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Havana 2000

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What do we ask of a set of photographs that describes a city, Havana in this instance? Clearly, we want it to present architectural documentation as articulately as possible. We also want a sense of when “now” was for the photographer (ambiguously dated photographs seem loose at their moorings) and a sense of where the pictures fall along the timeline of the city’s development (historic buildings illustrated without their present contexts seem prevarications fit mainly for coffee table books).

In the twentieth century, the changes that have occurred in most Western cities (those that are not museums to their own pasts) have been ones of replacement and redesign. And in most of these cities, the most reliable visual indication of when architectural photographs were taken is the date of automobiles. In photographing these places, one juxtaposes the old and the new and keeps an automobile in view. But in Havana, the topographic changes during the last two-thirds of a century have been minimal: the juxtapositions one can make are often ones that could have been made seventy years ago. And, of course, Havana’s almost half century-old American automobiles are famously still in use.

In the pictures of Havana shown here, juxtapositions, rather than opposing time past to time present, describe architectural conversations that have been going on for the better part of a century. The topics have rarely changed in the last forty years, however, giving the city an aura of the past that an American city attempting to retain so-called historic districts must envy. The clothes of the citizens (and perhaps the mere fact that the pictures are in color) tell us that the photographs were taken recently and provide the present context. The old American automobiles, besides affirming that the city is indeed Havana, serve, by their yearly increasing age, the function of an ever receding temporal (and historical) shoreline.

—*Cervin Robinson*

Color reproduction of
“Havana 2000” was made
possible by Hardy
Holzman Pfeiffer Associates



Morro lighthouse and
Máximo Gómez monument



The city from El Morro,
Capitol at center,
Gómez monument to left



Monument to José Martí
in Parque Central, with
National Capitol and palacio
del Centro Gallego (teatro
García Lorca) behind



Assembling for a demonstration
for Elián Gonzalez, Vedado



Julio Antonio Mella
monument and steps
of University of Havana



Church of Jesús del Monte
seen across Calzada de
Días de Octubre



Park on Avenida 5ta, between
Calles 24 and 26, Miramar