

Miami

Once known mainly as a vacation hot spot,
the city is now an international art and design mecca,
with pleasures that go way beyond the beach

By Jorge S. Arango



To the uninitiated these days, boarding a flight to Miami in early December can be a disorienting experience. Anticipating a planeload of shorts-bedecked pleasure seekers, travelers instead find themselves staring at a vast sea of black. The dark sartorial uniformity indicates only one thing: Art Basel Miami Beach, the annual pilgrimage of the international art world to the tropical nexus of preening, Cavalli-clad models, exclusivity, and excess. "Yes, the art crowd," admits Bonnie Clearwater, director and chief curator of Miami's Museum of Contemporary Art (MoCA), with a knowing laugh. "You can spot them a mile away."

The four-year-old offspring of the long-established annual art show in Switzerland, Art Basel Miami Beach is the clearest indication yet that

Miami can no longer be considered merely a hedonistic playground for fashionistas and hip-hop impresarios. The presence of the show, and the more than 180 galleries and thousands of art enthusiasts it attracts, suggests that something has shifted—that, in the words of local architect and designer Alison Spear, "Miami has become more serious."

It also illustrates the particular ways that art, architecture, and design mix in this city. "You have developers hiring Jenny Holzer to create installations for their building openings," says Spear with some amazement. For Social Miami, the new restaurant-cum-gallery at the Sagamore hotel on South Beach (it will open shortly after Art Basel has packed up), designer Mark Zeff has devised a bank of glass screens in the >

lounge to showcase videos "curated" by Christine Taplin, who owns the hotel with her husband, Marty Taplin.

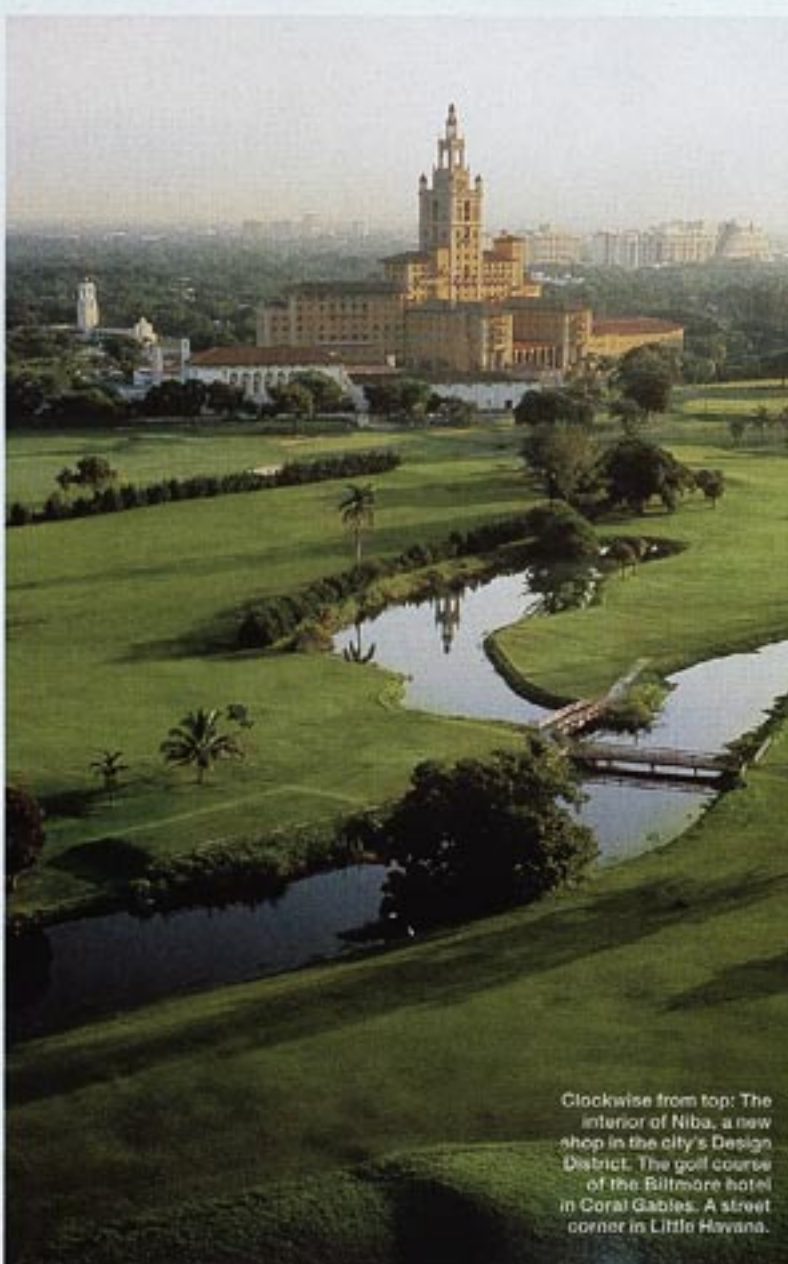
Clearly, Miami has come a long way since the 1960s, when Lenny Bruce dubbed it the place "where neon goes to die." Today, it draws music moguls, Latin-American tycoons, European tourists, and a coterie of the young and the beautiful who think nothing of plunking down \$300 for a bottle of vodka at trendy nightclubs like Mansion, B.E.D., and Privé. And the glam quotient continues to escalate. Casa Casuarina, Gianni Versace's flagrantly outré 20,000-square-foot estate, has just reopened as an exclusive social club where initial membership will set you back \$70,000 and annual dues are \$3,500.

