

OVERVIEW

Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes, also known as Breakwater Homes, is a neighborhood located in the southeastern part of the City of Fort Lauderdale. It is bounded on the east by South Ocean Drive, on the south by the Port Everglades inlet. It is bounded on the west by SE 25 Avenue and property of St. Sebastian Catholic Church, and on the north by the rear property lines between SE 20th Street (Anchor Drive) and Barbara Drive. The entire development is encircled by a five-foot perforated concrete block wall. The neighborhood is accessed via South Ocean Avenue and SE 21 Street (Inlet Drive). The streets are laid out approximately in a grid, but with slight variations. SE 26 Terrace is a non-through-street, and ends with a cul-de-sac. Properties along the south side of SE 21st Street (Inlet Drive) front the Port Everglades inlet to the south.



Figure 6D-1: Map of Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes. Map by Rollin Maycumber, City of Fort Lauderdale.

The neighborhood was planned as a cohesive community and the extant original houses are of a similar design and scale. With the exception of 2621 SE 21st Street, the cooperative's common recreation building, all of the properties in the neighborhood are private residences. All of the residential buildings are single-family houses. The majority are small, single-story freestanding houses on modest lots. All of the intact buildings from the 1950s are ranch houses, while newly constructed and altered non-contributing buildings are built in the millennium mansion or vernacular Neo-Mediterranean styles. Most of the houses are clad with stucco and have low-pitched or flat roofs. Original significant features of the houses in



Figure 6D-2: Rendering of the Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes development. 1957. Image courtesy of Fort Lauderdale News.

Breakwater Homes include deep eave overhangs, recessed entries, wide horizontal fenestration patterns, integrated carports, integrated landscaping planters, and Bermuda roofs. Overall, the neighborhood and individual structures retain a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.

STATEMENT OF SIGNIFICANCE

The Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes neighborhood appears eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places under Criterion A in the area of community development as an intact example of post-war development and early cooperative housing development in



Figure 6D-3: A Typical home at Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes. Likely 2505 or 2513 SE 21st Street, 1958. Image courtesy of Fort Lauderdale News.

Florida, and under Criterion C in the area of architecture as a cohesive neighborhood of the mid-century modern ranch style by prominent local architect, Charles F. McKirahan. The district represents the housing boom of the post-war period and the corresponding shifts in method of construction and architectural expression. The structures retain a high degree of integrity of location, design, setting,

materials, workmanship, feeling, and association. The period of significance for the historic district is 1956 through 1958, the period of planning and construction of the Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes development.

DEVELOPMENT HISTORY

By the end of World War II, the improved economic conditions and returning service members catalyzed a new construction boom in Fort Lauderdale, as well as around the country. The barrier island north of the Port Everglades inlet was undeveloped as late as 1946. Known as Harbor Beach, this area was cut-off from the rest of Fort Lauderdale until 1941 when it was sold by Fort Lauderdale pioneer, Tom Bryan. That year, a road was laid out but development was stalled by the Second World War. Just north of Breakwater Beach Surf Club, the area



Figure 6D-4: Houses under construction at Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes, 1957. Image courtesy of Fort Lauderdale News.

around SE 17th Street was the first to be filled and subdivided as the Harbor Beach development. The first house was constructed about May 1946. The Harbor Beach extension, including Barbara Drive immediately to the north of the Breakwater Homes, was fully occupied by 1954. In that year, Mrs. Ruggie moved into the last house of Harbor Beach Extension, 2512 Barbara Drive. A keen animal lover, Mrs. Ruggie had a credible panther sighting in the spring of 1954. A news account of the sighting described the area that would become Breakwater Beach: "To the south is a dense forest of Australian pines on the Port Everglades channel."¹ In 1956, the Commodore Brook Causeway (the first 17th Street bridge) opened. This route served as a second connection to the barrier island, and provided convenient access to the new developments near the channel.

The plat map for the Breakwater Beach Surf Club development was finalized in November, 1956.² Construction on the development began on January 11, 1957. A March newspaper article projected that six houses would be ready for occupancy in April, and the twenty-three initial houses would be complete by July 1. This first phase was estimated to cost \$2 million.³ The total development included 59 single-family houses. Other phases planned for additional high-rise cooperatives, a hotel, an 18-hole golf course, Olympic-sized pool, among other

¹ Wesley W. Stout, "The Beachcomber: Jet Panther Roams Beach," *Fort Lauderdale News*. (27 October 1954): 8.

