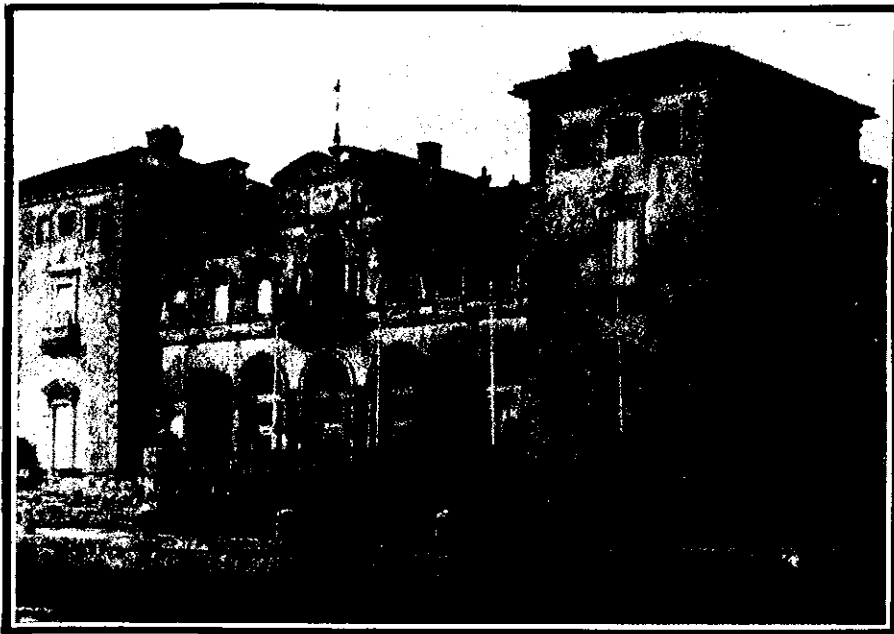

VIZCAYA

3251 S. MIAMI AVENUE & 50 S.W. 32 ROAD

Designation Report



City of Miami

REPORT OF THE CITY OF MIAMI PLANNING DEPARTMENT

TO THE HERITAGE CONSERVATION BOARD

ON THE POTENTIAL DESIGNATION OF

VIZCAYA

3251 S. MIAMI AVENUE AND
50 S.W. 32 ROAD

AS A HERITAGE CONSERVATION ZONING DISTRICT

Prepared by Arnell E. Esten 4-5-84
Historic Preservation Date
Consultant

Accepted by Richard W. Clark 4-24-84
Chairman Date

Designated by the Miami City Commission

Ordinance No. _____

Date _____

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- II. Significance
- III. Historical Information
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I. GENERAL INFORMATION

Historic Name:

Vizcaya

Current Name:

Vizcaya

Location:

Approximately 3251 S. Miami Avenue and 50 S.W.32 Road
Miami, Florida

Present Owner:

Metropolitan Dade County
Dade County Courthouse
73 West Flagler Street
Miami, Florida 33130

Present Occupant:

Metropolitan Dade County Park and Recreation Department
50 S.W. 32 Road
Miami, Florida 33133

Present Use:

Museum/Offices

Present Zoning District:

RS-2/2

HC Zoning Overlay District:

HC-1

Tax Folio Numbers

01-4114-05-0010
01-4114-05-0020
01-4114-05-0040

Boundary Description of HC Zoning District:

Tracts 1 and 2, and the northeasterly 600 feet of Tract 3, and that portion of Tract 4 northeasterly of a line 1524.68 feet southerly of and parallel with the southerly boundary of SE 32nd Road and northerly of the south bank of the Entrance Channel to Lagoon, of the plat of VIZCAYA, as recorded in Plat Book 34 at Page 46, of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida, less the property shown on the Plat of TRACT 1-Y VIZCAYA, as recorded in Plat Book 80 at Page 16 of the Public Records of Dade County, Florida. The complete legal description as per metes and bounds is on file with the Planning Department.

