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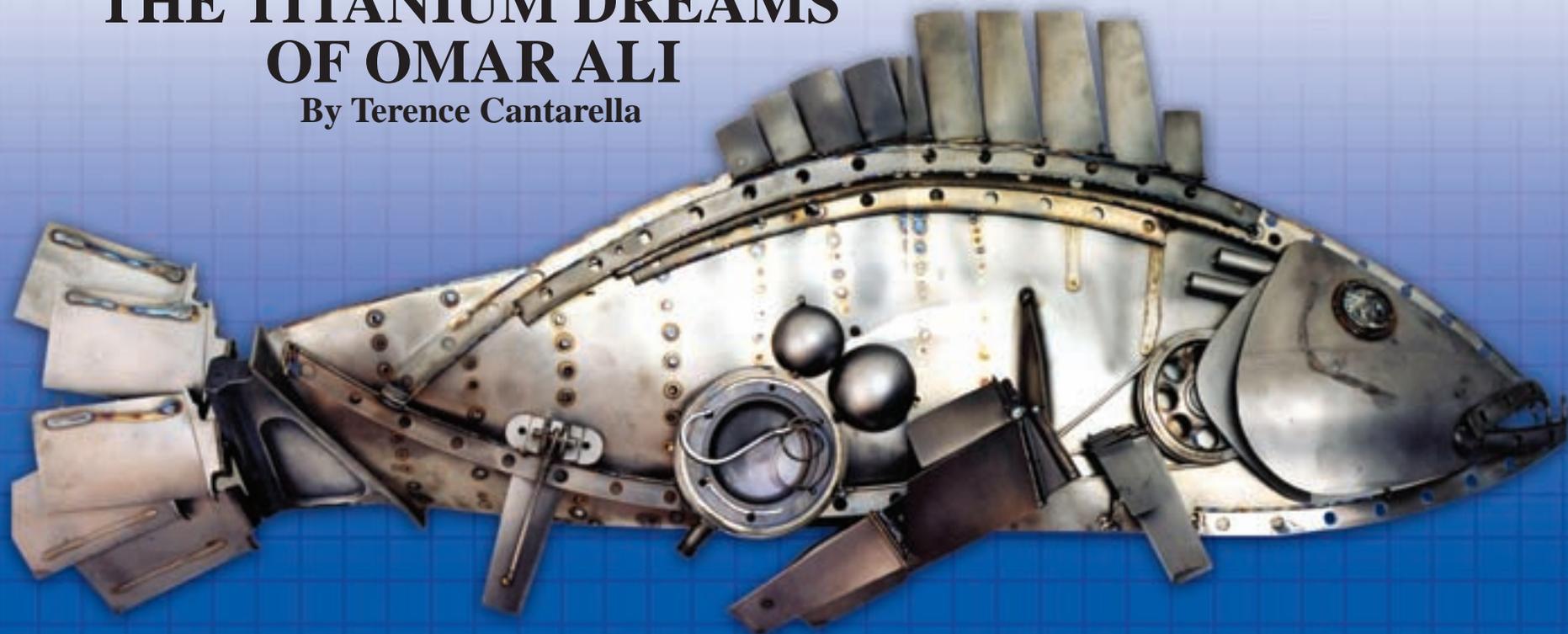
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Volume 7, Issue 1

Heavy Metal *on the* Bay

THE TITANIUM DREAMS OF OMAR ALI

By Terence Cantarella



Not far from Biscayne Boulevard, outside his ramshackle home just north of the 79th Street Causeway drawbridge, Omar Ali is slumped in a folding chair, his thin frame draped in well-worn canvas work clothes, his face turned toward the sun. He's listening to Classical South Florida radio over a pair of loudspeakers, fidgeting with an unlit

cigarette, and watching an osprey obsessively circling the sun-sparkled waters of Biscayne Bay that stretch before him.

The bird swoops down, talons outstretched, and with a soft splash, snatches a fish from the water. It rises, shakes off the water from its plunge, and glides over to a rotting wooden piling to feast on its writhing prey. Ali smiles. He lifts the

cigarette to his mouth, almost lights it, but stops. It's the holy Muslim month of Ramadan, smoking is forbidden during daylight hours, and he'll have to wait until sunset to break his daily fast.

But the 54-year-old Egyptian metal sculptor isn't focused on his hunger or nicotine craving right now. He's mostly thinking about the five-ton,

stainless-steel sculpture towering 25 feet over his head, casting a strange, twisted shadow over his Shorecrest property and, more figuratively, over his life.

Back in 2004, he designed and built the mammoth piece — a graceful, spherical tribute to the famed French explorer

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Dining Guide

We did it! This month's guide has 200 Biscayne Corridor restaurants!

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Community News

An architectural gem is up for sale in North Miami.

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Park Patrol

FIU's Biscayne Bay campus is a wide-open, waterfront beauty.

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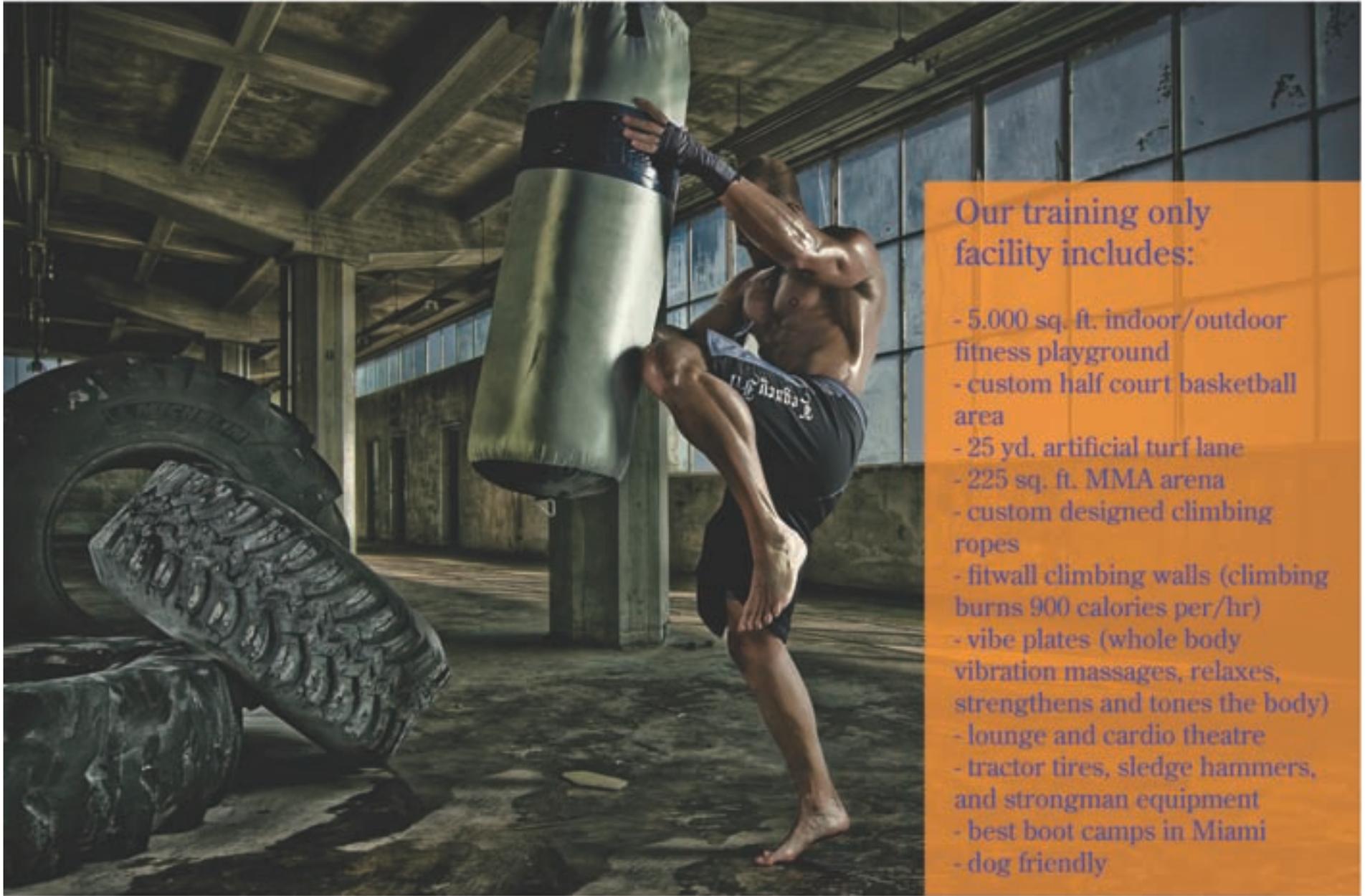
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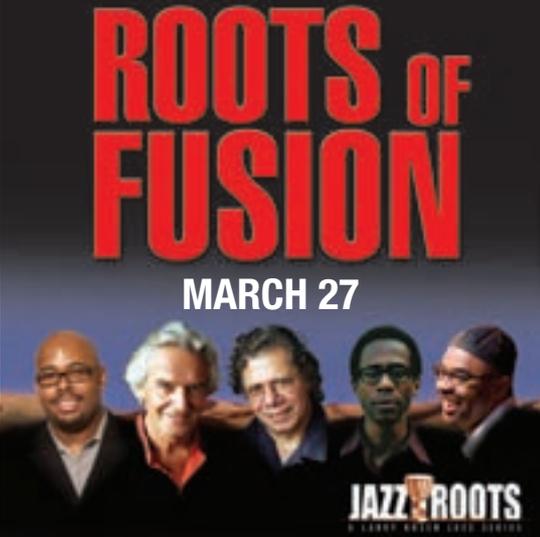
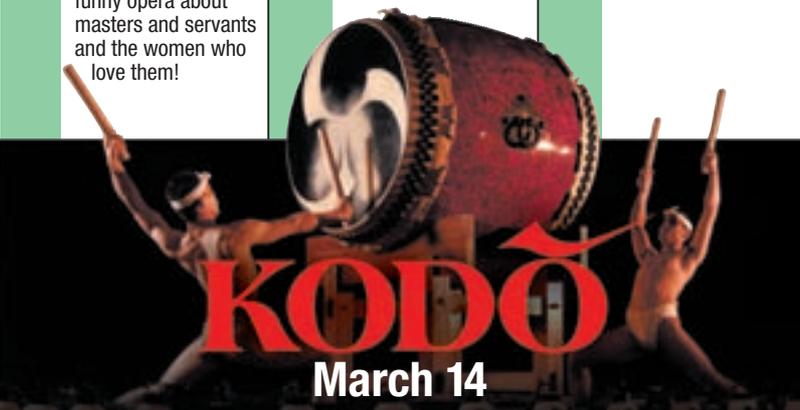
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8	9 Marcello Giordani, tenor with soprano Leah Partridge and orchestra 8PM K Opera arias and duets by Puccini, Verdi, Mascagni, and Bizet.	 <p>ROOTS OF FUSION MARCH 27</p>		12 Dallas Symphony Orchestra Pinchas Zuckerman, violinist and conductor 8PM K Grammy Award winner for "Best Chamber Music Performance!"	13 José Carreras, tenor 8PM K One of the "Three Tenors" superstars, any time he sings—anywhere in the world—it is a major event!	14 Kodo 8PM K "Kodo's music can raise the roof!" - <i>The New York Times</i>
 <p>MANDY PATINKIN: DRESS CASUAL March 21</p>		 <p>JAZZ ROOTS MARCH 27</p>		19 Celebrity Chef Series: Tom Colicchio 8PM K Interview, cooking demo, and Q&A with one of salon.com's "Sexiest Men of the Year!"	20	21 The Marriage of Figaro 7PM Z Mandy Patinkin: Dress Casual with Paul Ford on Piano 8PM K
22 The Marriage of Figaro 2PM Z Mozart's seriously funny opera about masters and servants and the women who love them!	23	24 The Marriage of Figaro 8PM Z	25 The Marriage of Figaro 8PM Z Mozart's opera is pure genius and unbridled joy from start to finish!	26	27 The Marriage of Figaro 8PM Z Jazz Roots Series: The Roots of Fusion with Chick Corea, John McLaughlin, Kenney Garrett, Christian McBride, and Brian Blade 8PM K	28 The Marriage of Figaro 8PM Z Mariza 8PM K The queen of "Fado" and one of Portugal's most popular singers.
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COMMENTARY: *FEEDBACK*

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

Great Story, Great Research, Great Tragedy

“Tragic Drama Under the Miami Moon” (February 2009) was a very interesting story. Great research by author Antolin García Carbonell.

I did not recognize the Cuban president’s name: Federico Laredo Brú.

*Manuel Perez-Vichot
Miami*

Editor’s note: The left-leaning Federico Laredo Brú, who attended the wedding of our story subject, Don Alfonso de Borbón, served as president of Cuba from December 24, 1936, to October 10, 1940. His successor: Fulgencio Batista.

What Secrets Lie Within the Walls of Miami?

I loved “Tragic Drama Under the Miami Moon.” I was riveted. What a story! I hope you can do more stories like this. It’s fascinating to think about the secrets held within the walls of some of Miami’s landmarks.

Thanks for sharing this intriguing story.
*Kristin Burke
Los Angeles*

Bayside: All That Work, All That Money — Lost for Water

Regarding Jim W. Harper’s review of Baywood Park (“Hidden Park, Open Views” February 2009) in our Bayside neighborhood: Once again it seems that we the taxpayers have spent a lot of money for community improvements and the city does not have the foresight of follow-up. I am referring to the landscaping project on 69th Street from Biscayne Boulevard to the bay.

Medians were built from the Boulevard to the bay starting at the entrance of the Palm Bay Yacht Club. It was a big project that took many months of disruption for the community. Well, it seems all this work was done, all this money spent, and guess what? No maintenance was apparently planned. All the plantings are all dead or dying, mainly the result of the city not watering during the first year to establish the planting. This is why so many people feel that are our taxes are being wasted and no one is watching the store.

I recently looked at the all plants in the medians. There were 16 dead sabal palms. It appears that in almost every case, the palms had begun to flush

with new growth at the tops. But four to six weeks ago the tops began to dry out rapidly, and in increasing numbers. This response indicates a failure to provide supplemental water once the rains stopped.

In my opinion, it is critical that supplemental watering be provided over a several-month period after the palms are replaced, and the watering should include the oaks as well. The watering should occur at least until the rains return in June.

*Joseph Canale
Bayside*

Bayside: Sparkle Smothered by Swill

I love Baywood Park and walk there every day. However, contrary to what Jim W. Harper says in “Hidden Park, Open Views,” the park does not “sparkle.” I have had to call and ask for clean-ups several times.

People stop and dump their auto garbage in the first bin or eat lunch beside the park and dump their garbage. Most of the time cups and boxes are flying all over the place.

.....
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COMMENTARY: FEEDBACK

Letters

Continued from page 4

Obviously Mr. Harper doesn't visit the park very often. My own goal is to have the park sparkle, but most of the time it doesn't.

*Marlene Wellington
Bayside*

About That Royal Castle Article...

I live in North Bay Village, and appreciate you sending *Biscayne Times* across the water to us. Here's a suggestion: With articles such as the one on Royal Castle ("Tiny Little Burgers Make a Big Comeback," February 2009), or any other business, please include the address because I definitely want to go there for some little burgers.

And you can then use the fact that more people go to these places as a result of your articles and you can get more advertising business! What do you think?

Thanks for the *BT* and great success in 2009!

*Jim Carter
North Bay Village*



Royal Castle? Missing Address? Duh!

Editor's note: A production snafu scrambled Pamela Robin Brandt's "Tiny Little Burgers," about Wayne Arnold's Royal Castle in North Miami. A number of readers, in addition to Mr. Carter, were kind enough to draw our attention to the goof. Here is that portion of Pam's story that may have seemed unintelligible:

Though the lunchtime crush has long passed on a recent Saturday afternoon at Arnold's Royal Castle, veteran manager Carlene Cunningham is still dashing around in a tear. When a new, and still very green, cook slaps one of the recently reopened eatery's signature tiny burgers (known to the initiated as sliders) on the griddle atop coal-black onions, she lets

out a primordial shriek of a sort not heard since the release of *Jurassic Park*.

"How many times do I have to tell you? This is not our system! This means burnt burgers," Cunningham scolds, flipping the thin, square patty off the offending veggies with one hand, dumping a tub of water on the hot griddle with the other as she scrubs vigorously with her spatula.

"She tell it like it is. With a Castle burger, you need that grease. But it's gotta be *good* grease," chuckles a woman at Royal Castle's counter.

The counter, like almost everything else in the diminutive (950 square feet) interior — from major appliances to plumbing pipes — is brand new. Constructed in 1956, the miniature MiMo mini-burger palace had been in continuous 24/7 operation on its North Miami corner (NW 7th Avenue at 125th Street) until a fire in August of 2005 wiped out everything but the exterior shell, forcing its closure for more than three years.

"I intended to rebuild and reopen as soon as possible," says owner Wayne Arnold, who bought the location in 1982 after Royal Castle, once a thriving Florida-based chain, went belly up. "This restaurant always did good business. But the initial repair estimate was \$120,000. I couldn't manage that."

The final bill turned out to be more than \$200,000. "We had to make the structure hurricane-compliant. The original iron plumbing pipes were crumbling, so we couldn't just attach new PVC. It's *all* new plumbing. We put in new walls, a whole roof, a floor, booths, all the lighting fixtures, new air conditioning, new appliances. The only things we could salvage were one refrigerator and a freezer."

The sad story's heroes turned out to be North Miami's Mayor Kevin Burns (who has said that Arnold's Royal Castle *defines* the city) and the city's slider-scarfing Community Redevelopment Agency, which contributed \$80,000 toward the repair bill. "I never went to them," Arnold reveals. "They contacted *me*. Many people on the board had been customers since they were kids."

That sounds familiar to the 71-year-old Arnold. "It's like me — I had my first slider in 1953 when my family moved to Miami, and there were Royal Castles all over town. But I still eat a couple a day. The mayor is a frequent customer, too."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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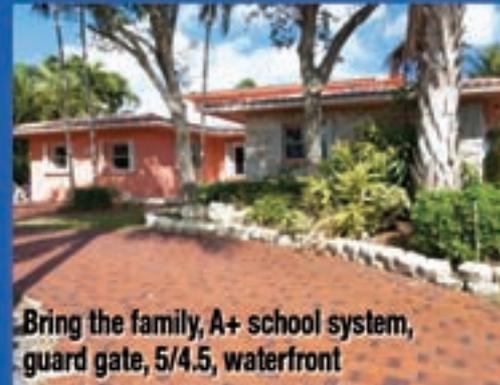
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BizBuzz: March 2009

Sales, special events, and more from the people who make Biscayne Times possible

By Pamela Robin Brandt
BT Contributor

Up in the frozen north, it's a blessing that February is such a short month. But in Miami it ought to last longer, and **Chantik Imports** is doing its part to make that happen. The Asian imports company, which celebrated the inauguration of its new Upper East-side store (6667 Biscayne Blvd., 954-559-2804) with a grand-opening sale that ran throughout February, is extending the bargain-priced period (up to 35 percent off) through the entire month of March. Mention Chantik's BT advertisement for an additional discount.

March is the month of St. Patrick's Day, and nobody looks better in a "Kiss Me, I'm Irish" tie than the family dog. But just in case a few green beers might inspire you to follow the tie's instructions, better schlep man's best friend over to **Junior's Pet Grooming** for a thorough tooth-brushing (2500 Biscayne Blvd., 305-571-1818). And the really good news is that if you get your pets there between 8:00 and 9:00 a.m., the dental cleaning is 10 percent off — along with the rest of Junior's complete grooming services, which include pet haircuts, baths, ear cleaning, pedicures, and more.

But why stop there? Now that Fido or Fang is looking good, immortalize your fabulous favorite in frame-worthy form. Catherine Kirkwood of **Pet Portraits** (305-756-0719) is offering a St. Patrick's

Day special: 15 percent off all oil portraits (which begin at \$400). And because the artist is part-Irish, the deal runs for the whole month of March. And by the way, if your pet pal is the odd sort, no worries. Kirkwood has painted everything from parakeets to pythons and pigs.

Everybody complains about the economy, but the **River Oyster Bar** (650 S. Miami Ave., 305-530-1915) is doing something about it. On Fridays from noon to 4:30 p.m., accompany your whining with some wining at prices no one can complain about:

Bottles from the River's *Wine Spectator*-award-winning wine list for half price. Yes, 50 percent off.

No complaints from **Anise Taverna** (620 NE 78th St., 305-758-2929), where response to their grand opening has been so positive they're now serving lunch daily (closed Monday). On Saturday, March 14, join them for their inaugural monthly lamb roast — outdoors, all day long. And don't miss the belly dancing hosted by Randi the River Goddess. Opa!

March is a time when customers at **Casca Doce** (which, reports owner/interior designer AnaCristina Correia, is "stuffed with new accessories") needn't

worry about where to place their purchases. The showroom (6815 Biscayne Blvd., 305-757-6001) is offering free space-planning all month.

March is also the time to begin thinking about that beloved old oak tree (or banyan or magnolia or buttonwood) in the backyard. Hurricane season will be upon us before we know it, and our good luck the past couple of years cannot and will not last forever. That's why Paul Wesley Barnett, the veteran certified

arborist who operates **Barnett Tree Service & Landscaping** (305-538-2451) is making you an offer you can't refuse: a pre-hurricane

discount of 25 percent for tree-trimming in March. For procrastinators, Barnett will knock off 20 percent in April or 15 percent in May. But wait, there's more! Barnett will also meet or beat any written arbor estimate from a licensed and insured company.