² McLaughlin Engineering Co. *Breakwater*. Scale 1" = 100'. Fort Lauderdale, Broward County, Florida. Plat Book 42, Page 19. September 21, 1956.

³ "23 Co-op Homes Under Way," *Fort Lauderdale News*. (30 March 1957): 6-C.

amenities. The golf course and other components were never built, but additional high-rise cooperatives were later constructed in the adjacent area to the east. Charles F. McKirahan was to be the architect for the entire development.⁴

COOPERATIVE LIVING

The development was planned as a cooperative housing community rather than following the traditional model of home ownership. While each resident occupies their own home, they are actually part-owner shareholders of a non-profit housing corporation that collectively owns the entire development. Shareholders have an exclusive lease on their house and all maintenance and amenity expenses is shared by the corporation. This provides many of the benefits of home ownership (the shareholders have equity in the property) while providing access to common amenities and minimal individual maintenance. Co-ops were popular in New York City and elsewhere prior to World War II, but did not become practical in other areas until the 1950s. In 1942, Section 216 of the IRS code put cooperative tax implications in line with traditional homeownership, and in 1950, Section 213 of the National Housing Act authorized the Federal Housing Administration to insure mortgages on middle-income cooperatives.⁵

Advertisements and news articles about Breakwater Beach heavily promoted and celebrated the cooperative model. They described “spacious private homes with all the advantages of cooperative living.” This “new agreeable way of cooperative living” provided large luxurious free-standing homes and “the entire maintenance of the exterior of your home, including its painting, will be taken care of for you.”⁶ A news article in March 1957 described the types of expected common amenities: “Residents of the walled-in community will enjoy such features as a large swimming pool, a garden club house, fishing from the seawall, and an attractive lake.”⁷ The homes sold well, and the press mentioned that even though a model home would be ready by April 1957, most of the houses had already sold. Later advertisements in 1958 emphasized the value of the few remaining homes, touting that many prominent real estate professionals had chosen Breakwater for their own homes.⁸

CHARLES F. MCKIRAHAN & FIRM

Charles Foster McKirahan was a prominent Fort Lauderdale-based architect who left an astounding architectural legacy in South Florida and beyond. McKirahan was born in Tulsa, Oklahoma in 1919. He first studied at Oklahoma State University. He served during World War II, spending three years as a captain with the US Army Corps of Engineers. He was sent to the Pacific theater where he spent time in Australia, Hawaii, Guam, Japan, and the South Pacific.

⁴ “Fort Lauderdale Project Plans Cooperative Houses,” *Tampa Bay Times*. (St. Petersburg, FL: 13 January 1957).

⁵ “A History of Cooperatives,” National Cooperative Law Center Website. <http://nationalcooperativelawcenter.com/national-cooperative-law-center/the-history-of-housing-cooperatives/3/> Accessed May 2020.

⁶ “Announcing... [Advertisement],” *Fort Lauderdale News*. (14 January 1957): 11-C.

⁷ “23 Co-op Homes Under Way,” *Fort Lauderdale News*. (30 March 1957): 6-C.

⁸ “Christmas Special! [Advertisement],” *Fort Lauderdale News*. (December 13, 1958): 12.

He returned to school after the war, earning his B.S. in Architecture from the University of Illinois in 1947. He moved to Fort Lauderdale soon after graduation.⁹

McKirahan worked briefly as chief draftsman at the office of Gamble, Pownall & Gilroy before forming a partnership, Wilmer & McKirahan, in 1951. He soon launched his own firm in 1953. An early project of McKirahan was the Mai Kai Restaurant in Fort Lauderdale. The renowned Polynesian-themed restaurant drew on McKirahan's experience in the Pacific.¹⁰

McKirahan's first projects were small. In 1953, he designed Manhattan Tower in Fort Lauderdale as a General Motors corporate retreat.¹¹ The building is notable for its sculptural outdoor "birdcage" stairway. McKirahan soon became the preferred architect of Coral Ridge Properties, a prolific and powerful Broward County developer. McKirahan designed hundreds of homes and apartments for the developer including the Coral Ridge Country Club, Coral Ridge Yacht Club, Coral Cove, Bay Club, Sunrise Bay Club, Coral Ridge Towers (North and East), and Ocean Manors Hotel.¹²

