

Date: December 16, 2022  
To: **City of Oakland Park** Development Review Committee & Historic Board  
From: **Melissa Ann Bierman**, Kravit Architectural Associates  
CC: File JBC.25  
Re: Mai Kai Restaurant and Polynesian Show 3599 N Federal Highway Oakland Park, FL  
Certificate of Appropriateness Letter of Intent

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Applicant: Tiki Real Estate LLC  
1637 SW 8<sup>th</sup> Street Suite 200  
Miami, FL 33135

Architect: Kravit Architectural Associates, Inc.

We would like to request a Certificate of Appropriateness for the proposed exterior renovations to the Mai Kai Restaurant located at 3599 N Federal Highway Oakland Park, FL.

### **1. Background**

The national register of historic places summary states:

*“The Mai-Kai Restaurant is a stylistically intact, still-operating Polynesian style restaurant located on a busy commercial highway that divides Oakland Park from Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It comprises two buildings, the restaurant and the Bora Bora Room. It is set amid verdant landscaping with simulated rock formations, waterfalls, ponds, tropical vegetation and Tiki statues. The 1-story main restaurant building features a large A-frame gable roof and two smaller thatched roofs. A thatched porte-cochere visually defines the entrance to the restaurant. The interior is ornately decorated in nautical and South Seas decor with many authentic artifacts from Polynesia. Each room is named for a specific area of the South Seas and is decorated with items from that region. The restaurant features twice-nightly Polynesian shows that are visible from seats in the Tonga, Hawaii, New Guinea and Moorea Rooms. Other areas include the Tahiti and Samoa Rooms, which are exclusively dining rooms, and the Molokai Bar. An outdoor terrace, the Lanai, overlooks the Garden. A secondary building, the Bora Bora Room, was also constructed with Polynesian styling. It originally served as dining space but is not currently being used due to hurricane damage. Overall, the property retains the integrity of its original and distinct South Seas and nautical*

## Plan Review Response Memo

*themes. Alterations to the Mai-Kai have been consistent with the design and feeling of the original construction, and the restaurant has experienced very few changes since 1971."*

*"The Mai-Kai Restaurant is locally significant under Criteria A in the areas of Commerce and Entertainment/Recreation. It is significant as an intact, still operating, Polynesian-themed restaurant. The period of significance is from 1956 to 1964 when it largely achieved its present appearance. The Mai-Kai reflects national broad patterns of entertainment that began in the 1920s and thrived in the mid-20th century. The Mai-Kai is one of the few remaining Polynesian themed restaurants in Florida. The building, landscaped garden, interior decor, and the operational elements make the Mai-Kai an exemplary of an exotic themed restaurant and tourist destination. In addition to its decor, the Mai-Kai maintains a Polynesian-Asian influenced menu, as well as the mandatory cocktail menu. While the Mai-Kai's food menu has adapted to changing culinary tastes, its drink menu, including the quality ingredients, has not changed since 1956. As a result, the restaurant is renowned for its expert tropical drinks. A review of the Mai-Kai's drink menu indicates over a dozen registered trademark cocktails. The Mai-Kai has a permanent place in a holy trio of old-school holdouts dedicated to the careful construction of their libations."*

### **ALTERATIONS**

#### **Main Restaurant Building 1956 - Original Construction**

*Although the Mai-Kai has undergone some modification over the decades, it retains the integrity of its original and distinct South Seas and nautical themes that contribute to both its significant architectural character and its role in Mid-Century "Tiki" popular culture. These themes are expressed on both the exterior and interior of the Mai-Kai.*

*The Mai-Kai was constructed in 1956 in an undeveloped area of Oakland Park on U.S Highway 1. At the time, there were no other buildings in the vicinity, and many of the nearby roads were unpaved. The building sat much further west of Federal Highway than it does currently. The tourist industry began developing in nearby Fort Lauderdale in the late 1950s, and soon other businesses were locating in the area. The road has since been widened twice and a sidewalk added, reducing the landscaped area along Federal Highway.*

*The 1-story Mai-Kai originally had a plan footprint that was roughly square in configuration with a cut at the north eastern corner that contained the main entrance. Two equally sized wings projected to the east, and a garden area was located between the wings. The garden extended to the east toward Federal Highway. A large A-frame roof with a ridge that was perpendicular to Federal Highway rose from the center of the complex over the garden area and continued to the west where it terminated approximately twenty three feet to the east of the western elevation. The remainder of the building's roof was very low pitched. The eastern portion of the A-frame had fiberglass panels that could be raised and lowered. The western portion of the A-frame roof was covered with thatch. The main entrance on the north elevation was covered by wide, flat canopy with an upturned notched ridge beam at the eastern end.*