HC Zoning Classification:

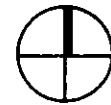
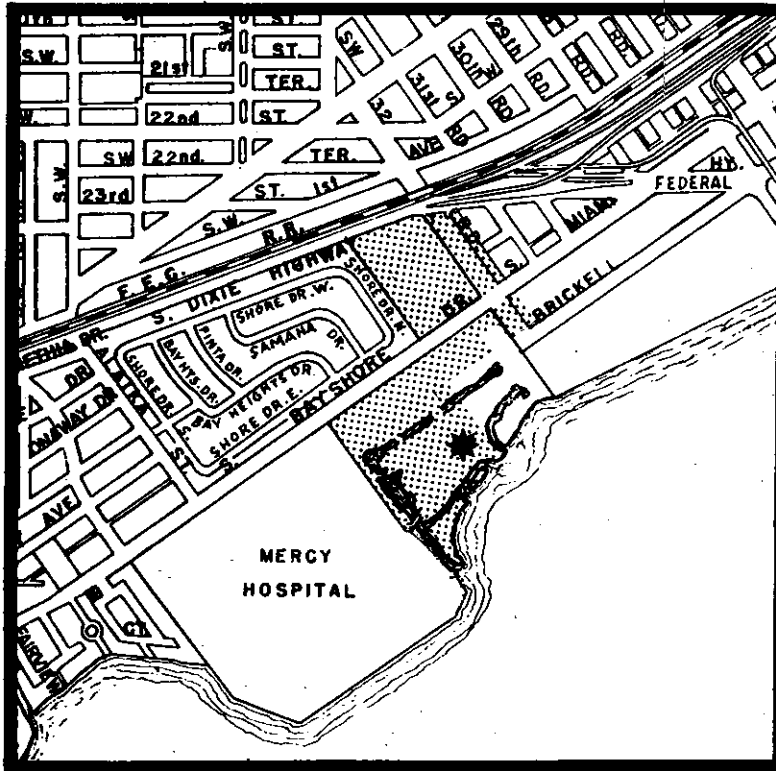
Historic Site

Dade County Historic Survey Rating:

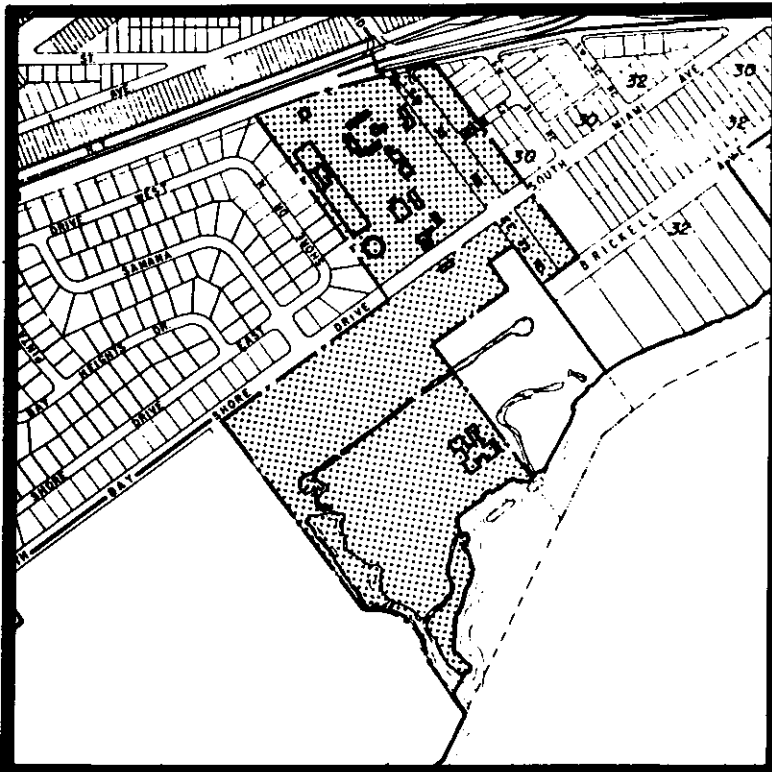
Architectural Significance - 1
Historical Significance - 1
Contextural Significance - 1

VIZCAYA

3251 S. MIAMI AVENUE & 50 S.W. 32 ROAD



location



site plan

II. SIGNIFICANCE

Statement of Significance:

Vizcaya, Miami's architectural masterpiece, is significant as an outstanding example of Italian Renaissance Revival architecture and is noted for its superb design, detail, materials, and craftsmanship. Designed by three prominent architects, Vizcaya and its environs are a visual focal point of downtown Miami and Coconut Grove. Vizcaya is also significant for its association with a noted industrialist and for its role in the development of early Miami.

