcock, *Latin American Architecture Since 1945*, 26.

³²⁵ Hyde, *Constitutional Modernism*, 278. When construction became more challenging after the 1962 executive order embargo against importing from the United States, Cubans found other ways to express their interest in shell forms. For example, in the National Art Schools, designed by Ricardo Porro, Roberto Gottardi, and Vittorio Garatti, curved forms were often achieved through brick rather than concrete. However, in this case the forms are more akin to domes than the shell forms discussed above, and have been likened to the traditional Cuban *bohío*, or peasant hut.

³²⁶ This was the house of Santiago Claret, which was located on the Malecón at the corner of J Street in Vedado, and was lamentably demolished in 1986.

In the 1950s the Tropicana was world famous and on the top of many a tourist's list of things to do while in Havana. The Tropicana certainly shaped the U.S. tourist's impression of Cuba through reference to its culture. While parts of this experience, such as various aspects of the show, may have reinforced more negative stereotypes of Cuban culture, there was nothing thoughtless about the Tropicana's design. The Tropicana defined how Cuban modernism encapsulated *cubanidad* through its attention to climate and vegetation. As a space where countless tourists passed through its doors, it succeeded in proclaiming to the world that Cuba was a place of exceptional culture. Though some aspects of the nightclub did reinforce some less-than-positive stereotypes that tourists held, the architecture of the Tropicana encouraged a new way of understanding Cuba as a place where tradition and heritage gladly accommodated the desire to be modern.

C. The Havana Riviera

Tourism development in Havana in the 1950s was both directly responsible for urban growth and was a product of it. Through a series of new laws and initiatives in urban infrastructure and construction, the city spread further out and became taller. There was no need to demolish buildings in the old part of the city because Batista was building roads, bridges and tunnels to better connect the outskirts of the Havana to the city center. Skyscrapers proliferated, thanks in part to Batista's 1952 *Ley de Propiedad Horizontal* (Condominium Law), which allowed buildings taller than six stories to be built along the Malecón.³²⁷ The urban form of Vedado, especially near the Malecón, the famous oceanfront drive, was drastically altered by the towering heights of these hotels, which altered the city's skyline and stifled the Antillean breezes

³²⁷ Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 121.

that cooled the city.³²⁸ Most of the new hotels that were built heightened Havana's skyline and were focused in the area known as *La Rampa* and along the Malecón in the Vedado district, and further west in Miramar. The new modern hotels were clearly separated from the historic city center, reinforcing the notion that the modern was where U.S. visitors stayed, was the world they lived in, while the historic was something to be visited and consumed on a day trip.³²⁹ In fact, it was because so many of the new hotels were built there that Vedado became the preeminent tourist district in the 1950s.³³⁰

The rest of this chapter focuses on the Havana Riviera hotel as both agent and example of the hotel boom in the late 1950s (see Figure 94). The hotels built during this boom were, and still are, contested spaces. The presence of elite private interests handpicked by a corrupt Cuban government made them possible, but also made them controversial from their inception. However, the ease of building under an authoritarian system such as the Batista government allowed for certain rules and regulations to be skirted or overlooked and projects to be fast-tracked, ultimately resulting in a significant amount of completed projects. However corrupt this system was, it made it possible for Cubans to proudly claim their country's status as a truly modern metropolis.

One of the highlights of these new, ultramodern skyscraper hotels, the Havana Riviera was perhaps rivaled only by the 1958 Havana Hilton, a building that has been studied more than the Havana Riviera. I have chosen to focus on the Havana Riviera for a number of reasons, not solely because it is understudied. Mainly, the Havana Riviera is more representative of hotel

³²⁸ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 124.

³²⁹ This is not to say that there were not plenty of U.S. travelers who would visit Havana and stay in some of the older hotels in the historic city center. Certainly there were tourists who would have preferred this experience. But the nicest and most modern hotels, those with the most amenities, were the new hotels outside of the historic center.

³³⁰ Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 122.

building in Havana in this period than the Havana Hilton, which adhered to an investment, design, and operational scheme that was more specific to Hilton International Corporation policies than to Havana tourism trends. Conrad Hilton dreamed of a Hilton in Havana in 1950 based on the immediate and great success of the Caribe Hilton, even though the project was not realized until the end of the decade. The Havana Hilton did not open until October 1958, and in the early days of January 1959 it became headquarters of the revolutionary troops in Havana and Fidel Castro, further dampening U.S. desires to lodge there. Because the Havana Riviera was a project tied to U.S. mobsters, Meyer Lansky in particular, the project moved forward quickly. It opened in 1957 and operated more than a year before the 1959 Cuban Revolution disrupted tourism. Therefore, because it was open longer than the Havana Hilton, more U.S. visitors experienced the Havana Riviera and it played a larger role in shaping U.S. tourists' understanding of Cuba.

Though the architecture of the Havana Riviera has often been overlooked or dismissed because the architect was not Cuban and U.S. mobsters funded the building, the analysis here presents a new appraisal of the Havana Riviera as a significant example of modern Cuban design. An examination of the architecture and interiors shows how modern design could be assimilated into local practices, which reinforced a Cuban identity that was at once modern and traditional, and at the very core presented modern design as desirable. Although a Cuban desire to be modern and to make Havana a modern city had existed for some time, the quest for modernity in the postwar period was uniquely defined by the larger postwar climate. Finally, this analysis resituates our understanding of the Havana Riviera and persistent claims that its design was simply an imitation of thoughtless Miami kitsch by considering the Havana Riviera in relation to modern hotels built in Miami in the 1950s.

1. The Foundations of Hotel Building in Postwar Havana

These new modern hotels and the area in which they were built were the direct result of the Batista government's approach to urban development, and the urban planning project of Ramón Grau San Martín's government (1944-1948), the largest carried out by the Cuban state in the first half of the century.³³¹ These public works projects modernized the city, especially at the outskirts, by building new roads, upgrading the water and sewage systems, updating port facilities, creating parks and gardens, and building schools, hospitals, and residences. Despite all of the advances, the city retained much of its appearance and newly developed areas simply mimicked other visual characteristics of the city. A proliferation of styles in these new peripheral areas, such as Spanish-colonial, Art Deco and proto-rationalist, echoed those in the center and continued the tradition of limiting building heights to four stories.³³²

With Grau's project as a base, the Batista government issued \$350 million in bonds to finance public works, including aqueducts, roads, industrial projects, and tunnels. Two major tunnel projects were meant to connect central Havana to areas further east and west. One project was for a tunnel under Havana Bay that would connect the urban area to the relatively undeveloped area to the east. The second project was for two tunnels under the Almendares River that would connect the rapidly growing western residential municipalities of Playa, Marianao and La Lisa, in particular via Quinta Avenida, a grand boulevard that ran through the Playa district and was flanked by the grand homes of Havana's wealthiest residents. In search of development and economic prosperity, Batista's government looked to elite private interests to invest in the island.³³³ In particular, Batista needed an influx of foreign money as there was more

³³¹ Scarpaci, Segre, and Coyula, *Havana*, 73-74.

³³² *Ibid*, 74.

³³³ Though in general this prosperity was at the expense of workers rights and those who lived in rural areas.

Cuban money leaving the island than there was foreign money entering it. The most obvious and lucrative source was tourism and Batista set out to entice investors to buy into this industry.

Hotel Law 2074, adopted in 1953, did just that. It offered a range of tax breaks and incentives to encourage investment in large-scale hotel projects. It stipulated that if investors committed at least \$1 million to build a hotel or \$200,000 to construct a nightclub, they would also be allowed to include a casino as long as they paid the government \$25,000 for the license, plus a monthly fee of \$2,000 and a percentage of the take. Of these monthly fees, Batista declared that a portion of it would be used for charitable works, a move probably done to reduce criticism of his decision to grow the gambling industry.³³⁴

Batista strongly encouraged investors who were interested in projects related to tourism to solicit funds from government loaning entities, such as the *Banco de Fomento Agrícola e Industrial de Cuba* (Banfaic, or Bank of Agricultural and Industrial Development of Cuba). As its name indicates, this publicly funded entity was originally founded for agricultural and industrial development. Along with the manipulation of the extant Banfaic organization, the Batista government established the *Financiera Nacional de Cuba* (National Finance Company) in 1953 and the *Banco de Desarrollo Económico y Social* (Bandes, or Bank of Economic and Social Development) in 1955. The National Finance Company was utilized to fund public and private ventures by taking out loans themselves from other entities and issuing bonds.³³⁵ Those policies were overseen by Banco Nacional de Cuba (National Bank of Cuba) who owned a controlling share of the National Finance Company. The president of the National Bank of Cuba also managed Bandes, which was funded in part with government money and Banfaic was also a subsidy of the National Bank of Cuba. Besides providing loans for such projects as building or

³³⁴ Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 152.

³³⁵ Ibid, 153.

improving railroad and airline facilities, Bandes also issued loans to hotel construction, most notably the Havana Hilton and the Havana Riviera. Batista created and manipulated government organizations as he saw fit in order to promote tourism development and his banks replaced the foreign National City Bank as the major supplier of investment capital. During the 1950s, these entities loaned more than \$80 million in public loans for private companies who were building in the tourist sector.³³⁶

Batista's efforts to lure private interests to invest in Cuban tourism occurred as U.S. mob syndicates involved in the gambling sought to set up more operations outside of the United States. Meyer Lansky and other major mob leaders were not strangers to Havana, but the incentives Batista was offering to set up operations outside of the United States came at a particularly critical moment for them. In the United States, growing public awareness and concern about increased juvenile narcotic use, organized crime activity, and corruption among politicians and law enforcement officers, all of which was linked to the Mafia, propelled the U.S. government to take action against mobsters. Hearings held from May 1950 to May 1951 by the Senate Crime Committee led to a heavy crack down on mob-controlled gambling, which had the effect of pushing some mob-run gambling outside of the United States.³³⁷ The timing was fortuitous for Batista in his efforts to encourage tourism through hotel building and increased gambling.

In fact, to many the arrival of the U.S. mob in Cuba marked a positive turn in gambling in Cuba. Gaming in Cuba had become notorious for pushing illegal games that were fast-paced, impossible to win, and that quickly stripped U.S. tourists (the unwitting targets of these games)

³³⁶ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 113. This sheds some light on the economic difficulties the Castro regime encountered. When the government nationalized private entities, they lost their outside sources for loan repayment to the state bank and loaning institutions. Now the state hotel had to repay the state bank.

³³⁷ They are often referred to as the Kefauver hearings for the chair, Senator Estes Kefauver of Tennessee, who led the probe into organized crime's connections to drugs, gambling, and political corruption.

of large amounts of money. When a well-connected and respected lawyer from California, Dana C. Smith, raised a commotion in 1953 in the United States about a game called razzle-dazzle, in which he had lost several thousand dollars in Cuba, Batista had to respond to the bad publicity in the United States. Batista immediately announced that razzle-dazzle was illegal and ordered police to monitor casinos to make sure tourists were treated fairly.³³⁸ This scandal undoubtedly also encouraged Batista to open his arms more widely to U.S. gambling mobsters, who knew how to run a tight ship and could come to Havana and operate establishments that tourists would respect.

Mobster Meyer Lansky, who was indicted on illegal gambling charges in Florida, seized this opportunity to more heavily invest in gambling in Cuba after serving some time in prison.³³⁹ Lansky had a relationship with Batista dating back to the 1930s and Cuba's president was eager to bring in someone with Lansky's reputation for running professional, reputable games in a classy atmosphere.³⁴⁰ Lansky bought a share in the Montmartre Club in Vedado, and set up a school that trained and screened casino workers. He became convinced of the potential of Havana and commenced upon a plan to build a large, impressive, modern resort hotel with first-class casino.³⁴¹ The investors of the project provided \$8 million to build the hotel and solicited a \$6 million loan from Banes. Top Cuban officials spoke glowingly of the project and its role in increasing foreign exchange, supporting Cuban employment, and growing the tourist industry.³⁴²

³³⁸ Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 144.