Creating its own kind of storm in Wynwood is **Legacy Fit** (77 NE 24th St., 305-799-0850), whose much-anticipated grand opening gives new meaning to march — as in boot camps and other workouts of the strenuous sort. This isn't your ordinary fitness studio. This is climbing ropes and sledge hammers and tractor tires and fitness

walls and mixed martial arts. Legacy's brand-new facility is also dog-friendly, so your pooch can lounge while you train.

For those who prefer to train their palates, the recently revived Friday wine tastings at **Laurenzo's Italian Market** continue, with a different theme each week. While exact themes are chosen only a week in advance, says the market's sommelier, Larry Baker (aka Larry the Wine Guy). "I can reveal that we'll be taking people to Greece," he says. "There's such a negative stigma about Greek wines due to retsina. We're probably the only retailer in South Florida to offer five-star Greek whites, reds, even a phenomenal dessert fortified wine." Flights are obviously in a glass, not a plane, but the price is unbeatable: Tastings are *free*, including complimentary housemade nibbles.

And finally this month we have a March mystery. An anonymous BT sponsor has a message for **Treasure Hunters** who can't resist the lure of adventure. That message: Call 305-525-8816 for an appointment to discover what's behind the doors at a particular Wynwood address. Maybe a French day bed, or hand-painted doors, or a unique billiard table, or chandeliers, or glassware, or who knows what? You'll have to call to find out.

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Loose Money, Lousy Deals, and Low-end Jobs

When politicians promise you paradise, hold onto your wallet

By Jack King
BT Contributor

Several weeks ago the *New York Times's* Frank Rich had a wonderful column about how America is in full denial about why we have gotten into this wonderful economic mess. He concluded that we as a nation really didn't want a recession, but didn't really want to do anything about it, either. So we just stuck our heads in the sand and kept right on spending money we didn't have. And as long as we got ours, we didn't care how much money the banks, investment houses, corporate America, and their ilk took for themselves.

The economic discussion at the national level is still stuck in the mud, with most Republicans taking what they believe to be the high moral ground and holding out for their sacred beliefs: lower taxes, lower spending, and smaller government. It sure worked well during the Bush years. They lowered taxes and increased spending to record levels, but they did make government smaller by cutting oversight employees by the thousands at the Food and Drug Administration, the Securities and Exchange Commission, and the Federal Reserve. It worked really well, unless you liked your bank account, your investment account, and peanut butter. The Republicans paint the Democrats as tax-and-spend liberals. I paint the Republicans as borrow-and-spend idiots.

While the Obama stimulus plan has not been well received in Washington by Republicans, it has met with mixed response by the nation's governors. Seems like the governors are a little bit closer to the real people, the ones who are losing

their homes and have no jobs. Leading the opposition to the plan (but with so many caveats it isn't even funny) is Louisiana's Gov. Bobby Jindal. He was on one of the Sunday talking-heads programs, where he told so many lies about the stimulus program in such a rapid-fire way that the host could hardly get in a word. Jindal said he would look at every program to see how it worked. What he left out is that he will take every nickel while trying to make himself look like a conservative Republican.

Jindal has fallen ill to the disease that hits every politician eventually. It is called "since my party wants me to run for president in

2012, my head has gotten so big I can say anything I want, no matter how stupid." How about this for a ticket: Jindal-

Palin, or Palin-Jindal. Whatever, it would be a great American thing to have these two running for the highest office in America with a bunch of old, fat, white guys in the background running the program. Can you say, "House of the Rising Sun?"

But let's get closer to home. The mayors of Miami-Dade and Miami are just drooling over the stimulus money. They have no moral compunction about taking federal funds. They just want to look good at all costs. Not only are Carlos Alvarez and Manny Diaz willing to take every nickel the feds will give them (they *must* be Democrats), they're willing to borrow nearly two billion dollars (wait, they must be *Republicans*) to build a baseball stadium we don't really

own, a port tunnel that will be completely useless whenever a hurricane threatens, an art museum that's supposed to put up construction money for a new home but doesn't have two nickels, and a science museum that's supposed to do the same but also doesn't have two nickels. Wow, what a quadfecta!

And our two bobblehead mayors are selling this vaporware (a term that means selling software and hardware that doesn't yet exist), and they are doing it with one word: jobs. No doubt this gets people's attention. Jobs, especially good ones, have always been in short supply in

South Florida.

These days they are practically nonexistent. So Manny and Carlos have taken up the mantra

that they are generating new jobs with all these new projects.

And they are right — sort of. Most of the high-end construction jobs go to highly skilled, out-of-town workers. They work, send their money back to where they normally live, and then depart when the project is completed. There are quite a few lower-paying jobs that go to local workers, but not nearly the number that the bobblehead mayors would have us believe.

When asked about the low-paying jobs the construction projects will bring, and the recurring low-paying jobs the baseball stadium will provide, Mayor Diaz said, "What's the difference? A job is a job." I'm sure that's true if you're a really bad attorney like the good mayor.

If all this goes according to the mayors' plan, we'll have a billion-dollar tunnel to resolve a problem that could have been done with \$200 million in expressway modifications; a new science museum, even though the one they have is not fully utilized; an art museum with no art or money to buy art; and most disconcerting of all — a baseball stadium we pay for and have no control over. That *really* bothers me.

Personally I think we *should* have a baseball stadium, but not on the terms the Marlins have written. Unfortunately they've promised the city and county commissioners so much in perks (read: campaign money) that this may be a done deal. Unfortunately we won't know until it's too late. And we can't stop Jeffery Loria from hawking the stadium and selling the Marlins as the city and residents get nothing but the mortgage payment. There's the reason Loria has money and Alvarez and Diaz are "public servants."

At the city level there are two firm votes for the stadium, and one who has not committed. That's Michelle Spence-Jones, and based on her prior modus operandi, she's waiting to see what the deal will be. My best guess: Joe Sanchez is planning to finance his campaign for mayor with this deal. And Angel Gonzalez? Well he doesn't particularly like wealthy Cubans or gringos. He's voting for the stadium just to see them twist in the wind.

Oh, I forgot to add that the City of Miami is donating the land, worth about \$100 million, and is building the parking garage, worth about \$94 million. Think the Marlins will write an individual thank-you note to every resident in the city?

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Our mayors are drooling over the stimulus money. They have no moral compunction about taking federal funds. They just want to look good at all costs.

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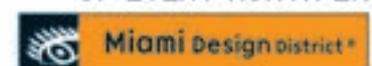
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Road Plan, by Michael Jensen, 2008. Oil on canvas. On view at the Buena Vista Building_180 N.E. 39th Street_Suite 120

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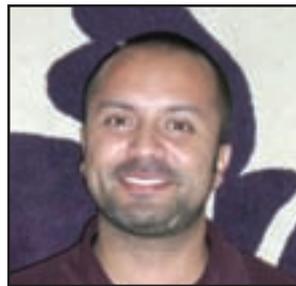
How do you think an Obama presidency will affect race relations?

Compiled by Victor Barrenechea — BT Contributor



Jorge Goya
Photographer
Downtown

I don't think Obama is going to have any kind of immediate effect. If the economy goes bad, maybe that will have more of an impact on race relations. Then again, I think the United States is more advanced in race relations and socio-economic relations, more so than my home country of Argentina. Things have advanced. I think now people accept minorities. They had to be accepted because they're also part of this country made of immigrants.



Hassan Shala
Shop Assistant
Design District

It's going to be a long process, and we'll have to wait, but I think it's better for everyone. He's the first black President of the United States. There's going to be opportunities for everyone. He's opening doors for all people — for immigrants like me. People will say, "He did it, now I can do it." Anyone can do it.



Rucht D'Oleo
Fashion Designer
North Miami

I hope now that Obama is president people actually realize that the color of your skin doesn't matter. I hope it breaks down barriers and helps us realize that we're all together and all the same. A lot still needs to be done, so it'll take a while, but I think people now have a new kind of consciousness. Younger people, at least my age, we don't care about race. It's going to get better over time, but it will take a while.



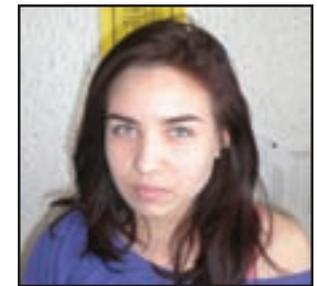
Craig Demott
Client Specialist
Omni

I think it'll have a big impact on race relations. The fact that he was an elected president signifies that there's been a change in middle America, outside of the major U.S. cities. Inside major U.S. cities, things are pretty liberal, but when you get outside in middle America, it's harder to convince people. And now they're coming around. Something like that doesn't change overnight. It has to filter down, but at least now it can filter down from the top, because he's the president of this country.



Summer Bosworth
Sales
Design District

I think it'll affect it. I think it'll be positive. I think it'll make people more open-minded. Since he's in power, white people have to defer to someone of another race. I think there'll be more of a sense of equality between blacks and whites. I think he's opening communications between races. I think in general it opened a whole new door. If a black man can become president, maybe there'll be less of a grudge because now someone's been given a chance.



Catalina Piedrahita
Student
Downtown

I think it will affect the racial situation because now we have a person who is not Caucasian as president, and the president is a role model a lot of people follow and look up to. He's a person who has a lot of influence. He really gets across to people. I hope it'll have a big impact on race. It's like he's representing his entire race, and it has created a positive stereotype.

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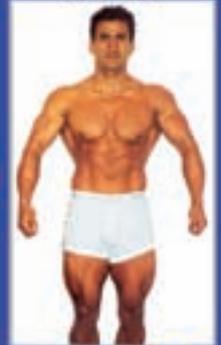
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Metal

Continued from page 1

Jacques Cousteau — for a local real-estate developer named Riccardo Olivieri.

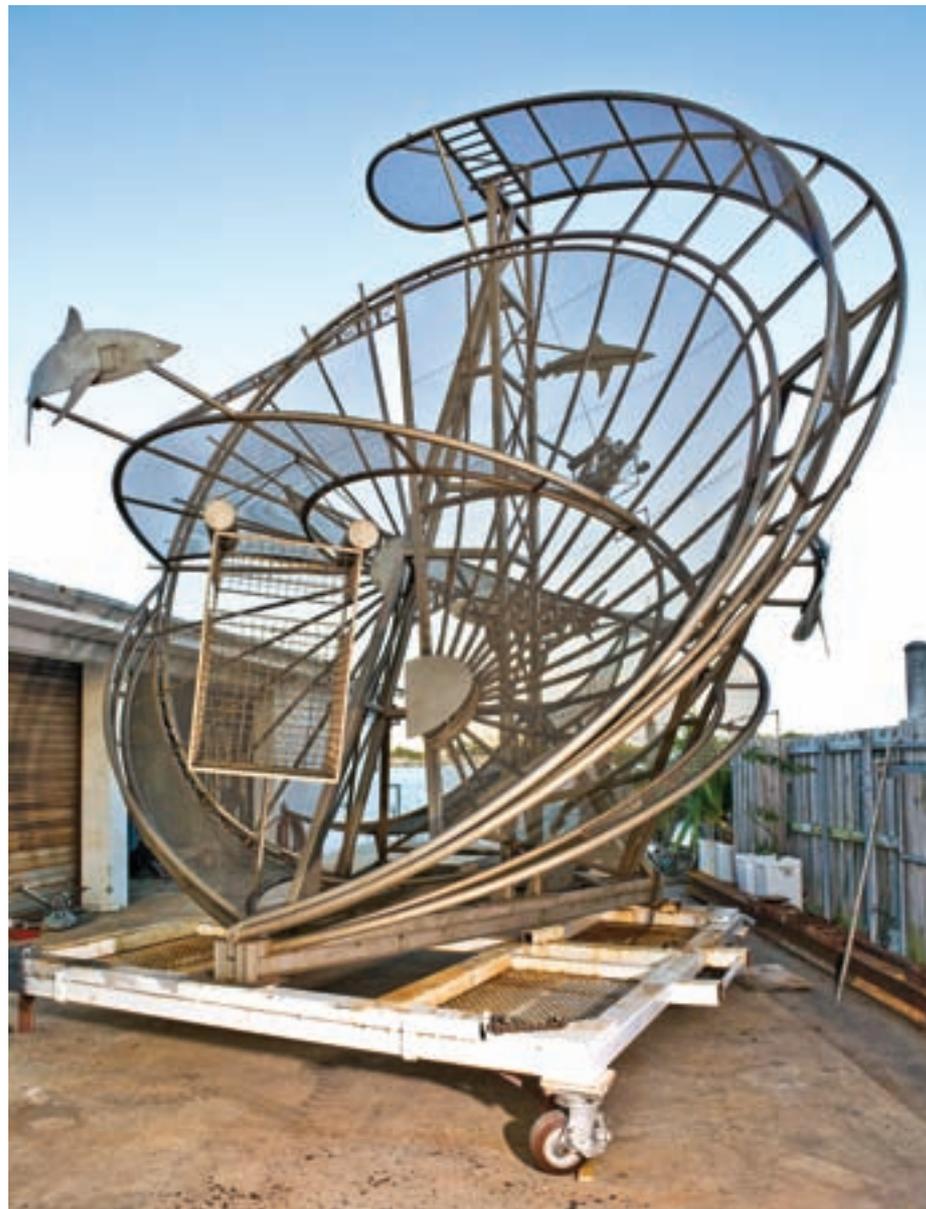
Olivieri planned to install the work at the eastern entrance to the MacArthur Causeway, as part of his twin-tower condo development named the Bentley Bay, in full view of the tens of thousands of motorists who careen daily across the busy thoroughfare. With such prime skyline positioning, the installation would have been one of the area's most prominently displayed sculptural artwork and would almost certainly have become a local landmark. And of course, the exposure for Ali as an artist would have been unparalleled.

But five years later the sculpture is still here, looming above Ali's one-story home, rather than overlooking one of the South Florida's busiest bridges. Ali reaches for a folder, pulls out a sheet of paper, and holds it up. It's a court document with a judge's signature at the bottom. "They bought the piece for \$85,000," he says dryly, "and sold it back to me for nothing."

The path that led up to, and then veered sharply away from, artistic success was a long one for Ali. He'd like to think he'll still get another shot at a high-profile installation. For now, though, he's eager to tell the story of his abandoned sculpture and of all the legal wrangling that came with it.

Not many people know the reclusive Ali or of his fierce brand of metal work. He doesn't leave his house much, he rarely exhibits, and most of all he doesn't like to be separated from his tools. In fact his home and his studio are one in the same — a shoddy former boat-repair yard and work shed that he converted into a makeshift home. Roll-down metal shutters serve as doors, the exposed concrete walls are lined with metallic sculptures and tools, and the unairconditioned bedroom he constructed in the back sits so close to Biscayne Bay he can hear the water gently lapping the seawall as he falls asleep at night.

Ali spends his days drafting intricate designs, occasionally heading out in his 1989 Chevy pickup to scavenge for airplane and military parts at scrap yards along the Miami River or at military and government auctions. The titanium and stainless steel, of which those parts are often made, are Ali's metals of choice. He doesn't build. He "engineers"



Ali's tribute to Jacques Cousteau awaits a buyer, perhaps in Abu Dhabi.



The Cousteau sculpture as it would have appeared at the Bentley Bay.

BT photo by Silvia Ros

precision sculptural objects that are as elaborate in design as they are formidable in construction. Chairs, benches, floor lamps, table lamps, animals, abstractions — most of his pieces look like something between art and artillery. (For examples, visit www.artaircraft.com.)

"The best metal is airplane metal," Ali explains. He turns jet engines into chairs, wings into benches, turbines into tables, fuel valves into lighting fixtures, steel tubing into faux machine guns. "But I don't consider all of that art," he concedes. Well-designed functional pieces, like furniture, are just easier to sell. And as for the machine gun, he traded that to a local mechanic for \$5000 in repair work on his old truck.

"Real art delivers a message," he contends. Art is the 11-foot great blue heron spreading its titanium wings on Ali's concrete terrace. Art is the metallic fish (a grouper?) whose graceful curves follow the aerodynamic arcs of stainless-steel aircraft parts. Art is the sundial he's crafting from a DC-9 engine to commemorate the crew of the space shuttle *Columbia* by directing a single beam of sunlight onto the name of each astronaut at different hours throughout the day.

Ever since Ali was a boy in Cairo, his creative tastes have leaned toward the industrial, the mechanical, and especially militaria. "My father was a genius with his hands," he recalls. A mechanic by trade, Ali's father would scour Cairo for old automobile parts, refurbish them, and assemble large, fortified work trucks, which he would later sell.

Ali quickly began to mimic the old man, building his own toys in a similar fashion. He'd rig small electric motors to empty tomato cans to make toy cars. A neighbor in uniform influenced him, too. "There was a military guy in my building," he recalls, "and every morning soldiers would come pick him up in a big, brand-new Land Rover. I fell in love with that car and with everything military." Eventually Ali started using his father's tools to make mini tanks instead of cars.

But at age 17, seeing no future for himself in his impoverished homeland, he obtained an Italian tourist visa — the easiest and cheapest visa Egyptians could get in the 1970s — and headed for Rome. Circo Nones Orfei, an Italian circus, recruited him at Rome's main train station on his very first day in the country, the station being a popular hunting ground

Photo illustration courtesy of Omar Ali

Continued on page 15

Metal

Continued from page 14

for immigrant labor.

“I cleaned up a lot of animal dung in the beginning,” he says. With time, and once he had learned enough Italian, the circus manager upgraded him to helping care for the elephants and creating promotional artwork. “Italy was paradise,” he remembers. “I spent four years with the circus and saw the entire country. But there were a lot of dangerous people in the circus — criminals, lunatics, all kinds.”

Tired of the vagabond lifestyle, Ali settled in Milan in 1976 and began to concentrate on his art. He rented a machine shop and began experimenting with leather and jewelry, churning out purses, belts, amulets, and lockets. Functional metalwork like lamps, gates, windows, and doors helped to pay the bills, too. In his free time,

he began sculpting, exhibiting widely and even enjoying extensive coverage in Italian newspapers.

But, he says, the country experienced an economic downturn in the 1990s and it became increasingly difficult to make a living. Ali could no longer afford his rent. He lost the workshop, sold his tools, and after 28 years in Italy, packed up and headed for Miami on the advice of a friend who had already emigrated.

“In 1999, when I arrived, Miami was beautiful,” Ali recalls. “The lifestyle was free and everything was easy. I managed to get a work permit, found some decent work here and there, and bought my house.” Notable among his projects, he created and installed

the metallic interior of Jail, a former bar and lounge designed to look like a prison inside the Bentley Hotel at 510 Ocean Dr. And it was the owner of that hotel, prominent South Florida developer Riccardo Olivieri, who would later commission him to create his colossal *Jacques Cousteau*.

Olivieri, an Italian businessman now in his 60s, was not only a developer but also an art-lover who adorned his Miami Beach buildings with designer materials, fine paintings, and pricey sculptures. In 2003 his largest South Beach development, the Bentley Bay condo towers at 520 and 540 West Ave., was under construction and he wanted the project to reflect his artistic taste and make a bold statement.

Familiar with Omar Ali’s workmanship, and having already seen a miniature version of Ali’s *Jacques Cousteau* briefly on display in his Ocean Drive hotel, Olivieri decided that a 25-foot version of the artwork would perfectly compliment the Bentley Bay’s sail-shaped condo towers and

reflect the development’s distinct nautical theme. And of course, placed atop the stairwell tower rising above the condo’s multistory parking garage, the sculpture would be visible to every South Beach visitor coming across the MacArthur Causeway, turning the artwork, and the Bentley Bay, into a Miami landmark.

According to Ali’s records, contracts were drawn up in July 2004 and Olivieri agreed to pay



Forklift ant with driver’s seat.

him \$60,000 to design and construct the full-size *Jacques Cousteau* piece. The price tag mostly reflected the market cost of stainless steel, heavy-duty equipment required for the job, and labor. Upon completion, Olivieri was to arrange for transportation of the 9000-pound sculpture by barge across Biscayne Bay and have it hoisted by crane into position at the Bentley Bay. Alternatively, the sculpture would cross the bay by helicopter, if consulting engineers felt that would be more practical.

What Ali didn’t know at the time, however, was that a pending foreclosure hearing on the Bentley Bay had forced Olivieri’s company, Florida Development Associates, to file for bankruptcy four months before signing the contract with him. Why Olivieri entered into an agreement with Ali in the midst of financial difficulties is unclear. *BT*’s efforts to contact him for comment were unsuccessful.