While the city's sybaritic delights have been a draw since the turn of the century, things didn't heat up until the late 1980s, when the fashion and music worlds hit the beach. Hip-hop artist Lil' Kim best summarized the excessive glamour of the decade and a half that followed: "It's sweaty in Miami," she said last year, "but the diamonds will keep me cool."

A good barometer was Fisher Island, home to celebrities like Oprah Winfrey and Boris Becker. Exclusive ever since its days as the retreat of William K. Vanderbilt II (great-grandson of the commodore), it continues to hold the distinction of having the highest per capita income in the country. But even here development had stalled until an infusion of billionaires in the '80s jump-started restoration and led to the first new construction the island had seen in many years.

The city's renewed popularity also sparked a preservation movement to save the famed Art Deco District. Restaurants and clubs were suddenly thriving, New Yorkers were swooping in and buying cheap apartments on the beach, and a gallery scene began to gestate. That first revival was fairly localized, however, mostly in South Beach. (Miami is enormous, encompassing Miami Beach—actually a long barrier island connected to Miami proper by causeways across Biscayne Bay—and a much larger area on the mainland.) South Beach became so replete with attractions designed to lure the glittering and the gauche that pioneer types began to push out beyond the main drags of Collins Avenue, Lincoln Road, and Ocean Drive into industrial neighborhoods like Sunset Harbour.

But something else began shifting around the millennium. Since 2001, the city's population has grown *(text continues on page 106)* ▷



Clockwise from top: The interior of Niba, a new shop in the city's Design District. The golf course of the Biltmore hotel in Coral Gables. A street corner in Little Havana.

TOP: MOSES VORONOV; BOTTOM LEFT: © AGE FOTOSTOCK; RIGHT: SHUTTERSTOCK





Essential Miami

The area code is 305.