³³⁹ As Schwartz recounts, Lansky missed out on some significant business opportunities in Las Vegas because he was serving a short prison term in Saratoga, New York. By the time he was out, Cuba seemed a more lucrative opportunity than Las Vegas. Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 149.

³⁴⁰ Ibid, 145.

³⁴¹ Although there is no doubt that Lansky was running the project, he was not listed on the papers as one of the investors. In fact, the closest he was connected to the hotel was through his nominal position as Head of Kitchens. The hotel's papers listed a Toronto hotelier company run by brothers Ben and Harry Smith as the operating company, though in reality Lansky had complete control over all operations.

³⁴² Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*, 157.

Lansky was committed to moving forward on the project at top speed, while still ensuring that his hotel was one of the finest in Havana—the new Riviera of the Americas.

2. Modernism on the Malecón

Trying to build new high-rise hotels in the historic center would have been a logistical nightmare and would have involved the demolition of an entire block or more of high-density structures. However, the urban infrastructure projects completed under Presidents Grau and Batista meant that neighborhoods peripheral to the historic center were now easily accessible and navigable.³⁴³ The neighborhood of Vedado was less developed than older ones and boasted a large expanse of Havana's Malecón, an eight-kilometer oceanfront promenade that runs from the historic center to the Almendares River.³⁴⁴

The Havana Riviera was part of a large building boom of high-rises in the 1950s in Vedado spurred by Batista's initiative to encourage investors to build and it contributed to the drastic change in the neighborhood. Before the 1950s, the neighborhood hardly had any buildings over four stories, the most notable exception was Mira and Rosich's fourteen-story Art Deco Lopez Serrano Building. The Havana Riviera is also the example *par excellence* of the desire to situate these new high-rise structures close to the ocean to achieve desirable views and benefit from the ocean breezes. Vedado was a booming area in the 1950s and home to the majority of new hotels: the Havana Riviera, Havana Hilton, Hotel Capri, Flamingo, St. Johns, and Vedado. The location of the Havana Riviera, near the western end of Vedado where the area meets the Almendares River and turns into the Miramar neighborhood, helped provide an anchor

³⁴³ In addition, areas outside of the historic center may have offered better water, sewage, electricity, and other services, as these things in Habana Vieja were always problematic. They were constantly dealing with antiquated systems that could not adequately support the amount of inhabitants in this part of the city.

³⁴⁴ Malecón means seawall in Spanish.

for the spread of tourism infrastructure from Habana Vieja to the outer edges of Vedado and out towards Miramar, symbolic of the spread of the city to the west.

With the location of the hotel project determined in 1956, Lansky began looking for an architect to design a thoroughly modern resort hotel. His desire to start profiting from his investment as quickly as possible played no small part in the selection of the architect. Originally, Philip Johnson developed a design for this prime waterfront location. His proposal was for a tall rectangular tower, completely closed off with lots of plate glass windows. This design would have presented issues in terms of exorbitant air-conditioning cost to keep the interiors cool but the disagreement the investors had with the project was rooted in the interior decoration.³⁴⁵ A widely disseminated anecdote about Philip Johnson's withdrawal from the project involves a meeting between the architect, Lansky, and some of Lansky's associates. As the story goes, Johnson finished pitching his design proposal of the hotel, at which point one of Lansky's associates suggested that a large pair of dice be painted on a ceiling. Johnson reportedly responded, "Gentlemen, let's not be crude," and walked out of the meeting.³⁴⁶ What is interesting about this anecdote is that despite Lansky's associate's request for kitsch interior decoration, the kind that could certainly be found in Las Vegas and Miami gambling establishments, the project ultimately was more of the refined, high modern type of design that Johnson had originally proposed, although better suited to and representative of the climate and culture than Johnson's proposal.

After Wayne McAllister, a Los Angeles-based designer known for his Las Vegas hotels, reportedly declined the commission based on Lansky's insistence on a six-month completion

³⁴⁵ The HistoryMiami Archives state that Lansky rejected Johnson's original proposal, causing Johnson to abandon the project.

³⁴⁶ The disagreement between Johnson and investors is stated in Rodríguez, *The Havana Guide*, 140. Though it doesn't seem to be published anywhere, the anecdote about the proposal for dice on the ceiling and Johnson's response is the accepted history amongst Cuban architectural historians.

schedule for the hotel, Lansky solicited Polevitzky, Johnson and Associates.³⁴⁷ The Miami-based firm was respected in the field for its regionally inspired modernism and for hotel design, a perfect combination for the project at hand. The firm already had a fair amount of experience in designing hotels and motels in the greater Miami area. Igor Polevitzky accepted the commission and endeavored to create a design that respected the climate and the natural and manmade environment that surrounded it.³⁴⁸

Born in Russia in 1911, Igor Polevitzky had lived in Pennsylvania with his family since the age of eleven. He studied architecture at the University of Pennsylvania, where, at that time, the department had an excellent reputation due to the presence of Paul Philippe Cret, whose work was associated with modern classicism and whose writings addressed such issues as functional planning and modern styling.³⁴⁹ Although the school was still officially teaching a Beaux Arts approach to architecture, Cret and other like-minded instructors ensured that the Modern movement had a firm presence as well.³⁵⁰ Polevitzky had been designing projects in the Miami area since he moved there in 1934 and by the 1940s he had developed quite a reputation for his innovations in tropical domestic architecture. Most notably, through an understanding of architecture as volume rather than mass, he stripped down the white planar wall typical of Bauhaus-inspired design to little more than a light frame denoting the perimeters of the volume of the structure.³⁵¹ In doing so he was pushing his personal interest in developing architecture

³⁴⁷ Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 184.

³⁴⁸ We can see this in the attention to using architecture to make tropical climate more agreeable, like the Caribe Hilton, and in use of colors that meshed with the ocean and the surrounding buildings. Also, the hotel continued an approach already established in Havana, with the construction of the Malecón, to connect urban infrastructure to the sea.

³⁴⁹ Allan T. Schulman, "Igor Polevitzky's Architectural Vision for a Modern Miami" *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 23 (1998), 335-336.

³⁵⁰ Ibid, 336.

³⁵¹ Allan T. Schulman, "Polevitzky's Birdcage Houses" in *Miami Modern Metropolis: Paradise and Paradox in Midcentury Architecture and Planning*, ed. Allan T. Shulman (Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2009), 385.

appropriate for the Florida climate, one in which, he believed, the polarity between inside and outside could be mitigated (Figure 108).³⁵² This was made possible by innovations in building materials that allowed Plevitzky to design with light aluminum frames with screen infill. As scholar Allan T. Shulman has observed, the approach of integrating inside and outside “embodied the intertwining of modern and primitive and the progressive and traditional.”³⁵³ Likewise, Plevitzky’s “Tropotype,” developed in the late 1930s, was a design for a concrete cottage raised off of the ground, with the second story wrapped in balconies. This design took the vernacular tradition of southern plantations and Miami’s raised wood cottages and expressed it in a modern vocabulary. It used modernist materials such as concrete and steel, but respected traditions as a way to address climate by lifting the structure to tackle issues of dampness and air circulation.

The particularities of designing and building homes versus larger commercial and residential buildings meant that Plevitzky could be more experimental in his domestic architecture. For example, his hotels of the 1930s and 1940s, such as the Albion (1939), Shelbourne (1940), Center Hotel (1945, unbuilt), and Golden Strand Hotel and Villas (1946), though modern for their time, did not allow Plevitzky to push the boundaries of indoor/outdoor living. However, Plevitzky had the opportunity to be innovative in other aspects of the hotel design. For example, in the Albion, a Streamline Moderne hotel with ocean liner imagery, Plevitzky experimented with novel approaches to pool design. In keeping with the hotel’s motif, Plevitzky incorporated portholes along the side of the raised pool, introducing a voyeuristic device that allowed swimmers to be seen, and see out, while underwater. Scholars have also positioned Plevitzky’s Shelbourne hotel of 1940 as a “forecast [of] disengagement

³⁵² Shulman, “Igor Plevitzky’s Architectural Vision,” 359.

³⁵³ Schulman, “Plevitzky’s Birdcage Houses,” 389.

between tower and pedestal forms that would distinguish the modern resort hotel” (Figure 109).³⁵⁴ He did this by covering the pedestal in a curtain wall of mahogany and glass, revealing the multi-story lobby.

By the 1950s, Polevitzky was a recognized figure of Modernism in the United States, albeit in a regional sense. His work was considered, as Shulman has summarized, innovative and functional because “it addressed issues considered central to the Modern movement in the United States: contextualism, a responsiveness to environmental factors, and a creative use of materials and techniques.”³⁵⁵ The Havana Riviera is, in many ways, characteristic of Polevitzky’s design approach, though the design also reveals compromises the architect had to make to accommodate the location and owner.

For the design of the hotel, Polevitzky developed a twenty-one story, Y-shaped tower that, from certain sides, appears lifted up off the ground on spindly columns (Figure 110). The Y-shaped form worked well with the plot of land Polevitzky had to work with. Surpassing the limitations of a simple rectangular slab, the Y-shape allowed two shorter wings to come off the building on one end, increasing the number of rooms, and in particular the number of end rooms, which had balconies. In addition, the Y-shape made the building less static, the curve of the front façade and back pool façade and the positioning of these in relation to the ocean suggest the smooth motion of ocean breezes across the surfaces of the building. Finally, in using the Y-shape, Polevitzky inserted a tall shaft in the intersection of the wings that is taller than the rest of the structure, highlighting the vertical thrust of the building and creating a space to prominently display the hotel’s name.

³⁵⁴ Allan T. Schulman, “The Fontainebleau Hotel: Modernity, Decadence and the Iconography of Leisure” in *Miami Modern Metropolis: Paradise and Paradox in Midcentury Architecture and Planning*, ed. Allan T. Schulman (Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2009), 313.

³⁵⁵ Schulman, “Igor Polevitzky’s Architectural Vision,” 336.

The Havana Riviera's form is visually more open to the outside than Polevitzky's previous hotels, the result of floor slabs that extend the volume of the walls on all sides of the hotel, the scalloped-edges of which lend a sculptural and organic feel to the two broad sides of the building. The walls are set back in the structure and are composed of large windows and a light-turquoise infill, effectively conveying their non-structural quality and lending a lightness to the structure. The columns on the ground floor are functionally useful, an approach to hotel design pioneered by earlier hotels such as the Caribe Hilton, as they allow an open plan on the ground floor in order to accommodate hotel facilities. Likewise they create an extremely open sensation to the ground level, blurring the boundaries between indoor and outdoor, a quality characteristic of Polevitzky's architecture throughout his career.

The guest approached the main entry by passing under a large porte-cochere with a massive wall of sculpted concrete blocks on the left side. At the top of the stairs, beyond the glass doors, the space opened up. From here, the view extended through to the pool and cabana deck on the other side of the building. After the hallway to the casino on the right, the interior opened up into an area of floor-to-ceiling plate glass walls overlooking the Malecón and the ocean. Polevitzky was committed to a key tenet of Modernism—the symbiosis of man and his environment, which in the Florida climate, Polevitzky shaped by the gradation of space between inside and outside.³⁵⁶ In the Havana Riviera, Polevitzky created this gradation through the transparency of large amounts of plate glass and areas that are not physically, just visually, open to the next. This arrangement accommodated Lansky's requirement that the hotel have central air-conditioning, as he was determined to build the first hotel with central air-conditioning.³⁵⁷

³⁵⁶ Later interpretations of Modernism focused on it as a tool to master man's environment, in this case most notably by the incorporation of air-conditioning.

³⁵⁷ Indeed, this was a compromise for Polevitzky, who did not like to incorporate air conditioning in his designs.