Vizcaya is an American realization of an Italian Renaissance Villa and is the ultimate expression of the widespread American penchant during the early twentieth century for the architecture of an earlier era. The beauty of Vizcaya is derived from the skillful use of local and imported building materials imaginatively assembled on a building site expressly created for them.

Although Vizcaya itself is not visible from S. Miami Avenue, its gatehouses, wall, and former Deering Plaza create an outstanding visual composition that is a focal point of downtown Miami and Coconut Grove.

Vizcaya is also significant as a reflection of Miami's early development and the growing number of wealthy individuals who decided to move there. James Deering, a noted industrialist who was vice-president of International Harvester Company, selected Miami as his winter home after conducting a worldwide search.

The construction of Vizcaya also helped to significantly bolster Miami's economy in the years preceeding the boom. More than 1000 people were on the payroll at the peak of the construction of the house and gardens. Miami's population at the time was only 10,000.

Relationship to Criteria for Designation:

Vizcaya is eligible for designation under the following criteria for designation:

1. Is associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.

Vizcaya was the winter home of James Deering, an individual of national reputation, who was vice-president of International Harvester Company.

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

The construction of Vizcaya is closely associated with the early history of Miami. Over 1000 people were employed in the construc-

tion of Vizcaya at a time when Miami's population was only 10,000. As a result, Vizcaya greatly bolstered the City's economy. Vizcaya also reflects Miami's early development and the growing number of wealthy individuals who decided to settle there.

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

Vizcaya is an outstanding example of Italian Renaissance Revival style architecture. Its four facades portray the evolution of the Renaissance from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.

6. Is an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.

Vizcaya is the product of the collaboration of three noted architects, F. Burrall Hoffman, Diego Suarez, and Paul Chalfin. Vizcaya is perhaps their greatest work.

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

Vizcaya is an architectural and artistic masterpiece and is particularly noteworthy not for its individual elements (although each is outstanding), but for the whole of the composition.

9. Because of its prominence or spatial location, contrasts of siting, age, or scale, is an easily identifiable visual feature of a neighborhood or the city and contributes to the distinctive quality or identity of such neighborhood or the city.

Although Vizcaya itself is not visible from S. Miami Avenue, its gatehouses, wall, and former Deering Plaza at S. Miami Avenue at S.W. 32 Road are prominent visual features of the area and form a dramatic entrance to Coconut Grove.

III. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

Date of Erection:

1914-1916

Architect:

Vizcaya is the product of the collaboration of three architects. F. Burrall Hoffman, Jr. designed the buildings, Diego Suarez planned the gardens, and Paul Chalfin executed the interiors.

Builder/Contractor:

General contractors for Vizcaya were John B. Orr Co. of Miami and Fred T. Ley and Co. of Springfield, Massachusetts.

Historical Context:

James Deering was born in South Paris, Maine, in 1859 and later moved with his family to Chicago where his father established a farm machinery company. The company merged with the McCormick Harvester Company in 1902 to become the International Harvester Company, and Deering became vice-president.

When his fragile health prompted him to seek a winter home in a warm climate, Deering chose Miami after a worldwide search. Deering then hired Paul Chalfin to serve as artistic advisor for the new house that he envisioned for South Florida, and both men traveled extensively in Europe buying furnishings and architectural elements. In planning the house, they devised an elaborate scheme to create a grand Italian villa that would appear to have been occupied by many generations, each of which had remodeled and redecorated different parts of the house.

Over 1000 people were employed in the construction of Vizcaya between 1914 and 1916 at a time when the population of Miami was only 10,000. The house was not finished until the end of 1916, when Deering moved in on Christmas Day. The gardens were completed in 1921.

