History of the Coconut Grove Playhouse

I. Coconut Grove Theater, 1927 - 1955
   Silent Screen movie house
II. Coconut Grove Playhouse, 1955 - 1976
III. Players State Theater, 1977 – 2006
   Building Shuttered
Coconut Grove Theater, 1927
Front Elevation
Diagrammatic Kiehnel & Elliott floor plan showing the compositional organization of the Playhouse
A: The front building
B: The crescent shape lobby and vestibule
C: The auditorium
Interior view of the Coconut Grove Theater, 1927
Coconut Grove Chamber of Commerce Meetings
held at the Coconut Grove Theater (1946 Photo)
Kiehnel and Elliott Floor Plan and Section as extracted from the Alfred Browning Parker 1955 Plans
An iconic scene from the 1933 film King Kong

Sorrows of Satan, 1926

The Jazz Singer, 1927
Coconut Grove Chamber of Commerce Meetings held at the Coconut Grove Theater (1946 Photo)
Olympia Theater in Downtown Miami, by John Eberson, 1926
Interior view

Coconut Grove Theater, 1927
Front Elevation
Sketch of the Coconut Grove Playhouse as a two story structure
Arva Moore Parks Archives
Coconut Grove Theater, 1927
Front Elevation
Members of the Coconut Grove Chamber of Commerce in front of the Coconut Grove Theater (1946 Photo)
Kiehnel and Elliott Floor Plan and Section as extracted from the Alfred Browning Parker 1955 Plans
Left:
Mr. & Mrs. Engle entertaining guests in the Playhouse Dining Room. Architect Alfred Browning Parker is seated at the far left.

Right:
George Engle (1955 Owner) & Dorothy Engle at the Playhouse Art Gallery
Alfred Browning Parker Floor Plan and Section, 1955-56
The royal blue shows Parker's additions, and the light blue indicates the extent of the mezzanine overhead.
Detail of lobby fountain mirrored dome

Excerpt from Parker’s Longitudinal Section showing the change to the floor slope, which allowed for the fountain.
Interior View of the Coconut Grove Playhouse Auditorium
Excerpt from Parker's plans showing the new mezzanine obscuring the existing bays and ceiling heights
Solomonic Columns now located in the restroom. Due to the change in floor slope, the bases are now below the floor slab.
Diagram showing Alfred Browning Parker’s Mezzanine in Kiehnel and Elliot’s Section
Solomonic Columns at the Concession Area that have been buried by Alfred Browning Parkers change to the floor slope.

Excerpt from the Ferguson Glasgow Schuster Inc. Alterations & Remodeling plans 1984

Section in Alfred Browning Parker’s Plans showing change in floor slope, 1955
Alfred Browning Parker’s Plans showing the Auditorium without the Mezzanine, 1955

Alfred Browning Parker’s Plans showing the Auditorium with the Mezzanine, 1955-56
Coconut Grove Playhouse front elevation showing the closed up store fronts (Photo 1971)

Coconut Grove Playhouse front elevation showing the elevated planters (Photo 1984)
Comparison of the 1926 and 1971 Coconut Grove Playhouse front elevations showing the removal of the crenellation along the roof line.
Coconut Grove First Floor Plan
Blue represents changes made by Alfred Browning Parker, and green represents changes made by Ferguson Glasglow Schuster, Inc.
Carol Channing in *Show Business* (left)

Tennessee Williams during the run of *A Streetcar Named Desire* (right)

Mickey Rooney in *No Sex Please We’re British* (left)

Liza Minnelli in *The Fantasticks* (right)
I. Coconut Grove Theater, 1927 – 1955

- 1926 Mediterranean Revival Silent Screen movie house by Kiehnel and Elliott
- A composition organized about the corner of Charles Ave and Main Highway featuring three distinct parts
- Extraordinary handling of the urban corner
- Included an early form of air conditioning
- Used as: a movie theater, air force training location during WWII, Radio broadcast by Kate Smith, closed at intermittent times
- Example of a master work of Mediterranean Revival architecture
- National Register Criteria C
  - Master work, work of a master
- Miami 21, Chapter 23, Section 4, A-5 & 6
  - (5) Embody those distinguishing characteristics of an architectural style, or period, or method of construction.
  - (6) Are an outstanding work of a prominent designer or builder.
II. Coconut Grove Playhouse, 1955 – 1976