Get in with the art crowd. Art Basel Miami Beach runs December 1–4 at the Miami Beach Convention Center. Some 180 international galleries exhibit modern and contemporary work (358-5883; artbasel.com). Don't miss the first-ever design.05 exhibits at the historic Moore Building in the Design District (572-0866; design05miami.com). Look for events all over town and especially in the galleries and studios of the Wynwood Art District (wynwoodartdistrict.com). Get a dose of design. Walk the 18-block Design District, with showrooms, stores, and galleries (designmiami.com). Learn about MiMo (Miami Modern) and architect Morris Lapidus on a Miami Design Preservation League tour of Art Deco neighborhoods (672-2014; mdpl.org). Experience Miami's Gilded Age. George Merrick's 14-square-mile Coral Gables is one of America's first planned cities, full of graceful Spanish- and Italian-style architecture (coralgables.com). Have tea at Schultze and

Weaver's opulent Biltmore hotel (1200 Anastasia Ave.), shop the Miracle Mile (Coral Way), and swim in the over-the-top Venetian Pool, a former quarry (venetianpool.com). Get back to the garden. The Kampong is plant explorer David Fairchild's old estate and a National Tropical Botanical Garden on Biscayne Bay (ntbg.org). Peddle along Coconut Grove's lush bike path. Enjoy rare palms and cycads at the Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (667-1651; fairchildgarden.org).

What to See

Miami Art Museum, 101 W. Flagler St., Miami, 375-3000; miamiartmuseum.org: Wide-ranging, with work by locals, internationally known artists, and contemporary photographers.
Museum of Contemporary Art, 770 NE 125th St., North Miami, 893-6211; mocanomi.org: MoCA has brought many Miami artists their earliest acclaim.
Vizcaya Museum & Gardens, 3251 S. Miami Ave., Miami, 250-9133; vizcaya-museum.org: Industrialist James

Deering's estate, built in 1916, is Miami's belle époque on steroids; 34 rooms with enough antiques and art to give Bauhaus aficionados a spontaneous coronary.
The Wolfsonian-FIU, 1001 Washington Ave., Miami Beach, 531-1001; wolfsonian.fiu.edu: The city's premier museum of the decorative arts, with objects from 1885 through 1945.

Where to Stay

The Biltmore, 1200 Anastasia Ave., Coral Gables, 445-1926; biltmore-hotel.com: Quintessential old Miami—the whole peach-stucco, Spanish Colonial nine yards. Where else will you find a chevron-shaped pool?
Conrad Miami, 1395 Brickell Ave., Miami, 503-6500; conradhotels.com: Housed in an exciting addition to the skyline, the Espirito Santo Plaza, and convenient to everything. Its Noir Bar is one of the best in town.
Delano, 1685 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 672-2000; delano-hotel.com: It's Philippe Starck—so it's hot, expensive, luxurious, and loaded with fashionistas.

Hotel Victor, 1144 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach, 428-1234; hotelvictorsouth-beach.com: Jacques Garcia's interiors for this landmark reek of 1930s panache and reflect its marine setting.
The Setai, 2001 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 520-6000; setai.com: It has the most talked-about restaurant in Miami Beach, but its soothing Asian aesthetic is a welcome relief from the area's retro obsession and modern bling-bling.
The Standard, 40 Island Ave., Miami Beach, 673-1717; standardhotel.com: Located on an island, it features private outdoor living rooms and soaking tubs, almost more Mustique than Miami.

Where to Eat

Baleen, 4 Grove Isle Dr., Coconut Grove, 857-6007; groveisle.com: A gem on an island setting. Seafood is its forte. If it's hot, sit in the clubby space indoors; if not, request the gorgeous terrace.
Captain Jim's Seafood, 12950 W. Dixie Hwy., Miami, 892-2812: If you can't wait hours for a table at Joe's Stone Crab, get that Florida delicacy here.
Forge Restaurant & Bar, 432 W. 41st St., Miami Beach, 538-8533: This legendary steak house has a huge celebrity following—Lenny Kravitz, the Iglesias clan, et al. Is it the lobster thermidor or the sconces from Napoleon's bed-chamber? Probably both.
Soyka, 5556 NE 4th Ct., Miami, 759-3117: The Design District hangout, and the casual food's good too—salads, brick-oven pizzas, and more.
Wish, 801 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, 674-9474; wishrestaurant.com: Chef Michael Bloise's trendy spot, with great fusion cuisine (Cuban coffee-braised osso buco anyone?).