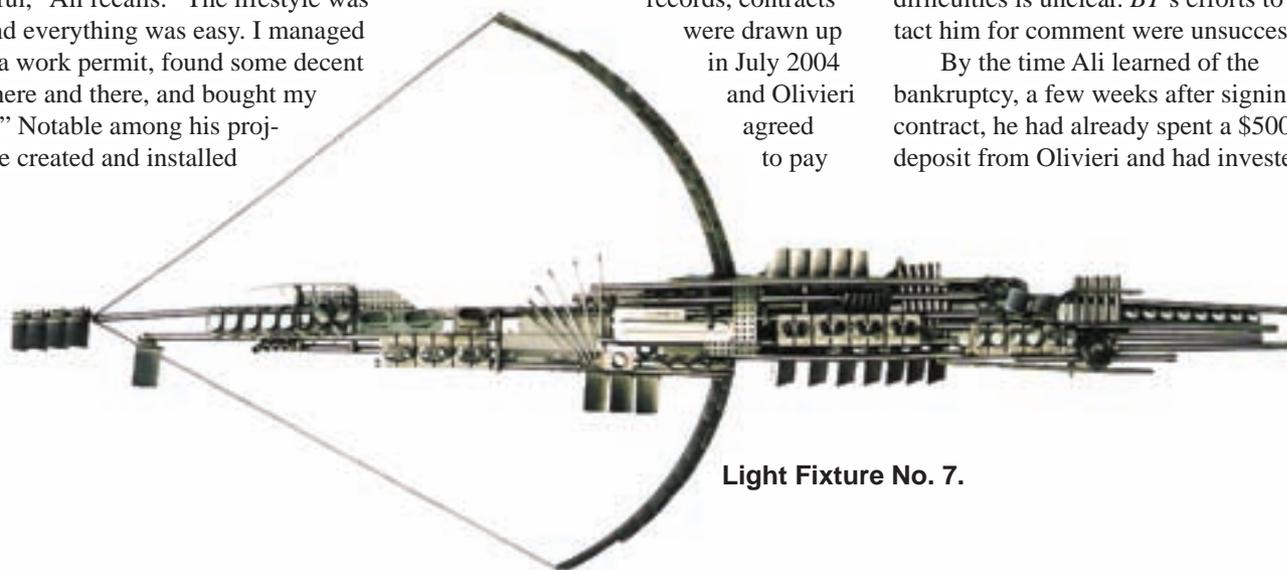
By the time Ali learned of the bankruptcy, a few weeks after signing the contract, he had already spent a \$5000 deposit from Olivieri and had invested a

few thousand dollars of his own money on materials and equipment. He also found that Olivieri had become impossible to reach, and Ali was left wondering if he should even continue work on his sculpture, or if he’d ever be able to recoup his expenses should the agreement fall apart.

The bankruptcy case came before a federal judge in August 2004, and Ali’s agreement with Olivieri was among the contractual obligations the judge ordered to be honored. Moreover, to account for the rapidly increasing price of stainless steel, an amended contract for \$80,000 was signed and Ali was instructed to complete his sculpture within 120 days. He received payment in full, hired several workers, and on December 21, 2004, after almost six months of meticulous planning and labor, his sweeping, 25-by-19-foot *Jacques Cousteau* sculpture, complete with sharks, a shark cage, and abstract representations of waves and sails, stood ready on the concrete patio outside his house.

But a year and half would pass without anyone from the Bentley Bay coming to pick it up. According to Ali, whenever he would call the attorney representing the Bentley’s interests at the time, the lawyer would cite issues with Miami Beach permits relating to the artwork’s installation as reasons for the delay. “They never showed me any proof that they contacted the city,” Ali complains, “and they never asked me for my drawings or sent an engineer to discuss the installation and to draft

“In 1999, when I arrived, Miami was beautiful. The lifestyle was free and everything was easy. I managed to get a work permit, found some decent work.”



Light Fixture No. 7.

Photo courtesy of Omar Ali

Photo courtesy of Omar Ali

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Metal

Continued from page 15

engineering papers.” Those papers, he says, would have been necessary for the city to determine whether installation was permissible.

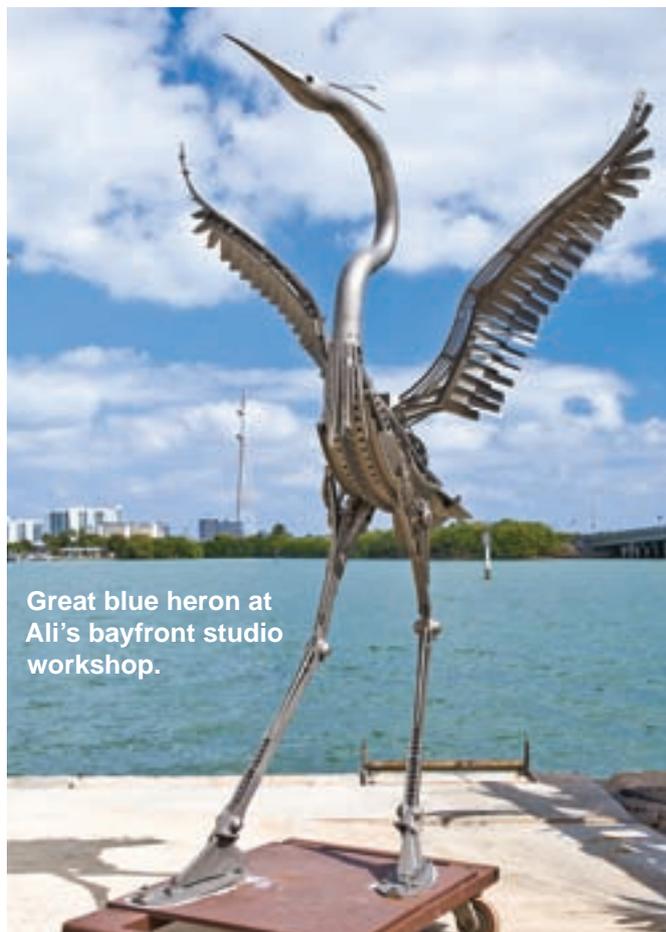
Over time it became clear that no one was going to collect the sculpture. The problem, however, was that Ali couldn't sell it. Technically it didn't belong to him, since the Bentley Bay had already paid for it. Selling it, he surmised, could put him in the position of having to repay the Bentley Bay should they suddenly decide they wanted it.

Ali went through a string of lawyers to see if he could regain legal ownership but, he says, three and a half years passed with little communication and no progress. The sculpture remained on Ali's property, requiring upkeep and safety preparations with each hurricane season to prevent the piece from being destroyed or toppling over onto his house.

Frustrated, Ali drafted a demand letter to the Bentley Bay's attorneys, threatening legal action and citing the

costs he was incurring for storage, maintenance, labor, attorney fees, and more. All this, he asserted, added up to at least \$300,000. Ali did not expect to receive monetary damages, but he hoped at least to provoke the Bentley Bay into giving him a legal document restoring his ownership rights to the sculpture — which he claims actually cost him \$120,000 in total, \$35,000 more than he received in payment.

When he didn't get a response, he hired what he calls an “honest lawyer,” a Miami attorney named William Sumner Scott, who managed to get results where others had failed. “Perhaps Omar's letter softened



Great blue heron at Ali's bayfront studio workshop.

BT photo by Silvia Ros

them up a bit and they realized just how bad this could get for them,” Scott says of the Bentley's legal team. “I simply presented an offer and we negotiated back and forth until we worked it out. It was definitely a heavy-duty negotiation, though.”

To Ali's surprise, just three weeks later, in October 2008, the Bentley Bay gave him what he needed, a court order signed by federal Judge A. Jay Cristol granting him full ownership rights to *Jacques Cousteau*, with a stipulation that he “shall not have any further claim” against the Bentley Bay. “I could have pressed my case and tried to get more money from them,” Ali says, “but I was happy not to give them the sculpture in the end. They might have chopped it up and sold it for scrap.”

“The challenge now,” he says, “is to find a buyer. I'm trying to sell it to collectors in Abu Dhabi, where there's a huge art market, because honestly, good public art doesn't exist in Miami.”

Of the hundreds of publicly displayed works of art countywide, he

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Metal

Continued from page 16

points out, hardly any are known outside of the Miami area, and very few are memorable to most locals. "Cheap art is unhealthy," Ali says. "People are losing trust in artists, and it's because of all the bad art that's around."

Regarding his own work, he refuses to show in galleries because he rejects the commission structure most of them use. "They take half your blood," he

Omar Ali's work inhabits a creative realm where design and fine art co-exist, where the boundaries between form and function tend to blur.

says, and he simply won't "give [his] life to them." But with little in the way of commissioned work, lack of exposure is a major issue for Ali.

Still, he can't imagine doing anything else but create art: "When you love something, you do your best work." And

his best work is all around him. "I've always lived in my studio," he says. "I love to have my tools next to my bed. When I can't sleep, I get up and make something. Creating things relaxes me."

He has about 50 cherished pieces he holds onto like offspring, ranging from representational to abstract. "If someone loves them enough to pay the high price," he says, "I'll sell them. Otherwise, when I die, I want them all thrown into the ocean."

Omar Ali's work inhabits a creative realm where design and fine art co-exist, where the boundaries between form and function tend to blur, where imagination knows no limits. But the enchantment Ali sells comes at a price few art aficionados are able to pay. "Since I've been here in the U.S.," he says, "I've

been surviving, that's all, doing small practical jobs here and there." He'd like to think that the quality of his work will someday be recognized, and that he will once again be able to make a decent living from it.

As for his *Jacques Cousteau*, he's holding out hope that it will find a



BT photo by Silvia Ros

Omar Ali: If he can't sell his work, he'll have it sent to the bottom of the sea.

permanent home where it can be appreciated. If not, he'll commit it to the watery world of its French namesake. He'll have it sent to the bottom of the Atlantic.

With a trace of heartache in his voice, Ali turns to the quivering waters

of Biscayne Bay stretched out before him, finally puts his unlit cigarette back in the pack, and mutters, "It's written in my will."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

the art of living

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Our Very Own Gastronomic Extravaganza

By Jen Karetnick
BT Contributor

The day before the Super Bowl, I did something that, despite battling a stubborn case of bronchitis, was all-too-characteristic of me: I drove 275 miles for grub. Of course, this wasn't just any old chow. I made the trek from Miami Shores to Tampa for Taste of the NFL, also known as "Party with a Purpose," one of the premier food-and-wine fundraising events in the nation.

Founded in Minneapolis in 1992, where the Super Bowl was held that year, Taste of the NFL raised \$90,000 for local and national hunger organizations in its first outing. Since then each Super Bowl city, on the eve of the big game, hosts this gastronomic extravaganza, in which each city with an NFL team is represented by top-name chefs (like our very own Allen Susser of Chef Allen's, pictured here with former Dolphin Dick Anderson), along with off-season and alumni

Taste of the Shores can be a reality with your help. So let's go!



Taste of the NFL by Tom Donoghue

players (such as QB Earl Morrall from the undefeated Dolphins). To date, approximately \$7 million has been raised.

Though improvements are made annually, and guest celebrities change, the format remains: The chefs set up tasting tables and the players perch at their own stations beside them in the middle of a venue — in the case of Tampa, Tropicana Field. Partygoers, who pay

hundreds of dollars per ticket (thousands for VIP tables) not only feast on signature delicacies and sample Gallo wines that are paired with the goodies, but they purchase footballs, aprons, cookbooks, caps, and auctioned sports memorabilia for both toques and athletes to autograph.

Because Taste of the NFL founder Wayne Kostroski and his crew manage to get almost everything donated or reduced

in price (lodging and airfare for participants), and the chefs, their vendors, and the players all volunteer their time, products, and services, operating costs are extremely low. So the funds that come in? To mix sporting metaphors, they're mostly all net, and they're distributed to Share Our Strength charities that feed the hungry.

Coincidentally, my food-writing career also began in 1992, and since then I've been to countless walk-around food-and-wine tastings, most of all which raise money for a good cause. But I attended Taste of the NFL with a different purpose in mind, which was to huddle with my sister, who was broadcasting live from the event for Martha Stewart Living Sirius Satellite Radio (also in the food biz, Betsy is the co-host for the morning drive show).

Just kidding, of course. I love my sister and was delighted to spend time with her — and crash in her hotel room. But I really went to Taste of the NFL

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Taste

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because I fully intend to make into a reality what I proposed a few months ago: revitalizing a Taste of the Shores.

Response to that column has been inspiring. Not only do residents want to see such an event happen in our village, several have already come forward to lend a hand, including our own publisher, who says *Biscayne Times* will happily be a sponsor.

Given that the original Taste of the Shores turned out to be the model for festivals such as Taste of the Grove and many others, I have little interest in spearheading a revival of what once was. So I do believe research is in order, not to mention forming a committee.

I chose Taste of the NFL initially to study as a model for a few reasons. For starters, it has a firm identity that allows for terrific tie-ins. Taste of the Shores could draw on our village's agricultural past, and certainly we have plenty of mango trees to support that. And it could take on an appropriate annual theme, like renewal, that plays into that identity. But I'm looking to refine that angle — or who

knows, maybe come up with a brand-new one — and am open to all ideas.

For another thing, Taste of the NFL has a distinct aura of sophistication. It's for adults. I've long been a proponent of bringing my kids to fine-dining restaurants and chic functions, and I hope you do too. But when it comes to Taste of the Shores, I don't want it to be about chocolate-flavored face paint. We already have Unity Day

I went to Taste of the NFL because I fully intend to make into a reality what I proposed a few months ago: revitalizing a Taste of the Shores.

and the Marshmallow Drop and St. Rose's Carnival and a whole bunch of other truly great family-style events in Miami Shores. It's time to give the grown-ups a night out in their own backyard.

Finally, Taste of the NFL targeted a recipient for its fundraising from the first day, and its mission has never altered. I'd like to see Taste of the Shores do the

same, designating monies for the entity that I believe is the most neglected in town: Miami Shores Elementary School.

I know all our schools are struggling in this economy. At Miami Country Day, which my kids attend, tuition has gone up but teachers and staff are still being laid off, which is heartbreaking for everybody. But Shores Elementary suffers from a complex problem.

Chief among its difficulties is a poor community image, thanks in part to its socio-economic demographic, and how that's perceived. Second to that is money itself, an influx of which could help to change the image. "The new administration is great," says Judith Williams, a member of the PTA, whose son is in the third grade after switching from Aida

Merritt a little over a year ago. "Most of the teachers are very passionate and have been there a long time. A lot of us are convinced the school is being overlooked."

While Williams and Margarita Mesa, current PTA president, are among the motivators who work on the school's behalf, they have trouble eliciting participation from the students' parents. "Many of the homes are

nontraditional," Williams notes. "We have a lot of parents who don't, or can't, participate at all in the PTA or in the school."

To that end, the MS Elementary PTA is presenting its own food festival on April 24, called Caribbean Carnivale. Williams estimates that 80 percent of the student body is of Afro-Carib origin, but she emphasizes the diversity of those ethnicities. The Carnivale, which will have booths featuring dishes from Haiti, Jamaica, Trinidad, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and the Dominican Republic, plus Haitian dancers and a Bahamian junkanoo band, is meant to unite those cultures both within the school and within the Shores. "It's more of a friend-raiser than a fundraiser," Williams says. The event, which will run from 5:30 to 8:00 p.m., will be open to students, their families, and friends of the school.

To my mind, a friend-raiser is the perfect first step in the right direction. Want to join me in taking the second one? Send me an e-mail (Kavetchnik@aol.com)

And next year, when Taste of the NFL comes to Miami, maybe they'll learn something from us.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



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To Stop the Bleeding, Apply a Tourniquet — To Yourself

Need to cut costs? Here are seven tough decisions local politicians could make

By Frank Rollason
BT Contributor

It's early morning on Friday the 13th as I pen this column. This is an auspicious day for our community, for in a few hours, both the city and the county will (theoretically) make a Yes or No decision on the new Marlin's baseball stadium.

My thoughts today, however, are not about the stadium. They've been triggered by an opinion piece by Miami Commissioner Marc Sarnoff that appeared in the *Miami Herald* on January 26, entitled, "Freeze City Employees' Salaries." In it, the commissioner invokes the words of President Obama: "Families are tightening their belts, so should Washington." The premise was that freezing the salaries of *nonunion* employees, including each commissioner and staff (no mention of the mayor), would be a "symbolic move" showing that the city is tightening its



own belt, one of the "tough decisions" elected leaders must make. There was no call for the manager to renegotiate existing union contracts to achieve the same freeze. This is not only a permitted course of action, but it's certainly a viable option if the city is in dire financial straits.

However, union families vote in great numbers and are very active in supporting candidates who protect

their salaries and benefits. Nonunion employees serve at the will of the manager and are safer targets for such a "symbolic move."

A few days after "Freeze" appeared, a rebuttal appeared from Miami Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones. Her closing summed it up: "A tough decision is asking for salary freezes across the board, including for the unions, but that was not proffered."

Today, facing a grave financial crisis, we are dealing with a city budget that has grown from \$313 million in 1999 to more than \$523 million in 2008 — a 60-percent increase in less than ten years! Without doubt it's time to make some genuinely "tough decisions," so let's consider a few that commissioners could enact immediately, that no one would find objectionable, and that everyone would see as more than symbolic.

Tough Decision #1 Freeze their own salaries (\$58,200), independent of any other action involving any other employees. Just do it!

Tough Decision #2 Reduce their own staffs dramatically. Just do it! In tough times, you have to believe their offices could be run with two staff personnel. Certainly eliminate all contract employees.

Tough Decision #3 Eliminate the commissioners' sergeant-at-arms. Just

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Tourniquet

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do it! Sworn police officers providing chauffeur and bodyguard services? What kind of message does it send when commissioners feel they must have a bodyguard to move around their own city? This would put two or three more officers back on the street, where they're really needed.

Tough Decision #4 Eliminate their annual expense account (\$32,000). Just do it! Every commissioner receives this gift, which was unilaterally (and quietly) provided by a previous city manager as a way to increase commissioners' compensation. To his credit, Commissioner Johnny Winton refused to take this freebie. To date, I believe, he is the only commissioner who has ever turned it down. This generous benefit, by the way, requires nothing of commissioners — no accounting, no records, no justifications, no oversight, no nothing.

Tough Decision #5 Eliminate their annual phone allowance (\$3900). Just do it! This one is arguably a justified expense, but it could be handled as a

reimbursement for official city business instead of a blanket amount. Right now I have a personal family plan with five phones and virtually unlimited minutes, two of them Blackberries with e-mail, and it runs just under \$4200 a year. I'd venture to say the cost of conducting city business on one phone would be a hell of a lot cheaper than \$3900 per year.

Tough Decision #6 Eliminate their annual car allowance (\$10,800). Just do it! Most of us drive a car to and from work, and some of us are able to receive reimbursement for mileage other than normal commuting. Commissioners could be entitled to the same. This allowance is also supposed to cover the cost auto insurance, which in most cases includes the commissioner's spouses. Such policies are normally issued in the names both spouses' jointly. This relates to Tough Decision #3 — eliminating the sergeant-at-arms. Currently commissioners not only enjoy the use of a police chauffeur, they also receive an annual car allowance, yet the car can sit at home in the garage! Some commissioners utilize the police chauffeur service more than others, but drastic times call

for drastic measures, like driving your own car to and from work and to various events throughout the city you love and serve selflessly.

Tough Decision #7 Eliminate their pension. Just do it! This one is a beauty. Here we have a noncontributory plan (*noncontributory* for the commissioners, but *all* contributory for the taxpayers) that essentially provides 50 percent of their highest two years' earnings for the rest of their lives after serving as a commissioner for only seven years. Notice I said "earnings" not "salaries." This means their pensions are based on salary (\$58,200), expense account (\$32,000), car allowance (\$10,800), and phone allowance (\$3900), for a total of \$104,900. That results in a *minimum* lifetime pension of more than \$52,000 annually, a pension that an average city employee would have work more than 30 years to receive.

Notice that I said "minimum" lifetime pension. Here's the catch: After seven years, elected officials receive an additional 5 percent above the 50 percent for each year of service, up to 100 percent of earnings. (If a commissioner becomes mayor, those years also count above the minimum of seven.)

To put this in perspective, consider former Commissioner J.L. Plummer, who served the city as an elected official for 29 years. He left city hall in 1999, before the current pension plan was in place. Today he receives an annual pension of just \$29,471.

It is unconscionable that individuals serving at the will of the public, for the purpose of performing the work of the public, be rewarded so much for so little. I'm in a position to say that because, after serving 33 years as a firefighter for the City of Miami (of which I am very proud), I receive a pension of roughly \$100,000 annually — but I contributed ten percent of my salary each and every year to make that pension possible.

Seven tough decisions that could be made by our elected leaders. They could fashion them as a package and do it tomorrow. A personal sacrifice that would set an example for all. As Commissioner Sarnoff so eloquently wrote: "It's now up to each of us to follow the lead of President Obama and 'make a clean break from business as usual' for the best interest of all of our constituents."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



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Me and My Foul Mouth

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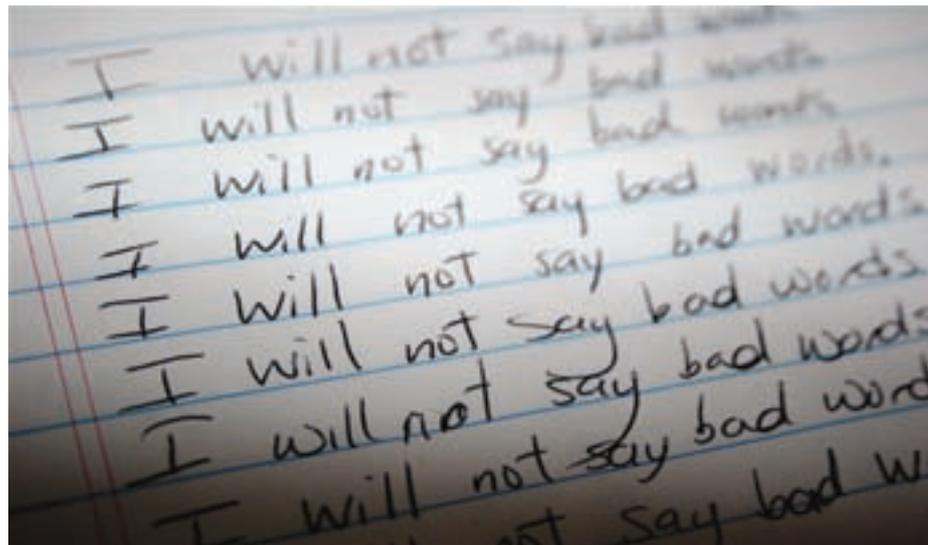
By Wendy Doscher-Smith
BT Contributor

I'll never forget the day my kindergarten teacher threatened to wash my mouth out with soap. Ms. Spatafora grabbed my arm and dragged me over to the janitor's closet, pushed my head down over a sludgy bar of brownish soap, and into the industrial-grade, double-wide steel sink.