#### **c.1958 -Remodeling**

*Around 1958, the northernmost projecting wing of the original structure was expanded approximately twenty feet to the north in order to accommodate a larger bar facility. Additionally, a large porte-cochere was added to the northern entrance, and several modifications were made to the interior.*

#### **1960- 1970**

*In the period between 1960 and 1970, several smaller modifications were made to the property. Because the Mai-Kai was so successful, the interior was reconfigured to accommodate more patrons and the stage show that began in 1962. The separate Bora Bora Room was added at the northern end of the site, and the porte-cochere was structurally reinforced. The original garden area that existed between the two projecting wings was enclosed, and the roof was modified to remain permanently closed.*

#### *1971 -Major Expansion*

*In 1971, a kitchen/service wing and an ell-shaped addition were constructed. The kitchen wing was added to the south and was utilitarian in its architectural character, with its location away from the primary facades. The ell was added to the southern and eastern ends the restaurant building and abutted the new kitchen wing. The ell included the Tahiti and Moorea Rooms as well as a covered terrace, the Lanai, along the southern elevation. Additionally at this time, some of the interior service and administration areas were reconfigured.*

## **2. Proposed Renovations**

The proposed renovations include the demolition of the unoccupied Bora Bora Room, removal of the mechanical penthouse, raising the vertical plank siding along the North elevation to screen the mechanical equipment, adding vertical plank siding to match existing on the West elevation with creeping fig vines, new synthetic palm leaf thatched mansard roof on East elevation to replace previously removed mansard roof, replacement of the existing deteriorating roof thatching with new, replacement of the exterior flat roof that has collapsed with a new A-Frame thatched roof structure reminiscent to that of the existing A-frame roof structures already existing on site, replace previously removed thatching on main A-frame, construction of event space in part of the previous kitchen footprint with new impact windows and sliding doors and painted stucco to match the existing, repaint to match existing the decorative mural and roof on the main A-frame, renovate existing interior kitchen, relocate staff restrooms and locker rooms in back of house area, new ADA restroom, access and circulation improvements off N. Federal Highway with new roundabout and landscape enhancements consistent with the historic simulated rock and lush tropical landscaping. Existing missing wood tikis are to be replaced in same manner as historically replaced with fiberglass from mold of original tiki. Existing rotted wood entry bridge planks to be replaced in kind with new to match existing.

Please note that since the existing finished floor level is at 6.78' NAVD. If the existing finished floor level of the Mai Kai were to be raised due to substantial improvement, it would significantly damage the historic interior of the Mai Kai which would preclude the structure's continued designation as a historic structure which is what allows the Mai Kai to be exempt from the FEMA requirements for substantial improvement.

### **3. Phasing**

**Emergency Repair** – Interior finishes with significant water damages were repaired or replaced in kind to match the existing to prevent further deterioration of the surrounding areas. Toilet fixtures were removed to scope the plumbing lines. Rotted purlins of the existing porte cochere were replaced in kind to match existing. Existing deteriorated roof thatching was removed and in the process of being replaced but has since been paused along with the repainting of the mural and A-Frame with the original colors and design.

**Existing Flat Roof Repair** – Permit was received to replace the existing flat roof system that was leaking and compromising the historic interiors of the Mai Kai. Existing mansard thatched roof was removed in order to repair the existing flat roof.

**Mechanical Equipment Replacement** – Permit was approved for the replacement of the existing HVAC equipment in order to maintain the interior environment.

**Phase 1 Interior Renovation** - Permit drawings are currently being reviewed for the interior reconfiguration of the back of house area to include the staff restroom, locker rooms, new ADA restroom and temporary kitchen.

**Phase 2 Exterior & Site work** – Please see proposed plans and elevations submitted for DRC. The original building footprint is to remain the same with new event center and kitchen build out in previous kitchen area, with new A-frame roof and flat roof to match existing. South elevation to have new impact sliding doors with painted stucco to match existing. New vertical wood planks on the West Elevation and height of planks on North elevation to be raised. Replacement of previously removed thatched mansard roof on portion of East and North elevations. Demolition of the Bora Bora Room and mechanical penthouse. All of the exterior site improvements per the attached Landscape and Civil Plans with new parking layout and roundabout.

### **4. Exterior Finish Materials**

South Elevation – New A-Frame roof with synthetic palm thatching. Replace existing thatched roofs with new synthetic palm. New sliding impact doors with bronze frame and painted stucco wall to match existing colors and texture.