The architect used columns on the ground floor to create an open space that extended down to a lower level of public space. One could descend a flight of stairs to an open area that was level with the Malecón (Figure 111). Large plate glass windows opened views to the outside, while protecting people from the noise and pollution of passing automobile traffic.

Although the Y-shaped tower was new for Polevitzky, it was consistent with other alternative structural footprints he was developing for hotel and residential apartments.³⁵⁸ In the same year that Polevitzky started the Havana Riviera project in 1956 he also designed the Carlton Terrace Apartments in Bal Harbour, Florida (Figure 112).³⁵⁹ The plan was two rectangular towers of equal dimensions that intersected at the ends at a right angle. On the inside of the angle, where the two slabs met, the façade was curved to create a continuous line. On the outer angle, two smaller wings were added, and were offset on their respective sides so that they were both closer to the point where the two large towers met. The visual result of looking at this part of the building is not unlike looking at the large shaft that juts out a bit from the intersection of the two short wings of the Y-shape at the Havana Riviera. Likewise, the curved façade on the one side of the Carlton Terrace Apartments seems to be a scaled down version of the sweeping curves of the front façade and pool façade of the Havana Riviera. Comparing the two structures also underscores the visual lightness Polevitzky achieved by placing an emphasis on the floor slabs that extend out, which are simply filled in with large windows and infill panels, the color of which make them appear less structural than the white walls of the Carlton Terrace Apartments.

³⁵⁸ According to Shulman and Lejeune by the late 1950s apartment high-rises had replaced resort hotels as the main paradigm of beachfront development in Miami. Allan T. Shulman and Jean-Francois Lejeune, "Postwar Towns: Bal Harbour Village and Bar Harbor Islands" in *Miami Modern Metropolis: Paradise and Paradox in Midcentury Architecture and Planning*, ed. Allan T. Shulman (Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2009), 194.

³⁵⁹ Should include footnote here about how Miami Beach already developed and moving out more to developing neighboring areas such as Bal Harbour.

In the 1950s, no luxury resort hotel located in a warm climate was complete without a pool. All of the hotels and motels in Miami included pools in their plans, and all of the new, high quality hotels in Havana were building them, even if a diminutive plot size meant they were located on the roof, such as the Hotel Capri and the Havana Hilton. As Rocco Ceo and Allan T. Shulman have discussed in an essay on pools, diving towers, and cabanas, “after World War II, swimming pools became even more accessible to Miami tourists...like air conditioning, the pool was an emblem of luxury, but an essential one.”³⁶⁰ In order to lure more tourists, Cuba needed to offer a better version of Miami, which meant they had to offer guests all of the luxuries they could find in Miami, plus more if they wanted to gain a competitive edge in tourism. Hotel investors recognized this, and realized that details such as pools and air conditioning were necessary to compete with Miami and other destinations in the Caribbean that were growing as tourist destinations, such as Puerto Rico, Mexico, and Jamaica.

Polevitzky was not just familiar with the practice of including pools in his hotel designs (and some residences as well), he was swept up in the pool craze in the postwar period. As Ceo and Shulman recount, “Diving platforms designed by architects evolved characteristic and even proprietary forms.”³⁶¹ At the Havana Riviera, Polevitzky included a diving platform that “featured a cantilevered arc that intersected with a large observation deck.”³⁶² Interestingly, this design was not new, he had proposed it for the Center Hotel, an unbuilt project from 1945.

While Polevitzky may have recycled the diving platform design, the rendering of the Center Hotel reveals just how far he had come in conveying volume rather than mass in his hotel designs, and the sense of lightness and openness this could engender. The lightness and openness

³⁶⁰ Rocco Ceo and Allan T. Shulman, “Privileged Views and Underwater Antics: Swimming Pools, Diving Towers and Cabana Colonies” in *Miami Modern Metropolis: Paradise and Paradox in Midcentury Architecture and Planning*, ed. Allan T. Shulman (Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2009), 340.

³⁶¹ Ibid, 343.

³⁶² Ibid, 343.

of the Havana Riviera's design allowed U.S. guests who saw this building and experienced the space to draw connections to tropicality and use it to aid them in the definition of the tropics. In this case tropicality was not referenced by lush vegetation, but through an attention to climate through transparency. In addition, the color of the exterior walls helped stress the lightness of the structure as well as being a traditional color for buildings in the Caribbean. A design that stressed connection and flow between interior and exterior would remind guests of their foreign environment, one markedly different from theirs at home, and the approach to architecture it necessitated. As a forerunner of modern hotels in Havana, the Havana Riviera displayed to U.S. visitors the way Cuba embraced modernity via modern design as a means to achieve higher standards of living.

3. The Havana Riviera Interiors: The Marriage of *Cubanidad* and International Modernism

While the architecture was certainly impressive, the interior decoration of the public areas on the main level conveyed the richness of modern Cuban art and design. The lobby was a veritable *gesamtkunstwerk* of Cuban artworks, furniture, and materials that unequivocally presented Cuba and its people as simultaneously engaged with their heritage and with being thoroughly modern. References to global trends in design and assertions of a unique Cuban identity through materials, and even more strongly in the many works of avant-garde art displayed prominently in the public areas, expressed Havana's cosmopolitanism and nationalism. The hotel's lounges, bars, and restaurants encouraged guests to linger in spaces that explained the notion of *cubanidad* and offered the most luxurious and up-to-date in resort hotel experiences.

Artworks, from figural to abstract, engaged with themes of Cuban heritage and culture, from images of carnival to more abstract depictions of symbols related to the unique, Cuban syncretic faith of Regla de Ocha, or Santería. Just as all of the artworks had subject matter that dealt with *cubanidad*, they all expressed a clear engagement with global avant-garde trends. A number of the artworks warrant consideration in terms of the position within the historical framework of Cuban art and Western art traditions and their function within the hotel setting.

Before entering the hotel, guests saw Florencio Gelabert's white marble sculpture outdoors in front of the porte-cochere (Figure 113). Displayed above a pool, *Danza* (Dance) is composed of intertwined abstracted forms of a mermaid and sea creature (variously described as a swordfish or dolphin), suggesting associations of Cuba as a place of natural abundance. The artwork brings this to the point of fantasy in its use of the mythical mermaid, a parallel and reminder to guests of their passage from their everyday lives into the escapism of vacation. Born just after the turn of the twentieth century, Gelabert was an established and respected sculptor by the time he received the commission for the various artworks he produced for the Havana Riviera. He had studied at the San Alejandro Academy of Art from 1928-1934 and traveled throughout Europe, including Paris, to study the famed masters. Upon his return to Havana, he continued his artistic practice and was continuously included in expositions and won prizes throughout his career. *Danza* and other sculptures Gelabert created for the Havana Riviera are typical of his work: smooth, attenuated abstracted forms, with an emphasis on curvilinearity and negative space to convey movement.

Another sculpture by Gelabert dominated the lobby. Cast in bronze, *Ritmo Cubano* depicts an abstracted male and female couple frozen in a moment of dance, twirling around and engaged with one another in a manner reminiscent of *Danza* (Figure 114). The subject plays

upon the famous legacy of dance in Cuba. Dating far back, representations of dance had been popular in the art of Cuba. Foreigners, such as Frenchman Frédéric Miahle, who captured the various social and ethnic classes of Cuba in his series of lithographs published in *Viaje Al Rededor de la Isla de Cuba* in the mid-nineteenth century, represented this theme in their works. For example, in *El zapateado* Miahle depicted people from the rural countryside partaking in traditional peasant dances. Dance was also an important subject for native Cuban artists, especially the *vanguardia* that made its appearance in 1927.³⁶³ One of the most iconic works of the early vanguardia is Eduardo Abela's *El triunfo de la rumba*, painted around 1928 (Figure 115). As art historian Narciso Menocal has documented, the Cuban vanguardia was more concerned with content than with thoroughly investigating and innovating modern form, as was the case with the avant-garde in Europe and the United States.³⁶⁴ The attention to content and iconography was due to the vanguardia's focus on art as a means to convey and define Cuban identity. They utilized explorations in form as a means to underscore the theme or subject matter of the work. Such is the case with Abela's *El triunfo de la rumba*, where line is used to evoke the sensuous movement of Cuban dance, and color is used to reinforce notions of place, the pastels of blue, green, and bits of yellow and salmon, depict the ocean, tropical vegetation, and sun and warmth of the Caribbean island. The main focus of the painting is a mulattress dressed in white, flanked by drum players, among other figures.

Although nearly thirty years separate Abela's painting and Gelabert's sculpture, they serve as an interesting comparison. Abela's work focuses more on the depiction of the seductive,

³⁶³ Nineteen twenty-seven is considered the year that Cuban modern art was born because it marked the year that the first significant exhibitions of Cuban modern art took place. These were two solo exhibitions of work by Victor Manuel and Antonio Gattorno, both held at the Association of Painters and Sculptors on Paseo del Prado. This year also marked the debut of *Revista de Avance*, a journal that promoted avant-garde Cuban art. Vanguardia is Spanish for avant-garde.

³⁶⁴ Narciso G. Menocal, "An Overriding Passion—The Quest for a National Identity in Painting" *Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 22 (1996), 199.

lascivious, and perhaps even dark aspects of the Cuban rumba, underscored by the use of a mulattress as the main dancer and the connotations these women carried of assertive sensuality and debauchery.³⁶⁵ In many ways, this depiction reinforced popular stereotypes in the United States that there was something untamed or primitive in the Cuban soul when it came to dance—that all Cubans were born with rhythm and they all lived for music and dance, especially as a form of sexual outlet. On the other hand, the sweeping curved that define Gelabert's sculpture render it less provocative than Abela's mulattress who stares out in a confrontational invitation to the viewer. Likewise, Gelabert's sculpture would not have been considered as avant-garde as Abela's painting, at least not by art critics and historians, though it was very legible to tourists. Gelabert's sculpture invites the viewer to contemplate these two figures who have become one, lost in the dance. His work projects the idea of escape, the way movement across a dance floor could transport one somewhere else, connotations all fitting for the sculpture's placement in the hotel lobby and as something to be viewed by guests who found themselves transported to a foreign place as well.

A juxtaposition of two works on the main floor, one to the right in the hallway to the casino and the other to the left in L'Aiglon restaurant, also provide an illuminating display of ideas about Cuban identity. Perhaps the most narrative driven and representational pieces in the hotel are the painted murals by Hipólito Hidalgo de Caviedes that grace the walls of the hotel's formal dining restaurant. Set amidst the splendor of eighteenth century French revival chandeliers, fittings, and settings, Hidalgo de Caviedes's paintings depict historic scenes of Cuban Carnival (Figure 116). The Spanish artist was more known as a portrait painter and was quite desired for his tendency to render female sitters in a more attractive light than they may have appeared in real life. Trained primarily in Spain and Berlin, Hidalgo de Caviedes moved to

³⁶⁵ Ibid, 202.

Cuba in 1937 because of the Civil War in Spain and his works reveal an assortment of influence by other European artists such as Pablo Picasso, Giorgio De Chirico and Marsden Hartley.

For his murals in the Havana Riviera, Hidalgo de Caviedes adopted a simplified and stylistic approach to depicting the figures that perform a variety of activities, from music playing, kite flying and general revelry to women and men posed in elaborate costumes (Figure 117). The simplicity of the scenes is underscored by the backgrounds, which include the minimal amount of representation needed to convey setting, and in some cases there is none at all. The subject matter reinforces the festive, carefree aspect of Cuban culture. In the most positive light, they reference the rich cultural traditions of Carnival, similar to those in Venice, Rio de Janeiro, or New Orleans. However, negative attributes of Carnival combined with stereotypes to which many U.S. citizens subscribed, meant that for many U.S. guests these images reinforced notions of Cuba as a site of debauchery and depravity. It was, of course, a double standard. These were the exact reasons for which U.S. travelers flocked to Havana, but were also the source of their severe judgment of Cuban culture and society.

