

Property

HOT

By Saxon Henry

The Miami
Design District
brings new life
to America's
playground.

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Developer Craig Robins has an artful way of taking down-in-the-teeth sections of Miami and transforming them into vibrant destinations. Once he'd helped to steer South Beach's revival, he turned his attention toward a swath of the mainland known as the Buena Vista neighbourhood to correct what he saw as a flaw in the way design products were sold. "In the United States, design was only available in decorator malls where people weren't allowed without licensed professionals," he explains. "I felt that that was just wrong." This thinking became the beginning of the Miami Design District.

With a keen sense of what's hot and what's not, Robins lured some of the world's top showrooms to the 18-square-block grid of streets. But before long, he noticed something was amiss. Although the string of well-heeled businesses drew design devotees to the District's streets during the day, the neighbourhood grew quiet once the showrooms closed up shop in the evenings. Robins set his sights on drawing edgy fashion houses, art aficionados and gastronomic heavyweights to the area to make it a scene for fashionistas, art lovers and foodies.

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states Robins. "I knew it could emerge as a special place, so we began to think in terms of having art and design side-by-side with food and fashion, as well as creating art installations. Today you can walk around and see a Zaha Hadid sculpture in the Moore Building, a Marc Newson fence at DASH [Design and Architecture Senior High] and Jose Bedia's public art."

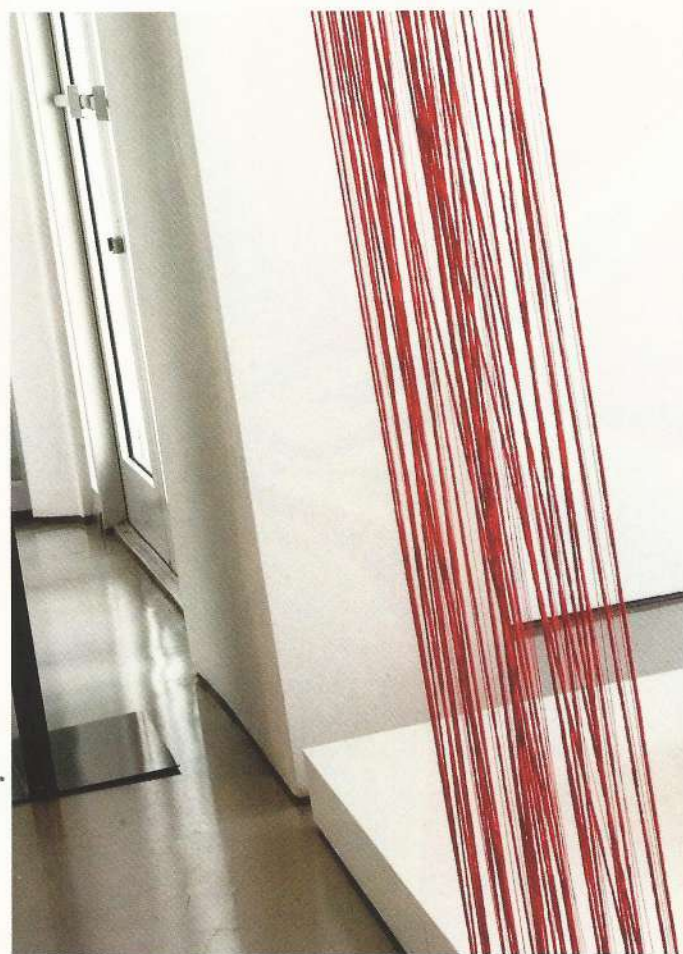
Art is definitely thriving in the neighbourhood. "The second Saturday evening of each month, when the galleries and showrooms hold events, is becoming bigger and better attended with each passing month," says Robins, who also cites the number of important artists who are setting up studios in the neighbourhood (including Naomi Fisher, Jim Drain and Hernan Bas) as a sign that the District is a new hotbed for the arts.

Robins is so serious about creating an art-centred atmosphere that he's bringing a post-graduate arts school to the District — a collaboration of the Anaphiel Foundation and the University of Miami. "The Design District is becoming this really fun place," he says. "Not only are the fine arts thriving; we're drawing fashion brands that are very exclusive, including Marni, Y-3, Tomas Maier and En Avance. We're also thrilled to announce that French designer Christian Louboutin will be opening a boutique in November."