East Elevation – Repaint existing mural with colors to match existing. New decorative design imagery on new A-frame similar to that of the existing with colors to match the existing. New double door entry to event area with wood finish to match existing wood finish. New palm leaf thatched textured mansard roof to replace previously removed mansard roof.

North Elevation - Height of the vertical wood planks to match existing are to be raised and replaced in kind to match existing finish and color. Previously removed thatched mansard roof to be reinstalled at previous location with new palm thatching. Thatching of Porte cochere to be replaced. Palm thatching to be partially reinstalled over main A-frame per original photographs. Repaint existing main A-frame with colors to match existing.

West Elevation - Height of the vertical wood planks to match existing are to be raised and replaced in kind to match existing finish and color. New creeping fig vine areas on elevation. Stucco wall finish, color and texture to match existing with new mural painted to match existing mural colors.

## **5. Existing Photographs**

Please see I-1 through I-9 for existing images and key plan for location.

## **6. COA narrative for Architectural Compatibility**

**Sec. 25-108. - Review criteria for proposed exterior work on buildings or structures where a certificate of designation has previously been issued.** In consideration of an application for a certificate of appropriateness for proposed exterior construction, the historic preservation board shall utilize the following guidelines based on the United States Secretary of the Interior's Standards for Rehabilitation, 36 CFR 67:

1. A property shall be used for its historic purpose or be placed in a new use that requires minimal change to the defining characteristics of the building and its site and environment.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the use shall remain the same, a restaurant and Polynesian dinner show.*

2. The historic character of a property shall be retained and preserved. The removal of historic materials or alteration of exterior features that characterize a property shall be avoided.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the character of the property shall be retained and preserved. The alterations to the façade are along the West Elevation which is an existing plain painted stucco wall and the mechanical penthouse is not contributing. The exterior palm thatching was significantly deteriorating and in need of replacement.*

3. Each property shall be recognized as a physical record of its time, place and use. Changes that create a false sense of historical development, such as adding conjectural features or architectural elements from other buildings, shall not be undertaken.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the intent is to add features from elements already present on site. The thatching elements, A-frame, decorative murals, vertical wood planks, synthetic rock features, and dense tropical landscaping are already present on site.*

4. Most properties change over time; those changes that have acquired historic significance in their own right shall be retained and preserved.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the mechanical room being removed has no historical significance. The Bora Bora room has been unsafe to inhabited since hurricane Wilma in 2005.*

5. Distinctive features, finishes and construction techniques or examples of craftsmanship that characterize a historic property shall be preserved.

*Architect's Response: Complies.*

6. Deteriorated historic features shall be repaired rather than replaced. Where the severity of deterioration requires replacement of a distinctive feature, the new feature shall match the old in design, texture and other visual qualities and, where possible, materials. Replacement of missing features shall be substantiated by documentary, physical or pictorial evidence.

*Architect's Response: Complies, we are replacing the missing palm thatching on the main A-frame roof. The intent is to repair elements, when possible, or to replace in kind to match the existing. The original wood tikis have been replaced over time with fiberglass, due to the exposure from the elements. Molds of the original tikis were made in the intent is to use the molds to replace the missing or damaged tikis.*

7. Chemical or physical treatments, such as sandblasting, that cause damage to historic materials shall not be used. The surface cleaning of structures, if appropriate, shall be undertaken using the gentlest means possible.

*Architect's Response: Complies and understood sandblasting or damaging treatments will not be used.*

8. Significant archaeological resources affected by a project shall be protected and preserved. If such resources must be disturbed, work shall be monitored by an archaeologist, as appropriate, and mitigation measures shall be undertaken.

*Architect's Response: Complies.*

9. New additions, exterior alterations or related new construction shall not destroy historic materials that characterize the property. The new work shall be differentiated from the old and shall be compatible with the massing, size, scale and architectural features to protect the historic integrity of the property and its environment.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the intent is to make the West façade more cohesive with the main elevations. We are proposing to continue the existing wood paneling from the North facade and extend the paneling to conceal the roof equipment. We are also proposing incorporating vines reminiscent of the dense landscaping that is found in the existing gardens. The new pitch roof is similar to that of the existing A-frame, with design elements already present on site. The new*

*roof will have the same pitch and will be slightly shorter, such that the existing A-frame is the more prevalent feature. The new roof is also significantly setback from the street, behind the existing gardens and will not be visible from the main street. The building was conceived with the thematic Polynesian realm, which is what precipitated its inclusion on the National Register. Rather than feeling it is a replication of history, it is consistent with the additions that have gone before it and all of those previous additions stayed within this Polynesian style realm.*