On the other hand, Roland López Dirube's relief sculpture, which runs along the left wall of the hallway to the casino, also references Cuban culture, but in a more abstract and esoteric manner (Figure 118). Compared to Hidalgo de Caviedes's murals, Dirube's sculpture is much more abstract, non-representational, and focused on material. Composed of plaster, metal wire and backlit resin, at first glance Dirube's mural appears to be just an abstract pattern of geometric shapes. However, upon more careful scrutiny one can observe boats and symbols. Boats have been, and still are, a loaded imagery used frequently in Cuban art, in literary as well as visual works, and one that would not hold as much meaning to someone who does live on an island. Whether from Spain, Africa, the American colonies/United States, China, Jamaica or

Haiti, immigrants and visitors historically arrived by boat, and the countless boats that landed at its shores made possible the rich creole culture of Cuba. Boats were the only way on and off of the island. They were the connection to the rest of the world, they provided Cuba's main livelihood for the first two hundred and fifty years, and they were necessary for providing the island with all it could not produce on its own. Although probably less legible to casino visitors, Dirube's mural addresses the complexity of the simple image of the boat, the complexity of which is indicated in the rich pattern of the mural.

Boats not only represent the European discovery and colonization of the island, but also the more than 500,000 Africans who arrived by boat to Cuba's shores as slaves and syncretized their various African faiths in order to carry on the fundamental concepts of their native religion.³⁶⁶ The result of this syncretization was Regla de Ocha, commonly referred to as Santería. In this religion the *orishas*, or deities, of the Yoruba religion are coupled with various saints of the Roman Catholic religion. This was often based on visual similarities of the saints and orishas, for example Changó, god of fire and thunder, symbol of male potency, was coupled or merged with Santa Barbara because they were both associated with wearing red and white. In effect, an African slave who identified with Changó could publicly wear or carry images of Santa Barbara. To Catholics it appeared as if they were successfully converted Africans to the Catholic faith, but it was really a way for practitioners of Santería to keep their faith alive and proclaim it in a coded way. For example, the boat is an important part of the representation of the Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre, the patroness of Cuba who saved three Cubans who were out at sea, one of them a slave, during a storm. The Virgen de la Caridad de Cobre is syncretized to

³⁶⁶ John Charles Chasteen, *Born in Blood and Fire: A Concise History of Latin America*, 2nd ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 17.

Ochun, a very powerful Santería orisha who is associated with love and sensuality, women, and rivers.

The symbols in the sculpture also reference different aspects of Abakuá, a secret society in Cuba with African roots. An all male fraternity, the Abakuá society was derived from fraternal associations from different areas of Nigeria and Cameroon and was started in Havana in the 1830s. One element of the Abakuá society is the system of symbols that hold distinct meanings. Common markings symbolically represent the trade winds, the ceiba tree, crocodiles, arrows, death, rebirth, and much more. The symbols in Dirube's mural are unintelligible to the uninitiated. The oval and cross designs that the artist employed may represent the different branches of peoples of Africa that the Abakuá was based upon, or may be simply creations of the artist. Even if they are inventions of the artist, they are based upon the Abakuá vocabulary of marks such as ovals, crosses, dots and arrows, which are used to compose intelligible symbols. To the untrained viewer this work may carry little significance, but to one with even a basic understanding of this religion, the mural comes alive with meaning.

La Religión del Palo, also by Rolando López Dirube, was the most prominently displayed artwork in the Havana Riviera (Figure 119). This large-scale, dynamic sculpture hung from the center of the spiral staircase located toward the back of the lobby area, centrally located near the reception desk. Though representational, it is a highly abstracted piece. The title refers to Palo, or Las Reglas de Congo, a religion that developed in Cuba mostly among slaves that came from the Congo Basin.³⁶⁷ Palo, which means stick in Spanish, references the wooden sticks used in altar preparation. Basic tenets of the faith revolve around natural or earth powers and the spirits of ancestors. Like the Abakuá society, the Palo faith uses a system of symbols and in form the two are not dissimilar. Undoubtedly, guests could not have fully grasped these pieces, but

³⁶⁷ It is also commonly referred to as Palo Monte.

one wonders what the two works by Dirube may have meant to the countless Cuban workers who were familiar with or practitioners of these religions. The Havana Riviera contained more imagery of Cuban culture than guests could comprehend.

The spiral staircase and sculpture are often regarded as simply a cheap imitation of Morris Lapidus's "stairs to nowhere" in the 1954 Fontainebleau hotel in Miami. First, the nickname given to Lapidus's staircase is not accurate as it actually does lead to somewhere, although just to a cloakroom. While the interior design does not follow the traditional layout of a grand staircase in a hotel leading to important areas, such as a ballroom or restaurant, it incorporates the staircase as a stage for the spectacle of guests descending into the lobby. Second, the two are formally very different. Lapidus's staircase hugs a curved wall, which was decorated with an oversized reprint of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's 1772 etching *View of Campo Vaccino*. The Havana Riviera's staircase is much more modern. The light treads with open backs warrant more comparison with the Caribe Hilton than with the Fontainebleau. In a time when high-rise hotels were serviced by elevators and open, sprawling pedestal forms allowed for a single floor of public spaces, the staircase and sculpture combination was an ingenious design addition. In fact, the staircase and sculpture create one unified artwork, it is impossible to tell if the staircase complements the sculpture or vice versa. Referencing the grand staircases of the great hotels of the past, the design also reveals the antiquated-ness of the concept of the grand staircase by rendering the staircase as nothing more than a sculpture.

This was modern art best complemented by modern design. Though perhaps not as obvious, other aspects of the lobby proclaimed the Cuban-ness of the hotel. In general, Cuba and Cuban society embraced the modern design of midcentury. The large boom in residential building meant that many middle and upper class Cubans were looking to match their interior

design to their now modern home and there was a general high literacy in terms of design in Havana in this period. Like architecture, interiors were a way for Cuba and Cubans to proclaim their modernity and participation in a global world of design and commerce. The Havana Riviera's use of modern furniture not only mirrored general furniture trends in Havana, but did this by using Cuban materials and Cuban produced designs.

As one entered through the front door, the lobby walls stretched in front, alternating between panels of decorative concrete grilles and marble panels that were produced in Cuba out of Cuban materials (Figure 120). The use of this marble presents a striking contrast to other approaches to materials in hotel design. Whereas luxury was usually expressed through imported materials, such as marble from Italy, the Havana Riviera did not take the standard path of relying on the cache of iconic luxury materials, a practice particularly popular in hotel design. Instead, the Havana Riviera worked to connect notions of luxury to Cuba itself by displaying Cuban marble in the same fashion that Italian marble would be implemented in design.

While U.S. furniture, and modern furniture at that, was locally available—a Knoll store and a shop that carried Herman Miller furniture were located within the city limits—all of the modern furniture in the main lobby was made in Cuba.³⁶⁸ This is notable since, as previously

³⁶⁸ With such an emphasis on Cuban materials, furniture, and artwork in the main public areas it seems quite striking that Alvin Parvin, of the Parvin-Dohrman Company of Los Angeles was listed as responsible for designing all of the furniture in the hotel. Parvin, who had designed other hotels in Las Vegas, surely had established means for producing his designs for those hotels in the United States. However, it seems it would have been a daunting task for him to make all of these new connections and business arrangements in a foreign country. While the Parvin-Dohrman Company may have been listed officially as head of interior design, I suspect there was a local designer or design firm associated with the project, a ubiquitous practice in Cuba when foreign architects or designers took on projects in Cuba. For example, at the Havana Hilton James McQuaid was in charge of the interior design. However, Fredo Rivera reports that hearsay in Cuba is that the interior designer worked with a well-known Cuban art collector and dealer, Ramon Osuna, and with architect Gabriela Menendez on everything from the art to the furnishing. What we can confirm is that much of the furniture, such as the rattan furniture in the Hurricane Bar and the metal furniture in the Sugar Bar Terrace were locally produced. Typical of performing research in Cuba, where there tends to be very little preserved documentation pertaining to these projects, much of the history of twentieth century architecture in Cuba exists as oral histories that have yet to be recorded and often cannot be verified. This applies to the Havana Riviera. Architect Daniel Bejerano was responsible for the restoration of the hotel in the 1990s, which was the most historically accurate restoration of the hotel to date. The research that was

mentioned, postwar Cuban culture subscribed to a U.S. notion of modernity and they had ready access to a wide array of U.S. goods. Despite the heavy reliance on U.S. imports, there was a keen interest amongst the architecture and design community in developing design, including furniture, on the island. The Cuban design journal, *Espacio*, indicates that there were at least two furniture design studios in Havana in the 1950s, and *Espacio* and *Arquitectura* fostered a dialogue between Cuban architecture and furniture design in this period. This is all the more notable when compared to Miami, another major city in the area. Miami did not have a modern design store until the Arango Design Store opened in 1959.³⁶⁹

The furniture in the main lobby area was typical of midcentury design (Figure 121). Long, low-slung couches filled the area with simple lines and neat, angular forms. These were complemented by equally minimal and low-slung coffee tables, which were decorated with organically shaped, abstract marble sculptures. Some tropical vegetation was incorporated into the space, neatly contained in rectangular planters built into the center of stone benches. While an open plan defined the main floor, the lobby lounge area was clearly demarcated through the arrangement of the cubic furniture, which clearly delimited the space.

4. The Politics of Reception

The name of the hotel played no small part in U.S. tourists' understanding of the hotel and Havana. Riviera, of course, referred to the chic coastal portion of France to which many

necessary for the restoration made Bejerano the authority on hotel's design and history and he claims the furniture was made in Cuba. I tend to lean more toward his findings, as he knows how to accurately mine the somewhat scholarly unorthodox avenues of information in Cuba. Interviews with Daniel Bejerano, February 2011. Moruzzi's overview of furniture claims that all furniture was designed by Alvin Parvin, of the Parvin-Dohrman Company of Los Angeles, which is probably based on what he found listed in official documents. See Moruzzi, *Havana Before Castro*, 186.

³⁶⁹ Anthony J. Abbate, "Arango Design: Progressive Style and Latin Influence" in *Miami Modern Metropolis: Paradise and Paradox in Midcentury Architecture and Planning*, ed. Allan T. Shulman (Miami Beach: Bass Museum of Art, 2009). Jorge and Judith Arango felt there was a lack of contemporary design and an overabundance of kitsch design in Miami. To remedy that they opened their design store, which was the first in Miami of to offer pieces by such designers as Arne Jacobsen, Alvar Aalto, and Charles and Ray Eames.

aspired to travel. It was a nice complement to Havana's moniker as the "Paris of the Caribbean." The sophistication and glamour of Paris and the French Riviera were borrowed and attached to Havana and the Havana Riviera hotel. The hotel's tagline, "Havana in the Grand Manner" underscored this association, positioning the Havana Riviera as the key element in experiencing the ultimate in Caribbean vacationing (see Figure 110). French references were sprinkled throughout the hotel, from Regency-style fittings that decorated parts of the hotel to restaurant and bar names, such as L'Aiglon Restaurant and L'Elegante Bar. The interest in emphasizing the French theme in the hotel is apparent in the name of L'Elegante Bar. The "e" at the end is not grammatical in French, but to U.S. visitors it makes the work seem for foreign. The Havana Riviera carefully blended French sophistication, Western modernity and Cuban culture in its architecture and design to give U.S. guests a highly constructed vision of life in Havana, one that was very different from that lived by Cubans. The combination of furniture, materials, and artworks that composed the interior design created a *gesamtkunstwerk* of *cubanidad*, which was defined by and had profound respect for its cultural heritage and resources.