Fashion Forward

Whether you're a fan of sexy and trendy (think En Avance and Marni), casual chic (Y-3) or upscale hip (Tomas Maier and Sebastian James), the District holds a source for your style. It's no secret that celebrities set the tone for high-flying fashion. Given Maggie Gyllenhaal's and supermodel Amber Valetta's craving for Marni, and Madonna's and Cameron Diaz's trips to En Avance, Robins' choices for fashioning a dishier destination are proving to be right on. Not only do these shops have flirty offerings that are perfect for beach-goers, they hold everything to dazzle the city's club set when the sun goes down.

As the creative director at Bottega Veneta, Tomas Maier knows his way around fashion. His eponymous shop in the Design District is a sun-worshipping fashionista's dream. One-of-a-kind linen smocks, so finely woven that they seem ephemeral, rest side-by-side with brightly coloured totes that go from beach to brunch with ease. Due to their proximity, it's easy to hop from one fashion stop to the next, but galleries and showrooms are also in the mix — so save ample time to see all.



Art Appraisal

If you're an art fanatic, you'll have plenty to keep you busy. Wolfgang Roth and Reiner Opoku got a head start on the competition by opening Wolfgang Roth & Partners Fine Art late last year. This year, AE District has opened a new concept gallery, and Joseph Spinello has moved his cutting-edge gallery to the neighbourhood. Locust Projects and 101/exhibit are also nabe newbies. With a wide variety of rotating shows, there's always something new to see. Spinello's fall exhibition, *New Dark Age*, from Sept. 12–Oct. 3, features Manny Prieres in a solo show.

A number of collectors have a presence in the District — including Robins, who makes his collection at his offices available for tours. Noteworthy collector Rosa de la Cruz is bringing her expansive body of works to the neighbourhood with the completion of The Collecting Building this fall.

Designs on You

This is still the Design District, after all, and seeing the array of showrooms in one day will demand a strong constitution. Miami is known as the gateway to Latin America, and the area's commanding presence among the Italian and U.S. showrooms seems to grow each year. Ornare is a Brazilian manufacturer known for its exquisitely detailed and environmentally friendly cabinetry. This summer the company launched Linah, a new line of sleek and sexy kitchens.



J. Kevin Foltz

Adriana Hoyos is a talented furniture designer who was born in Colombia and raised in Ecuador, where she developed an eye for melding warm woods and elemental style.

Luminaire is notable for its cultivated, cutting-edge design. Its founder, Nasir Kassamali, is apt to stage pop-up shops called Luminaire X from time to time, which hold offbeat exhibitions relating to design. His new effort, Outdoor Therapy, is a must see, as the showroom exudes a Zen-like calmness that reflects Kassamali's serene sensibilities. "In Miami, the incredible climate enables us to live outside," he says. "The soothing light of the sun behind the trees, the unique sound of singing birds, the fragrance of the gardens take you to another dimension of what I consider 'outdoor therapy.'"

Kassamali was inspired to create the showroom because he believes that melding the indoor and outdoor rooms of a home is an important aspect of design. "So often I find that people do not know how to choose a synonymous vocabulary or scale between the inside of their homes and the outside," he explains. "Ultimately, I believe that the outdoor world deserves special furnishings that communicate one's unique personality."

The Rug Company opened its beautifully serene space that holds a vibrant display of textiles late last year. You may recognise the British-based company's carpets, pillows

and wall hangings from the *Sex and the City* movie. Carrie Bradshaw's newly decorated foyer caused a run on the company's "Love" wall hanging designed by Paul Smith, which you can see in their Design District space. Avant Gallery, which offers an audacious mix of new and collectible furnishings, and Marimekko Miami are two of the newest design-focused shops to open in the District. Avant often holds exhibitions that intermingle art and iconic furniture, and Marimekko is turning a room of her concept store into a space where designers will be asked to create environments using the Finnish company's vibrant products.

If you are in town during the first week of December, Design Miami, a sister fair to Art Basel Miami Beach that focuses on design rather than art, transforms the District into a design-rich string of venues. Robins is one of the fair's organizers and helps select an annual "Designer of the Year," commissioning substantive works that are left behind, like Hadid's dynamic sculpture in the Moore Building and Newson's undulant gate at DASH. The Campana Brothers from Brazil were the 2008 recipients of the award.