But I wriggled away from her, twisting my arm out of her grasp, screaming that I would "sue her" if she touched me again. She didn't.

My past is littered with these sorts of moments. I never took well to authority. It wasn't a question of my ornery nature. I simply didn't believe anyone deserved my respect or trust until they earned it. And I didn't appreciate the presumption made by adults that just because they lived longer they knew better. More than often, they did not.

When I was ten, the director of my after-school program instructed me to write 100 times "I will not talk back." I



BT photo by Wendy Doscher-Smith

wrote it 100 times and waited for my father to pick me up. He arrived, and the director glared at me as she told my father I was *bad*. I sat on my metal-and-plastic chair in the deserted school cafeteria and watched as her buggy eyeballs darted back and forth between us. He

pretended to be upset and I yawned. The director did not seem satisfied.

"See? I told you he wouldn't care," I said to her as I gathered my book bag. I gave her a smug smile and walked out.

My father didn't care because he was the one who taught me all the curse words

I knew. He was always swearing. So was I. However, if I said, "When I graduate high school," I was promptly corrected: "When I graduate *from* high school."

Before he became a full-time lawyer, my father taught English at the University of Miami. He knew all about "bad words," but he didn't believe that any words were truly "bad." As for perceptions? Well, the man just didn't give a fuck. He cared about proper *usage* of curse words.

I learned that using "bad words" too often was not a good idea because it cheapened the effect of the words and lessened their impact. *That* mattered.

In Biscayne Park or surrounding areas, I never got in trouble for swearing. But I also did not fraternize with people who believe language censorship is one of life's top priorities.

Yet I'll be damned, as I have unintentionally run into the same language

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NEIGHBORHOOD CORRESPONDENTS: BISCAYNE PARK

Foul Mouth

Continued from page 24

problem up here in Binghamton, New York, or what I call the Merciless Frozen Tundra, MFT. I was recently reprimanded for my foul mouth. And sinks played a part once more, as this time my hair colorist played Ms. Spatafora in the dirty-word drama.

I get my hair done at a salon in the city — which is quite gritty, actually — by a woman who is covered in tattoos, worked as a stripper, had a job in a porn shop, and used to hang by hooks in a circus. None of this mattered to me. She happens to be an okay colorist. But the last time I went in, Bea told me I had to “tone it down.”

I thought she must have been talking about my hair. No. She was referring to my language.

“It’s just, well,” Bea said as she poked at a piece of foil on top of my damp head. “It’s not cool. All those f-bombs.”

F-bombs? Was she serious?

I stared at her in the mirror, which reflected, apparently, not just a gloppy mess of red pigment that used to be

my hair, but a person (me) who uttered something called an “f-bomb.”

“What?” was the best I could immediately muster.

I thought back to my salon in the Biscayne Corridor, the one with the mandatory French Maid costumes and sexy themed days. I could not begin to count the “f-bombs” that detonated in that salon. And in that moment, I realized just how far I was from home.

“You know,” Bea said, dipping her brush in a stained cup, “we try to keep this place classy and professional. We have some older ladies come in here. Some church ladies! They would faint at that language! It’s okay if certain customers are here.”

I looked around. Seconds before my reprimand, an “older lady” had smiled at me while looking up from her magazine. Did she go to church? Did she worship at the altar of the Filthy Mouth and Contaminated Soul?

I remained speechless, but I was thinking along these lines: What happened to “The customer is always right?” How much younger than me is this tattooed little bitch? And then: What

happened to “Respect your elders?”

What did I even say? I listened to the music playing and the hair dryers whirling. How could anyone hear me talking anyway? Are there kids around? No. I had already checked for that. And of course ultimately: Who the fuck cared?

The answer was that Bea cared. Thousands of miles away and years later, I had stumbled onto an inked-up version of Ms. Spatafora.

I thought about walking out. One problem: It was characteristically 19 degrees outside, and I looked like something from Planet Zar with my foiled, wet, half-colored head. Damned MFT.

So as usual I tried to talk it out. “But Bea,” I said, “I don’t understand the problem. I’m your client. It’s not *you* saying, um, f-bombs.”

“Yes,” Bea continued, twirling a piece of wet hair in her gloved hand and placing it atop my head, “but I have a sinus infection, so if I can hear you, *anyone* can. Plus what you do reflects on me and the entire salon, really.”

Oh? I stared at her and chewed my lip.

“Look,” she continued, “I had a guy in here once. He used to scream horrible,

horrible things across the salon. So I finally told him I couldn’t do his hair here anymore. He was not appropriate for the salon.”

Again, I sat speechless. What was this? A threat? Now I was not appropriate?

Sensing my seething, she gave me a friendly pat on the shoulder. “Wendy,” she continued, “it’s not a big deal. I don’t care! It’s just, ya know, tone it down is all.”

Oh really? So now Bea is a colorist, a judge of character, and a liar.

She sauntered away to check on another client.

I was pissed. My heart was pounding in my head. But something else was happening as well. I was sent to the principal’s office once. For kissing a boy in the second grade. And this was the same feeling I had back then: shame.

Shame. Perhaps the dirtiest word of all.

Bea finished my hair, and messed up my highlights in the process. But that’s not why I never returned. I don’t want a lecture. And if shame is involved, I’d better at least get a kiss for my troubles.

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You've Got Mail – Lots and Lots of It

Are you in Steve Hagen's address book? Should you be?

By Erik Bojnansky
Special to *BT*

Steve Hagen isn't pitching subscriptions, pretending he's Nigerian royalty, or offering you a job as a telemarketer. But his barrages of e-mails to civic-minded Miamians still get him pegged by some as a nuisance — which is unfortunate, his fans say.

"He can be very irritating," concedes Greg Bush, a founder of the Urban Environment League, history professor at the University of Miami, and one of Hagen's admirers. "He sends so many damn e-mails, and sometimes he needs to edit himself a little more."

"He can type about 75 words a minute, but [his mind] moves at 190 words a minute," laughs Coconut Grove activist and Miami Neighborhoods United member Nina West. "He has all kinds of spelling mistakes. He's lousy at that. And he doesn't put in periods or commas."

However, those who direct Hagen's missives straight to the trash bin may be missing some valuable substance in the deluge of Hagen-speak. His most recent crusade, for example, raises troubling questions about how two local museums



From his home office in Belle Meade, Steve Hagen keeps you informed, whether you like it or not.

are proceeding in a drive to create new facilities for themselves. Hagen believes the Miami Art Museum and the Miami Museum of Science are not being forthright about their fundraising campaigns to build fancy new homes on an eight-acre chunk of Bicentennial Park in downtown Miami.

"According to a reliable source, the museums have essentially no money in their capital campaign accounts," Hagen wrote in a recent e-mail to *BT* and some

two dozen others. "Pledges are not very much either... We are in year two, I think, of their capital campaigns...What they have raised, they have spent on consultants..."

So where does that leave the building drive? And assuming it goes forward, who will really end up paying for it? Hagen, typically, is better at asking questions than answering them.

The controversy goes back to 2004, when Miami-Dade voters approved a \$553 million bond measure, which,

among other things, committed the county to providing \$100 million for a new Miami Art Museum (MAM) and \$175 million for a new Museum of Science. But the deal was that MAM's board of directors was supposed to raise more than \$120 million on its own for its project, and the science museum's board would similarly come up with at least \$100 million. That was before the economy went south.

Hagen thinks the museums do not have the money to kick in their share, and he isn't shy about sharing his views with anyone who'll listen. He also criticizes what he sees as MAM's profligate spending practices. According to the museum's tax returns from 2005 and 2006, MAM invested \$55,708 in lobbying governments, paid \$286,397 in 2006 to hire Terence Riley as the museum's executive director, and spent \$1.8 million on "professional fees."

"Big sucking sound, as Ross Perot would say, as the fees leave Miami," Hagen wrote in a January e-mail. "Question is: Are they [MAM] going to raise their 150 million... Or are we Miami taxpayers

.....
Continued on page 27

Gender Bender Quick Surrender

Naked ladies didn't draw crowds to the Boulevard Theater, so it's back to boys

By Erik Bojnansky
Special to *BT*

Someday Leroy Griffith is going to get it right. Someday the owner of the Boulevard Theater at 7770 Biscayne Blvd. will find the right combination of striptease specialists, burlesque acts, or X-rated movies, and Griffith will stop experimenting with the formula, like a frustrated interior designer moving furniture around in a showroom.

In the meantime the veteran adult-entertainment impresario is at it again — as local civic leaders, once eager to shut the place down, look on with world-weary indifference. Griffith recently switched again, from nude women back to scantily clad men. The venue has been re-re-christened At the Boulevard, and it celebrated its grand re-re-opening on Valentine's Day weekend. Three nights a week, it's where the boys are.

"It was doing really good before," says Griffith, referring to a previous incarnation of At The Boulevard that existed six months ago — until he decided to shut it down and convert the landmark theater to a traditional strip club called Club Madonna II. (Madonna I is his adult club on South Beach.)

Griffith has owned the Boulevard Theater since 1971, transforming the single-screen, family-oriented movie house into a burlesque theater and, later, a triple-X cinema. In recent times, the Boulevard has switched from a nightclub with female strippers to a nightclub with male strippers so many times that, during an interview with *BT*, even Griffith had trouble keeping track.

Last year he leased the club to a group that ran Black Gold, a strip club aimed at African-American men. When

that tanked, he tried a gay format, which he says had a respectable following. But he was lured back to female strippers after talking to a guy with an impressive adult-entertainment résumé who promised him a quality operation.

Griffith then left town for a vacation. When he returned, Griffith says, he paid the club a visit. That "quality operation" amounted to six lonely dancers. He shut down Madonna II after only two weeks of operation.

Griffith says he has now sunk another \$200,000 into renovations, including expanding the main dance floor. He has kept a small porno theater in the complex but removed a parking fee, lowered the price of admission, and added drink specials. "I hope it works," he says of the latest incarnation. "Who knows what will happen down the road? That's up to neighborhood."

Fran Rollason, president of the MiMo Biscayne Association and a Belle Meade resident, is pretty much resigned to the Boulevard being an adult venue in one form or another. "I have to be quite honest with you, I really don't even pay attention," she says, "They're just there. It would be really nice if something *else* were there, like an independent film cinema. But whatever he wants to do — it's his building."

Griffith apparently isn't through experimenting, though. He's open to using the theater as a nightclub *without* naked dancers. How about jazz nights at the Boulevard, or a Minsky-style burlesque theater, with comedians, chorus girls, vaudeville acts? "Maybe we can get Jackie Mason," he jokes.

Maybe he could. No joke.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Still Waiting for the Train

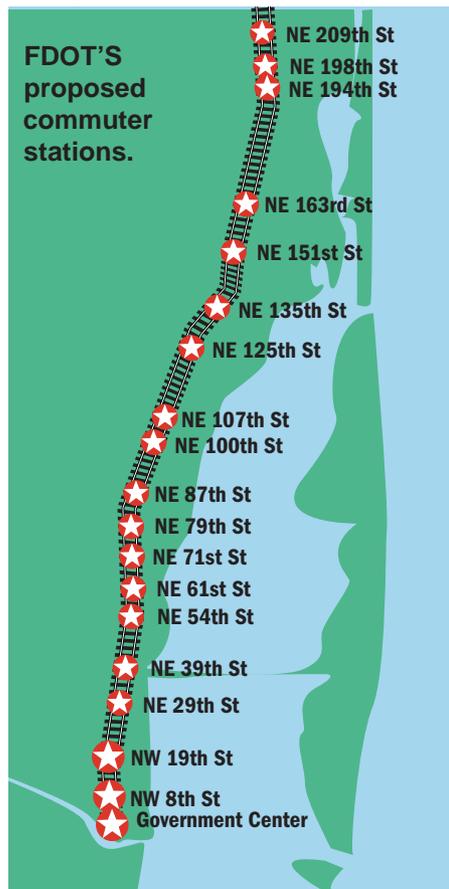
Biscayne Corridor residents to FDOT: Yes! And please hurry!

By Terence Cantarella
BT Contributor

South Florida, like many densely populated metro regions around the nation, is planning to expand commuter-rail transit in an effort to curb traffic congestion, create jobs, lower emissions, and reduce fuel dependence. The only problem, say many Biscayne Corridor residents, is that it's not happening fast enough.

Some 50 people showed up at the Miami Shores Country Club on the evening February 12 for the Florida Department of Transportation's "Phase 2 Kick-off Meeting" of their South Florida East Coast Corridor study. The study, launched in 2005, has been examining the possibility of adding passenger trains to the Florida East Coast Railway.

The railway (known as the FEC) runs along the coast from Miami to Jacksonville, and then connects to other railroads that head north up the Eastern Seaboard. But the southernmost 85-mile stretch, which roughly parallels U.S. 1 from downtown Miami (Biscayne Boulevard) to West Palm



Beach, passes through the centers of 28 South Florida cities, making it an obvious candidate for commuter-rail services and the focus of FDOT's study.

Built by oil and hotel magnate Henry Flagler in the late 19th Century, the FEC played a major role in Florida's development, bringing goods and people to the once inaccessible southern end of the peninsula. But competition from cars, affordable air travel, and problems posed by a workers' strike brought passenger service to an abrupt end in 1968, and the railroad has carried nothing but freight ever since. Reinstating passenger service today, says FDOT, would not only ease north-south traffic congestion on I-95 and U.S. 1, but also improve the quality of life along the corridor.

The gathering in Miami Shores, one of 11 meetings in the tri-county area over the past five weeks, was part of an effort by FDOT to involve the public as they move toward deciding things like transit technologies, routes, station locations, and possible connections to Tri-Rail in the west. Attendees had an opportunity to examine project illustrations, mingle with

project reps, and ask questions following a half-hour presentation.

Sue Gibbons of Gannett Fleming, the consulting firm working on the rail study, began the evening with these prophetic words: "If you think congestion is bad today, there's an enormous amount of growth that's going to take place between now and 2030, and it's only going to get worse."

Within the 100-foot-wide FEC corridor, she explained, there's room for up to five tracks, so a combination of local, express, and even inter-city Amtrak trains is possible. But she cautioned, "In the very best of circumstances, it's going to be six years or more before we actually have service running anywhere on this corridor — and probably many more years than that before the whole plan is implemented."

That timeline frustrated Miami Shores resident John Van Leer, who stood up and stated, "I'd really like to ride on this system before I die."

Scott Seeburger, project manager at FDOT, noted that securing funding for the project is a major cause of the delay.

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Hidden in Plain View: An Architectural Gem

In the heart of North Miami, a nod to Frank Lloyd Wright

By Christian Cipriani
Special to BT

If you drive too fast along NE 125th Street in North Miami, you may very well miss an architectural landmark — the Mortgage Corporation of America Building at 1125 NE 125th, a structure that has captured the imagination for nearly 40 years. The building is again up for sale after being purchased in 2007 by Salerno Holdings. Salerno's principals, Donato and Vito Carretta, were as interested in the architecture as the investment, but after picking it up for \$4.25 million, they're now asking \$7 million, though in a tumbling real estate market. As the Carrettas search for a buyer, the *BT* caught up with the building's architect, Carson Bennett Wright, for a trip down memory lane.

Designed in 1971, the building's style remains as arresting as it is tough to classify: Towering, hand-laid walls made from 167 tons of Tennessee River boulders,

and 15,000 board feet of imported Honduran mahogany establish a visual weight that far exceeds the four-story layout. Dark wood pervades the design — in window frames, doors, interior woodwork, and overhangs that extend at least six feet from the roof of each floor.

The lines evoke the geometric balance of Japanese temples and the cantilevered lines of that other famous Wright — Frank Lloyd Wright. While there's no relation, Carson Wright says his namesake forerunner was a huge influence, from prominent horizontals to allowing the aesthetic to permeate every



Designed by Carson Bennett Wright, this North Miami landmark evokes the style of a more famous Wright — Frank Lloyd.

detail to designing in harmony with the site. It stands as a worthy homage to the master.

"We used lots of organic materials and put a huge emphasis on landscaping," says Wright. "The Honduran mahogany, for instance, contains natural preservatives and still looks great today."

Wright designed the building to host the headquarters of Miami millionaire Tom Ireland's Mortgage Corporation of America, and soon after completion, the structure collected virtually every design and landscape award around. "Tom wanted a building with real identity," Wright recalls. "And it gave me a chance to express architecture as a mixture of art and science. It takes an investor-owner who's looking way beyond the dollar to contribute something lasting to the community. We've lost that today — everyone wants boxes that are all about money."

The stone-and-wood theme is preserved throughout the interior at 1125, and in most office suites the finishes remain intact. Four decades of wear on the brass-and-mahogany front doors

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Train

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“The hang-up is that we’re trying to capture federal money, which eats up a lot of time.” The federal government will fund up to 50 percent of the project, he said, and FDOT’s protracted studies are necessary in order to comply with complicated federal regulations. With an estimated project cost of \$4 to \$10 billion, federal money will be essential.

A North Miami resident named Mike suggested, “The length of time you’re spending to get federal money is kind of rankling. Is there anything we can do to push this?”

“Talk to your local officials,” Seeburger said. “If the local community really wants it, there’s going to have to be a sharing of the cost.” In other parts of the country where rail systems are in place, he said, citizens have been willing to pay for it. So a dedicated source of local funding will need to be secured.

Mention of local funding rubbed some raw nerves in the room. Miami-Dade implemented a half-cent sales tax back in 2002 to fund *new* transportation projects, but nearly half of the \$800 million collected so far has been squandered, and the new projects never materialized. “I don’t think



Back to the future: FEC’s “Havana Special” to Miami, ca. 1930.

you realize how badly burned people are,” said one Upper Eastside resident. “We paid money and expected things, and through corruption we lost everything.”

The biggest question of the night, though, was whether the FEC project would receive any money from Florida’s \$12.2 billion share of President Barack Obama’s economic stimulus plan. “The short answer,” Seeburger said, “is no. We won’t have anything ready to go to construction within the time frame that the stimulus demands.”

On a positive note, Seeburger mentioned that he has worked on several large transportation projects and has never seen the level of support that exists



The last FEC passenger train heads for Miami, July 30, 1968.

for the FEC project.

Approximately 96 proposed station locations are currently on the table for the tri-county region, and so far only the Village of Miami Shores has expressed no interest. “They don’t want a station,” said Ric Katz, an FDOT consultant. “They don’t want noise from horns or any more commotion in their city than they already have, and I think we can accommodate that.”

The effects of commuter trains on minority and historic neighborhoods, as well as on parks, trails, and wetlands along the corridor will also be taken into consideration in this new, second phase of FDOT’s study. “We’re going

Photos courtesy Florida State Archives

to rock and roll to get through Phase 2,” Seeburger enthused. “We should have a decision [about the project’s viability] by spring of next year.”

Bob Powers, president of the Upper Eastside’s Palm Grove Neighborhood Association, questioned why there were no representatives from the FEC at the meeting. “I’m furious that you can even say to me that it’s going to be another six years.... You could put trains on there tomorrow and people would use them. The next time you do this, I’d really like to see a rep from the FEC here to say whether they’re onboard or not.”

Seeburger responded, “If there’s something that makes a lot of sense and it’s not happening, it’s not because there’s a conspiracy, it isn’t because people aren’t doing their jobs. The fight over money is constant, even in boom times.”

Overall residents displayed a mix of impatience and enthusiasm for the project. The *BT*’s January cover story, which took an in-depth look at the FEC railroad and the FDOT study, bore the title “Waiting for the Train.” The gathering in Miami Shores clearly showed that Biscayne Corridor residents are not only waiting, they’re eager to climb aboard.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Hidden

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is evident from the outside, but inside, the design’s concentric rectangles still catch the light in deep caramel tones. Likewise, swooping, concentric wooden Vs emanate from angled lamps the length of the main hallway, and the elevator retains its intricately carved doors. The project remains one of Wright’s favorites, and holds a special place in his heart.

“My affection for that building is a very decent, pure love affair,” he says. “It’s actually how I met my wife. My first wife had passed away and I had two small children, and Tom Ireland had a friend who wanted to meet the architect. She and I were set up on a blind date, and 30 years later we’re still married.”

The Mortgage Corporation of America building was the start of a decade-plus period in which Wright applied his touch to a number of commercial and residential designs around Miami. In 1972 he was hired to design the retirement home of chemical engineer Paul Vaughan, who had invented a mechanism that dispenses plastic wrap, and Wright recalls the day

he walked into the office flush with \$22 million after selling his company.

“I’ll never forget it,” Wright recounts. “Paul told me that he spent his whole life being an ordinary working guy, and he wanted this house to be *extraordinary*.”

The result was a 12,000-square-foot waterfront mansion on Arvida Parkway in Gables Estates. Vaughan lived out his retirement in his dream home, passing away shortly before the next buyer razed it in 1993. Like the Mortgage Corporation building, Vaughan’s house also used Honduran mahogany, copper, enormous glass panels, and six railroad cars of hand-laid, sand-colored river stone. The house was described by the *Miami Herald* as “one-of-a-kind...a mix of jutting angles and sloping planes.”