Other Fort Lauderdale works include the Point of Americas Condominium, Everglades House, Sky Harbour East, Lago Mar Apartments, Birch House, and Sea Chateau Motel. Other South Florida work included the Castaways Island Hotel, the Seaquarium dome, Point View Co-op, Island House on Key Biscayne, Bay Harbor Club and Bay Harbor Continental co-ops, and Seacoast Towers (now the Alexander).¹³ He also designed the Playboy Club in Miami and the Gill Sheraton Hotel.¹⁴

McKirahan's international work included buildings in the Bahamas, Ecuador, Honduras, the Dominican Republic, and Brazil. He designed residences for actor Raymond Burr and artist Alexander Calder. He also designed six residences that are the anchor of the Mid-Century Modern Historic District in Norwich, Vermont.¹⁵ At its height, McKirahan's firm employed over 100 people and he had satellite offices in the Bahamas, Brazil, and Chicago.¹⁶ His prolific

⁹ "Architects Biographies," MiMo on the Beach. City of Miami Beach. Accessed April 2020. www.mimoonthebeach.com

¹⁰ "Architects Biographies," and "Uncovering McKirahan," *Tropic Magazine*. (April 2015): 18-25.

¹¹ "Architects Biographies," and "History of Manhattan Towers." *Manhattan Tower Apartment Hotel*. Accessed on July 17, 2020. <https://www.manhattantowerfl.com/>

¹² "Architects Biographies" and "Uncovering McKirahan," 18-25.

¹³ "Architects Biographies"

¹⁴ "McKirahan Dies in Pike Auto Wreck," *Fort Lauderdale News*. (13 February 1964): 13.

¹⁵ "Architects Biographies"

¹⁶ "Uncovering McKirahan," 18-25.

career was cut short when he was tragically killed in a car accident in West Palm Beach on February 12, 1964 at the age of 44.¹⁷

It should be noted that Charles's first wife, Lucile W. McKirahan, a pioneering woman in architecture in her own right, helped found the McKirahan firm, which she led successfully through the 70's and 80's with her architect son, Charles. F. McKirahan Jr. Lucile graduated from the University of Illinois School of Architecture in 1940. That same year, she was the first woman to win first place in the Ecole de Beaux Arts Paris Prize in 1940. Her proudest accomplishment was a design for a prefabricated farm house, a humanitarian project during the Great Depression, thousands of which were constructed throughout the United States. Lucile was particularly strong at developing renderings to win projects for the firm. Charles and Lucile divorced before 1960, although it appears she remained active at the firm. Her contribution to the Breakwater Beach Surf Club Homes project is unknown, but it is likely that she played a role in its development.¹⁸

ARCHITECTURAL CONTEXT

The houses built in Breakwater Homes and other post-World War II Fort Lauderdale developments were fundamentally different from the houses built during the land boom of the 1920s. The early houses were built of light wood framing. Bungalow-style houses clad in wood clapboard were common, but even the stuccoed simulated masonry of Spanish-colonial and Mediterranean-revival houses were often constructed of wood. Wood framing was clad with tar paper and wire lath to which stucco was applied. This method of construction proved woefully inadequate when the hurricane of 1926 struck Fort Lauderdale. The light, often shoddy, construction led to severe destruction in the face of high winds. When intense housing construction resumed after World War II, hurricane resiliency was a major priority. In 1944,