Deering died unexpectedly in 1925, and the estate passed to his heirs. Although Vizcaya remained essentially closed and unused, the property remained intact for the next 20 years. Finally, in 1945, Deering's heirs reluctantly sold the great south gardens and farm land and, in 1952, sold the house and remaining 30 acres of land to Dade County. The property has been operated by the Park and Recreation Department as a museum since acquisition by the County.

IV. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

Description of Building:

Vizcaya is a two-and-one-half story structure with a U-shaped plan connected by an entrance loggia at the U. Corner towers of the building are topped with low-pitched hipped roofs covered with barrel tile. Vizcaya is built of limestone, and its exterior walls are covered with stucco.

Although not a copy of any villa that ever existed, Vizcaya takes its inspiration from several Italian sources, and its design was intended to give the illusion of having been built in the sixteenth century.

Vizcaya's four facades, each grand enough to be considered the principal facade, are independent architectural compositions and reflect the evolution of Italian Renaissance design from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century. The east facade overlooks Biscayne Bay from its high, balustraded terrace. This facade, with its two tall corner towers connected by a central section, is reminiscent of a sixteenth century villa, the Villa Rezzonico, near Venice. The north facade is seventeenth century in style, with a baroque double stairway leading from the main floor to the lower floor. The west, or entrance, facade reflects the eighteenth century. The openness of this facade encourages the flow of air and is an example of Vizcaya's adaptation to the South Florida environment.

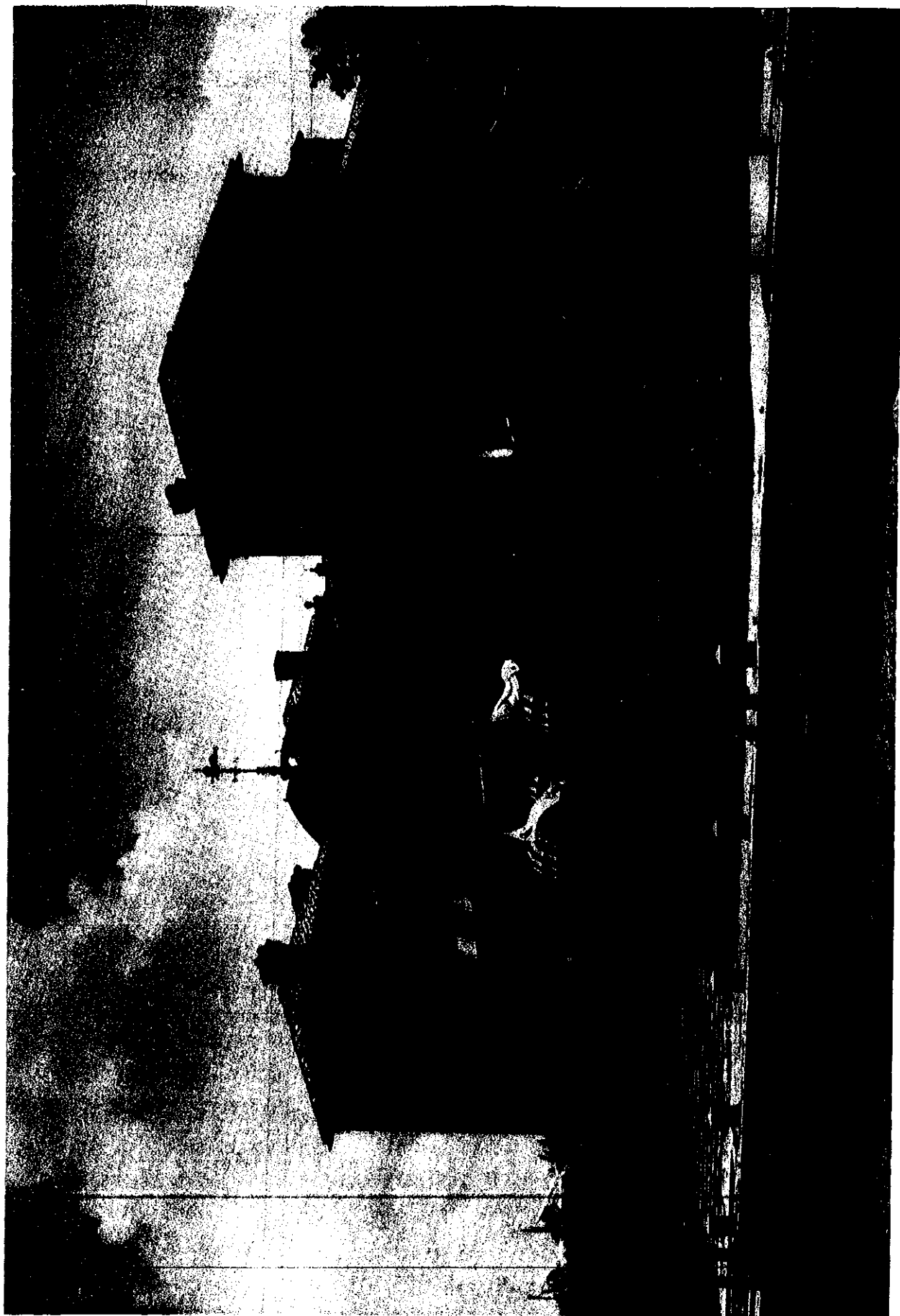
In addition to the main house, the estate includes a group of ten buildings designed to resemble a baroque Italian farm village. Included are a Gate House, Garage, Blacksmith Shop, two staff residences, Mule Stable, Carriage House, Dairy, Chicken Coop, and Paint Shop. These buildings, designed in the seventeenth century Italian style, are of varying shapes and sizes but create a unified and harmonious whole.