According to Wright, the house was designed so that every vantage point looked down at the water,



creating a sense that there was no separation between the resident and the bay. As with his work on Tom Ireland’s building, Wright’s design

vision permeated the interior, bringing his palette of materials to a handmade wine cellar; glass, brass, and mahogany double doors; mahogany planters; and stone fireplaces — most of which was salvaged before the home’s cumbersome destruction. “The demolition company almost went bankrupt trying to take that house down,” says Wright with pride. “It was all poured concrete and *very* sturdy. The demolition was painful for me because I put so much passion into designing it. I guess you could say that the house died with Paul.”

Carson Wright is still a practicing architect, managing partner of the Tampa office of Schwab Twitty & Hanser, and he’s grateful to still be in demand: “I’ve been blessed that I’ve been able to do what I love the most — design buildings.”

The days of river rocks by the trainload and heavy beams imported from tropical jungles may be gone, but Wright’s work has left an indelible impression on Miami’s architectural landscape, in particular at 1125 NE 125th St.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Hagen

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throwing dollars down a rat hole?”

According to Michael Spring, director of cultural affairs for Miami-Dade County, two things need to happen before the museums can proceed with their projects: They have to nail down long-term leases with the City of Miami for the Bicentennial Park land (the museums are reportedly negotiating 99-year arrangements), and they need to raise their share of the capital.

“They have to have enough money to pay for the entire project,” says Spring, who adds that he has been following the museums’ fundraising efforts very closely and only releases bond money to them when they document expenditures related to their future homes at Bicentennial, or Museum Park, as it may one day be called.

According to a county manager’s report, MAM has taken in \$14.88 million of \$45 million pledged by would-be donors, “all of which has been expended on project costs to date.” No new financial updates have been received by the science museum since last year, when it reported raising \$1.8 million, Spring says. (Officials from MAM and the Museum of Science did not return BT’s calls seeking clarification.)

Museum Park skeptics, Greg Bush included, doubt the county’s ability to track the funds collected by the museums, raising the specter of another project like the performing arts center, which was 20 months late in opening and more than \$100 million over budget. “It really needs to be looked at a lot more,” Bush says. “They’re getting advances on money from the county bond issue. We can’t walk away from that.”

A county commission committee last month recommended another \$8.4 million disbursement to MAM from the bond money for design costs. However, Commissioner Sally Heyman added language requiring that unspent funds be returned to the county in the event the museums are not built. The allocation has been delayed in order to give all 13 commissioners more time to review the proposal.

Hagen, a 15-year resident of Belle Meade now retired from his business importing art and goods from Indonesia, isn’t just an e-mail crusader on the subject of museums in a waterfront park. He’s been vociferous in opposition to a publicly funded Marlins stadium, to high-rise projects along the Biscayne Boulevard and the 79th Street corridors, to the

proliferation of billboards and advertising murals, and to the slashing of trees by developers. He’s also been a relentless advocate for additional park space.

Says Greg Bush: “I gained a great deal of respect for him and his research on issues.”

Albert Ruder, now a Bay Harbor Islands councilmember, headed Miami’s parks department for 14 years. “I think he is an outstanding citizen,” Ruder says. “He is very well informed and does outstanding research. Every time he got involved with an issue, it was never to benefit himself but for the benefit of community.”

Adds Miami Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, a supporter of Museum Park: “He [Hagen] taught me a lot of what I know about parks, how much acreage we need for parks and how many we’re lacking.”

Hagen often points out that the City of Miami is dead last in the United States when it comes to recreational open space. “We currently have about 3.4 acres per thousand residents, or 148 square feet per person,” he wrote in an e-mail to the city’s Planning Advisory Board. “Yes this number puts Miami at the bottom of all medium and high density cities. If we doubled our space we would still be last. If we tripled it we would rise just one slot on the list of cities.”

“Great cities have great spaces to walk around in,” Hagen says, adding that parks not only give locals and tourists a place to decompress but also to interact with one another. “It’s an opportunity to rub shoulders with someone.”

When city officials opted for the Museum Park idea in 2003, consuming more than a quarter of Bicentennial’s 29 acres, Hagen weighed in as an opponent of the \$553 million bond issue, which also promised new libraries and schools. But the measure passed easily, along with seven other bond issues — a grand total of \$2.9 billion.

“They [museum supporters] basically drove the bus afterward,” Bush says. “Park advocates really had no say. Steve, to his credit, examined the [plans] carefully. He has held their feet to the fire.”

Hagen continues stoking that fire, and overloading countless e-mail inboxes. His recent communiqués accuse Miami officials of being outright lawbreakers, arguing that the Carollo Amendment, spearheaded by former mayor Joe Carollo, requires a public referendum prior to major development within a public park. “They’re violating the law,” Hagen fumes. “There is supposed to be a vote by the people.”

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That fact is that dogs left tethered and unattended are deprived of social interaction, and since they can’t run if they feel threatened, they are 2.8 times more likely to bite. So the anti-tethering law has been enacted to improve the safety of residents as well as the well-being of pets.



Once the law is in effect, illegally tethering your dog can result in fines of \$100 or more.

Please remember, **train don’t chain.**

For more information go to miamidade.gov/animals or call 3-1-1.

Biscayne Crime Beat

Compiled by Derek McCann

Boulevard Trinity

100 Block of NE 73rd Street

Jalousie windows are an aesthetically pleasing Miami staple, but they are anachronisms too. A church was closed up by a member one evening. All doors were locked and all windows secured. Someone still managed to enter the church and stole several items. The thief gained entry through the back jalousie windows — the same windows that had been manipulated several months earlier (and featured in “Crime Beat”) when another burglary occurred at this church. Miami denizens are warned to lose the jalousies or risk becoming a future item in this monthly crime report. This church, it appears, may be going for the trifecta.

Snake of a Man Strikes Hard

Upper Eastside

A female cashier needed to use the bathroom, so she left her station, which she thought she had locked, and disappeared



from view for three minutes. During those three minutes, a mystery man crawled on the floor — to avoid detection — and opened the cash register with his right hand, stealing \$300. He then crawled out the door. There is video of this slithering scrounger, but at press time no arrests have been made.



The Limits of Charity

Omni

A Good Samaritan saw a seemingly hungry woman and offered to feed her. She brought the poor woman to her apartment and told her to stay outside as she prepared something for her to eat. The famished female gained some spunk and

entered the apartment anyway, uninvited, and gathered the audacity to remove a 20-dollar bill from a coffee table. Hell broke loose and an old-fashioned chase through the apartment complex ensued. With the assistance of a neighbor, the starving woman was tackled just as she began to climb a 12-foot fence. Police arrived and found the offending woman on the ground and the victim yelling, “Give me my money!” The defendant offered a feeble excuse and returned the bill. Police then arrested her. This “charity” incident, Biscayne Corridor residents should know, occurred in at least six different forms in this month’s reports.

On the Trail of Another Criminal Genius

700 Block of NE 64th Street

Victim legally evicted her boyfriend one week earlier and had taken his key. On this night, he did not need a key. He kicked in the bathroom window

Continued on page 31

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Crime Beat

Continued from page 30

(which was locked) and entered the apartment, ransacking and vandalizing it, while stealing several items, including a plasma television. But this dolt left his wallet at the scene! He was later arrested at a local pawnshop trying to hawk that plasma television.

Travails of a Walgreens Shopper

3103 Biscayne Blvd.

Shopping at Walgreens in Miami can be a frustrating experience owing to the heavy volume of customers, but at the very least you can remain somewhat autonomous by using your own shopping cart. This victim took that to heart, placing his briefcase in his cart. While shopping, he briefly walked away from the cart (typical Boulevard victim behavior), only to return and find the cart and briefcase gone. There are no leads save for a fuzzy image of a man casually striding away with the goods. Miami's true credo: "Here one second, gone the next."

Reefer Madness Menaces Miami

200 Block of NE 20th Street

Victim arranged for sex on a chat line and met the subject at her home, in the vestibule. Apparently the agreement was marijuana for sex. (Weed whore?) While they engaged in Clintonian sexual relations, the woman asked for actual intercourse, which the victim (?) refused. At this time the victim was pushed out the door and locked out of the home, sans marijuana. When police arrived, the subject refused to interrupt her green day, and did not answer the door. NORML would need to sort this one out.

Felony Dumb

Morningside Park

On a beautiful Miami day, a woman decided to spend some quality time at the park. She impulsively decided she wanted a little exercise, so she went for a run. She placed her purse on a park bench, left it unattended, and then did her little jog. When she returned, the purse, of course, was missing. Miami's Finest still answered the call. Next time, she might want to spend that beautiful day on her couch.

I Want Your Sex, but I'll Settle for Your Watch

Club Space

Victim was outside the club, eating a hotdog, when a nymphomaniac of a woman walked up to him. She aggressively began grabbing his body in places the man found none too comfortable. (He was just not that into her.) He pushed her away, but as he did he felt her hand on his wrist. Shaken by the sexual high jinks, he did not notice she was stealing his watch. Efforts to locate the wanton coquette were not successful.

Secure All Sticky Substances

5900 Block of Biscayne Boulevard

Opportunists will steal just about anything. This victim had his annual vehicle-registration decal stolen from his car's license plate. It was meticulously peeled off by the perpetrator and probably sold on the decal black market for crack. There is no foolproof way to secure such a decal, so just pray this does not happen to you.

A Hirsute Case of He Said, She Said

600 Block of NE 36th Street

Victim claims her ex-boyfriend from two years ago attacked her after she opened her door. He pulled her hair and said, "I'm going to kill you." She fought him off. However, the alleged perpetrator's story is that she attacked him, ripping out a hunk of his chest hair and threatening to kill him. Hair samples from both were found at the scene, lending credence to both versions. In what may have been a toss of the coin, police arrested the man.

After Two Years, Time to File that Police Report

200 Block of NE 82nd Terrace

A woman had applied for a job at a record store and had given her passport to the manager as proof of identity. Two years passed and the passport was not returned. ("Crime Beat" is unsure if she ever asked for it back.) Victim filed a report because she now "believes it was stolen." For police, this was a cold case from the first day.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Steven K. Baird, P.A. Attorney at Law

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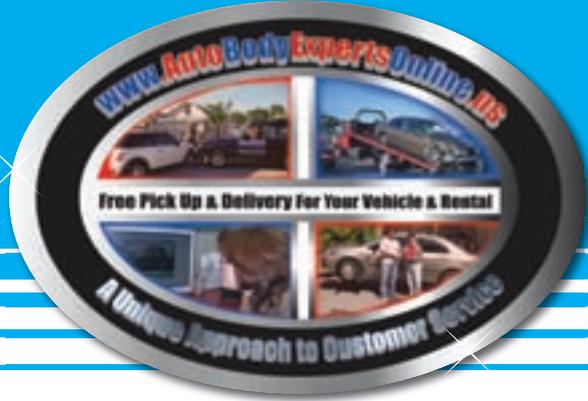
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The Book As Artwork

What happens when artists create books? We'll soon find out

By Victor Barrenechea
BT Contributor

A new medium will soon be available to select Miami artists: the printed page. At least it will be if [NAME] Publications has its way. The publishing house intends to release four books this year, each showcasing a single Miami artist, giving him or her the opportunity to branch out into new modes of expression.

[NAME] is the brainchild of artist/writer Gean Moreno, a winner of the James L. Knight Foundation's Knight Arts Challenge. His is just one of the many community arts projects made possible by grants from the Knight Foundation — in Moreno's case, \$30,000, a sum that must be matched by another funding source. Moreno is confident the grant money will be matched, and he plans to expand his project over the next five years to include a total of 20 books, each created by a Miami artist. Artists chosen for this year include Daniel Newman, Beatriz Monteavaro, and Clifton Childree, as well as William Cordova and the BASE collective.

Moreno (geanmoreno@hotmail.com) has been a fixture on the local art scene since the late 1990s, known for creating art that has been exhibited internationally. He's also known for his extensive writing on the arts. In addition, he's had a hand in curating numerous shows, and for years was closely associated with exhibits at the alternative art space Locust Projects.

"I've always done curatorial and organizational things," says Moreno, and for him [NAME] is just an extension of that. "A long time ago I stopped



Online image from Daniel Newman's *WWW*.

making the distinction between creating and writing," he says, hinting at the line-blurring, media-hopping approach that will inform [NAME]. But Moreno does not plan to publish his own work as part of this endeavor, nor does he expect mere artist monographs. As he puts it: "I think of it almost as a design project, where you create a system and you let people do whatever they want. Inside these structures, there's kind of no restrictions."

The only restrictions for each book will be a page count of 80 to 100, and dimensions of six-by-nine inches. Artists essentially will have a blank slate upon

which to work. Moreno's only job is to choose who gets to release a book. From there it's up to the artists.

For instance, if someone wants to glue all the pages together and release it that way, so be it. The cover designs will be as minimal and unobtrusive as possible, including edition number, the [NAME] logo, and the artist's own name. The rest will be left to the bookmaker's imagination. Even within that broad framework, things are negotiable, according to Moreno. "If an artist comes up with this great way to undermine the design, that would be fantastic too," he says. "The whole idea is to have this

space where people can do what they want to do."

The first book, *WWW* by artist Daniel Newman, should be out in May. A longtime underground Miami mainstay, Newman uses a wide array of media, from painting to sculpture to video, and now books. The multi-tasking artist, who is busy with an upcoming solo exhibition in Los Angeles as well as the [NAME] project, reveals that his will be a book about the Internet. The original idea was to create a reference volume that would catalogue oddities found on the World Wide Web, but it has morphed into a massive undertaking that hopes to convey a snapshot of this moment in our digital age.

"There's a book that made an impression on me that I came across recently," says Newman. "It's titled *The Complete Compendium of Universal Knowledge*." Published in 1895, it was written by William Ralston Balch, who sought to compile all knowledge of the universe into one digestible read, a feat the Internet has come much closer to achieving.

Newman describes *WWW* as the *Compendium's* "red-headed stepchild." In an effort to model itself on *The Complete Compendium*, Newman's *WWW* will include text and images, most lifted directly from the Web, that highlight curious items, strange stories, hoaxes, and other forms of Web misinformation, presented in a stream-of-consciousness manner designed to mirror the mechanics of the Internet itself.

Newman may be no stranger to producing work in written form (he has

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ART & CULTURE

Book

Continued from page 30

created a handful of small-circulation zines, manifestos, even a book of poetry), but he freely admits that the [NAME] project is taking him outside his comfort zone. "This is a different situation for sure," he acknowledges. "The book opened a number of doors for other ideas, too."

The book as artwork appears to be a novel concept for Miami. Even Moreno admits he's never seen anything quite like his project here. "But it's also in the spirit of a lot of things that have happened in Miami," he adds, citing some of Miami's laissez-faire alternative spaces such as the Bas Fisher Invitational and Locust Projects. Both these spaces have given artists the freedom to experiment and produce work that would probably never be accepted in more commercial galleries.

For example, last summer filmmaker Clifton Childree was offered free run of the Locust space and given two months to create whatever he wanted. He ended up with an installation called *Dream-Cum-Tru*, in which he transformed the space into a meticulously detailed replica (in miniature) of an



Clifton Childree: For his book, he's planning an audio component from local noise artists.

abandoned amusement park, with his films interspersed throughout. He says he's finding similar creative freedom while working on his upcoming book, tentatively titled *Black Licorice*.

"With Clifton, I kind of didn't know what a Clifton book would look like,



Gean Moreno sees [NAME] as a design project.

and I thought that would be interesting," Moreno explains.

Childree's project is still in the planning stages, but he does say he's been thinking about surrealist Max Ernst, and imagines a multimedia book that would use two-minute snippets of noise, created by noise-music artists assembled by Childree and Rat Bastard, a veteran Miami

noisemaker. Each succeeding artist would create his own sound segment after listening to a ten-second sample of the preceding artist's work. A CD would be included with the book to accompany Childree's illustrations.

With a going price of \$15, and print runs of 1000 each, each [NAME] book will have a chance of reaching larger audiences than a single painting or sculpture displayed temporarily in a gallery. Newman believes the books will provide "the opportunity for some really great artists from the swamp to reach out beyond. Books are eternal. They carry a life of their own."

Many art-related books, printed in very limited numbers and priced exorbitantly, never circulate outside of elite circles. "I didn't want to make them like art books, like a 75 run," says Moreno. "I want them to be out in the world."

Imagine stumbling across a wildly eccentric book like *WWW* at some random bookstore, having never heard of Daniel Newman. Moreno delights in such a scenario: "I think it's pretty amazing if someone buys it because it's in the culture — if it negotiates a place in the culture."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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ABBA FINE ART

233 NW 36th St., Miami
305-576-4278
www.abbafineart.com
Through March 11:

"Forces of Nature" by Suzan Woodruff
March 14 through May 5:
"Zoe" by Debra Holt

Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

ALEJANDRA VON HARTZ FINE ARTS

2134 NW Miami Ct., Miami
305-438-0220
www.alejandravonhartz.net
Through March 29:

"Everything Is Borrowed" by Jaime Gili

AMAYA GALLERY

2033 NW 1st Pl., Miami
917-743-2925
www.amayagallery.com
Call gallery for exhibition information.

ART FUSION

1 NE 40th St., Miami
305-573-5730
www.artfusiongallery.com
Through March 25:

"Exploration of the Spirit" with various artists
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

ART GALLERY AT GOVERNMENT CENTER

111 NW 1st St., Suite 625, Miami
305-375-4634
www.miamidadearts.org
Through April 2: "Adopt a Masterpiece: Selections from the Miami-Dade Art in Public Places Artbank Collection" with Carlos Alfonso, José Bedia, Condo Bermudez, Keith Haring, Wifredo Lam, and Ed Ruscha

ART ROUGE

46 NW 36th St., Miami
305-448-2060
www.artrouge.com
Through March 11: "Art of Deception: abstract and ethnic sculptures and paintings" with Terence Carr, Dee Sands, and John LaHuis

ARTFORMZ

171 NW 23rd St., Miami
305-572-0040
www.artformz.net
Through March 9: "Faith, Fear, and Fortune" with PJ Mills and Ramon Williams

BAKEHOUSE ART COMPLEX

561 NW 32nd St., Miami
305-576-2828; www.bacfl.org
March 13 through April 1:
"Collective Consciousness" with Jennifer Basile, Ingrid Eliasson, Patricia Gutierrez, Tina Salvessen, and José Pacheco Silva
Reception March 13, 7 to 10 p.m.

BARBARA GILLMAN GALLERY

4141 NE 2nd Ave. #202, Miami
305-573-1920
www.artnet.com/bgillman.html
Call gallery for exhibition information.

BERNICE STEINBAUM GALLERY

3550 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-573-2700
www.bernicesteinbaumgallery.com
Through March 7: "Voom Portraits" by Robert Wilson

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Through March 30:
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"OTHERWORLD" by Guerra de la Paz
March 20 through April 12:
"Deepen / Deeper" by Asser Saint Val
Reception March 20, 7 to 10 p.m.

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Through April 4:
"New Sculpture" by Larry Estridge
March 14:
Exhibition featuring the work of DASH students
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

CHELSEA GALLERIA

2441 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-576-2950
www.chelseagalleria.com
Through March 10:
"Walking on Air" by Garie Waltzer

DAMIEN B. CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER

282 NW 36th St., Miami
305-573-4949
www.damiemb.com
March 14 through April 10:
"Sentinels" by Narbero
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY

2234 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-573-8110
www.castilloart.com
Through March 7:
"Pinched" by Tom Scicluna and "Calor" by Guido Albi-Marini
March 14 through April 4:
"Fight or Flight" by George Sanchez-Calderon and
"Opportunities Multiply As They Are Seized" by Shay Kun
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

DIANA LOWENSTEIN FINE ARTS

2043 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-576-1804
www.dlfinearts.com
Through March 7:
"Pigment Coast" by Dario Basso
March 14 through April 4:
"Inanimate Survey of Male Potential" by Luis M. Alonzo-Barkigia and "Diagrams for a Seismic Bioscape" by Julie Davidow
Reception March 14, 7:30 to 10 p.m.

DIASPORA VIBE GALLERY

3938 NE 39th St., Miami
305-573-4046
www.diasporavibe.net



Shay Kun, *Never regret anything because at one time it was exactly what you wanted, oil on canvas, 2008, at David Castillo Gallery.*

Though March 25: "Juxtaposition" with Hubert Neal Jr., Francesca Lalanne, and Adrienne Chadwick

DORSCH GALLERY

151 NW 24th St., Miami
305-576-1278
www.dorschgallery.com
March 14 through April 4:
"Celluloid Drag: some spaces between film and architecture" curated by Terri C. Smith with Gordon Matta-Clark, Todd McDaniel, and Ralph Provisero
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

DOT FIFTYONE ART SPACE

51 NW 36th St., Miami
305-573-9994
www.dofiftyone.com
Through March 30:
"Bazaar" by Pancho Luna

EDGAR ACE GALLERY

7520 NE 4th Ct., Miami
305-877-2401
March 21 through April 4:
"Fly Away" by Bernardo Medina-Colón
Reception March 21, 8 to 11 p.m.

EDGE ZONES CONTEMPORARY ART

47 NE 25th St., Miami
305-303-8852
www.edgezones.org
March 14 through March 30:
"Everything Must Go" by Mideo M. Cruz and "Ten Selves" by J. Valdia
Reception March 14, 8 to 11 p.m.