Tasteful Territory

The restaurateurs who bring their brands to the District are among Miami's best. At Michael's Genuine Food &



Robin Hill



J. Kevin Foltz

Drink, Michael Schwartz's emphasis is local and organic ingredients that he infuses with savoury wood-smoked flavours. Seating spills from a minimally designed chic space into Atlas Plaza for al fresco dining. Schwartz has a deal in the works to take his brand to Grand Cayman, and plans to offer his delicious fare to visitors and Caymanites at Camana Bay by early 2010.

Chef Michelle Bernstein's Sra. Martinez intermingles sensual Latin flavours in her tapas offerings. For lunch, feast on Paella or Crispy Eggplant; for dinner, the menu includes Beer Battered Sweetbreads and Garbanzo Stew. For wine lovers, the W Wine Bistro accompanies its serious selection for sipping or purchasing with tasty fare, all of which is served in a seriously relaxed atmosphere.

Speaking of wine, Ken Lyon's restaurant Fratelli Lyon, flanked by avant-garde design showrooms Driade and Vitra, has a sexy Italian vibe and an extensive selection of varietals imported from Italy. "We like to be as authentic as possible," says the restaurant's General Manager Aniece Meinhold. "We concentrate on small vineyards and quality brands, but we don't mark the price up 300 percent like some American restaurants do."

Training is also emphasized. "We have mandatory two-hour wine classes each week that the staff must attend," she explains. "Why offer incredible wines if the waitstaff doesn't understand what we're serving?"

A pre- or post-meal stroll through Vitra and Driade brings dynamic design into focus, as both showrooms contain some of the hippest, newest furnishings available. Vitra won an Editors Award for their Vegetal chair, designed by the renowned Bouroullec brothers, Ronan and Erwan, at the International Contemporary Furniture Fair this past spring.

Packable Pleasures

To help with those souvenirs you promised everyone at home, the District has a surprisingly large selection of goods that will fit easily into a rollerboard. We spotted the London Slipper, in varying colours, and Love Notes scarves at En Avance. The Rogues Gallery vinyl totes, Koli Classic Thong sandals in gold and Mod Beach Blanket hat with bright pink trim at Tomas Maier are trip-friendly finds. Marni's chunky necklaces in an array of bright colours and the brand's astonishing selection of kicky sunglasses are delightful, so much so that we predict you'll be



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snapping up one of each for yourself as well as something for that loved one you promised you'd treat.

Jalan Jalan, a furnishings showroom known for its tribal chic appeal, has petite treasure boxes in fish skin and bone that pack easily, and their selection of sumptuously soft cashmere throws will be someone's newest naptime friend. Check out the backpacks, cotton hats and sneaker sandals at Y-3, and the linen and viscose shawls at Sebastian James. James has been a fashion designer for 18 years and his designs exude classic elegance. He sells cufflinks and ties, as well as leather daypacks for men, made in France. His overnight bag with a hard compartment for keeping slacks wrinkle-free just might be your next best travel companion.


Tommy Turchin's jewellery showroom is filled with glinting eye candy, but his creations are far from superficial. Turchin gathers the building blocks for his jewellery from Tibet, Nepal and Bhutan. "Our jewellery is blessed by Tibetan and Buddhist monks," he explains. "This reinforces the notion that through compassion and kindness, we can change the world." Ornate, dainty prayer boxes dangling from strings of sparkling beads punctuate many of his necklaces. "The point is to write down a wish every 30 days

and place it inside," says Turchin. "At the end of each 30-day period, rip up the prayer, throw it to the wind and write down another one; prayers never end!"

Art by Design

The second Saturday of any given month brings Art + Design Night to the District. Galleries and shops stay open late and stage special exhibitions. In the winter, there's little need to pray for good weather, as nights are generally breezy but rarely brisk. During the summer months, "balmy" describes the night air — the less you wear, the better for strolling through the steamy streets. For an ever-steady stream of the most current news about the District, including highlights of each month's events, join the Design District Facebook page. To schedule a tour to view Robins' collection at Dacra, visit the Miami Design District's website at www.miamidesigndistrict.net.

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