

Miami's Fast-Changing Neighborhoods

With the opening of Frank Gehry's New World Symphony Building, the Magic City is ready for its next act. T+L takes a tour of Miami's fast-changing neighborhoods.

By [Tom Austin](#)

Throughout the late 1980's and early 90's, I worked as a nightlife columnist for the alternative newspaper *Miami New Times* and kept a small office on Lincoln Road, the pedestrian mall that bisects the northern stretches of South Beach. In the 60's, the vibe of Lincoln Road—designed by the late Morris Lapidus of Fontainebleau and Eden Roc fame—was *Mad Men* South, but the glamour days were long gone by the 80's: retirees with radioactive tans shuffled past bedraggled drag queens and downtrodden shops. But there were interludes of grace: I'd start the day watching the rehearsals of the Miami City Ballet, in an old windowed storefront (their original studios are now a Victoria's Secret store). In the evenings, the New World Symphony (NWS), conducted by Michael Tilson Thomas, would broadcast its concerts live on the street over a terminally low-tech sound system.



Thirty years later, Lincoln Road has emerged at the forefront of Miami's cultural revolution, thanks to Frank Gehry's just-opened [New World Center](#) performing arts venue. An ambitious stab at the civic transcendence of blockbuster architecture, the building is a testament to the city's ability to reinvent itself after years of shaky real estate developments. The project is relatively modest in comparison to Gehry's other work—his trademark geological formations are contained within a partly-glass-walled rectangular box. In all respects, the Gehry campus is intended to be used as an everyday social arena, not simply gaped at. Visitors to the adjacent 2 1/2-acre park, designed by the renowned Dutch firm West 8, can watch rehearsals and symphony patrons through a six-story glass curtain wall, as well as concert broadcasts and video-art murals on a 7,000-square-foot projection wall. As Gehry explains, "The building is meant to be a seduction, a way to lure people in by blurring the distinction between the private and public realms."

In the same manner that the fight to preserve South Beach's Art Deco district 40 years ago jump-started the first resurrection of Miami, the campus—and, of course, such events as Art Basel Miami Beach—is helping the city establish itself as a major destination on the global cultural map. Just north of Gehry's complex, the Collins Park arts district is adding to South Beach's architectural cachet by creating a thoughtfully landscaped domain for sculptural installations. "Miami has little green space, but South Beach is leading the way with intelligently designed public parks," says Jean-François Lejeune, an urban historian and professor of architecture at the University of Miami. Bordered on the north by the Arquitectonica-designed studios of the Miami City Ballet, the park features an open expanse of lawn studded with sculptures that stretch from the Bass Museum of Art to the beach. From there, it's a 10-minute bike ride along the newly extended boardwalk to South Pointe Park, a 19-acre former wasteland

at the southern tip of Miami Beach that's been transformed by Hargreaves Associates, the team behind the planned 2012 Olympic Park Lands, in East London. South Pointe incorporates a series of serpentine trails that wind through dune grasses to a waterfront promenade lined with 18 pylons that emit colored LED light.

These projects come on the heels of significant development across the city. In mid-Miami Beach, the top-to-bottom, billion-dollar renovation of the Fontainebleau kicked off the area's rebirth two years ago; now there's the [Soho Beach House](#) next door. "We wanted to be outside the madness, but close enough to dip in easily," says Nick Jones, owner of the newest outpost of the London-based boutique hotel and social club. To build the property, local architect and writer Allan Shulman joined the 1941 Roy France-designed Sovereign Hotel with a slim new Modernist tower. "Allan is very clever in the way he manages to infuse Art Deco and contemporary styles," Jones says. The public spaces are designed by London-based Martin Brudnizki and include heavy ye-olde-English-club leather chairs, along with a 150-plus-piece contemporary art collection curated by Francesca Gavin.

Nowhere is the hotel boom more acute than in downtown Miami. In the 1980's, the area was dominated by the illuminated I. M. Pei tower immortalized on TV's *Miami Vice*: the skyline then had a certain less-is-more elegance. Now it looks like a kid with too many teeth. It's way too overbuilt, but the cheaper rents and low condo prices are starting to lure the bold and hardy.