To better understand the importance of Cubanidad in the design, I propose to consider how unlike hotel design in Havana and Miami was in this period. While it is true that high-rise resort hotel building did boom in Miami earlier in the decade than in Havana, hotel architecture in Havana was not a lazy copy of Miami design. Designs tended to be more thoughtful and less kitschy in Cuba because they participated in the visual dialogue about *cubanidad*, and in some cases redefined the term. Miami, on the other hand, always struggled to develop a clear identity to project to the rest of the world. Florida promoters could not try to entice people with some exotically different culture, as south Florida was part of the United States and had no deeply rooted culture. What differentiated Florida the most was its climate, and images of sunshine,

palms, and oranges were commonly evoked.³⁷⁰ Hotels in Florida often relied upon a variety of adopted themes to offer an alternative to cultural experience. Some touched on potentially valid historic topics, though were grossly exaggerated, like pirate themes. Others blatantly had nothing to do with Florida, such as Polynesian themes and the French baroque styling of the Fontainebleau (Figure 122). One hotel that was perhaps an attempt to situate Florida within the greater context of the Americas was Morris Lapidus's 1955 Americana hotel in Bal Harbour, Florida (Figure 123).³⁷¹ The hotel's location in a U.S. state was recognized in interior decoration that explicitly referenced various part of the United States. In addition, the concept of Miami as connected with and similar to Central and South American was showcased through designs that focused on tropical vegetation, or on cultures of these regions (Figure 124). In this sense, the design exoticized Miami by connecting it to Latin America (even if it could only be done through climate and not culture), endorsing a larger tendency in the period to promote Miami as a crossroads in the Pan-American world, or even as a truly Pan-American city.

Unfortunately, observations about the thoughtfulness of the Havana Riviera's design regarding Cuban culture have really only been made in retrospect. During this period the architectural world was firmly under the influence of the European avant-garde and the ideas of such critics as Henry-Russell Hitchcock and Siegfried Gideon. This group promoted a definition of modernism that would have considered a great deal of the Havana Riviera as kitsch design. Only more recently has a younger group of scholars with a more wide-ranging view of architecture reappraised designs such as the Havana Riviera.

³⁷⁰ Even the palm was not as culturally and historically potent a symbol in Florida as in Cuba. See section on the Tropicana for more on palms as a symbol of Cuba.

³⁷¹ Unfortunately the hotel was demolished in 2007.

U.S. publications of the period acknowledged the innovative architecture of the Havana Riviera, which they tied to a growing internationalism in the city.³⁷² Despite U.S. newspaper headlines like “Cuba’s Newest Hotel Brings Tropical Beauty Indoors,” it was the gambling and other illicit activities offered by the Havana Riviera—“a self-contained orbit for the pleasure seeker”—that were highlighted in the articles.³⁷³ Indeed, the image of the hotel had been marred since construction began by the image of Cuba as the playground of the United States. The tourism and hotels that were developed under the corruption of Batista’s dictatorship catapulted gambling, prostitution, drinking and drug use to new levels in the country.³⁷⁴ After the Revolution, the Havana Riviera and other postwar hotels, as well as the Tropicana, were seen as symbols of the deleterious effects of U.S. imperialism and were taken up by Fidel Castro to denounce the Batista government and its relationship with the United States.

Castro argued that Batista’s approach to tourism was deeply corrupt poisonous to Cuban culture and society. These claims echoes others about the Batista regime. Castro did not blame everything on Batista; he also faulted the United States for the problems in Cuba. He held the United States accountable for doing business with and supporting a dictator like Batista in order to continue the legacy of U.S. imperialism on the island and he condemned the behavior of U.S. tourists in Havana for the deleterious effect it had on Cuban society.³⁷⁵ Castro associated the ills of capitalism—greed, corruption, gambling, drug and alcohol abuse, and prostitution—with the places where he felt this took place: casinos, cabarets, and hotels. These spaces were also tainted because most were owned or operated by U.S. businessmen, many of whom were mobsters, and

³⁷² “Havana Riviera to Open Dec. 10,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 1, 1957, B22.

³⁷³ “Cuba’s Newest Hotel Brings Tropical Beauty Indoors,” *Boston Globe*, Dec. 8, 1957, B36.

³⁷⁴ On the devolution of tourism in the 1950s see Rosalie Schwartz, *Pleasure Island*. The initial development of mass tourism in Cuba was in the 1920s, when U.S. travelers flocked to Cuba to escape Prohibition. This period firmly established Cuba as a place of boozing, where one could escape the strictures of life in the United States.

³⁷⁵ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 142-144, 154-155, 169-170.

because they seemed to epitomize the imposition of U.S. interests in Cuba. Every U.S. business operating in Cuba meant one less business that was run by a Cuban. Castro's revolution aimed to take back Cuba for the Cubans.

In the second half of the 1950s, hotels, nightclubs, and casinos became symbolic to many Cubans of all that was wrong in Cuba, and throughout the revolutionary struggle, many revolutionary activities played out in these spaces as a means to reclaim them for the Cuban people. After Castro's government was firmly in place, these buildings continued to carry the negative connotations developed during the revolutionary fight and has been solidified in Cuban discourse. With his rise to power in 1959, Castro strategically reclaimed these sites of U.S. imperialism for the Cuban people. Most famously, he set up temporary headquarters in the Havana Hilton. Less known is that Castro repurposed the Copa Room at the Havana Riviera, the space used for the cabaret shows, and hosted a press conference there shortly after the triumph of the Revolution. During this press conference he underscored the popular nature of the Revolution and its commitment to having the Cuban people determine their own destiny and reject foreign interference. Moreover, the Castro regime legally reclaimed these sites when it nationalized these businesses and buildings. In the process of reclaiming these sites, the Castro regime solidified an understanding of the design of these hotels as insignificant or harmful. In particular, the design of the Havana Riviera hotel has been described as everything from thoughtless, to kitsch, to an imitation of Miami design, but most commonly it is referred to as all three—thoughtless Miami kitsch. The Havana Riviera was referred to simplistically as an example of imported Miami design, a characterization that served a larger program of vilifying all things associated with the United States. As a result, the notion of the interior design as a confident statement of Cuban identity was erased from discourse.

We have much to lose by continuing to subscribe to these appraisals. The current state of tourism reveals the inherent conflict in this simplistic understanding of the Tropicana's and the Havana Riviera's designs and suggests a shift in attitude toward an appreciation bordering on respect of these designs. The Tropicana still functions as a cabaret venue and the Cuban government has restored the Havana Riviera's interiors to closely resemble their original appearance. These approaches allow the Cuban state, which owns both of these buildings, to profit off of tourists' desires to experience a particular representation of Havana. This, in many ways, sensationalizes for touristic consumption the history of the mob and corruption in Havana, and in so doing legitimizes the Revolution's fight against this. The state's control over these sites renders them ideologically safe—they are relics of a time passed, one that the state can parade as being beaten and of having no fear of returning.

What we need to remember is that at the time of their construction, the Tropicana and the Havana Riviera promoted modern design as something that was not foreign, that was assimilated into local practices, and was, above all, desirable. In many ways, they represented the strong ties of Cuba to the economy and culture of the United States, and the struggle of Cuba to propose and realize its own national identity, which was not always at odds with U.S. attributes or modernity. The significance of the modern design of these two structures lies within its existence within competing, and at times conflicting, discursive agendas. This is evidenced by the numerous agents—U.S. and insular governments, owners and operators, guests and workers—who were involved in the creation and life of these buildings and realized the power of design in projecting identity and shaping international and cross-cultural encounters and opinions.



Figure 93. Postcard of Max Borges's Arcos de Cristal at the Tropicana (1951), circa 1950s. Collection of the author.



Figure 94. Igor Polevitzky, Havana Riviera, 1957. Photograph of the author, 2012.



Figure 95. Postcard by Conrad Massaguer, c. 1955. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 96. Tourism brochure, cover by Conrad Massaguer, 1955. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 97. Entry drive to Tropicana. Photograph of the author, 2012.



Figure 98. Aldo Gamba, fountain sculpture, circa 1919. Photo of the author, 2012.



Figure 99. Rita Longa, *Bailarina*, circa 1950. Photo of the author, 2012.



Figure 100. Max Borges Recio, Fox Residence, 1941, Playa, Havana, Cuba. Photography by the author, 2014.



Figure 101. Max Borges Recio, Medical and Surgical Center, 1948/1951, Plaza, Havana, Cuba.
Photograph by the author, 2014.



Figure 102. Tropicana Advertisement, circa 1956. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 103. Postcard showing Max Borges's Under the Stars stage (1952) at the Tropicana, circa 1950s. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 104. Drawing from promotional material of Borges's Casino (1954) at the Tropicana. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 105. Héctor Carrillo, Gallery at the Tropicana, 1956.



Figure 106. Max Borges Recio, Club Nautico, 1953, Havana, Cuba. Photograph of the author, 2014.



Figure 107. Beach Hut, 1958, Brisas del Mar, East Havana, Cuba. Photograph of the author, 2014.



Figure 108. Igor Plevitzky, Heller Residence #2 ("Birdcage House"), 1949, Miami, Florida. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 109. View of Miami hotels with Igor Plevitzky's Shelbourne Hotel on the left. Photograph probably circa 1940-1950. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.

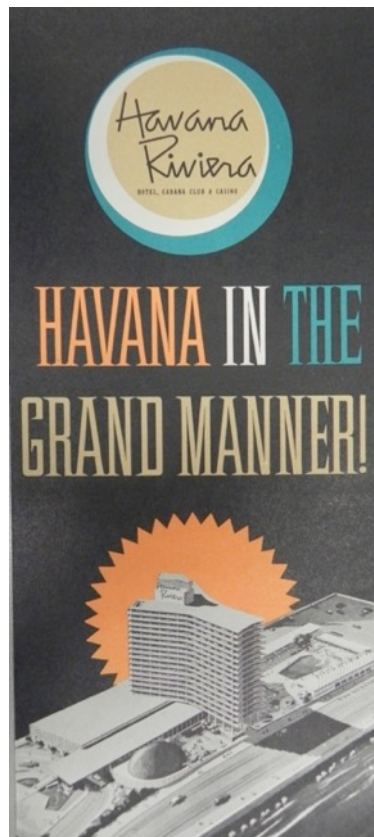


Figure 110. Ad for the Havana Riviera, circa 1957. Courtesy of the Wolfsonian, Florida International University.



Figure 111. Photograph of Malecón side of the Havana Riviera, circa 1957. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 112. Model of Polevitzky, Johnson & Associates' Carlton Terrace Apartments (1956) in Bal Harbour Village, Florida. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 113. Photograph of the Havana Riviera with Florencio Gelabert's *Danza* to the left in the foreground, circa 1957. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 114. Florencio Gelabert, *Ritmo Cubano*, 1957. Detail from figure 120. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.

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Figure 115. Eduardo Abela, *El triunfo de la Rumba*, circa 1928, oil on canvas.



Figure 116. Hipólito Hidalgo de Caviedes, mural in L'Aiglon Restaurant, 1957, Havana Riviera hotel. Photograph of the author, 2012.



Figure 117. Hipólito Hidalgo de Caviedes, mural in L'Aiglon Restaurant, 1957, Havana Riviera hotel. Photograph of the author, 2012.



Figure 118. Rolando López Dirube, mural in the Havana Riviera, 1957. Photograph of the author, 2012.

