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# ALFRED I. DUPONT BUILDING

169 EAST FLAGLER STREET

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## Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI  
PLANNING AND ZONING DEPARTMENT  
TO THE HISTORIC AND ENVIRONMENTAL PRESERVATION BOARD  
ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF  
ALFRED I. DUPONT BUILDING  
169 EAST FLAGLER STREET  
AS A HISTORIC SITE

Prepared by Sarah E. Eaton,  
Historic Preservation Planner

Accepted by \_\_\_\_\_  
Chairman, Heritage  
Conservation Board

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. 1993-32  
Date 09/28/93

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**I. GENERAL INFORMATION**

Historic Name:

Alfred I. duPont Building

Current Name:

Alfred I. duPont Building

Location:

169 East Flagler Street  
Miami, Florida 33131

Present Owner:

Alfred I. duPont Building Partnership  
Attn.: Joel Benes  
34 S.E. 2nd Avenue, Suite #701  
Miami, Florida 33131

Present Use:

Commercial

Zoning District:

CBD

Tax Folio Number:

01-0111-070-1010

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

Lots 18, 19, 20, and the easterly 35 feet of Lot 17, less the easterly 10 feet of Lot 20, of Block 117 of the plat of MIAMI NORTH (PB B-41)

HC Zoning Classification:

Historic Site

# ALFRED I DU PONT BUILDING

169 E. FLAGLER STREET



location



site plan

## II. SIGNIFICANCE

### Specific Dates:

1939

### Architect:

Marsh and Saxelbye

### Statement of Significance:

The Alfred I. duPont Building is architecturally significant because it is one of the most representative Moderne structures in Miami. Designed by the architectural firm of Marsh and Saxelbye, the building reflects an excellent local adaptation of a prevailing national style as evidenced in the decoration throughout the major interior spaces. The duPont Building also possesses important historical associations with the development of downtown Miami during the period of time between the World Wars.

The presence of the local flora and fauna, as well as the painted Seminole Indian motifs, throughout the interior surfaces of the building is indicative of the prevailing 1930s movement that emphasized "regionalism" in commercial architecture. The visual composition of the duPont Building makes it one of the most outstanding examples of the Moderne style of architecture in Dade County. The Moderne style was popularized by way of the projects undertaken by the Works Progress Administration, but its presence is a rarity within Miami's built environment. The duPont Building is architecturally noteworthy for the excellence of its design, materials, and detailing.

Begun in 1937, the duPont Building was the first skyscraper to be built in Miami since the completion of the Dade County Courthouse in 1928. The building constituted the first major construction project privately undertaken in Miami after the Bust in 1926. As such, it signaled Miami's economic recovery from the Depression.

Completed at a cost of \$2.5 million in 1939, the building was the headquarters for the Florida National Bank. The Florida National Bank of Miami was organized in 1931 by Alfred I. duPont. Originally located at 118 East Flagler Street, the bank steadily grew in assets, and bank officials in 1937 announced the construction of a new, modern banking facility. Dedicated to the memory of Alfred I. duPont, the building replaced the Halcyon Hotel, an early Miami landmark.

The building was a showcase of Miami when it opened in 1939 and displayed the innovative idea of placing the bank lobby on the second floor. Retail stores occupied the street level, while the bank claimed floors two through five. Office spaces on the remaining floors were leased to various tenants.

The Alfred I. duPont Building has important historical associations with the military activity present in South Florida during the Second World War. During the war, the duPont Building was commissioned by the United States Navy and served as the fleet headquarters for the 7th Naval District until June 30, 1946. The Navy command took over two entire floors of the building and installed a huge map of the Gulf Sea Frontier territory. During its occupation by the United States Navy, the building was dubbed the "U.S.S. Neversink."

#### Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

As stated above, the Alfred I. duPont Building is significant in the historical, aesthetic, and architectural heritage of the city; possesses integrity of design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association; and meets the following criteria for designation:

3. Exemplify the historical, cultural, political, economic, or social trends of the community.

Begun in 1937, the duPont Building was the first skyscraper to be built in Miami since the completion of the Dade County Courthouse in 1928. The building's construction heralded Miami's economic recovery from the Depression.

5. Embody those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.

The duPont Building is Miami's most outstanding example of the Moderne architectural style.

7. Contain elements of design, detail, materials or craftsmanship of outstanding quality or which represent a significant innovation or adaptation to the South Florida environment.

The duPont Building is noteworthy for the excellence of its design, materials, and detailing, particularly its limestone and granite facing and its subdued, relief ornamentation.

### III. DESCRIPTION

#### Present and Original Appearance:

The Alfred I. duPont Building is a rectangular 17-story structure executed in the Moderne style of architecture and embellished with features derived from the Art Deco influences of the late 1920s. The construction of the building was carried out according to plans provided by the architectural firm of Marsh and Saxelbye from Jacksonville, Florida. The building's structure is comprised of a steel frame skeleton and its exterior walls are clad with stone. The building is situated at the northwest corner of East Flagler Street and N.E. 2nd Avenue.