Where to Shop

Arango, 7519 SW 88th St., Miami, 661-4229; arango-design.com: Revolutionary when the late Judith Arango opened it in 1959, it still carries forward designs from around the world.
Artisan Antiques Art Deco, 110 NE 40th St., Miami, 573-5619: The city's best selection of French 1920s and '30s pieces, especially lighting.
East Pottery, 1515 Sunset Dr., Coral Gables, 668-0273; eastpottery.com: Garden stools and unusual pots. A must for serious gardeners—and they ship!
Glo, 5050 Biscayne Blvd., Miami, 758-2727: Specializes in vintage modern Scandinavian (Wegner, Juht) but also carries other periods and designers (Wormley, Ponti, McCobb).
Harris Kratz, 742 NE 125th St., North Miami, 981-4040; harriskratz.com: If you want Tommi Parzinger, this is the place, plus Dorothy Draper and James Mont.
Jalan Jalan Collection, 3921 NE 2nd Ave., Miami, 572-9998; jalanmiami.com: Exquisite furniture and curiosities from all over the world. If Juan Montoya likes something, it's probably here.
Niba, 39 NE 39th St., Miami, 573-1939; nibahome.com: Furniture by Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz, lighting by And Bob's Your Uncle, and more.

miami

Vicciays, the villa built in 1916 by industrialist James Deering and now open to the public. Below: Glo, a vintage-modern shop in the Design District.



Hobe Sound Wall Lantern, designed by nationally-acclaimed designer Tom Schaefer.

by 10 percent (compared with only a 7-percent rise from 1970 to 2000). Many attribute the current renaissance to Miami's emergence as an important international city. A huge influx of Central and South American people, most recently Venezuelans, cemented Miami's reputation as the gateway to Latin America. But the complexion of the long-established Cuban population has also changed. Though Cuban culture has permeated every level of Miami society—from the bittersweet aroma of Cuban coffee emanating out of countless restaurants to the highest offices at City Hall—it is no longer necessarily the same culture of the old-guard exiles who arrived here in the wake of Castro's revolution. The early 1990s saw the en-masse migration of what is known as the '80s generation of Cuban artists, with their disillusioned post-utopian views of the Cuban experiment.

The confluence of all these elements forced expansion to burst the boundaries of the beach and leapfrog across Biscayne Bay to every neighborhood along the water from North Miami down to Coral Gables and Coconut Grove. The real-estate boom that has ensued is astonishing, particularly along the Biscayne corridor, from downtown all the way to the northern reaches of Miami-Dade County.

"It looks like the rebuilding of Berlin," says architect Chad Oppenheim, only partly in jest. The 35-year-old Oppenheim is as good a symbol of the development frenzy as you'll get. He started his business six years ago out of his



PHOTO: BOB LANGRISH/GETTY IMAGES

hand-crafted lighting by

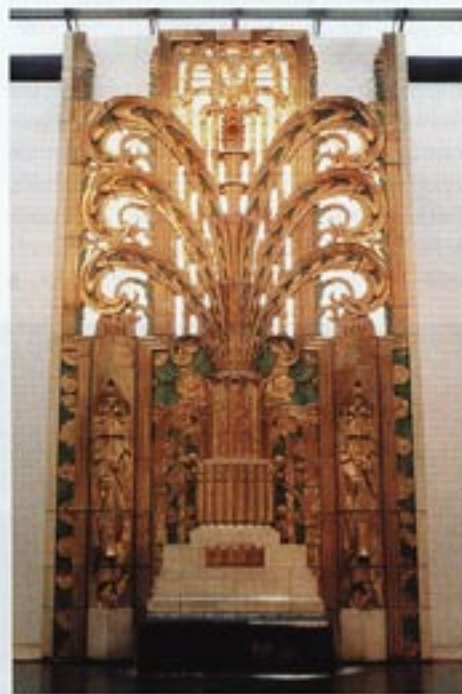
THE URBAN ELECTRIC CO.[®]

843.723.8140
charleston, sc
urbanelectricco.com
through the mode



The restaurant at the Setai Hotel in South Beach. Below: The lobby of the Wolfsonian, a museum of decorative arts.