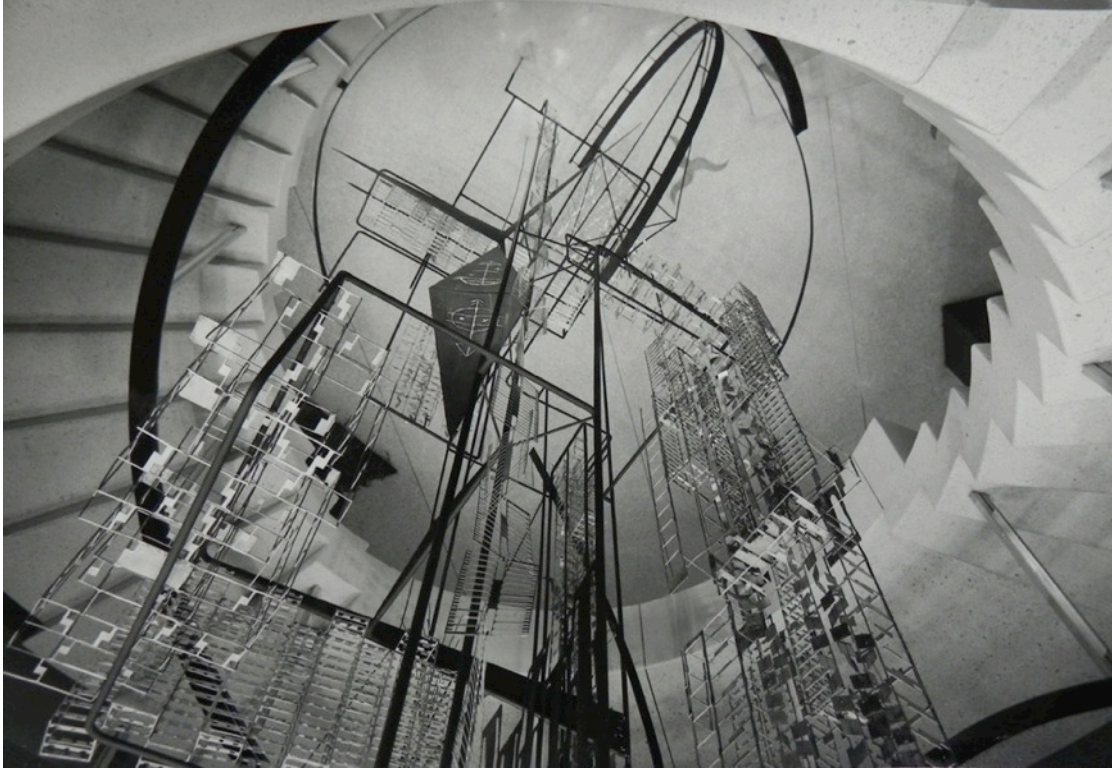


Figure 119. Photograph of Rolando López Dirube's *La Religión del Palo* (1957), circa 1957. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 120. Photograph of the Havana Riviera lobby, circa 1957. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 121. Photograph of the Havana Riviera lobby, circa 1957. Courtesy of HistoryMiami.



Figure 122. Castaways Motel, which had a Polynesian tiki theme throughout, circa 1950s, Miami. Collection of the author.



Figure 123. Postcard of Morris Lapidus's Americana hotel (1955) in Bal Harbour, Florida, date unknown. Collection of the author.

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Figure 124. Interior of Americana hotel with wall decoration referencing ancient indigenous American cultures.

VI. CONCLUSION

Part of the power that hotels wield stems from the fact that they are not seen as important civic structure, such as the government buildings that rank higher in a traditional hierarchy of building types. Moreover, part of their purpose is to simply promise fun, entertainment, leisure and other experiences that are contrary to normal, serious, or everyday life. This study has shown that, despite their superficial appearance, hotels are powerful agents of soft power. Not only do they wield soft power as key sites of tourism, but as designed works they exert soft power. It is within the seemingly trivial details such as wicker furniture, neo-Plateresque ornamentation, indoor ponds, and artwork by local artists that visitors and locals receive messages that shape attitudes and opinions about a place and culture.

Through the use of case studies, this dissertation illustrates the particularities of four different hotels, including their design and context in which they were built, as well as other supporting design examples. Through an emphasis on three themes of the modern, the historic, and the tropical that run throughout all of these designs, this study also suggests the ways in which continuities over time existed in hotel design and the type of touristic experience it provided. This conclusion serves to elucidate some of the arguments, findings, and comparative points raised in the previous chapters, as well as touch upon the influence of this historical period on hotel design today.

While some may initially dismiss San Juan and Havana as peripheral areas, this study demonstrates how these cities were, in fact, significant sites for the development of hotel design. The impact of hotel design in these two cities influenced a larger global building practice. Furthermore, as I argue throughout this dissertation, the images conveyed through the design,

specifically through the themes of the modern, historic, and tropical, played a powerful role in shaping understandings of place and culture. The particular programs of national development that each island was undertaking, combined with the unique relationships these islands had with the United States, influenced the way hotel design was used to shape perceptions of local identity and foreign relations.

By recognizing San Juan and Havana as centers of hotel design, this study offers a corrective to other approaches that would maintain that innovative design is always produced in specific “central” areas and merely copied or reproduced in other marginal areas around the globe. The study begins by first looking at the Gran Condado Vanderbilt, a hotel that at first glance seems to reinforce colonialist histories of empire. However, this project was integrated into larger suburban development projects, specifically the development of Condado, which was conceived for the high-class inhabitants of San Juan. While many may have seen the hotel as an imposition of the influence of U.S. business interests, this study complicates that history by showing how the city took on the hotel as a symbol of its modernity and good taste. Puerto Ricans could use the Gran Condado Vanderbilt as one example of their movement towards modernity. We see the local government’s clear appreciation of the power of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt to function as a symbol of the island years later when it fought to purchase the hotel with federal government funds. This set the stage for later episodes in government sponsored hotel building.

The ability to look at these hotel designs as globally influential stems in part from the willingness of the local government to utilize hotel building as a practice for identity projection as well as an opportunity for economic profit. In the case of the Hotel Nacional, Caribe Hilton, and Havana Riviera, the local government recognized the value in investing not just in tourism,

but in supporting the hotel design of grand suburban resorts as a means of projecting a national identity. Of course, in each hotel the particular image of national identity was different, was not always supported by the citizens, and always trod a fine line between conveying an image that maintained self-respect and met tourist expectations. But in all cases the projected image was defined by employing the categories of the modern, the historic, and the tropical to varying extents and in varying forms and combinations or contrasts.

In recognizing that hotel design was a powerful form of soft power, these governments or hotel owners had to support designs that made a statement. As a result, the strikingly extravagant hotels that were built had an impact beyond San Juan and Havana. Images of these hotels spread throughout the world. The Hotel Nacional de Cuba was an exceptionally grand, expensive hotel that, essentially, concluded the period of Beaux-Arts hotel design at a level that was unprecedented. The Caribe Hilton created waves among the architectural world, ultimately serving as one of the groundbreaking designs that caused subsequent hotel building to adopt International Style-inspired design approaches. The Tropicana continued in this vein, proclaiming the architectural environment in Cuba to be truly innovative in a way that meshed modern designs with notions of cultural heritage. The Havana Riviera followed suite as well, an important piece of an urban design that, through its architecture, proclaimed Havana as a modern, cosmopolitan city.

Of course, as these case studies have shown, we cannot view the agents involved in these projects and their interests in black and white terms. While the government was involved to varying degrees—whether sponsoring the project (Hotel Nacional and Caribe Hilton), providing legislation that encouraged private business (Havana Riviera), or approving urban development plans that were attractive to hotel developers (Gran Condado Vanderbilt)—they were only one

component in a complex relationship between multiple agents. These case studies illustrate that in addition to the local government, local business interests, U.S. business interests, tourism boosters (both local and U.S.-sponsored), tourists, and locals all played a part in the conception and life of these hotels. Each case study reveals a unique mix of these agents and illustrates their connection to the hotel design, allowing us to see how various, and sometimes differing, interests are manifest in the building's design. For example, the Caribe Hilton's "ultra-modern" form reveals the unwillingness of the Puerto Rican government to consider Conrad Hilton's interest in a Mediterranean Revival design, while in the case of the Havana Riviera, the Cuban government can only claim a role in the design insofar as legislation stipulated the construction must cost at least two million dollars and allowed tall buildings. By showing the complexity of the people and entities involved in these hotels, this study complicates traditional histories that would suggest unidirectional flows of influence in U.S. empire, whether in terms of the politics, economics or architecture.

By tracing the themes of the modern, the historic, and the tropical in each of these hotels, this dissertation illustrates just how unique each hotel project was, at least at first glance. However, when we push beyond the differences, we can see how these three themes actually allow us to appreciate the continuities in all of these designs. By tracing these continuities, this study asks readers to rethink traditional understandings of architectural modernism. Rather than seeing a sharp contrast between post-World War II modernist architecture and that which came before, this study illustrates how previous methods of considering style limit the ways we view architectural history and reinforce the International Style modernist discourse. The visual contrast between the architecture of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the Havana Riviera

becomes much less severe when we consider style as only one aspect of the design to be analyzed.

The theme of the modern runs strongly throughout all of the hotels under study. Since the birth of the modern hotel, architects were concerned with creating hotel designs that offered the most up-to-date in modern technologies and amenities. Indeed, the notion of modernity is tied to the core understanding of the hotel as a “machine of efficiency” that must service, accommodate, feed, and bathe a great number of people. As more hotels were built, the incorporation of modern amenities as a means to compete with other hotels became increasingly important. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt expressed its modernity through the vast number of private bathrooms incorporated throughout the hotel (which necessitated advanced systems of plumbing), its kitchens filled with modern equipment that could feed all of the guests, the automobiles available for rent, and the lobby furniture that referenced hygiene. Though the details of modernity change over time, the chief concerns remained the same. Attending to such issues as plumbing, cooking, and sanitation, the Hotel Nacional’s architects conceived of a design that addressed all of this and more through modern technologies. The latest in plumbing and bathroom fixtures, cutting edge culinary equipment, and high-capacity laundry machines were integral to the design. Additional touches such as pneumatic tubes and a telautograph system were details that helped situate the Hotel Nacional at the highest levels of hotel design. The concern with modern equipment and services continued in the postwar period. The idea of modernity evolved in this period as air-conditioning, push button technology, and modern pools become concerns that the designer had to address in order to produce a cutting edge hotel design.

The major shift in thinking concerning the modern that we see over the period of time under study is in how the modern should look. The connotations of hygiene that the wicker

furniture of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt held were replaced with the easy-to-clean forms of Jens Risom's chairs in guestrooms at the Caribe Hilton. The aesthetic was different, but the goal was the same. The unornamented cubic forms and open plan of International Style-inspired modernism replaced the Beaux-Arts design of the Gran Condado Vanderbilt. Both approaches were concerned with functionality and efficiency—they just came in different “packaging.”

The notion of the tropical is visually apparent in all of these hotels, and while it takes on different visual forms, at the core the various representations are all concerned with expressing an exoticness or otherness, largely through an emphasis on vegetation and climate. The expression of tropicality in hotel design was predicated on the conveyance of modernity as well. Without assurance that these sites were modern enough, guests would not have been receptive to tropicality, something that, on its own, carried connotations of primitiveness or barbarism, lack of evolution or progress, and an unsafe climate. Therefore, hotels had to convey tropicality in a manner that did not overwhelm the guests. The visual form reinforced that modern man had control over tropicality and this was conveyed in various ways depending on the design. For example, the Gran Condado Vanderbilt had gardens organized in neat rectilinear forms, while organic curves defined the landscaping of the Caribe Hilton. Despite the difference in form, the grounds of both hotels were defined by the proliferation of vegetation, which reinforced the tropical. The containment of this vegetation within a man-made design underscored the idea that man had tamed tropicality.

Likewise, while the visual forms were different, all of the hotels were concerned with addressing climate in their designs. The way the designs did this ranges from the Hotel Nacional's canvas overhangs and the Caribe Hilton's concrete grills, which both provided shade, to the Gran Condado Vanderbilt's open loggias and the Havana Riviera's air conditioning, which

both provided cooler air inside the public areas of the hotels. Tropicality was also referenced in other design details of the hotels. Historic styles that referenced the Mediterranean, North Africa or the Middle East carried with them the connotations of warmer climes associated with these places. Furniture that incorporated native materials, such as the mahogany furniture in the Hotel Nacional (mahogany is a tropical wood) and the ARKLU furniture that incorporated native woods and fibers also reminded guests of their presence in a tropical location.