The exterior of the building follows the classic formula for "high-rise" construction. The building has a base, which in this case is a band of black granite wrapping around the building at the first story level. The base provides the support for a simple vertical shaft which emphasizes the height of the building, in this case, a repetitive fenestration pattern. Lastly, the shaft is topped by an articulated roofline, provided in the duPont Building by a series of setbacks facing N.E. 2nd Avenue.

The ground floor of the duPont Building is comprised of a series of storefronts set within the vertical band of black granite. These storefronts are entered at the sidewalk level and are delineated by a series of metal and glass doors and windows. The main entrances to the building are located at the center of each principal elevation and consist of double glass doors set within brass frames. Also located on the first story of the building are small octagonal windows set within the black granite cladding.

The second story of the duPont Building is rather tall, to accommodate the bank lobby which was deliberately placed there when the building was constructed. The first story lobby merely serves as an elevator lobby and also contains escalators leading up to the second floor. The height of the second story is visible on the building's exterior by the placement of tall multi-pane casement-type windows set within metal frames. Decorative metal grille work is found at the transom level of the second story windows.

Above the second story windows is a masonry band that serves as a belt course around the building elevations. The band is characterized by stylized floral decoration derived from the Art Deco style. From the third to the fifteenth floor, the fenestration pattern of the building is repeated vertically. There are 14 bays across the eastern elevation and 12 bays across the southern elevation. On the eastern elevation, single windows are placed at the end bays and the center six bays. The remaining bays contain paired windows. The southern elevation contains single windows on the end bays and paired windows throughout the remaining bays. The sixteenth floor of the building is set back from the East Flagler

Street side and occupies only eight bays across the N.E. 2nd Avenue side. The seventeenth story is further set back to a width of only six bays across.

The fenestration of the duPont Building contains the original windows which are comprised of two-over-two, double-hung sash set within metal frames. The paired windows are separated horizontally by spandrels flanked by stylized pilaster motifs. All the spandrels as well as the window mullions are tinted green.

The interiors of the duPont Building are some of the most ornate spaces in downtown Miami. The elevator doors are fashioned in brass and embellished with palm trees, flamingos, and other tropical motifs as "bas-relief" decoration. The walls of the first floor are clad in marble and continue the marble colorations to a portion of the second floor lobby. The ceiling of the entire second floor is comprised of primary and secondary wooden beams dividing the ceiling plane into numerous coffers. The primary and secondary beams are embellished with painted motifs derived from the ornaments used by the local Seminole Indians. The teller cages on the second floor bank lobby retain the majority of their original grille work forged out of wrought iron. The cages are delineated by alternating panels containing stylized floral motifs and lanterns above.

Except for minor alterations to some of the storefronts, the duPont Building remains virtually unaltered from the day it was completed.

Contributing Structures and/or Landscape Features:

The Alfred I. duPont Building is a contributing structure. There are no contributing landscape features on the site.

Interior Spaces Subject to Review:

Because of their exceptional architectural and artistic importance, the following interior spaces shall be subject to review: first floor lobby, second floor public spaces and former bank lobby, elevator doors, and elevator lobbies. Review shall be guided by the Secretary of the Interior's "Standards for Rehabilitation."



Alfred I. duPont Building  
169 E. Flagler Street  
South and east facades



Alfred I. duPont Building  
169 E. Flagler Street  
Elevator doors

#### IV. PLANNING CONTEXT

##### Present Trends and Conditions:

The Alfred I. duPont Building was owned by the Florida National Bank, the building's main tenant, from the time of construction until 1983. In 1983, the building was sold, and the bank moved its offices elsewhere.

The duPont Building is one of downtown Miami's major office structures and continues to be a desirable location. The present owner is actively attempting to lease the vacant office and retail space. The building is being well maintained.

The duPont Building was identified in the Downtown Miami Development of Regional Impact (DRI) as a historic site. The building has also been listed in the National Register of Historic Places.

##### Preservation Incentives:

The continued preservation of one of downtown Miami's major landmarks should remain a top priority for the present owner. Any future changes should carefully respect the building's architectural integrity. Because the present building represents the highest and best use of the property, there appears to be no zoning bonus which could be offered to encourage the building's preservation.

Historic designation, however, would relieve the property owner of the requirement for review of the project by the State Historic Preservation Office, per the provisions of the Downtown Miami Development of Regional Impact Master Development Order. Locally designated sites need not be submitted for State review.

The property owners could also benefit from Metro-Dade's tax abatement ordinance for historic properties. The Preservation Officer is available to work with the owners in exploring this possibility.

V. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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