800-square-foot apartment. He is now Miami's architectural golden boy, drafting plans for close to \$5 billion worth of projects in his 8,000-square-foot office in the Design District. He is following a similar trajectory to Arquitectonica before him, which created buildings like the Atlantis condominiums that have become iconic. Barring a huge unforeseen economic downturn, Oppenheim will be responsible for dramatically altering the city's skyline. "I couldn't have accomplished that in any other place but Miami," he says.



Lewis Aqüi, partner in the landscape design firm Hell Bell Aqüi, points out that "South Beach is not the only hot spot anymore. A lot of the design scene has moved out of Miami Beach to concentrate on other areas." Areas like the Design District. Visionary developer Craig Robins (who was also responsible for injecting life into Lincoln Road) deserves credit for transforming a neighborhood that was once deserted by nightfall into one that now teems with activity. Trendsetting showrooms like Holly Hunt and Odegard have hung out shingles, and Jalan Jalan draws savvy shoppers. The new Niba sponsors events that merrily blur the line between design and art. During Art Basel, for instance, Niba will show an installation by furniture and rug designers Doug and Gene Meyer.

Down Biscayne Boulevard is the trendy Wynwood Art District, which has become the center of the gallery scene. Here, collectors like Dennis Scholl and the Rubell family have exhibition spaces, and local artists like Rogelio López Marín (Gory) and José Bedía show alongside Pepón Osorio and Takashi Murakami (the latter at a new space designed for Paris art dealer Emmanuel Perrotin). "Miami is no longer a regional art center," notes Clearwater. "It's part of the international scene." This month, her museum inaugurates MoCA at Goldman Warehouse, a 12,000-square-foot satellite space, in the district.

Farther south, the resurgence has been more about preservation. Coconut Grove and Coral Gables (one of the first planned cities in America) hark back to the turn of the century. >

miami



An international mix at the shop Jalan Jalan. Below: A view of Miami Beach looking south past the famed Fontainebleau hotel.

when Henry Flagler first extended his railroad down the East Coast and made Miami a booming port city. Coral Gables's elegant Biltmore hotel, designed by Schultze and Weaver in 1926, was a famous tropical stopover for the Duke and Duchess of Windsor (as well as the place Johnny Weissmuller taught swimming before he was discovered by Hollywood), but had been transformed into a hospital and then largely abandoned by the late 1960s. In 1983, Coral Gables awarded the structure landmark status and it was renovated as a resort. The current owners have spent another \$40 million, recently completing a ten-year refurbishment. Miracle Mile—actually only a half-mile stretch of Coral Way—has also been cleaned up, with trendy stores, antique shops, and galleries.

The heightened importance of art in the cultural life of the city has proved a particular boon for architect René González, whose minimalist, sculptural style has made him the darling of collectors, museums, and other aficionados of Miami's contemporary art scene. It has earned him commissions like the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation as well as the office-studio of Karla Dascal—events planner extraordinaire for Madonna, Ricky Martin, and this year's lavish Bulgari party for the Art Basel crowd—which could be mistaken for a gallery were it not for the walk-in refrigerators and the leaf-strewn worktables.

González, a Cuban émigré who was raised in Miami but left years ago because he found it so culturally vapid, returned in 1990 in part because the city was becoming such an international destination. "When I get my coffee in the morning," says González, "I hear people from all over the world. You always heard various Spanish accents, but now I hear German and French—and from people who live here, not just tourists." The busy architect leans back in his Design District office and smiles contentedly—dressed completely in art-world black. ■

HARDEN

Natural Transitions Collection harden.com

