

INTERVIEW WITH JACK MEYER-ENGINEER OF MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

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Norman Dignum founded Dignum Engineers, which is where I worked. There were only a few good engineering firms after WWII-Les Taylor, Jorgenson and Schreffer. Some time after the War in the early 1950s, Schreffer died and Jorgenson got old. Norman Dignum had worked for Jorgenson.

Dignum Engineers was Norman Dignum, Jim Power, two other engineers and a couple of really good structural draftsmen.

I had been working for the City of Miami. I was with the Engineering Department at the time. The City was growing and I had an offer to head the General Services Department. I decided not to do it. I went to Dignum's Office and got a job with them in 1954.

In the early 1960s, the City of Miami had hired a firm to do a feasibility study for a Marine Stadium. They did it because during the Orange Bowl Regatta, the racing boats in the Bay would hit coconuts and they wanted to do something about it.

So the firm recommended that a Stadium be built. The City decided it was not an architectural project, but an engineering project. The City approached Dignum-and several other engineering firms-but they gave the job to Dignum. I was put in charge of the project. We then decided to work with Pancoast, Ferendino, Skeels and Burnham, the architectural firm as we had recently worked with them on several Dade Junior College projects.

I came up with the initial shell design. Hilario took it and re-worked it. Hilario's design was striking but was a lot more complicated, making it a difficult structure to engineer. Today however, we all are grateful to him as the stadium's pleasing good looks are critical to the restoration effort.

The contractor mostly constructed a lot of elementary schools. I was checking a school that was under construction, and at the rear of the site I saw a 1/10th scale model of the formwork for the Marine Stadium roof! The construction superintendent built the model and convinced his bosses to go after the contract. This firm ultimately won the contract.

Even though this contractor was not experienced in anything like this, they got the best workmen, and the most experienced steel detailers and steel workers in the City. Large portions of the roof slab are only three inches thick so the reinforcing steel in these areas had to be galvanized to prevent rusting. The steel detailers were very concerned about fitting the heavy amount of reinforcing in the spines of the shells so that one day they showed up at our office in Coral Gables with full scale drawings of the layout of the rebar on a roll of butcher paper 100 ft. long. Full size! Portions of the structure were poured with extra small concrete aggregate because of all the steel that was in it. And we had the best people in town doing it.

I think construction took about six months. The foreman of the rod busters was a friend of mine from many prior projects. He rightfully gave me all kinds of grief complaining about how difficult this job was.

When we poured the first shell on the roof, I estimated that the roof would dip 18 inches. It didn't—it dipped six inches. I was concerned because right after the Stadium was built, there was a hurricane and it went right over the Stadium.