Description of Site:

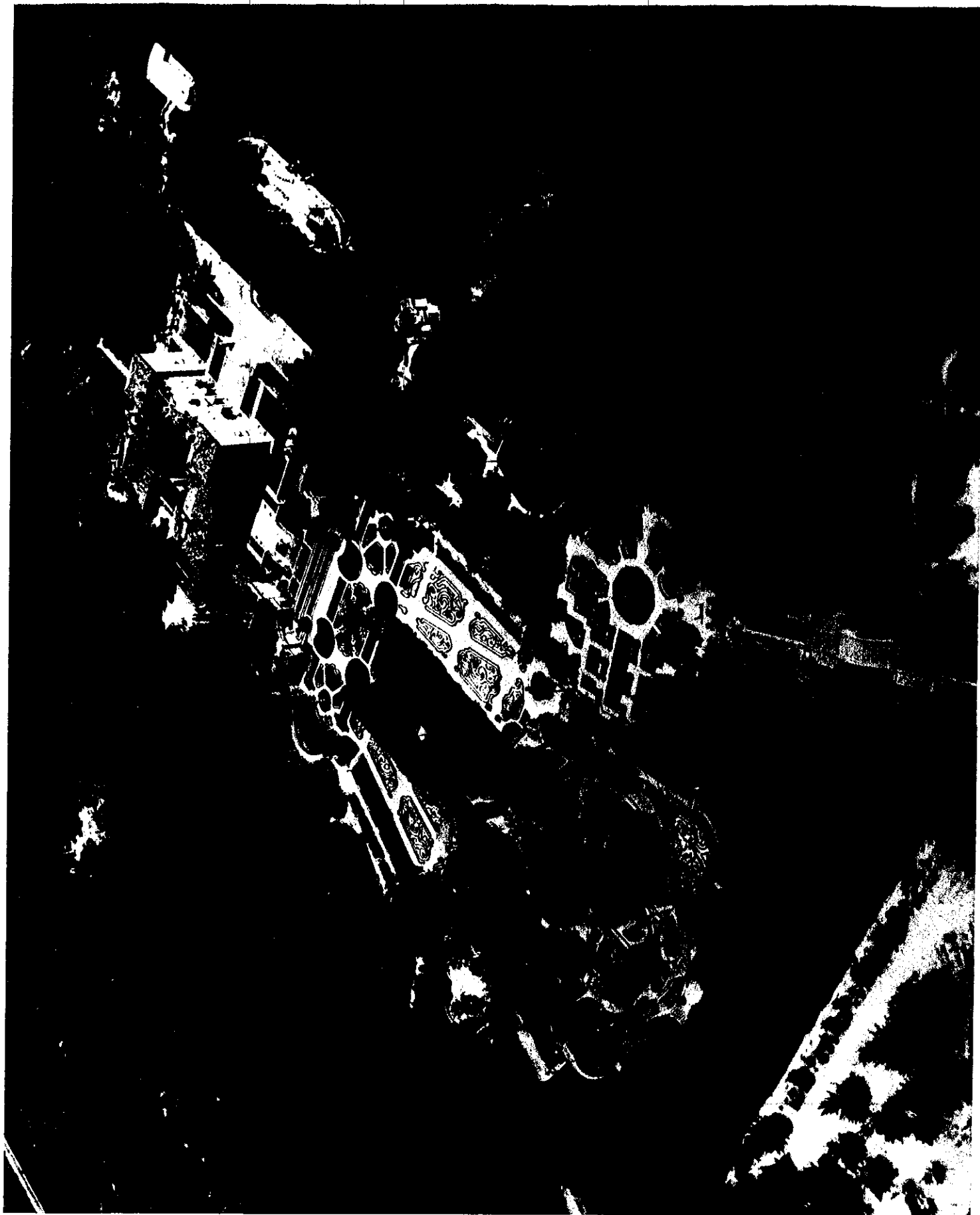
Thirty of the original 180 acres comprise the present Vizcaya property. Overlooking Biscayne Bay to the east, the property includes the main house, formal gardens, and fountains on the south side of S. Miami Avenue and the farm village on the north side.