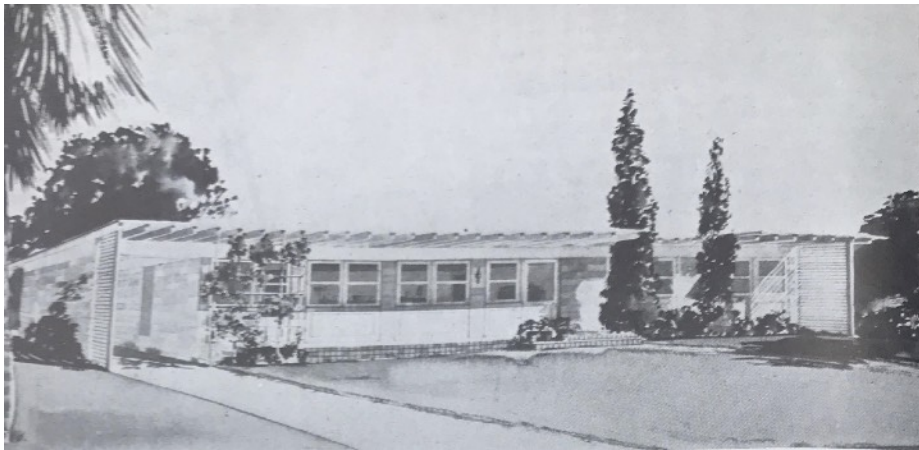


Figure 6D-5: "Inexpensive Hurricane-Proof House" in Fort Lauderdale by Igor Plevitzky, 1944. Image courtesy of Architectural Record.

Architectural Record published an article entitled "Inexpensive Hurricane-Proof House." The article featured a home designed for Mr. P. V. Burns to be built in Fort Lauderdale. The house, designed by prominent South Florida modernist Igor B. Polvitzky, was constructed of reinforced concrete

¹⁷ "McKirahan Dies in Pike Auto Wreck," *Fort Lauderdale News*. (13 February 1964): 13.

¹⁸ "McKirahan, Lucile W. [Obituary]," *Chicago Tribune*. (25 June 2005).

masonry units (CMU, commonly called concrete block or cinder block) set on a poured concrete slab foundation. The walls were constructed with the 8-inch hollow block and columns were formed by fully grouting the vertically aligned voids at specified intervals. A concrete tie beam was poured at the top of the walls above the window and door heads. The roof was constructed of precast concrete joists spaced 2-feet on center supporting 2-foot by 2-foot precast concrete slabs.¹⁹ Along with the modern construction methods, the architectural style of homes also shifted away from the historicist styles of the 1920s toward modernist aesthetics influenced by the International style.

Nearly all of the properties within the survey area are residential (the only exception being the cooperative's club house). The residential buildings are free-standing single-family houses, clad in stucco with modern design details. The renderings included in the advertisements show the 59-house development mostly as it was realized. The rendering of one house shows hallmarks of the houses as

they were built: carports, hipped Bermuda roof, and corner floor-to-ceiling windows.²⁰ Every house originally had Bermuda roofs.

Each house was sited on 70' x 100' lots and were planned to

cost from \$7,900 to \$29,900. The houses came in six baseline models; five two-bedroom models and one three-bedroom model. Different configurations individualized the designs: "Design difference in the exteriors of the six models will be considerable variations in the elevations, patios, and carports."²¹

All of the lots had houses constructed during the period of significance between 1956 and 1958. A handful of lots have been redeveloped with a new two-story house or have had large additions added to the original structure. All of the architecturally significant structures are designed in the ranch style with regional and architect-specific variations.



Figure 6D-6: Rendering of a typical Breakwater Beach Surf Club Home, 1957. Image courtesy of Fort Lauderdale News.

¹⁹ "Inexpensive Hurricane-Proof House," *Architectural Record*. v.96 (November 1944): 71-73.

²⁰ "Announcing... [Advertisement]," *Fort Lauderdale News*. (14 January 1957): 11-C.

²¹ "Fort Lauderdale Project Plans Cooperative Houses," *Tampa Bay Times*. (St. Petersburg, FL: 13 January 1957).



Figure 6D-7: The house at 2532 Inlet Drive is an example of the Ranch style. Photo by Bill Morache.

Ranch Style: The Ranch style first developed in the 1930s in California, and was embraced by builders and homeowners in the 1950s and 1960s. The type took hold as FHA financing was revised to allow for larger loans and large house sizes compared with depression- and wartime-era guidelines.²² The Ranch style is defined by its broad one-story shape, and low-pitched roof. It typically features moderate or wide eave overhangs, large picture windows, floor-to-ceiling and corner-located glazing, and off-centered sheltered entrance. It often incorporates an attached garage that is a visible component of the facade. Other features found on examples at Breakwater Homes include white

Bermuda roofs and pyramidal chimney caps, both favored local design elements utilized by the neighborhood's architect, Charles F. McKirahan. The roof design is derived from the local construction methods of Bermuda, where limestone block roofs provide a storm-resistant structure and a clean surface for rainwater collection.

²² Virginia Savage McAlester. *A Field Guide to American Houses*. 2nd ed. (New York: Alfred A, Knopf, 2013): 597-603.