While the historicist styles of the pre-World War II hotels makes it seem as though the notion of the historic was a bigger issue at that time, I have tried to show how the historic was a continuous preoccupation that was just addressed and manifest in different ways. The Gran Condado Vanderbilt and the Hotel Nacional took on the concept of the historic in a more visual and literal way in the hotel design through its historicist architecture. This, however, was not a slavish recreation of a specific historical style, but was an adoption and fusion of various aspects of different historical styles in order to create a unique design. I would argue that the reinterpretation, as opposed to copying, drawn from historical styles created designs that were visual signifiers that the design was also modern. The designs gave visitors a taste of the Spanish colonial past through tile work, exposed wood roof beams, or colonial style furniture, but it was not the only design factor. This taste allowed just enough of the historic, for just like the tropical, the historic could not be overwhelming or else visitors would fear for their safety in that foreign place.

The postwar hotels show us two different ways of taking on the historic. In the case of the Caribe Hilton, the historic was not located within the architecture or interior design of the hotel, but positioned as a contrast or complement to the hotel through historic structures and spaces that were geographically and discursively connected to the hotel. In terms of geography, Fortín San

Gerónimo, located right next to the hotel, offered a foil to the new modern Caribe Hilton. Also, promotional materials reveal to us the importance of the restoration of San Juan Viejo in the 1950s and its packaging as a tourist site. Historic San Juan Viejo was often discussed in brochures and flyers right next to the Caribe Hilton. Together, the two proposed to the potential tourist the complete package—accommodations in a modern hotel and daily sightseeing in the historic city center. In Cuba, the historic was addressed less through contrast with the modern and more by incorporating the themes of heritage and tradition into new, modern designs. The Tropicana cabaret and Havana Riviera hotel positioned the notion of *cubanidad* as dynamic and evolving. At the Tropicana, performances that addressed cultural traditions were enacted on modern stages and within architecturally innovative spaces. The lobby of the Havana Riviera was teeming with Cuban avant-garde art, all of which touched on aspects of Cuban heritage, with a particular emphasis on the marginalized sphere of Afro-Cuban religions. Conveying notions of the historic was a significant goal of hotel owners and the government as it was a major attraction for tourists and a means, in some cases, to promote national identity programs. In this respect, San Juan and Havana, with their rich histories and cultures, had an advantage over other tropical destinations, such as Florida, which struggled to find a way to define itself in the face of little heritage.

Looking at these hotel designs through the lens of the three themes allows us to see how the International Style modernism of the postwar hotels fundamentally functioned the way the Beaux-Arts forms did in the pre-World War II hotels. The striking visual contrast between the two styles of hotels was more a shift in emphasis on how to localize these hotels through the visual for foreign visitors, rather than a wholesale change in thinking. The postwar hotels referenced the tropics much more strongly than the Beaux-Arts hotels, and I argue that this

approach was a way of replacing the historical theme that was stronger in the earlier hotels.

These shifts show us that while the three thematic categories are usually considered distinct, and at times even oppositional, they, in fact, often intersect and overlap. In effect, just as these three categories allow us to understand how hotel design functions, these hotels shed new light on the way these themes operate.

A. **Shifts in Hotel Building and Tourism**

Although this study stops at the year 1959, tourism clearly did not end on the two islands. Certain consistencies in hotel building continued to some extent and tourism marched on in one form or another, but this moment also marks a turning point in tourism on the two islands. In the 1960s, Puerto Rico underwent a shift consistent with other trends in the Caribbean toward developing ex-urban, beach-oriented, all-inclusive resorts while still targeting the U.S. market. This shift had a profound effect on hotel building on the island. In Cuba, there was a dramatic turn as relations with the United States deteriorated and Fidel Castro focused on developing national instead of international tourism.³⁷⁶ These changes were informed by contemporary events and trends while continuing to use established forms as a frame of reference.

As discussed in the chapter on the Caribe Hilton, the Puerto Rican government continued to control tourism growth throughout the 1950s and did not hold back on hotel building. Historian Dennis Merrill has chronicled how this decade was not without its share of controversy regarding the growth of tourism and the form it took even though Puerto Rico was growing its tourism in a much more controlled way compared to other Caribbean destinations. Some were concerned that overbuilding was going to occur in Condado. In addition, consultants warned that

³⁷⁶ While there was a strong Russian presence in the 1960s, Castro focused official government tourism programs on tourism for Cuban citizens.

vacationers were reporting that San Juan was becoming too much like any other tropical city and were complaining that they were missing the experience of foreign culture that was part of the allure of a trip outside of the United States.³⁷⁷ Rafael Pico, head of the island Planning Commission, urged the government to step back and let private investors worry about footing the bill for large, expensive hotels.³⁷⁸ The new tourism plan that Fomento released in 1956 seemed to heed this warning by offering a multifaceted approach that, while still focusing on building up Condado, left more economic responsibility in the hands of private investors and included plans that turned attention outside of San Juan to Dorado Beach, located west of San Juan, and Luquillo Beach, located twenty miles to the east.

The example of Dorado Beach Resort illustrates how these shifts happened over time, and that, in fact, various trends in hotel design always existed but were more common or fashionable at different moments (Figure 125). Since the 1940s, Laurence and Nelson Rockefeller had been interested in tourism, especially decentralized tourism, as a means to improve relations between Latin American countries and the United States and to promote private business there. Laurence Rockefeller formed a company called RockResorts with the intent to build decentralized, nature-centered resorts starting first in the Caribbean. After converting an old sugar plantation in St. John into the Caneel Bay Resort (1956), Rockefeller turned towards Puerto Rico in a move that also reaffirmed the family's commitment to assisting with the economic development of Puerto Rico.³⁷⁹ In 1953, Teodoro Moscoso introduced Laurence Rockefeller to the estate of Alfred T. Livingston, which had already been chosen by Robert Trent Jones, Sr. as the site of a golf course, and Rockefeller bought the 225 acres of

³⁷⁷ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 201.

³⁷⁸ Ibid.

³⁷⁹ Ward, *Packaged Vacations*, 16.

beachfront property. The new Dorado Beach Resort opened December 1958, partially funded by loans from the Puerto Rican government.

As historian Evan Ward has asserted, these first two RockResorts were pioneering in the field of low-density resort design.³⁸⁰ Focusing on nature as the central theme of a relaxing vacation, Rockefeller strove to blend the modern cottages, beach houses, and auxiliary buildings, as well as the renovated extant plantation building, with the natural setting. There was a stress on horizontal, rather than vertical development, and an attempt to remove all references to modern civilization, such as telephone wires, from view. However, guests enjoyed all of the attributes of modern living, including air-conditioning in all rooms. Designed by the New York architectural firm of Goldstone and Dearborn, the new buildings were largely two stories tall and were expressed in a tropical modern style in the footsteps of earlier work by Toro and Ferrer. The architecture emphasized balconies in order to take advantage of breezes, as well as bris-soleils to provide ventilation and shade. The extant buildings of the Livingston estate were from the 1930s and Rockefeller kept their Spanish Colonial style. From its opening, the Dorado Beach Resort was a success and Rockefeller immediately began thinking of an expansion. Toro & Ferrer designed additional buildings for the complex in keeping with the low-slung, horizontal profile of the resort. Between 1959 and 1962, one hundred more rooms were added, and another seventy-two added between 1964 and 1966.

But Rockefeller still had much bigger ideas and he partnered with Eastern Airlines in 1967 to create the high-rise Cerromar Beach Hotel as a new addition to the Dorado Beach Resort. Designed in a modernist idiom that by then was the norm for hotel design, the new addition to the complex was an eight-story hotel with 503 rooms and suites that was designed specifically with conferences in mind. Opened in 1972, the Cerromar Beach Hotel was a far cry

³⁸⁰ Ibid.

from the intimate beach houses and cottages of the Dorado Beach Resort, and the large amount of rooms it offered were ill timed with the general oversupply of rooms in San Juan combined with the slump in tourism that occurred in Puerto Rico after 1969.

In the opposite direction of Dorado Beach, the spread of hotels out east from the city center created a string of accommodations that reached out to the updated Isla Verde airport. One of the first built out in this area east of Condado was the Americana Hotel (1961), designed by Morris Lapidus. In addition, after La Concha opened in 1958, the Puerto Rican government got involved with another hotel project. This time the Muñoz government partnered up with the Intercontinental Hotel Group, a subsidiary of Pan American, to build a new hotel in Isla Verde. The result was El San Juan (1965), a 400-room hotel on prime oceanfront property.

While hotel building was spreading outward in the 1960s it was still occurring closer to the city center. For example, in 1963 the Puerto Rico Sheraton Hotel, owned by a group of Puerto Ricans that formed the Enterprise Hotel Development Corporation but leased to the Sheraton Corporation, opened on Ashford Avenue in Condado. Designed by Toro & Ferrer, the 450-room hotel with twenty-two floors was the tallest building on the island, and helped reinforce this notion of a modern, progressive Puerto Rico conveyed through hotel design.

However, as much as new constructions were meant to convey a positive image of the island, the extensive building in Condado and other areas near the downtown area of San Juan incited concern in many. As architectural historian Jerry Torres has noted, Toro & Ferrer's design for the Sheraton was not much more than an "open box" design meant to meet functional needs and was missing the richness of earlier designs that engaged more fully with local climate and culture.³⁸¹ In addition, all of these tall hotels and condominiums, of which the Sheraton was the exemplar, were obstructing ocean views, and as there was already a discourse that bound

³⁸¹ Torres, "Invention of the Gates of Eden," 161.

national identity with tropical nature, some perceived the new form of the built environment as threatening to the Puerto Rican environment.³⁸² The race toward assimilation with the United States in the 1960s that Torres has recounted, combined with Merrill's analysis of growing clashes between locals and tourists, decline in the urban environment (such as greater pollution, sewage problems, and heavy automobile traffic), and increased urban crime contributed to conditions that did not appeal to tourists.³⁸³ The year 1969 witnessed a decline in the number of tourists, the first since after World War II. While certainly the situation on the island may have contributed to less interest in Puerto Rico as a destination, Merrill has also attributed the decline to the cyclical global economy, which is often first seen or is more severe in the tourist industry, as well as the high price of Puerto Rico vacations compared to newer Caribbean resort locations and highly-competitive airfares to Europe.³⁸⁴

The history of tourism after 1959 at first glance might seem to have taken a much sharper turn in Cuba than in Puerto Rico. When Fidel Castro came to power at the beginning of January in 1959, he immediately addressed the issue of the role of the tourism industry in the Cuban economy and its effect on Cuban culture. On February 19, 1959, Castro appeared on television and delivered a four-hour speech that stressed the importance of tourism for the Cuban economy. He was clear to differentiate what type of tourism was appropriate for the new revolutionary state, however. The former tourism economy that was based on gambling had to be exchanged for one that instead capitalized on the natural beauty of the island.³⁸⁵

To shape and promulgate what was being presented as a new approach to tourism and one that was ideologically congruent with the goals of the revolution, Castro approved in the

³⁸² Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 224.

³⁸³ Torres, "Invention of the Gates of Eden," 161; Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 223-230.

³⁸⁴ Merrill, *Negotiating Paradise*, 234. As an industry reliant upon expendable income, economic dips and scares are often first reflected in the tourism industry.

³⁸⁵ Ward, *Packaged Vacations*, 99.

same year the creation of two new entities, the *Junta de Fomento Turístico* (Tourism Development Board) and the *Instituto Nacional de la Industria Turística* (National Institute of the Tourism Industry), in June and November, respectively. As historian Evan Ward has argued in his comparison of tourism programs under the Batista regime and the Castro government, the rhetoric of a drastic shift in an approach to tourism was stronger than the reality. Since the new tourism organizations of the revolution primarily stepped into the structure that they inherited from the Batista government, Ward concludes that they drew upon existing ideas of Cuban tourism reformers who worked for the ITC under Batista.³⁸⁶ The new plans were primarily focused on the development plans of Armando Maribona, who argued in the early 1950s that Cuba should focus on developing beach tourism as well as paying more attention to cultivating culture and heritage tourism, with an attention to old buildings. Perhaps luckily for Castro, this approach to tourism development was largely pushed to the side in favor of developing urban tourism in Havana geared toward gambling, as discussed in chapter four. Thus, Castro could promote beach and nature tourism as a revolutionary idea and in sharp contrast to the tourism of Batista, even though this form of nationalist tourism existed prior to 1959.