10. New additions or related new construction shall be undertaken in such a manner that, if removed in the future, the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the new roof and wood paneling could be removed in the future and the essential form and integrity of the historic property and its environment would be unimpaired.*

**Sec. 25-109. - Review criteria for proposed new construction and additions.**

New construction and additions associated with an individually designated historic resource shall be compatible with the buildings, site, or environment with which the new construction is visually related. Criteria to be considered by the historic preservation board shall include the following:

1. The height, volume, mass, scale, proportions and relationship between doors and windows, rhythm of solids and voids created by openings in the facade, materials used in the facade, the texture inherent in the facade, the pattern and trim used in the facade, and the design of the roof shall be compatible with any existing historic buildings within view of the property.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the design is compatible with the existing structures. The scale of the new A-Frame is shorter than the existing main A-Frame with the same roof pitch slope. The proposed materials, texture, and pattern used in the facades are to match the existing.*

2. Rhythm created by existing building masses and spaces between them shall be preserved.

*Architect's Response: N/A, the new roof addition is over the existing footprint of the building and there is no new square footage as part of this project.*

3. Landscape plans shall be compatible with the buildings and environment with which it is visually related.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the new roundabout and entry drive are cohesive with the Polynesian theme of the historic structure and landscape.*

4. Architectural details should be incorporated as necessary to relate the new with the old and to preserve and enhance the inherent architectural characteristics of the area.

*Architect's Response: Complies, the new roof will have the same pitch and will be slightly shorter, such that the existing A-frame, as it is the more prevalent feature. The new roof thatching will allow the removal of the sprinklers overhanging the existing porte cochere which affect the visual aesthetics of the historic structure.*

**Sec. 25-111. - Demolition of a historic resource where a certificate of designation has been issued.**

No certificate of appropriateness shall be issued for the demolition of a historic resource issued a certificate of designation unless the applicant demonstrates by the preponderance of the evidence that undue economic hardship or unusual and compelling circumstances support such a demolition.

*(1) Unusual and compelling circumstances.*

- a. *Criteria.* In situations where the applicant claims that unusual and compelling circumstances require the demolition of an individually designated historic resource the historic preservation board shall consider the following criteria:
  - i. The building or structure is of such interest or quality that it would reasonably meet national standards for additional designation on the National Register of Historic Places or as a National Historic Landmark.

*Architect's Response: The Bora Bora room was the gift shop for the Polynesian Dinner show which was an auxiliary use to the historical significance of the site.*

- ii. The building or structure is of such design, craftsmanship or material that it could be reproduced only with great difficulty and/or expense.

*Architect's Response: The Bora Bora room was a later addition to the original structure. Since the structure has shifted off its foundation, it would be very difficult to keep the structure intact if it were to be repaired.*

- iii. The building or structure is one (1) of the last remaining examples of its kind in the city or the region.

*Architect's Response: The Bora Bora room is the same architectural style as the main building.*

- iv. Retention of the building or structure would promote the general welfare of the city by providing an opportunity for the study of local history, architecture or design.

*Architect's Response: The main building will still be retained and preserved, only the auxiliary building is being proposed to be removed.*

- v. Definite plans exist for reuse of the property if the proposed demolition is carried out, and if the plans will have a positive effect on the character of the surrounding area.

*Architect's Response: The Bora Bora room is a separate building on site and by removing the unoccupied structure, we are able to route the entry drive around the existing Porte Cochere which is too low to allow fire trucks to enter the site. The Porte Cochere can not be raised without substantially altering the existing façade and historic structure. The new drive allows the traffic to be rerouted through the site and roundabout which reduces the congestion and risk of accidents on Federal Highway, allowing for significant site/life safety improvements to the site. The roundabout also allows for the cars to be unloaded on the same side as the entry to the building. The existing drive has passengers unload and then cross the adjacent drive isle to enter the building creating an unsafe condition.*

- vi. A reasonable effort was made to relocate the building or structure.

*Architect's Response: We explored the possibilities to relocate the building on site, but there is not enough room for the building to be relocated along with a driveway.*

- vii. Demolition of the designated building or structure has been recommended or ordered by the appropriate public agency due to unsafe conditions.

*Architect's Response: Please see attached report from the structural engineer evaluating the current condition of the Bora Bora room as an unsafe structure.*



Reference Image 1 – Historic Photo with Palm Thatching



Reference Image 2 – Street View from Federal with new roof outline beyond  
(not visible from street)