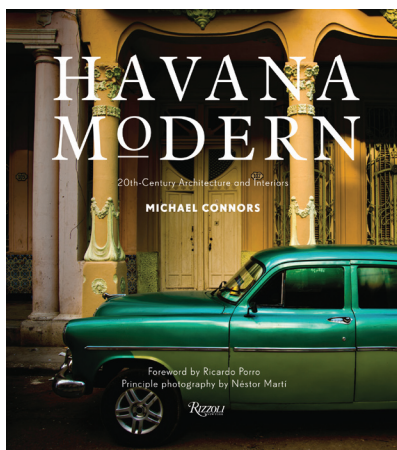


Finding the Hidden Havana

By DANIELLE DEVINE

MICHAEL CONNORS'S EIGHTH BOOK ON THE CARIBBEAN, *Havana Modern: 20th-Century Architecture and Interiors*, presents a close look at previously unpublished houses and other buildings built in Havana from the early 1900s to 1965, with specially commissioned photography by Néstor Martí. The book is both intelligent and visually rich, and a valuable resource showcasing modernist architecture from Havana's artsy Vedado neighborhood and seaside streets of Miramar, to Central Havana and the stylish Country Club park area. Among the city's most indelible modern places are Porro's National Schools of Art, the renowned Bacardi building, Casa de Alfred von Schulthess by Richard Neutra, the stylish Habana Riviera Hotel, the Hotel Nacional de Cuba designed by McKim, Mead and White, and the world-famous Tropicana cabaret nightclub by architect Max Borges.



What inspired you to write this book?

My last book *The Splendor of Cuba* was successful, but I decided to go a step beyond colonial-era architecture, and I was amazed by what I found. I realized that Cuban architects of the modernist movement have never been evaluated and that their contributions to architecture deserved further study and documentation. This led me to seek out world-renowned Cuban-born architect Ricardo Porro, most famous for being the lead architect of Havana's National Schools of Art—he is the spirit and source of inspiration for *Havana Modern*. He is now eighty-eight and is one of the most interesting people I have met. I see him whenever I am in Paris. He reminds me of Buckminster Fuller.

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Can you discuss the idea of “preservation by neglect”?

I coined that phrase when I visited Cuba several years ago and started to examine the architecture. Right now, I'm sitting on Fourteenth Street in New York with beautiful new and old buildings. The original Penn Station was architecturally and historically significant, but in 1963 the city government allowed it to be torn down. That is not happening in Cuba, but not necessarily consciously. It is not happening because there is such neglect, especially of twentieth-century buildings. One of the reasons for writing this book is to heighten awareness and help in the conservation of early to mid-twentieth century architecture in Havana. I do not want to see it torn down, nor do 90 percent of the architects and people who are aware of the situation there.

There must have been some memorable experiences shooting with Néstor Martí. Can you discuss some of the highlights?

The Tropicana cabaret nightclub by architect Max Borges. Initially we approached them to take some pictures and they said they were sorry but they could not authorize the shoot. We told them about the book and eventu-

ally they invited us back to a show for some night shots. When we asked if we could return for a day shoot, they said absolutely no one was allowed in except the dancers; a couple of days later they gave us permission. There we were, watching them practice—I have never found a shot like it in the archives. We're bringing things to the public that up to this point were totally impossible. Néstor lives in Cuba and was familiar with many of the buildings and houses. When Cubans say no, they kind of respect each other and don't push. I was born in New York. Sometimes New Yorkers don't take no for an answer. Néstor was amazed, “I don't know how you do this Connors,” he said to me. But it serves the Cubans; I am not taking pictures of children with no shoes, laundry in the courtyard, and buildings that are falling down. I am taking pictures of the beautiful parts of Cuba, the photography is not enhanced at all. The only time we edited was to remove some telephone wires. This is Cuba, this is beautiful Cuba, and that is what I like giving the people.

***Havana Modern: 20th-Century Architecture and Interiors* by Michael Connors, with a foreword by Ricardo Porro and principal photography by Néstor Martí, is published by Rizzoli.**