More than two-thirds of the property remains in a virgin condition, preserving the original hammock land. The hammock serves as a backdrop for the formal gardens to the south of the main house. The gardens combine Italian hill gardens, French parterres, classical sculpture, stone peacocks, and subtropical flora and fauna in a design adapted to the waterfront site.

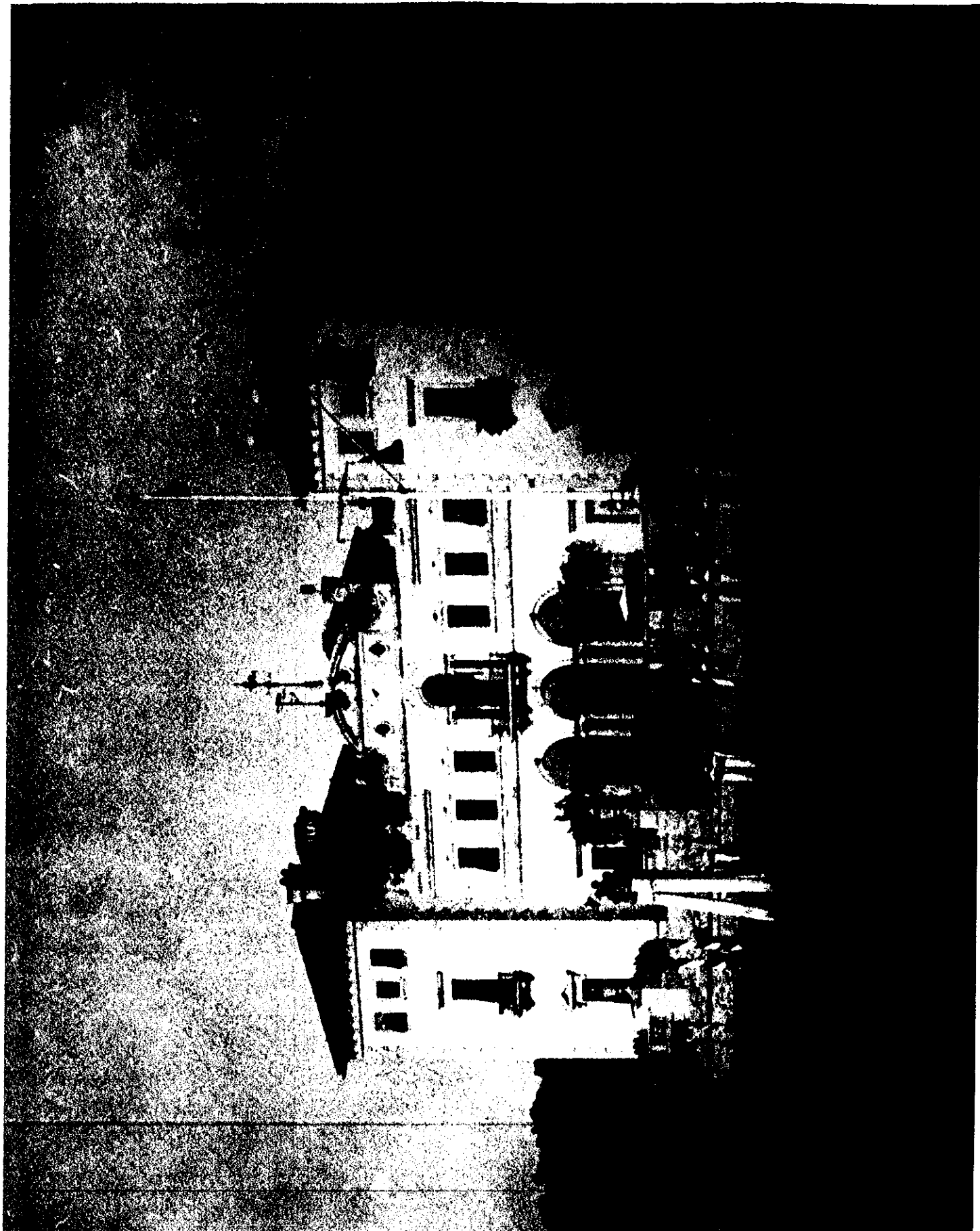
Other significant structures on the property include the Great Stone Barge, Tea House, Landing Dock, Casino, East Gate Lodge, Laundry, Engine House, and the wall which surrounds the estate.