ELITE ART EDITIONS GALLERY

151 NW 36th St., Miami
305-403-5856
www.elitearteditions.com
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ETRA FINE ART

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FREDRIC SNITZER GALLERY

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305-448-8976
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March 14 through April 4:
"Sculpture Without A Skin" by Yasue Maetake
Reception March 14, 7 to 9 p.m.

GALLERY DIET

174 NW 23rd St., Miami
305-571-2288
www.gallerydiet.com
Through March 7:
"The Best of Intentions" by Daniel Milewski
March 14 through April 4:
"The Benjamin Project" by The Benjamin Project
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

GARY NADER FINE ART

62 NE 27th St., Miami
305-576-0256
www.garynader.com
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HARDCORE ARTS CONTEMPORARY SPACE

3326 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-576-1645
www.hardcoreartcontemporary.com
Through March 7:
"Daily Scenes" by Ignacio Goitia, "La Ventana Indiscreta VI" by Alexis Perez Montero, and a group show with various artists from Valencia
March 14 through April 4:
"Squared In/Squared Out" with Pepe Lopez, Pancho Quillici, Claudia Bueno, Gladys Triana, Comba, Richard Gare, and Rodolfo Agrela
"From where, what, who" by Henry Bermudez
"it tastes like chicken" by Julie Lopez
"RE-CYCLED" by Andres Michelena
Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

HAROLD GOLEN GALLERY

Temporary location:
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305-576-1880
www.haroldgolengallery.com
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JULIO BLANCO STUDIO

164 NW 20th St., Miami
305-534-5737
www.onemansho.com
Through March 30:
"Abstractions" by Julio Blanco

KELLEY ROY GALLERY

50 NE 29 St., Miami
305-447-3888
www.kelleyroygallery.com
March 7 through April 25:
"Waters" by Antonio Ugarte and "Rhyme Art" by Mike Tesch
Reception March 7, 7 to 10 a.m.

KEVIN BRUK GALLERY

2249 NW 1st Pl., Miami
305-576-2000
www.kevinbrukgallery.com
Through April 8:
"PAINTINGS" curated by Sam Gordon with Lecia Dole-Recio, Jake Ewert, and Jacob Robihcaux
"48 Hours in Miami" by Sam Gordon

KUNSTHAUS MIAMI

3312 N. Miami Ave., Miami
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www.kunsthhaus.org.mx
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LEITER GALLERY

6900 Biscayne Blvd., Miami
305-389-2616
Call gallery for exhibition information.

LOCUST PROJECTS

105 NW 23rd St., Miami
305-576-8570
www.locustprojects.org
March 14 through April 26:
"transvirtual perspectives in a semi-tropical environment" by Bartow + Metzgar
Reception March 14, 7 to 11 p.m.

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Art Listings

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LUIS ADELANTADO GALLERY

98 NW 29th St., Miami
305-438-0069

www.luisadelantadomiami.com

March 14 through May 15:

"Homeless Boy" by Darío Villalba and a solo show by Marta María Pérez Bravo

Reception March 14, 7 to 10 p.m.

LYLE O. REITZEL GALLERY

2441 NW 2nd Ave., Miami

305-573-1333

www.artnet.com/reitzel.html

Call gallery for exhibition information.

MARIO FLORES GALLERY

12502 NE 8th Ave., North Miami

561-201-2053

www.mariofloresgallery.com

Through March 20:

"RED AND GRAY" with Mario Flores and Freddy Osorio

March 27 through April 20:

"GARAGE SALE" by Igor Montoya-Laske

Reception March 27, 6:30 to 11 p.m.

MIAMI ART GROUP GALLERY

126 NE 40th St., Miami

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www.miamiartgroup.com

March 1 through June 1

"Wake Up Your Walls!" with James Kitchens, Jeff

League, Tom Rossetti, Gail Taylor, Shawn McNulty,

Hessam, Goli Mahallati, and Gregory Deane

Reception March 14, 8 to 10 p.m.

MIAMI ART SPACE

244 NW 35th St., Miami

305-438-9002

www.miamiartspace.com



Asser Saint Val, Stumpt. W.E. (1988). The endocrinology of sunlight and darkness: complimentary roles of vitamin D and peneal hormones. Naturwissenschaftern, 75, 247-251, mixed media on masonite, 2008, at Carol Jazzar.

Through March 27:

"Cars of Cuba" by H. Allen Benowitz

MIAM-DADE COLLEGE, CENTER GALLERY

300 NE 2nd Ave.,

Bldg. 1, Room 1365, Miami

305-237-3696

www.mdc.edu

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MIAMI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

OF ART AND DESIGN

1501 Biscayne Blvd., Miami

305-428-5700

www.mymiu.com

Through March 15:

"A Celebration of Life - Luciano Franchi de Alfaro III," a

Luciano Franchi memorial retrospective

MUSEO VAULT

346 NW 29th St., Miami

305-571-1175.

www.museovault.com

Through March 7:

"Construction" by Barbara Frank

March 14 through April 15:

"Non-Stop, Retrospective from the glamorous 80s"

by Sheila Elias

Reception March 14, 6 to 10 p.m.

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3100 NW 7th Ave., Miami

305-490-2976

www.oh-wow.com

Call gallery for exhibition information.

PANAMERICAN ART PROJECTS

2450 NW 2nd Ave., Miami

305-573-2400

www.panamericanart.com

March 7 through April 4:

Kcho and Cuban Collective

Reception March 14, 6 to 9 p.m.

PRAXIS INTERNATIONAL ART

2219 NW 2nd Ave., Miami

305-573-2900

www.praxis-art.com

Call gallery for exhibition information.

PUZZLEMENT GALLERY

81 NW 24th St., Miami

917-929-8559; www.puzzlementart.com

Ongoing show with Kevin Brady, Manuel Carbonell,

Nichole Chimenti, Carter Davis, Stephen Gamson,

Raquel Glottman, Jim Herbert, Jennifer Kaiser, Alex

Paiva Lopez, Andy Piedilato, Tomy F. Trujillo, Jonathan

"Depoe" Villoch, and Giancarlo Zavala

SPINELLO GALLERY

531 NE 82nd Terr., Miami

786-271-4223

www.spinellogallery.com

Through March 31:

"I WANT TYPOE SO EFFIN BAD" by TYPOE

STASH GALLERY

162 NE 50 Terr., Miami.

305-992-7652

www.myspace.com/stashgallery

Call gallery for exhibition information.

STEVE MARTIN STUDIO

66 NE 40th St., Miami

305-484-1491; www.stevemartinfineart.com

Call gallery for exhibition information.

TWENTY TWENTY PROJECTS

2020 NW Miami Ct., Miami

786-217-7683

www.twentytwentyprojects.com

Call gallery for exhibition information.

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI PROJECTS SPACE

2200 NW 2nd Ave., Miami

305-284-2542

Through March 7:

"The Open City" by Karla Turcios

March 14 through April 1:

Tutua Boshell and Lisa Kaplowitz

Reception March 14, 6 to 10 p.m.

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305-576-2112
www.untitled2144.com
Call gallery for exhibition information.

WALLFLOWER GALLERY

10 NE 3rd St., Miami
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Call gallery for exhibition information.

WHITE VINYL SPACE

3322 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
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MUSEUM & COLLECTION EXHIBITS

CIFO (Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation)

1018 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-455-3380
www.cifo.org
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FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY FROST ART MUSEUM

11200 SW 8th St., Miami
305-348-0496
http://thefrost.fiu.edu/
Through March 9: "Drawing in Space: The Peninsula Project Illustrated" by John Henry
Through April 4: "Simulacra and Essence: The Paintings of Luisa Basnuevo" by Luisa Maria Basnuevo
March 16 through April 10:

"Aesthetics and Values Exhibition 2009" with Ray Azcuy, Brian Burkhardt, Cooper, Julie Davidow, Edouard Duval Carrié, Jacek Kolasinski, Mark Koven, Ralph Provisero, Sara Stites, and Ruben Torres-Llorca

LOWE ART MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

1301 Stanford Dr., Coral Gables
305-284-3535
www.lowemuseum.org
Through April 5:

"Los Artes de Mexico" with various artists

MIAMI ART MUSEUM

101 W. Flagler St., Miami
305-375-3000
www.miamiartmuseum.org
Through May 24:

"NeoHooDoo: Art for a Forgotten Faith" with various artists

March 13 through October 11:

"Recent Acquisitions" with various artists

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

770 NE 125th St., North Miami
305-893-6211
www.mocanomi.org
March 25 through May 10:

"Abstract Cinema" with various artists

MOCA AT GOLDMAN WAREHOUSE

404 NW 26th St., Miami
305-893-6211
www.mocanomi.org
Through March 21:

"The Possibility of an Island" with Cory Arcangel, Davide Balula, Tobias Bernstrup, Heman Chong, Peter Coffin, Matias Faldbakken, Cao Fei, Kim Fisher, Claire



José Valdivia, *Self*, photography, 2009, at Edge Zones.

Fontaine, K48, Chris Kraus, Cristina Lei Rodriguez, Nicolas Lobo, Martin Oppel, Philip (a novel written by Mark Aerial Waller, Heman Chong, Cosmin Costinas, Rosemary Heather, Leif Magne Tangen, Francis

McKee, David Reinfurt, and Steve Rushton), Lisi Raskin, Julika Rudelius, and Mungo Thomson

THE MARGULIES COLLECTION

591 NW 27th St., Miami
305-576-1051
www.margulieswarehouse.com
Through April 25:

"Hurma" by Magdalena Abakanowicz, "Western Union: Small Boats" by Isaac Julien, "Oil Rich Niger Delta" by George Osodi, and "Photography and Sculpture: A Correlated Exhibition" with various artists

THE RUBELL FAMILY COLLECTION

95 NW 29th St., Miami
305-573-6090
www.rubellfamilycollection.com
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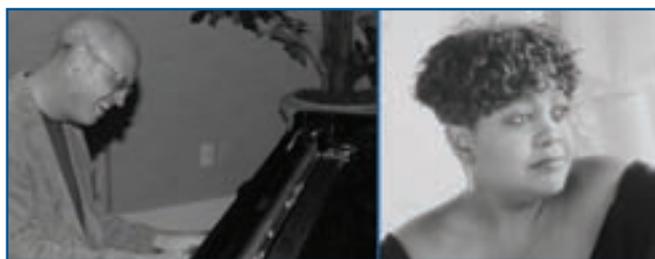
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Culture Briefs



Miami Time Machine

Your chances of getting past the front door of any of the stately manses in Morningside have probably been, until now, slim to none. The bayfront neighborhood has become something of an exclusive preserve since James Nunnally, owner of a string of candy stores, conceived of the tract in 1926. But on Sunday, **March 1**, the Morningside Civic Association throws the doors open during this annual tour. "None of these 1920s and 1930s historically significant gems has ever been on the home tour before," says association president William Hopper. Tickets are \$12 in advance at www.MorningsideTour.com (through February 28), or \$15 on the day of the tour. For more information call 305-754-1020.

New Work on the Edge

For years the Miami Light Project has commissioned new work from Miami's most adventurous emerging artists as part of its annual "Here & Now" festival. This year's festival features three new performance works. With subjects that range from bees to underwater dreams and airborne illusions, the new pieces premiere at the Arsht Center **March 5-7**. Elizabeth Doud and Jennylin Duany's *Sipping Fury from a Teacup* explores the mysteries of apiary "colony collapse disorder." Alexey Puig Taran takes on the challenges of aerial dance in *Symbol*. Rosie Herrera goes submarine in *Various Stages of Drowning: A Cabaret*. Performances begin at 7:30 p.m. in the center's Studio Theater (1300 Biscayne Blvd.). Tickets are \$20. Call 305-949-6722 or visit www.arshtcenter.org.

Go Fly a Piñata!

Flying kites dates back 3000 years, to the Chinese and their slinky, dragon-shaped aerial artworks. Since then millions have experienced the joys of holding a string and feeling the tug of

the wind on light-as-air constructions of stick and paper. Take the kids outside for some fresh air and let the winds of the Atlantic carry their kites and imaginations to the heavens at the 16th Annual Kite Day on Sunday, **March 8**, from noon until 5:00 p.m. at Haulover Park (10800 Collins Ave.) There will be activities for kite-lovers of all ages, including competitions, kite-making classes, and the promise of candy falling from high-flying piñata kites. Kite Day is free. Participants can bring their own kites or buy them on site. Call the park office (305-947-3525) or Skyward Kites (305-893-0906).



Joe the Restaurant Critic

Hosted by celebrity chef and Upper Eastside homegirl Michelle Bernstein, WPBT-2's restaurant-review show *Check, Please! South Florida* begins its second season on **March 9**. Airing on Mondays and Thursdays at 7:30 p.m., the show is a sort of on-the-air *Zagat's Guide*, with each episode highlighting three local restaurants chosen by diners from all walks of life. Restaurants can be anywhere from the Keys to Palm Beach. While this season's are still top secret, a number of last year's picks were from *BT* territory, including River Oyster Bar, Hiro's Yakko-San, and Uva 69. After dining anonymously, the amateur reviewers discuss the selected venue's pros and cons. Fun fact: In Chicago, where *Check, Please!* originated, one "reviewer" was a relatively unknown local politician named Barack Obama. Obama's episode never aired because the future president was "too thoughtful, too articulate, not enough an amateur."

Let Them Do the Trekking

Too broke to afford a vacation? Well, you can always let your imagination do the hiking and biking. It's free and you don't have to go through customs. Three

notable South Florida writers read their stories of travel on Thursday, **March 12**, at Bagua (4736 NE 2nd Ave.) as part of the Florida Center for the Literary Arts' *Write Out Loud* series. The speakers will be Tom Swick, travel editor at the *Sun-Sentinel* for 19 years, who writes and talks about living in Alsace, Greece, and Poland; Fabiola Santiago, an arts and culture writer for the *Miami Herald*, who'll discuss her travels from Cuba to Paris; and former *Herald* columnist and Pulitzer Prize-winner Liz Balmaseda, who will share stories from the newsworthy foreign fronts she has covered. The readings, free and open to the public, start at 7:30 p.m.



Get Spammed Friday Night in the Park — for Free!

Once again it's time for downtown office workers to chill out to some excellent music in a great setting on a Friday evening — for *free*, thanks to the Downtown Development Authority. On **March 13** at 5:30 p.m., DJ Le Spam and the Spam Allstars take the stage at Bayfront Park's Tina Hills Pavilion (south end of the park). Led by maestro Andrew Yeomanson, the Spam Allstars have invented an infectious, only-in-Miami musical form that blends Latin, funk, dance, electronica, jazz, hip hop, and more. So spread a blanket on the lawn, gaze up at the glittering skyscrapers, and unwind with your office pals.

Bids on Buds by Flower Fanatics

Orchids are the gemstones of the plant world — the largest family of flowering plants, with each prized species claiming its own mix of exotic color and form. Orchid aficionados will have a bonanza at the Exotic Orchid Auction on Monday, **March 23**, sponsored by the North Dade Orchid Club. The event will feature

more than 100 rare orchids open for bidding at the McDonald Center in North Miami Beach (17051 NE 19th St.). Doors open at 6:30 p.m., and bidding begins at 7:00 p.m. Admission is free. Bidders must pay with cash or checks. Free parking behind the center, on NE 171st Street. For more information contact Amy at 305-788-0484.

Jazz Cool and Uncool



Depending on whom you talked to in 1970, iconic jazz trumpeter Miles Davis's controversial album *Bitches Brew* was either a revolutionary step forward in American

music or an unwelcome descent into the dark side. Davis's use of electric instruments and rock rhythms had jazz purists frothing at the mouth, though in retrospect those who saw the genius of the music now seem closer to the truth. Two central players on the album, Chick Corea and John McLaughlin, appear at the Arsht Center as part of its Jazz Roots series on Friday, **March 27**, at 8:00 p.m. Pianist Corea, a 15-time Grammy winner, is renowned for his expansion of the fusion style. McLaughlin shot to fame in the 1970s with his band Mahavishnu Orchestra, which blended eclectic jazz with Eastern influences. The two will join three artists who are stars in their own right: saxophonist Kenny Garrett, bassist Christian McBride, and drummer Brian Blade. Tickets are \$25-\$145 at www.arshtcenter.org.

MiMo Tastes Good

The MiMo Historic District on Saturday, **March 28**, offers tasty gourmet treats as part of Taste of MiMo. Boulevard restaurants deliver samples straight to you between noon and 5:00 p.m. Small dishes ranging in price from \$2 to \$5 will be available at, among other places, Le Café, Ver Daddy's, Moonchine, Moshi Moshi, Che Soprano's, Wine 69, Casa Toscana, Kingdom, Anise Taverna, Uva 69, and Red Light. For details call 305-609-4288 or visit www.mimoboulevard.org.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

When Is a Park Not a Park?

When it's actually part of a college campus — thank goodness

By Jim W. Harper
BT Contributor

The best park in town is really not a park at all. Despite that, it has miles of jogging trails with million-dollar views of Biscayne Bay. There are actual forests of pines and mangroves, and it offers some of the best kayaking and bird-watching around. Manatees and dolphins are regulars.

It may sound like mammoth Oleta State Park, but it is actually Oleta's conjoined twin. Together they offer one of South Florida's largest patches of green east of I-95. Both are on state land. However, only one of them is free. The secret is now out: The best park in town is the Biscayne Bay campus of Florida International University.

The eastern half of FIU's 200-acre property is more like a park than a campus because it houses no buildings and remains in a mostly natural state. It is possible to explore the area for hours without coming across anything remotely academic. And the best way to experience the campus's better, greener half is from the back-door entrance.

A new bike trail leads you down 135th Street — North Miami's version of the Champs-Élysées — and brings you to nature's version of the Arc de Triomphe. Giant Australian pines create an arch above the newly marked pathway



Manatee Beach, perfect for pets, kayaks, and wild things.

into the forest. Two footbridges cross over idyllic canals of dark, brackish water that reflect the silhouettes above.

This former access road at the terminus of 135th Street is unmarked and inaccessible to cars, which makes it perfect for the many bike-riders, joggers, and dog-walkers who visit daily. You can hardly miss it, as the street loops around right where it begins. The lack of lighting makes it too spooky for

nighttime use, and there is no security. But in the daylight, it is our private little slice of paradise.

Connecting to the access road, the improved trail loops around the entire campus for nearly four miles, but the section along the bay is by far the best place to spend your time. At one point, the mangroves have been cleared and the view opens up to a circular thumb of Biscayne Bay that is dotted with glistening white yachts. I call it Manatee Beach, and it is one of my favorite spots in Miami. I bring my dogs here to take a dip, though people are not allowed to swim.

On one of my first visits to this shore of large pebbles, I saw a huge manatee in shallow water resting under the shade of a mangrove. On other visits, I have heard what sounds like a plastic soda bottle being opened — that's the whoosh of dolphins breaking the surface to exhale. I have also witnessed barren trees crammed with

black vultures, and a single white heron reflected in the water.

Take a few moments to search for the smaller, less obvious creatures along the shoreline: the hermit crabs, land crabs, and snails in the rocks. But be prepared for some disappointment, too. The rocks are covered with washed-up litter.

Most of the area near the bay is clean, wide open, rocky, and weedy. There is not a lot of shade. For some reason, I never see people flying kites, but I have seen a model airplane or two.

This eastern stretch of the FIU campus is so wide open that people actually say hello to each other when walking by. Call it a Miami miracle! Try it, you'll like it.

Unlike at Oleta State Park or the nearby spoil islands, fishing and dipping in the water is not permitted, although it is possible to kayak for miles. Check out the southwestern corner to experience an impenetrable man-



Wide-open spaces like this are rare in Miami.

grove forest, broken up only by a few canals.

Here is another remarkable element: 13 acres of waterfront that will never be developed. In 2007 the City of North Miami preserved its piece alongside the FIU pie by creating the Arch Creek East Environmental Preserve in perpetuity. North Miami Councilman Scott Galvin calls the 5-0 vote "one of my proudest moments."

Other large sections on the public university's land are also protected by their status as swampy mangrove

Continued on page 37

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

Park Rating

★★★★★

3000 NE 151st St.
North Miami
305-919-5500
Hours: Sunrise to sunset
Picnic tables: No
Barbecues: No
Picnic pavilions: No
Tennis courts: Yes
Athletic fields: Yes
Night lighting: No
Swimming pool: Yes
Playground: No

Campus

Continued from page 36

preserves, but most of the land could be developed. FIU considered selling some of its valuable waterfront property to private developers a few years ago, but Gov. Jeb Bush quashed the proposal. Any development here requires state approval, and the state wants it reserved only for educational purposes.

Given that this state land is free to visit, it is easy to overlook its shortcomings. The litter embedded in the shoreline rocks is disheartening. The towering, shady trees are actually invasive Australian pines that crowd out native species. Invasive Brazilian pepper plants are also common. The bugs can be insufferable at times, and as isolated as the area may be, it is still too close to the crazy people of Miami to feel completely safe.

But these transgressions are forgivable, because the Biscayne Bay campus gives the community something it really lacks: wide-open spaces. Here is one of the few places in town where you can wander around and truly forget where you are.

Campus police do appear at times



Bike path entrance as it extends from NE 135th Street.

to keep the peace, but usually the peace has not been disturbed. The crime of arson has been committed on the forest repeatedly, but I am unaware of any recent, major assaults in the area. A thin but steady stream of university



A footbridge across still waters that rise and fall with the tides.

types and dog-walkers acts as the civilian patrol.