Early hotel settlers included Mandarin Oriental and Four Seasons and the boom was amped up by the arrival of the Kelly Wearstler-designed Viceroy in 2009. Downtown's latest addition is the [JW Marriott Marquis Miami](#), situated within a 41-story tower in the Metropolitan Miami development. The building also holds the boutique [Hotel Beaux Arts Miami](#), the debut of Marriott's new luxury brand. There's also the new 67-story Marquis Residences, which houses the hotel [Tempo Miami](#), a [RockResort](#), and [Kimpton's Epic Hotel](#), overlooking the Brickell Avenue financial district, a landscape that resembles the unholy spawn of a three-way between Hong Kong, Times Square, and Las Vegas.

Of course, as with any hotel boom, noteworthy chefs are never far behind. After years of flirting with South Beach, Daniel Boulud chose downtown as the setting for his first Miami restaurant. "All my restaurants require a leap of faith," he says. "Downtown has fewer velvet ropes than South Beach, but has a very cultivated clientele." His [DB Bistro Moderne](#), designed by Yabu Pushelberg, is located on the first floor of the new Marriott. Other acclaimed restaurants include Rainer Becker's Japanese-inspired [Zuma](#), which has sister operations in Hong Kong and Dubai, and Eos, the brainchild of Donatella Arpaia and Michael Psilakis.

Accompanying downtown's hotel explosion is perhaps the city's most ambitious project. Overlooking Biscayne Bay is the vast fallow ground of Museum Park, a 29-acre architectural all-star complex slated to open in 2013 that will incorporate Herzog & de Meuron's new building for the Miami Art Museum. Inside, more than 100,000 square feet will be dedicated to contemporary art. This is the project that may transform downtown all over again.

Smaller Miami communities are also being reenergized. For years, Bal Harbour village was primarily

known for its luxury shopping. Now, [One Bal Harbour Resort & Spa](#), which includes a new beach club designed by Miami-based Hernan Arriaga, hosts free movie screenings on the beach, yoga classes, and concerts by indie bands such as Surfer Blood. Last year, the national Salon de Louis Vuitton was launched at the [Bal Harbour Shops](#) with an exhibition by Miami-born artist Teresita Fernandez. The mall has upped the culture quotient with the Bal Harbour Art Nights, as well as free performances by the Overtown Music Project, Miami City Ballet, and YoungArts, the core program of the National Foundation for Advancement in the Arts.

In the sleek Design District, high-end boutiques including Tomas Maier's eclectic boutique and 4141 Design, the first Florida showroom to feature Tom Dixon (and other designers) as well as innovative restaurants such as Michelle Bernstein's Andalusian-inspired [Sra. Martinez](#)—have been joined by the new 30,000 square-foot de la Cruz space of contemporary art. It's the latest in a series of museums that have been opened by eminent Miami collectors. Nearby Wynwood now has [Wynwood Walls](#), a graffiti garden with a restaurant and bar created by Tony Goldman, an early South Beach pioneer who jumped from the bankable buzz of Art Deco to street art.

Heading north on Biscayne Boulevard, visitors discover a historic district with row upon row of Miami Modern motels that unfurl like a ribbon of joy—all statues of cavorting sea nymphs and trapezoid forms resembling 1955 Cadillac fins, and bearing names like the South Pacific and Seven Seas. Little Haiti—centered around the whimsical Caribbean Marketplace designed by Haitian architect Charles Harrison Pawley in 1990—is a few blocks west, and has positioned itself as a new frontier for contemporary art: the atmospheric landscape is filled with artists' studios and fantastic street murals by Serge Toussaint. The new Little Haiti Cultural Center also showcases cutting-edge art exhibitions, dance performances, and free concerts. Across town, in the neon wonderland of Eighth Street, the heart of Little Havana, music and art take center stage: on the last Friday night of every month, the Viernes Culturales street party includes late-night gallery openings, local salsa bands, and sophisticated Afro-Cuban *timba*. Only here can you witness such a lively celebration of the city's cultural heritage. It's a party no traveler should miss. In a city known for reinventions, sometimes the classics of Miami are just as alluring.