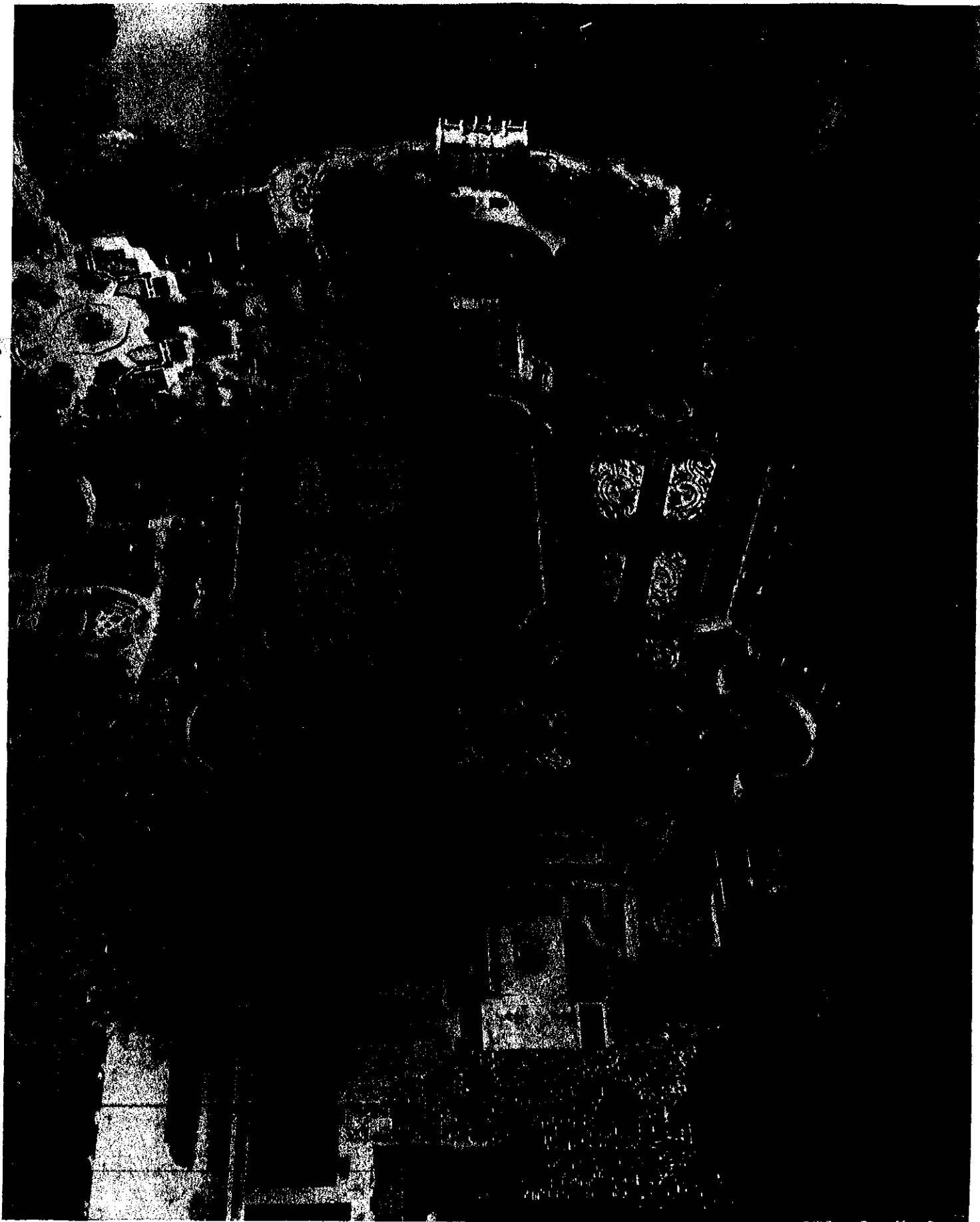
Vizcaya
3251 S. Miami Avenue
East facade
1982
(Courtesy of Vizcaya - Dorris Littlefield)