- Significant reworking of nearly all Kiehnel and Elliott interiors by Alfred Browning Parker
- Changes to exterior that affect the Charles Ave and Main Highway facades
- Changes to exterior that affected the roof lines of the corner
- The cultural history of the site is associated with persons and events significant to the history of the American stage
- National Register Criteria A & B
  - Significance for associations with persons and events
- Miami 21, Chapter 23, Section 4, A-1 & 2
  - (1) Are associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.
  - (2) Are the site of a historic event with significant effect upon the community, city, state, or nation.
III. Players State Theater, 1977 – 2006

- Further reworking of interiors typified by expedient and non-distinguished work of lesser quality
- Further changes to exterior
- The cultural history of the site is associated with persons and events significant to the history of the American stage
- National Register Criteria A & B
  - Significance for associations with persons and events
- Miami 21, Chapter 23, Section 4, A-1 & 2
  - (1) Are associated in a significant way with the life of a person important in the past.
  - (2) Are the site of a historic event with significant effect upon the community, city, state, or nation.
Methodology

Current state of the Coconut Grove Playhouse Exterior
“For some properties, comparison with similar properties should be considered during the evaluation of integrity. Such comparison may be important in deciding what physical features are essential to properties of that type.”

-National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, Section VIII: How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property, Comparing Similar Properties
Views of the Paramount Theater in Palm Beach
Exterior view of the Paramount Theater in Palm Beach and the Coconut Grove Playhouse
Aerial view of the Coconut Grove Playhouse
With regards to interiors:

“Some historic buildings are virtually defined by their interiors … the loss of an interior will disqualify properties from listing in the National Register - a historic concert hall noted for the beauty of its auditorium and its fine acoustic qualities would be the type of property that if it were to lose its interior, it would lose its value as a historic resource.”

National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, Section VIII - How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property, Interiors

“Some historic buildings are virtually defined by their exteriors, and their contribution to the built environment can be appreciated even if their interiors are not accessible.”

National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, Section VIII - How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property, Interiors
With regards to exteriors, the Bulletin addresses the topic of integrity under criterion C, for sites associated with the architectural work of a master. “A property that has maintained some historic materials or details can be eligible if it retains the majority of the features that illustrate its style in terms of massing, spatial relationships, proportion, pattern of windows and doors, texture of materials and ornamentation. The property is not eligible, however, if it retains some basic features conveying massing but has lost the majority of its features that once characterized its style.”

-National Register Bulletin: How to Apply the National Register Criteria for Evaluation, Section VIII: How to Evaluate the Integrity of a Property, Assessing the Integrity in Properties
Current state of the Coconut Grove Playhouse Exterior
Comparison of the 1926 and 1971 Coconut Grove Playhouse front elevations showing the removal of the crenellation along the roof line.
Coconut Grove Theater, 1927
Front Elevation

Recommendations
A: The Front Building

1. Restore front building to the 1927 Kiehnel design and remove non-contributing, non-original additions
2. Restore original paint, finishes, and surfaces
3. Replace non-original windows and doors with new windows and doors that are sympathetic to the original design
4. Return ground floor uses that are conducive to an active pedestrian environment.
5. Restore the original roof lines.
6. Re-establish the footprint of the original lobby as a lush tropical courtyard, where the memory, history and interpretation of this site will be displayed.
Aerial view of the Coconut Grove Playhouse
6. Document and survey for architectural elements to be incorporated in the design of a new state for the art auditorium in its original orientation towards the corner. The proscenium arch and remaining Solomonic columns are among the elements to be incorporated.
Coconut Grove Chamber of Commerce Meetings held at the Coconut Grove Theater (1946 Photos)

Solomonic Columns now located in the restroom. Due to the change in floor slope, the bases are now below the floor slab.
Diagrammatic Kiehnel & Elliott floor plan showing the compositional organization of the Playhouse
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El Jardin, 1918
Coconut Grove Theater, 1927
Bryan Memorial Methodist Church, 1928
Second Church of Christ Scientist, 1940