Here's hoping that the word will not spread too widely and people will not begin swarming the place in droves, because its magic might diminish.

"I'd hate for humans to ruin this place," said the dolphin to the manatee.

In response, the sea cow burped, "I indubitably agree."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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The Parent's Curse: Damaged Kids

It's our fate — we're going to mess up no matter what

By Jenni Person
BT Contributor

I brought my son late to karate the past two times. My daughter's reading homework was incomplete and she wasn't properly prepared with a poem she was supposed to recite. In addition to feeling like I am letting people down in my own life, I now feel like I am letting down two other layers of people: my kids and their karate teachers, reading teachers, and classroom teachers.

Recently I was out of town at a conference for one week and my partner for half of each of the next two. In an arrangement that is already a tag-team affair, things obviously got spotty. The poetry assignment slipped through the cracks. Having to get my son to karate on a day that is normally my partner's day to take him threw me completely off schedule. Despite reasonable real-life reasons for these less-than-perfect results, the words of the instructors feel like daggers piercing through my qualifications for being a parent.

"Your son is late today..."

"Your daughter was not prepared with her poem..."

And the layers are deeper than simply hearing the disappointment in their voices. Two bright kids — am I screwing them for life?

Then there's the grandparent layer! I never have to worry about what would happen if I were gone — clearly my mother and mother-in-law would be much better at raising my kids than I could ever be. You can tell by the way they always make it clear that they are



not satisfied by the way I do things.

"You're sending them out like that?"

"Don't you think she should eat this?"

"He should know better than to behave like that."

Being a mom is no picnic, and not just because of the challenges our kids present, but because the only affirmation comes from fleeting moments in our own minds when we observe or partake in our kids' deliciousness. The rest of the time all the messages we hear are how we should be doing better. And this, I guess, is the nature of the job. The truth is parents screw up their kids no matter what, right?

So it shouldn't surprise me now that my daughter is squarely into her elementary school years, the implications of my/our parenting are getting more public, more layered, and more complex.

It seems my Goldi is having some social challenges. *My Goldi*, the sunshine girl everyone always loves.

A psychiatrist once observing another child in Goldi's pre-K class even remarked that she is the one child all the kids play with. She has that "cross-over" appeal, if you will. This was not surprising to her parents, but suddenly Goldi is telling me she has no friends in school. Even the kids she talks about interacting with during her school day — at work and at play — she claims are not her friends.

And my heart breaks. How have we created the kid no one wants to be friends with? Is it that she has these colorful-artsy-hippie-public-parents who fly their freaks flags so damn high they're visible in space? Parents who are only trying to encourage and allow their kids to let their own imaginations soar? Is it that her dad is an authority figure and a very public persona at her school? Is it that her mom isn't like all the other coiffed designer moms at the affluent suburban private school?

Is it that the substantial distance between school and home interferes with play-date potential with schoolmates who generally have parental or domestic staff support available at the right hours for shuttling? Has she missed too many birthday parties because of her parents' weekend work schedules or because she spends her Sundays in Hebrew school for the sole purpose (her choice) of keeping close to the kids she spent her first five years with in preschool and Torah Tykes?

Is it because she needed some extra help reading — her sounding-out skills lagging behind her otherwise excellent learning skills — and goes to a specialist at reading time (an experience she sees as a special treat)? Is it because the music we play for our kids is stuff like *Free To Be...You and Me*, *They Might Be Giants* (both kids' and regular albums), and the soundtrack from *Moulin Rouge* instead of Hannah Montana and *High School Musical*?

Her reported perception, real or imagined, is a red flag that I must not ignore. Instead of wasting time beating up myself and trying to fight the inevitable, I need to act. I need to make more of an effort to get to Pinecrest every weekend for the birthday parties — even if it means she only gets a short time there and I have to bring along the baby brother. I need to arrange play dates and invite classmates over to play, and even their families over for Shabbat dinner.

But no way am I changing the music.

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New Ideas for New Pools

Morningside Park could set the standard for "green" swimming pools

By Jim W. Harper
BT Contributor

With a new public swimming pool coming to our community, the question arises as to the environmental impact of constructing and maintaining pools. How "green" can a pool be? This question didn't come up at a Morningside Park public meeting on February 11, when the City of Miami's parks department announced that funding was available to replace the park's current, aging pool.

Attendees vented about getting rid of the pool altogether or, at the other extreme, of creating a huge water park. A new pool here seems certain, but for now its size and style are undecided. This project is an opportunity for Miami to create a prototype, low-impact pool. It could be an architect's dream and a national model of sustainability.

I must confess I love pools, so it feels odd to look at them critically. My childhood was spent in our backyard pool, and as a competitive swimmer for most of my life, I've spent thousands of hours in chlorinated bliss. Sure, the chemicals sting your eyes and bleach your hair. There are remedies for those inconveniences. But is there a remedy for the waste generated by pools? What's the best way, environmentally, to create aquatic facilities? You don't hear much about this topic, but it bears considerable attention in South Florida, where backyard pools sprout like weeds.

One type of eco-pool can be built along a shoreline and filled by a natural body of water such as a bay or lake. This alternative makes perfect sense for South



Florida, and an excellent example can be found at Matheson Hammock Park. A few more such natural pools in Biscayne Bay, done correctly, could convert the bay into a real and sustainable swimming hole.

Most unnatural pools, however, give no consideration to their surroundings. They don't care how much they displace native flora and fauna nor how much energy they consume for heating and maintenance. But what is a concerned pool owner to do? You could skip the next two paragraphs, or you could consider removing it. Drain it and use it as an underground painting studio. Fill it up with dirt to create a giant planter.

If you're considering a new pool, think carefully about your options. Use public pools or pools at gyms. Join a neighborhood association and propose a community pool. If you still want a pool in your backyard, consider a blow-up kiddie pool or a hot tub first. An above-ground pool may be less disruptive to the earth than an in-ground pool, but in the long run it might not save much on water consumption and other maintenance.

The pool industry may be cleaning up its act. "We don't talk about 'going green' because we associate it with algae," jokes Frank Carmona, general manager at the All Florida Pool & Spa Center in North Miami. Yet the growth of alternatives to traditional chlorine pools shows that a green-pool market is growing.

Carmona offers several recommendations. A solar blanket will "reduce the heating bill by 50 percent," he says. It insulates the water while generating up to ten degrees of heat, and it should also reduce evaporation. Carmona also prefers a heat pump versus heat from gas. Third, he promotes a new hybrid-technology pump, Intelliflow, that saves more than 60 percent on electricity.

The conversion of a chlorine pool into a saltwater pool is worth exploring. Saltwater pools still convert their salt into chlorine, but they avoid the mess of transporting and storing it. Apparently they also cut down on its ugly effects, such as red eyes and green hair. The process requires an upgrade to a titanium-cell mechanism.

Several other alternatives for treating water exist, though sadly, none is free. *EThe Environmental Magazine* lists three types of reduced-chlorine options: Nature2's purifier; the Aqua-Flo ozone generator, and Chlor-Free, a patented chemical compound that replaces chlorine. But there might be an even better, chemical-free alternative.

Mother Earth News magazine suggests building a natural pool — the equivalent of a backyard pond that uses aquatic plants as filters and frogs or fish as insect consumers. Even a conventional pool can be converted to natural by constructing a natural filter area alongside it. Search for "natural pools" online and you'll see beautiful images of luxurious, private Golden Ponds — most likely behind the homes of wealthy Europeans.

Personally, I don't have or want a pool in my backyard, but if I did, the ideal manmade pool would be a cross between an Olympic, 50-meter pool and Miami Seaquarium — plenty of space and plenty of fish.

Come to think of it, the best pool is the ocean, right here in our communal backyard. That's why every Sunday I head over to the beach and go for a swim. Maybe manmade pools could try harder to imitate God's great swimming hole, but they will never achieve its level of beauty.

What's my recommendation for the new pool in Morningside Park? The concept would be a place where man and fish can coexist, but I don't know how that would be created. If you have a better idea, let us know about it via the feedback address below. It might just be realized as the pool of the future.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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Just the Two of Us

The investment of a little one-on-one, quality time pays a big dividend

By Lisa Hartman
BT Contributor

While busy running to and fro, trying to keep up with our overburdened schedules, we seldom get a chance to stop and, as they say, smell the roses. (Myself included!) Our animal friends sometimes end up being neglected as a result. Taking your dog out for a walk is an example. It can be done quickly and thoughtlessly, or it can be a wholly different experience. So when you are walking your pet, what are you *really* doing?

You may think I'm going to start preaching the values of training your pet during a walk — to stay beside you, to not pull, to get proper exercise, and so on. Well, I'm not. Been there, done that. Besides, the walk should be fun, not a military exercise.

I really want you to think about it: What are you doing when you walk the dog? Or for that matter, your cat or rabbit? Most people I observe may be walking, but they are doing a lot more talking — on a cell phone, that is. The pets are left to amuse themselves while their masters sip coffee and chat with friends. The dog possibly hears a mumbled "Good boy" with barely a glance when he does his business, and possibly receives a quick pat on the head. But a walk can be so much more than just a walk. It is a time for you to be *present* with your animal.

Sometimes I too have other things on my mind when I walk my dogs, especially in the morning, when I'm barely awake and planning my work day. But being conscious of it, I make sure we



use this time to be together intensely, not just walking side by side or in single file.

This may be the only time in the day, other than bedtime, in which we get to be in each other's company. Because of this, I make sure I really look my dogs in the eye and smile and praise them

when they do something wonderful.

Even Jay-J, now almost five years old, loves to

It may seem funny that I'm stressing eye contact, but you're always multi-tasking during your interactions with your pets, not completely acknowledging them.

hear me make a fuss occasionally when he does his business in the right spot. My arms extended, I

greet him, and call him to me like he just won a Nobel prize. I make sure to do

the same with little 11-month-old Saffy, separating her good deeds from Jay-J's, and looking directly at her. Sure, many animals don't look directly at people or other animals as it can be considered a challenge and rude, but you can teach those animals that it is a good thing to look at you, if you start small and if it has a positive outcome.

Being a conscious pet parent does not stop with dogs or the walk. You can always make sure you are truly present. Like when your cat comes over to you to rub against you and sit in your lap. Take a few minutes to put aside your magazine or your homework. Get on the floor and give him your undivided attention, and look right at him.

It may seem funny to you that I'm stressing eye contact with your pet, but if you really think about it, you might realize that you're always multi-tasking during your interactions with your pets, not completely acknowledging them. Even a few minutes a day of undivided attention can strengthen your relationship far more than walking for an hour with your coffee, friends, cell phone, and pet.

On another note, if you have more than one animal, it's important to avoid always treating them like a unit, no matter how much they love each other or how well they get along. Separate them for a few minutes, even if only now and then each week, and spend time with each pet separately. I too fall into this group habit. Both of my dogs need to do their business before I start work, and so we have ended up a unit of three.

.....
Continued on page 41

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COLUMNISTS: PAWSITIVELY PETS

Two

Continued from page 40

But truth be told, Saffy doesn't always want to go. Since she usually does most of her bathroom business in the yard first thing in the morning anyway, I have been leaving her home sometimes. This gives me a chance to focus on Jay-J alone, to connect with him in a way we used to before Saffy came into our lives. He loves walking at our old pace, and getting all the attention and play for a little while.

Those of you who are parents to human children know this well. You have to be a conscientious parent sometimes. Turn off your Blackberry and shut off the TV. With a warm and friendly expression, look them square in the eye when speaking to them. It is important for you to do something with your kids, separating them sometimes as individuals. You'll notice that the more you validate them and really notice them, the less actual time you'll need to invest for them to be happy and well-adjusted. And as reinforcement for

you, fewer feelings of guilt! It's quality versus quantity, for people and our pets — rabbit, bird, badger, whatever.

As I write this, Jay-J and Saffy are wrestling next to me. I'll take a break with them before I hit the gym. When they take turns somersaulting into my lap, as they like to do to make me laugh, I will giggle, smile at them, and scratch their bellies. It's a few

Those who are parents to human children know you have to turn off your Blackberry and shut off the TV to do something with your kids.

moments of validation to let them know how important they are. A few moments of individual training. And it is important. Then it's back to our busy lives as an energetic trio.

Lisa Hartman is head dog trainer for Pawsitively Pets. You can reach her at pawsitivelypetsonline@yahoo.com or www.pawsitivelypetsonline.com.

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Fear and the Fig Whitefly

Go ahead, rip out that ficus hedge — we have too many as it is

By Jeff Shimonski
BT Contributor

A few weeks ago I attended a half-day seminar that provided an update on treatment and control for the fig whitefly. There was really nothing new on the life cycle of this insect — approximately one month from egg to egg, and that it really only likes certain species of ficus.

One point that really becomes apparent when discussing fig whitefly is the fact that this problem is mostly our fault. Why is that? Well, we all planted so many *Ficus benjaminia* that our collective South Florida landscape is almost a monoculture. A monoculture in this instance means lots of food for any newly introduced insect or disease that likes to dine on that particular species of ficus. If we had very few *Ficus benjaminia* in the landscape, there would be no problem.

So now tons of chemicals are being used in yards everywhere to affect some kind of control. Many types and classes of chemicals were discussed at this seminar. There were the systemic drenches that get taken up by the roots and translocated through the tree and foliage, that can last from eight to twelve months. There was also foliar spraying that may last a few weeks at best. I don't advocate the use of pesticides, but here are a few points you need to be aware of if you spray or hire someone who will be spraying for you.

Do not use the same chemical to drench the roots and spray the foliage. This could possibly be illegal, depending on the label and directions that come with the pesticide. More important, there are already other species of whitefly infesting



BT photo by Jeff Shimonski

Crotons come in many colors and leaf forms, and they make great hedges.

other plant species here in South Florida that are resistant to the chemicals available for fig whitefly control.

Pesticides need to be rotated or insect resistance will occur. That means different chemicals with different modes of action. Do not spray or drench unless you find the whitefly on the leaves. No whitefly, no chemicals. If you have a hedge and only part of it is infested, only spray or drench the part with the whitefly.

If someone else is spraying for you, ask them questions like these: What is the efficacy of this chemical against fig whitefly? What is the rate of chemical you are using and why? Are you going to switch chemicals? What is the effect of this chemical on beneficial insects and honey bees? Are you a licensed pest-control operator? Can you show me the different life stages of this whitefly on the foliage of my plants?

Or you can make your yard a chemical-free zone and start to establish full-time populations of natural predators. At the fig whitefly seminar, natural predators were identified and discussed. The five species of Lady beetle, wasp, and fly that are known to attack fig whitefly are all found in our area. So how about really practicing sustainability? Rip out that ficus hedge and plant something else. Here are a few recommendations that grow in full sun and need little fertilizer in our soil conditions:

Clusia. This is an attractive, thick-leaf tree that comes in several sizes and varieties and tolerates salt, drought, and our soil conditions very well.

Silver and Green Buttonwood. These are excellent plants for our area. They are drought resistant, and tolerate salty conditions. Green Buttonwood is considered a mangrove species here. At Jungle Island

we have hundreds of feet of Green Buttonwood hedges. They definitely don't have to be trimmed as often as a ficus hedge and never need to be fertilized.

Crotons. What better way to add color to your landscape? Crotons can live 40 or 50 years with no fertilizer or insect problems. When established, they tolerate drought.

Jamaican Caper. This relative of the caper you eat grows very happily in our area. An attractive plant with very few problems. At Jungle Island we have grown them from seed to six-foot-tall plants in four years.

Cordyline or Dracaena species. The many relatives of the dracaena can thrive in our soils. At Jungle Island we use hundreds of *Dracaena fragrans Massangeana*. This is an excellent hedge plant and very fragrant when in bloom.

Podocarpus species. This is an old-time South Florida hedge plant that used to be quite common. It is very temperate-looking but does well in our conditions.

Acalypha species and varieties. These very colorful plants are a bit soft-leaved and brittle, but they do well here, tolerate full sun, and are very easy to grow.

Areca palm. With enough water, this clumping palm will make a tall, long-lasting hedge.

Schefflera arboricola. This is a very tough plant. Several varieties are available.

Hamelia species. This well-known butterfly plant is now available in different species or hybrids. A bit brittle, but the sturdier varieties will last for years.

Stop spending so much money trying to save all those ficus hedges. Try something new — and go sustainable.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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Dining Guide

RESTAURANT LISTINGS

The Biscayne Corridor's most comprehensive restaurant guide. Total this month: 200.

NEW THIS MONTH

MIAMI

BRICKELL / DOWNTOWN

Area 31

270 Biscayne Boulevard Way
305-524-5234

www.area31restaurant.com

Not that the sleek interior of this seafood restaurant (named for fishing area 31, stretching from the Carolinas to South America) isn't a glamorous dining setting. But we'd eat outside. From the expansive terrace on the 16th floor of the Epic condo and hotel on the Miami River, the views of Brickell's high-rises actually make Miami look like a real city. As for ingestibles, it's hard to decide whether the eats or drinks are the most impressive. The food is impeccably fresh regional fish, prepared in a clean Mediterranean-influenced style, like Royal Red shrimp

with salmoriglio sauce. The cocktails are, for a change, genuinely creative. They pack a wallop, but are refreshing rather than overwrought. Luckily you don't have to choose one or the other. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Manny's Steakhouse

300 S. Biscayne Blvd.

305-938-9000

www.mannyssteakhouse.com

M. Night Shyamalan couldn't have come up with more obvious irony: Located directly opposite Prime Blue Grille, Miami's most intentionally female-friendly steakhouse (light décor, lightened dishes), is Manny's, Miami's most intentionally masculine steakhouse. Here, ensconced in your black leather booth, everything is humongous: dry-aged choice-grade steaks like the Bludgeon of Beef (a boldly flavorful 40-ounce bone-in ribeye, described as "part meat, part weapon"); king crab legs that dwarf the plate; cocktail shrimp that could swallow the Loch Ness monster whole; two-fisted cocktails that would fell a T-Rex. Not for the frail. \$\$\$\$\$

MIAMI

MIDTOWN / WYNWOOD / DESIGN DISTRICT

Captain Joe Seafood & Pasta Grill

3401 N. Miami Ave. (Shops at Midtown)

305-573-6111

No matter if your splurge in the Shops at Midtown Miami begins at 8:00 a.m. and ends at 10:00 p.m. This eatery will be there for you, with eggs, pancakes, French toast, and bagels till 11:00 a.m. After that it's a seafood-oriented menu of fast-casual food, like a more upscale and more regional version of Long John Silver's. Best values are combo platters (served with choice of two Latin or All-American sides) such as shrimp and a grilled kebab, a hefty fried or grilled fish sandwich, or a Caribbean paella. The last is more like a pilaf than Spain's saffron-rich creation, but is packed with enough mussels, fish, calamari, chicken, and small shrimp to feed two. There are also more than a half-dozen specials (chicken, shrimp, or veggie-topped pastas) served from 4:00-9:00 p.m. daily, all for under seven bucks. \$

MIAMI

UPPER EASTSIDE

News Lounge

5582 NE 4th Ct.

305-758-9932; www.the55thstation.com

Unlike South Beach's News Café, Mark Soyka's new News is, as its name suggests, more a friendly neighborhood hangout and watering hole than a full-fledged eatery. Nevertheless the limited menu of light bites is – along with other entertaining lures like an inviting outdoor patio, an intriguing music selection, a 5:00-9:00 p.m. half-price deal on well drinks and selected beers, and rest rooms that resemble eclectic art galleries – part of the reason that almost all who drop in stay for hours. Especially recommended snacks are fat mini-burgers with chipotle ketchup; a brie, turkey, and mango chutney sandwich on crusty baguette; and what many feel is the original café's Greatest Hit: creamy hummus with warm pita. A beer list that includes Tucher on tap, plus high-octane Belgian brews like Duvel and Delirium Tremens, reminds diners that beer is food too. \$

Restaurant listings for the BT Dining Guide are written by Pamela Robin Brandt. Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, but restaurants frequently change menus, chefs, and operating hours, so please call ahead to confirm information. Icons (\$\$\$) represent estimates for a typical meal without wine, tax, or tip. Hyphenated icons (\$-\$\$\$) indicate a significant range in prices between lunch and dinner menus, or among individual items on those menus.

