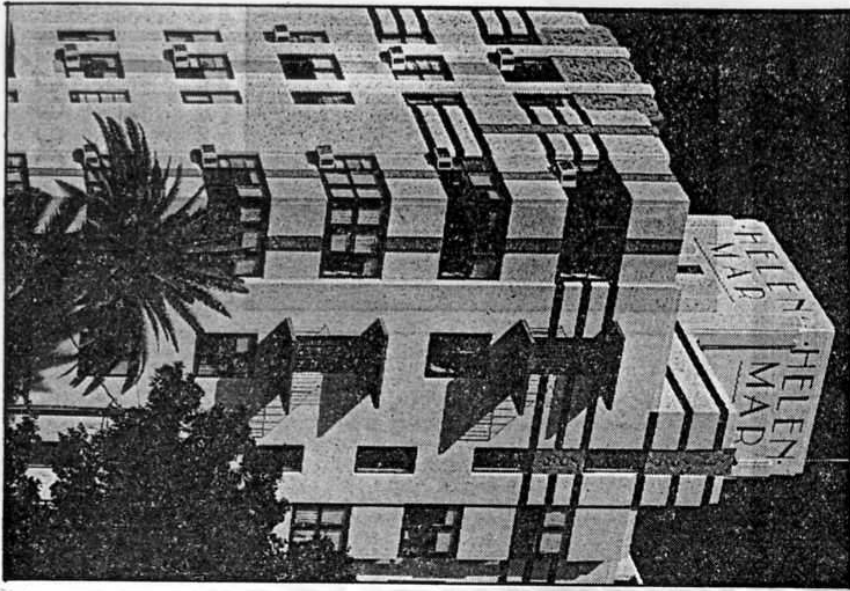


Capitman's book shows off true Deco Delights



STEVEN BROOKE
The Helen Mar apartments, just north of the Art Deco District, have been renovated and turned into condominiums.

Deco Delights pays splendid homage to Miami Beach's engaging architecture; it tells a sometimes bit-litersweet story with a mostly happy ending.

Ironically enough, this new book arrives at a time when the historic district in Miami Beach is much in the news, and for preservationists, the news is not good. The front-piece is a photograph of the Senator Hotel, demolished earlier this month. The caption: "The Senator — Symbol of the Deco District."



BETH DUNLOP
ARCHITECTURE

And so *Deco Delights* (Dutton, \$17.95, paperback; \$29.95 hard cover) also serves as a valiant reminder of the importance of documenting our architectural treasures, for some times photographs are all that remain.

This is, in a way, two books in one: It is an engaging memoir by Barbara Baer Capitman, who for the past dozen years has relentlessly worked to transform a battered seaside neighborhood into an urban showcase, and on that level it is rather personal.

It also displays the considerable talents of Steven Brooke, whose powerful architectural photographs show off Miami Beach's Art Deco buildings at their very best. In that respect, it is universal.

The Art Deco District is a seductive place. Against steep odds — initial politicians, impoverished res-

The photographs let the architecture tell the story. There are no tricky angles, just buildings aglow in the sunlight.

idents, uncertain economics — it has emerged, a charming relic of jazz-age architecture and a historic urban neighborhood with vast appeal to the young.

With Brooke's dramatic pictures, it's easy to tell why. He spent a year taking the 150 photographs, stalking the precise moment when the clouds moved away, waiting sometimes for hours till the sun tilted a certain way to highlight, as he says, "every nuance of detail."

The photographs are both impassioned — only someone adoring of Miami Beach's Art Deco could have taken them — and strikingly straightforward. Impressively, they let the architecture itself tell the story. There are no tricky angles, no fish-eye lenses, just buildings aglow in the sunlight, their pastel stucco framed by a cloudless sky.

Mostly, the photos show buildings already renovated, painted in luscious pastels to highlight their crisp geometric and capricious detailing. Some are "before" pictures; the unrenovated are a kind of memento of the days, less than a decade ago, when to many, the resurgence of the Art Deco district was a pipe dream, not a reality.

Capitman's well-written memoir recounts this transformation. Her text for *Deco Delights* is at once

quirky and brilliant, anecdotal and historical, rambling and focused. It is fascinating, somewhat — though in this case not inappropriately — self-serving, and refreshingly eccentric.

Just an example of its eccentricity: She chose the title, *Deco Delights*, from a chocolate fudge dessert served at the Cafe Cardozo while her son owned it. "*Deco Delights* has now achieved a broader meaning," she writes. "The title of this book refers to the buildings themselves and the more manifold pleasures of the District: the sound, fashion, life style, art, joyful events and world renown generated here." Perhaps the chief annoyance of

the text are the numerous misspelled names, including Addison Mizner and Edward Villella. And yet the captions for the photographs — all Capitman's work — show a prodigious mastery of the district's buildings; there is an appreciable amount of architectural documentation here.

In the beginning, back in 1976, it was just Barbara Capitman and a handful of others. The others have come and gone. Capitman has remained, an inspiration to preservationists, an annoyance to politicians and an obstacle to demolitionists.

And for all the setbacks, this book is a grand celebration of the triumph of architecture over adversity.