Vizcaya
3251 S. Miami Avenue
Aerial view showing south and east facades and gardens
1982
(Courtesy of Vizcaya)



Vizcaya
3251 S. Miami Avenue
East facade
c. 1925
(Courtesy of Miami Public Library, Romer Collection)



Vizcaya
3251 S. Miami Avenue
"Air View of Italian Formal Gardens"
c. 1934
(Courtesy of Miami Public Library, Romer Collection)

V. PLANNING CONTEXT

Present Trends and Conditions:

The villa and gardens at Vizcaya are operated as a museum by Metropolitan Dade County Park and Recreation Department. Approximately 2000,000 persons visit the attraction each year supplying about 100% of its cost of upkeep, excluding capital projects. The exterior painting of the villa, as well as all garden structures, has recently been completed. In addition, the third phase of the climate control/smoke detection/security system is being installed.

The farm village currently houses the Metropolitan Dade Park and Recreation Department offices and receives very little public exposure. The farm buildings are sound, but in need of restoration. The superintendent's house is in the process of restoration for use as a gallery. It will open to the public on April 28, 1984.

Conservation Objectives:

Vizcaya is a singular treasure that should continue to receive public funding for necessary repairs and capital projects. Necessary funding should be secured to construct new offices for the Park and Recreation Department so the entire farm village can be converted to a use which the public can enjoy.

Preservation of the interior spaces at Vizcaya is considered as important as preservation of the exterior. Despite the significance of the interior, however, regulation of this space is not recommended at this time because of the expertise of the professional staff at Vizcaya. If the property should cease to support such a staff, designation of interior spaces may be recommended at that time.

Conservation objectives can best be achieved by maintaining the present zoning of the property. A proposed change in zoning from RS-2/2 to G-U could also achieve these objectives. An HC-1 zoning overlay district will maintain the existing zoning, requiring only the review of physical changes to the property.

VI. HC ZONING ELEMENTS

Boundaries:

The boundaries of the HC zoning district have been drawn to include the entire tract of land owned by Metropolitan Dade County. This tract includes all remaining portions of the original James Deering Estate.

Major Exterior Surfaces Subject to Review:

All four facades of Vizcaya and all surfaces of all other existing improvements on the site shall be considered major exterior surfaces subject to review. The Planetarium and the new building housing the Museum of Science, however, shall not be considered major exterior surfaces.

Major Landscape Features Subject to Review:

The major landscape features subject to review shall include all existing landscape features on the site.

VII. BIBLIOGRAPHY

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