In speeches he gave to the Hotel Workers Union and the Food Workers Union, both delivered on June 16, 1906, Castro declared that Cuban tourism would now cater to Cuban nationals rather than international visitors.³⁸⁷ With this new model of tourism, Castro envisioned that all Cuban workers would get a paid vacation and that this leisure empowerment would allow them to see the wonders of the island.³⁸⁸ Rather than the upper class traveling to international destinations such as Paris or the United States and spending their money there, Castro envisioned a more populist tourism that was geared toward retaining Cuban money within its own markets.

³⁸⁶ Ibid, 88.

³⁸⁷ Ibid, 49.

³⁸⁸ Ibid, 100.

To implement this type of populist tourism a number of initiatives and reforms took place that had powerful ideological import. For example, formerly private beaches were made public for all Cubans to enjoy, in 1960 the Havana Hilton was renamed the Havana Libre (Free Havana), and in 1961 the government nationalized tourist sector property.

The Castro government, as part of larger ideological goals of concentrating less on Havana and more on rural areas and developing the rest of the country, focused on increasing tourism infrastructure throughout the island. In 1959, a new three-year tourism development plan designated fifty million dollars for the first year to build roads to improve access throughout the island and to build hotels in remote locations.³⁸⁹ One of these was a hotel to be constructed in Viñales, a town in rural Pinar del Rio on the western end of the island. Likewise, the government was committed to the underdeveloped eastern end of the island, and its future plans included the completion of the Hotel Jagua in Cienfuegos (started under the Batista government), a hotel in Santiago de Cuba, and motels at many beach towns. One of the major goals of the plan was to promote all of Cuba as a tourist destination, encouraging vacationers to visit all coasts and the interior of the island, not just Havana.³⁹⁰

However, significant hotel construction did not occur until 1970 and when it did, although a lot of it was outside of Havana, more than sixty percent of it was located in the capital cities of the other provinces.³⁹¹ The majority of these hotels utilized a prefabricated system of construction popular in Cuba at the time, the Girón System, which was developed for school architecture and was then applied to other social building projects. The Castro government applauded this system, and prefabrication in general, for offering solutions in terms of successful

³⁸⁹ Ibid, 99.

³⁹⁰ Ibid, 100. This was consistent with the larger aims of the revolution to place less attention on Havana and more efforts on developing and raising the quality of living in the rest of the island.

³⁹¹ *Arquitectura Hoteles en la Revolución Cubana* (La Habana: Poligrafito MICONS, 1986), 15.

space-function, structural and technical systems that could be easily reproduced in all locations. And while they could be easily reproduced, the panels came in various designs and colors that allowed the architect to individualize, to a certain extent, each project.³⁹² Between 1975 and 1978 nineteen hotels, with a total of 2,500 rooms, were constructed, followed by eighteen more hotels with 2,400 rooms between 1980 and 1981.

The project of hotel building that took place in the late 1970s was related to a growth of foreign tourism that had started around 1970. Indeed, after 1959 tourism in Cuba had changed fairly drastically. Castro's commitment to focusing on tourism in Cuba for Cubans offered him a relatively cheap way to continue tourism and keep it in line with the ideology of the revolution. After 1959, as he closed casinos and nationalized hotels, fewer U.S. travelers came to Cuba, and this was clearly compounded by rapidly devolving relations between the United States and Cuba and palpable anti-American tourism sentiments expressed by the Cuban government. The nail in the coffin for U.S. tourism to Cuba was the United States' 1960 trade embargo against Cuba, which effectively prohibited travel to Cuba.³⁹³

B. The Modern Becomes Historic and Other Tales of Preservation

Despite the decline in U.S. tourism to both islands after 1959 and the effect this had on hotel building in the capital cities, today tourism is a major industry in both islands. In addition, the type of tourism each island has encouraged is shaped by and in turn reinforces, current

³⁹² Despite being promoted as a system that allowed for individualization of projects, it is very apparent which hotels were built using the Girón System.

³⁹³ The inability for U.S. citizens to travel freely to Cuba is based out of economic sanctions. Under the current regulations, U.S. citizens are not prohibited from traveling to Cuba, but they are prohibited from making monetary transactions in Cuba and cannot accept gifts that could have a monetary value (such as lodging or food). It is effectively impossible for a U.S. citizen to visit Cuba without breaking these economic restrictions. However, specific licenses, such as academic, professional, religious, and humanitarian, do allow a small number of U.S. citizens to travel to Cuba. U.S. citizens who are related to Cuban nationals that live in Cuba are also allowed to visit the island.

diplomatic relationships with the United States. Moreover, the built landscape of tourism represents the current attitude and practices on the part of the host country and visitor. I want to conclude by addressing an historic post-World War II hotel in Havana and the ways in which it demonstrates how the three themes of the modern, historic and tropical are still relevant in hotel design today.

At the beginning of 2014, the Hotel Capri, one of the most notable of the modernist hotels constructed in the 1950s, reopened its doors (Figure 126). Built in late 1957, the tall, slim hotel occupies a portion of a city block located close to the Hotel Nacional at the corner of Calles 21 and N. Funded by Miami hoteliers and mobsters, the Hotel Capri was conceived as a way to take advantage of Batista's Hotel Law 2074, which was also used at the Havana Riviera. Cuban architect José Canaves Ugalde designed the nineteen-floor hotel that had a rooftop pool as a design solution to address the limited footprint of the hotel. The idea of "swimming in the sky" was an attractive modern addition to the modern styling of a hotel that was devoted primarily to promoting gambling in its casino.

The notorious gangsters who ran the hotel and casino left when Castro came to power and the hotel subsequently became property of the state. The Hotel Capri became run-down and shabby over time, like other hotels of the 1950s, as these structures and international tourism were simply not a priority of the Castro regime. In 1997, militant anti-Castro exiles detonated a bomb in the lobby, inflicting even more damage to the aging hotel. The hotel finally closed its doors in the early 2000s and during the same decade underwent renovation and restoration efforts.

The Hotel Capri that has just reopened is a model example of the current government's approach to hotel design and tourism. Like the majority of hotels on the island, the Hotel Capri is

a joint business venture between the state and a foreign operating company, in this case the Spanish hotel chain NH Hoteles SA, in which the Cuban government retains a majority share of the business.³⁹⁴ Consistent with a totalitarian state, the government ultimately retains control over everything and with this in mind we can look at what the design of the hotel suggests about current attitudes about national identity.

The Cuban government has finally embraced the economic opportunities of taking what was once modern, the hotels of the 1950s, and packaging them as historic for tourists with a hunger for nostalgia. In an ironic move, the Cuban government now financially profits off of packaging and selling a part of Cuban history that they struggled to quash with the revolution in 1959. As argued in chapter four, this move is possible, and comfortable, for the Cuban government because there is no fear of a return to the Havana of the 1950s, which, after more than fifty years of communism/socialism, is no longer a threat. Indeed, the ability to package and sell this history, something that could only be done after enough time had elapsed, most likely makes the current government feel even more secure because it creates even more distance between the pre-Communist past and the socialist present.

In renovating the hotel, designers have restored and preserved a number of original pieces, such as the lobby chandeliers and lobby desk, to maintain the 1950s feel. This decade is historicized in the old Havana cityscape photos that decorate the guest rooms. The Cuban government uses this historic design to cash in on the lost, glamorous past of the 1950s. However, the government also had to concern itself with producing a modern hotel. New

³⁹⁴ This arrangement is the most typical type of business arrangement, which has predominated in Cuba since the 1990s when the government started looking to other parts of the world for foreign hotel chains to operate state-owned hotels. This filled a deficiency on the part of the Cuban government to run a hotel efficiently and according to contemporary practices that meet today's tourist's desires. However, as I write this, a new law in Cuba that will soon go into effect allows foreign companies to own one hundred percent of business ventures in Cuba. This is part of a larger program of economic reforms designed to boost the Cuban economy and put less financial pressure on the Cuban government.

amenities, such as Wi-Fi, have been incorporated into the hotel. In a country with antiquated public telecommunications technology, and element such as Wi-Fi is no small detail. Likewise, the rooftop pool, restored and reopened, provides guests with the reminder that they are in a tropical setting.

Just as with the La Concha Hotel in San Juan, the Hotel Capri demonstrates how what was once the modern, or contemporary, has now been fixed into a consumable past. This mid-century past is contrasted with modern amenities that meet the expectations of today's tourists, such as high-speed internet and Wi-Fi, spas, and fitness centers. The mid-century historicism of the hotels is complemented by continued efforts to restore and preserve colonial centers, which have become even more important with the growing interest in cultural and heritage tourism. Preserved in their original forms to a great extent, these modernist hotels continue to convey notions of the tropical through their emphasis on tropical vegetation and architectural features that highlight climate, such as concrete screens and blurred distinctions between interior and exterior.

As mentioned earlier in the discussion of the Hotel Capri, this hotel was the site of a terrorist attack in 1997, making it part of a larger phenomenon of terrorist attacks that take place at hotels. Between 2002 and 2011, eighteen major terrorist attacks against hotels occurred worldwide.³⁹⁵ These attacks were carried out predominantly by groups affiliated with al-Qaeda, revealing current geo-politics. A report on these attacks cites the opportunity for mass casualty as the motivating factor.³⁹⁶ What it does not explicitly cover are the types of people who would be hurt and the types of hotels that are targeted. Many of these hotels are recognizable chains associated with the United States, such as Marriott, Intercontinental, Hilton, and Days Inn, and

³⁹⁵ "Threat Assessment: Major Terror Attacks against Hotels, 2002-2011," (New York: New York State Intelligence Center, 2012), 2.

³⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

many of these hotels cater to westerners. An ideological basis and motive obviously exists for the hotels that are targeted.

That hotels are targets for terrorist attacks reveals how politically charged these structures are. While in some cases they are seen by locals as an imposition of a foreign influence, this study has shown how many hotels reflect local influence, which shapes guests' and locals' attitudes and opinions as well. From the nineteenth into the twenty-first century tourism has grown into one of the largest industries in the world, second only to oil. Though far less common a topic in scholarly debates than the politics of oil, tourism is equally powerful in shaping local affairs and global relations. This study underscores the potent role of art and architecture in tourism and encourages us to be more critical of the way the design of tourist spaces continues to be a key force in shaping foreign relations, global economics, identity politics, and cultural exchange. The seemingly carefree vacations of tropical ambiance and colonial charm in the Caribbean were so much more than they appear at first glance and Spanish Caribbean hotel design shaped attitudes and practices in ways that still resonate today.



Figure 125. Photograph of Goldstone & Deaborn's Dorado Beach Resort (1958) in Dorado Puerto Rico, probably from circa 1958. Courtesy of the Archivo de Arquitectura y Construcción, Universidad de Puerto Rico.



Figure 126. Contemporary photograph of José Canaves Ugalde's Hotel Capri (1957) in Havana, Cuba. Photograph of the author, 2014.

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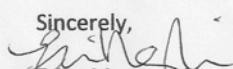
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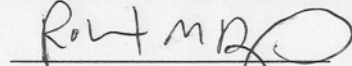
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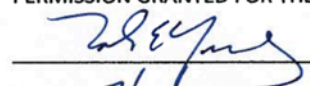
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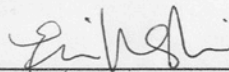
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