\$= \$10 and under

\$\$= \$20

\$\$\$= \$30

\$\$\$\$= \$40

\$\$\$\$\$= \$50 and over

MIAMI

Brickell / Downtown

Acqua

1435 Brickell Ave., Four Seasons Hotel
305-381-3190

Originally an Italian/Mediterranean restaurant, this comfortably elegant, upscale spot switched chefs in 2006 (to Patrick Duff, formerly at the Sukhothai in Bangkok), resulting in a complete menu renovation. Thailand's famed sense of culinary balance

is now evident throughout the global (though primarily Asian or Latin American-inspired) menu, in dishes like yuzu/white soya-dressed salad of shrimp tempura (with watercress, Vidalia onion, avocado, pomegranate), a tender pork shank glazed with spicy Szechuan citrus sauce (accompanied by a chorizo-flecked plantain mash), or lunchtime's rare tuna burger with lively wasabi aioli and wakame salad. For dessert few chocoholics can resist a buttery-crust tart filled with sinfully rich warm chocolate custard. \$\$\$\$\$

Azul

500 Brickell Key Dr., 305-913-8254

Floor-to-ceiling picture windows showcase Biscayne Bay. But diners are more likely to focus on the sparkling raw bar and open kitchen, where chef Clay Conley crafts imaginative global creations – many of them combinations, to satisfy those who want it all. One offering, "A Study in Tuna," includes tuna sashimi, Maine crab, avocado tempura, and caviar, with several Asian sauces. Moroccan lamb is three preparations (grilled chop, harissa-marinated loin, and bastilla, the famed savory-sweet Middle Eastern pastry, stuffed with braised shank), plus feta and smoked eggplant. Finish with a vanilla soufflé your way, a choice of toppings: chocolate, raspberry, or crème anglaise. \$\$\$\$\$

Bali

109 NE 2nd Ave., 305-358-5751

While Indonesian food isn't easy to find in Miami, downtown has secret stashes – small joints catering to Asian-Pacific cruise-ship and construction workers. Opened circa 2002, this cute, exotically decorated café has survived and thrived for good reason. The homey cooking is delicious, and the friendly family feel encourages even the timid of palate to try something new. Novices will want Indonesia's signature rijsttafel, a mix-and-match collection of small dishes and condiments to be heaped on rice. Once you're hooked, there's great gado-gado (veggies in peanut sauce), nasi goreng (ultimate fried rice), and laksa, a complex coconut-curry noodle soup that's near-impossible to find made properly, as it is here. Note: bring cash. No plastic accepted here. \$\$\$

The Bar at Level 25 (Conrad Hotel)

1395 Brickell Ave., 305-503-6500

On the Conrad's restaurant/lobby-level 25th floor, the expansive, picture-windowed space around the corner from the

check-in desks used to be just a lobby extension. Now it's The Bar, which is not just a watering hole with panoramic views. At lunch it's an elegant sandwich bar; at night it's a raw bar (with pristine coldwater oysters) and (best) a tapas bar serving pintxos. That's just the Basque word for tapas, but as interpreted by Trio's chef Michael Gilligan, there's nothing mere about the generously portioned small plates. They range from traditional items like cod fish equixada (a zingy bacalao salad) and saffron-sautéed Spanish artichokes to inventive inspirations like foie gras and goat cheese-stuffed empanadas, or Asian-inspired soft-shell crab in airy tempura batter. \$\$\$

Blu Pizzeria e Cucina

900 S. Miami Ave. (Mary Brickell Village)

305-381-8335; www.blurestaurantsgroup.com

More than a mere pizzeria, this spot sports a super-sleek Upper Eastside (of Manhattan) interior. If that's too formal, opt for a casual patio table while you study the menu over an order of warm, just-made gnocchetti (zeppole-like bread sticks, with prosciutto and savory fontina fondue dip), or creamy-centered suppli alla romana (porcini-studded tomato and mozzarella rice croquettes). And don't worry. The place looks upscale, but prices of even the fanciest seafood or veal entrées don't exceed \$20. The fare fashioned by chef Ricardo Tognozzi (formerly from La Bussola and Oggi) is wide-ranging, but as the name suggests, you can't go wrong with one of the thin-crust brick-oven pizzas, whether a traditional margherita or inventive asparagi e granchi (with lump crab, lobster cream, mozzarella, and fresh asparagus). \$\$-\$\$\$

Café Sambal

500 Brickell Key Dr.

305-913-8358; www.mandarinoriental.com/miami

Though the Mandarin Oriental Hotel describes this space as its "casual hotel restaurant," many consider it a more spectacular dining setting than the upscale Azul, upstairs, owing to the option of dining outdoors on a covered terrace directly on the waterfront. The food is Asian-inspired, with a few Latin and Mediterranean accents (sushi, plus creative fusion dishes like tangerine-anise spiced short ribs with scalion pancake, or a tempura-battered snapper sandwich with lemon aioli). For the health-conscious, the menu includes low-cal choices. For hedonists there's a big selection of artisan sakes. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Caribbean Delight

236 NE 1st Ave., 305-381-9254

Originally from Jamaica, proprietor Miss Pat has been serving her traditional homemade island specialties to downtown office workers and college students since the early 1990s. Most popular item here might be the weekday lunch special of jerk chicken with festival (sweet-fried cornmeal bread patties), but even vegetarians are well served with dishes like a tofu, carrot, and chayote curry. All entrées come with rice and peas, fried plantains, and salad, so no one leaves hungry – doubly true thanks to the home-baked Jamaican desserts. \$

Dolores, But You Can Call Me Lolita

1000 S. Miami Ave., 305-403-3103

www.doloreslolita.com

It's hard to figure why a Mediterranean/Latin restaurant (with Asian touches) would be named after a line in a 1950s novel about a New England pedophile. But everything else about this casually stylish spot is easy to understand – and easy on the wallet. All entrées cost either \$18 or \$23, a price that includes an appetizer – no low-rent crapola, either, but treats like Serrano ham croquetas, a spinach/leek tart with Portobello mushroom sauce, or shrimp-topped eggplant timbales. And all desserts, from tiramisu to mango carpaccio with lemon crème, are a bargain \$2.50. The best seats in this hip hangout, housed in the old Firehouse 4, are on the rooftop patio. \$\$\$

Fresco California Bistro

1744 SW 3rd Ave., 305-858-0608

This festively decorated indoor/outdoor bistro packs a lot of party spirit into a small space, a large variety of food onto its menu, and a very large amount of informal retro California-style fusion food onto its plates. To the familiar Latin American/Italian equation, the owners add a touch of Cal-Mex (like Tex-Mex but more health conscious). Menu offerings range from designer pizzas and pastas to custardy tamales, but the bistro's especially known for imaginative meal-size salads, like one featuring mandarin oranges, avocado, apple, blue cheese, raisins, candied pecans, and chicken on a mesclun bed. \$

Continued on page 44

Buena Vista Bistro



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DINING GUIDE

Restaurant Listings

Continued from page 43

Garcia's Seafood Grille and Fish Market

398 NW N. River Dr., 305-375-0765

Run by a fishing family for a couple of generations, this venerable Florida fish shack is the real thing. No worries about the seafood's freshness; on their way to the rustic outside dining deck overlooking the Miami River, diners can view the retail fish market to see what looks freshest. Best preparations, as always when fish is this fresh, are the simplest. When stone crabs are in season, Garcia's claws are as good as Joe's but considerably cheaper. The local fish sandwich is most popular - grouper, yellowtail snapper, or mahi mahi, fried, grilled, or blackened. The place is also famous for its zesty smoked fish dip and its sides of hushpuppies. \$-\$

Grimpa Steakhouse

901 S. Miami Ave., 305-455-4757
www.grimpa.com

This expansive indoor/outdoor Brazilian eatery at Brickell Plaza is more sleekly contemporary than most of Miami's rodizio joints, but no worries. The classic sword-wielding gauchos are here, serving a mind-reeling assortment of skewered beef, chicken, lamb, pork, sausages, and fish - 16 cuts at dinner, 12 at lunch. And included in the price (dinner \$47, lunch \$34) is the traditional belly-busting buffet of hot and cold prepared foods, salad, cold cuts, and cheeses, plus additional accompaniments - like irresistible cheese bread - served tableside. A pleasant, nontraditional surprise: unusual sauces like sweet/tart passion fruit or mint, tomato-based BBQ, and mango chutney, along with the ubiquitous chimichurri. \$\$\$\$-\$\$\$\$\$

Il Gabbiano

335 S. Biscayne Blvd., 305-373-0063
www.ilgabbianomiami.com

Its location at the mouth of the Miami River makes this ultra-uptown Italian spot (especially the chic outdoor terrace) the perfect power lunch/business dinner alternative for those wanting something beyond steakhouses. And the culinary experience goes way beyond the typical meat market, thanks in part to the flood of freebies that's a trademark of Manhattan's Il Mulino, originally run by Il Gabbiano's owners. (Free starters: A generous hunk of parmigiano-reggiano with aged balsamico dip, assertively garlicky fried zucchini coins, and tomato-topped bruschetta.) The rest of the food? Pricy, but portions are mammoth. And the champagne-cream-sauced housemade ravioli with black truffles? Worth every penny. \$\$\$\$

Indochine

638 S. Miami Ave.
305-379-1525
www.indochinebistro.com

Indochine has succeeded by morphing from mere restaurant into hip hangout. Copious special events (art openings, happy hours with DJs, classic movie or karaoke nights, wine or sake tastings) draw everyone from downtown business types to the counterculture crowd. Not that there's anything "mere" about the range of food served from three Asian nations. Light eaters can snack on Vietnamese summer rolls or Japanese sushi rolls, including an imaginative masago-coated model with mango, spicy tuna, and cilantro. For bigger appetites, there are Thai curries and Vietnamese specialties like pho, richly flavored beef soup with meatballs, steak slices, rice noodles, and add-in Asian herbs and sprouts. \$\$\$\$

Iron Sushi

120 SE 3rd Ave., 305-373-2000
(See Miami Shores listing)

La Loggia Ristorante and Lounge

68 W. Flagler St.
305-373-4800
www.laloggia.org

This luxuriantly neo-classical yet warm-feeling Italian restaurant was unquestionably a pioneer in revitalizing downtown; when it first opened, eating options in the courthouse area were basically a variety of hot dog wagons. With alternatives like amaretto-tinged pumpkin agnolotti in sage butter sauce, cilantro-spiced white bean/vegetable salad dressed with truffle oil, and soufflé di granchi (crabmeat soufflé atop arugula dressed with honey-mustard vinaigrette), proprietors Jennifer Porciello and Horatio Oliveira continue to draw a lunch crowd that returns for dinner, or perhaps just stays on through the afternoon, fueled by the Lawyer's Liquid Lunch, a vodka martini spiked with sweetened espresso. \$\$\$

La Moon

144 SW 8th St., 305-860-6209

At four in the morning, nothing quells the post-clubbing munchies like a Crazy Burger (a heart-stopping Colombian

take on a trucker's burger: beef patty, bacon, ham, mozzarella, lettuce, tomato, and a fried egg, with an arepa corn pancake "bun") unless it's a Supermoon perro, a similarly overloaded hot dog. For less dainty eaters, there's a bandeja paisa, a mountainous construction containing char-grilled steak, pork belly, pork-enriched beans, rice, plantains, eggs, and arepas. One hardly knows whether to eat it or burrow in to spend the rest of the night. While this tiny place's late hours (till 3:00 a.m. Thursday, 6:00 a.m. Friday and Saturday) are surprising, the daytime menu is more so. In addition to all the cholesterol-packed Colombian classics, there's a salad Nicoise with grilled fresh tuna, seared salmon with mango salsa, and other yuppie favorites. \$-\$

Latitude Zero

36 SW 1st St., 305-372-5205

Potted plants are the only sign outside this narrow storefront that the room inside is worlds more charming than standard downtown Latin eateries. This urban oasis is an artsy little white-tablecloth place (with alternating red tablecloths warming up the feel), but with no-tablecloth prices. While much of the menu is Miami's generic Latin mix, there is a separate Ecuadorian section that's a playlist of that country's culinary greatest hits. Standouts: encebollado, a centuries-old fishermen's soup given national individuality by yuca and zingy hits of lime; lighter caldo de bola, veggie-packed broth with plantain dumplings; and cazuelas, thick layered casseroles of mashed plantains and tomato-enriched seafood. No clue? Try a bandera, a mixed plate of Ecuador's most distinctive dishes, including shrimp ceviche. \$\$

Novocento

1414 Brickell Ave., 305-403-0900
www.bistronovocento.com

For those who think "Argentine cuisine" is a synonym for "beef and more beef," this popular eatery's wide range of more cosmopolitan contemporary Argentine fare will be a revelation. Classic parrilla-grilled steaks are here for traditionalists, but the menu is dominated by creative Nuevo Latino items like a new-style ceviche de chernia (lightly marinated grouper with jalapeños, basil, and the refreshing sweet counterpoint of watermelon), or crab ravioli with creamy saffron sauce. Especially notable are entrée salads like the signature Ensalada Novocento: skirt steak slices (cooked to order) atop mixed greens coated in rich mustard vinaigrette with a side of housemade fries. \$\$\$-\$

Oceanaire Seafood Room

900 S. Miami Ave.
305-372-8862
www.theoceanaire.com

With a dozen branches nationwide, Oceanaire may seem more All-American seafood empire than Florida fish shack. But while many dishes (including popular sides like bacon-enriched hash browns and fried green tomatoes) are identical at all Oceanaires, menus vary significantly according to regional tastes and fish. Here in Miami, chef Sean Bernal (formerly at Merrick Park's Pescado) supplements signature starters like lump crab cakes with his own lightly marinated, Peruvian-style grouper ceviche. The daily-changing, 15-20 specimen seafood selection includes local fish seldom seen on local menus: pompano, parrot fish, amberjack. But even flown-in fish (and the raw bar's cold-water oysters) are ultra-fresh. \$\$\$

Pasha's

1414 Brickell Ave.
305-416-5116

The original branch on Miami Beach's Lincoln Road was instantly popular, and the same healthy Middle Eastern fast food - made with no trans fats or other nutritional nasties - is served at the three newer outlets. The prices are low enough that one might suspect Pasha's was conceived as a tax write-off rather than a Harvard Business School project, which it was by founders Antonio Ellek and Nicolas Cortes. Dishes range from common classics like falafel and gyros to more unusual items like muhammara (tangy walnut spread), silky labneh yogurt cheese, and chicken adana kebabs with grilled veggies and aioli sauce. Everything from pitas to lemonade is made fresh, from scratch, daily. \$\$\$

Peoples Bar-B-Que

360 NW 8th St., 305-373-8080
www.peoplesbarbque.com

Oak-smoked, falling-off-the-bone tender barbecued ribs (enhanced with a secret sauce whose recipe goes back several generations) are the main draw at this Overtown institution. But the chicken is also a winner, plus there's a full menu of soul food entrées, including what many aficionados consider our town's tastiest souse. Sides include collards, yams, and soft mac and cheese. And it would be unthinkable to call it quits without homemade sweet potato pie or banana pudding, plus a bracing flop - half iced tea, half lemonade. \$-\$

Continued on page 45

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Restaurant Listings

Continued from page 44

Perricone's

15 SE 10th St.
305-374-9449

www.perricones.com

Housed in a Revolutionary-era barn (moved from Vermont), this market/café was one of the Brickell area's first gentrified amenities. At lunch chicken salad (with pignolias, raisins, apples, and basil) is a favorite; dinner's strong suit is the pasta list, ranging from Grandma Jennie's old-fashioned lasagna to chichi foccchi purses filled with fresh pear and gorgonzola. And Sunday's \$15.95 brunch buffet (\$9.95 for kids) - featuring an omelet station, waffles, smoked salmon and bagels, salads, and more - remains one of our town's most civilized all-you-can-eat deals. \$\$

Prime Blue Grille

315 S. Biscayne Blvd., Miami
305-358-5901

www.primebluegrille.com

This truly 21st-century steakhouse targets today's health-minded gourmets by serving only certified-organic Brandt beef - antibiotic- and hormone-free, as well as dry-aged, butchered in-house, and smoke-seared by Prime Blue's intense wood-burning grills and ovens. For noncarnivores, the menu gives equal time to fish, all caught wild, and offers dozens of cooked vegetable and salad options, including build-your-own. There's also a raw bar and a small steak/seafood retail counter. The décor is as modern as the menu. Instead of the stuffy men's club look, you have a soaring, light-hued, open-plan, indoor/outdoor space, with panoramic Miami River view. \$\$\$\$

Provence Grill

1001 S. Miami Ave.
305-373-1940

The cozy, terracotta-tiled dining room (and even more charming outdoor dining terrace) indeed evoke the south of France. But the menu of French bistro classics covers all regions, a Greatest Hits of French comfort food: country-style pâté maison with onion jam, roasted peppers and cornichons; steak/frites (grilled rib-eye with peppercorn cream sauce, fries, and salad); four preparations of mussels; a tarte tatin (French apple tart with roasted walnuts, served à la mode). Deal alert: An early-bird prix-fixe menu (5:30-7:30 p.m.) offers soup or salad, entrée, dessert, and a carafe of wine for \$44 per couple. \$\$\$\$

The River Oyster Bar

650 S. Miami Ave.
305-530-1915

www.rivermiami.com

This casually cool Miami River-area jewel is a full-service seafood spot, as evidenced by tempting menu selections like soft-shell crabs with grilled vegetables, corn relish, and remoulade. There are even a few dishes to please meat-and-potatoes diners, like short ribs with macaroni and cheese. But oyster fans will still find it difficult to resist stuffing themselves silly on the unusually large selection of bivalves (often ten varieties per night), especially since oysters are served both raw and cooked - fire-roasted with sofrito butter, chorizo, and manchego. To accompany these delights, there's a thoughtful wine list and numerous artisan beers on tap. \$\$\$

Rosa Mexicano

900 S. Miami Ave.
786-425-1001

www.rosamexicano.com

A branch of the original Rosa Mexicano that introduced New Yorkers to real Mexican food (not Tex-Mex) in 1984, this expansive indoor/outdoor space offers a dining experience that's haute in everything but price. Few entrées top \$20. The décor is both date-worthy and family-friendly - festive but not kitschy. And nonsophisticates needn't fear; though nachos aren't available, there is nothing scary about zarape de pato (roast duck between freshly made, soft corn tortillas, topped with yellow-and-habanero-pepper cream sauce), or Rosa's signature guacamole en molcajete, made tableside. A few pomegranate margaritas ensure no worries. \$\$\$

Soya & Pomodoro

120 NE 1st St.
305-381-9511

Life is complicated. Food should be simple. That's owner Armando Alfano's philosophy, which is stated above the entry to his atmospheric downtown eatery. And since it's also the formula for the truest traditional Italian food (Alfano hails from Pompeii), it's fitting that the menu is dominated by authentically straightforward yet sophisticated Italian entrées such as spinach- and ricotta-stuffed crêpes with béchamel and tomato

sauses. There are salads and sandwiches, too, including one soy burger to justify the other half of the place's name. The most enjoyable place to dine is the secret, open-air courtyard, completely hidden from the street. Alfano serves dinner on Thursdays only to accompany his "Thursday Night Live" events featuring local musicians and artists. \$\$\$

Taste of Bombay

111 NE 3rd Ave.; 305-358-0144

No surprise that a place called Taste of Bombay would be an Indian restaurant. And depending mostly on the predominant nationalities of downtown construction workers at any given time, Taste of Bombay has also served sushi, Philippine, and Chinese food. Best bet, though, is the all-you-can-eat Indian buffet lunch spread, featuring six changing entrées (a mix of meat, poultry, fish, and vegetable curries) plus veggie pakoras, rice, salad, chutneys, hot naan bread, and a dessert. The place looks plain outside, but it's pleasantly exotic enough inside for a bargain business lunch. \$\$

Tobacco Road

626 S. Miami Ave.
305-374-1198

www.tobacco-road.com

Prohibition-era speakeasy (reputedly a fave of Al Capone), gay bar, strip club. Previously all these, this gritty spot has been best known since 1982 as a venue for live music, primarily blues. But it also offers food from lunchtime to late night (on weekends till 4:00 a.m.). The kitchen is especially known for its chill, budget-priced steaks, and burgers, including the mega-mega burger, a trucker-style monster topped with said chili plus cheddar, mushrooms, bacon, and a fried egg. There's also surprisingly elegant fare, though, like a Norwegian salmon club with lemon aioli. A meat-smoker in back turns out tasty ribs, perfect accompaniment to the blues. \$\$

MIDTOWN / WYNWOOD / DESIGN DISTRICT

Adelita's Café

2699 Biscayne Blvd.
305-576-1262

From the street (which is actually NE 26th, not Biscayne) this Honduran restaurant seems unpromising, but inside it's bigger, better, and busier than it looks. Unlike many Latin American eateries, which serve a multinational mélange, this one sticks close to the source and proves a crowd-pleaser. On weekends especially, the two casual dining rooms are packed with families enjoying authentic fare like baleadas (thick corn tacos), tajadas (Honduras's take on tostones), rich meal-in-a-bowl soups packed with seafood or meat and veggies, and more. To spend ten bucks on a meal here, one would have to be a sumo wrestler. \$

Bengal

2010 Biscayne Blvd.
305-403-1976

At this Indian eatery the décor is date-worthy, with the typical garish brass/tapestry/elephants everywhere replaced by a cool, contemporary ambiance: muted gray and earth-tone walls, tasteful burgundy banquettes. And the menu touts "Modern Indian Cuisine" to match the look. Classicists, however, needn't worry. Some dishes' names are unfamiliar, but America's favorite familiar north Indian flavors are here, though dishes are generally more mildly spiced and presented with modern flair. Definitely don't miss starting with salad-garnished Deshi Samosas (which come with terrific cilantro/mint dip) or ending with mango kulfi, Indian ice milk. All meats are certified halal, Islam's version of kosher - which doesn't mean that observant orthodox Jews can eat here, but Muslims can. \$\$\$

Bin No. 18

1800 Biscayne Blvd.
786-235-7575

At this wine bar/café, located on the ground floor of one of midtown's new mixed-use condo buildings, the décor is a stylish mix of contemporary cool (high loft ceilings) and Old World warmth (tables made from old wine barrels). Cuisine is similarly geared to the area's new smart, upscale residents: creative sandwiches and salads at lunch, tapas and larger internationally themed Spanish, Italian, or French charcuterie platters at night. Though the place is small and family-run friendly, Venezuelan-born chef Alfredo Patino's former executive chef gigs at Bizcaya (at the Ritz-Carlton Coconut Grove) and other high-profile venues are evident in sophisticated snacks like the figciutto, a salad of arugula, gorgonzola dolce, caramelized onions, pine nuts, fresh figs, and prosciutto. Free parking in a fenced lot behind the building. \$\$

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Bleu Moon

1717 N. Bayshore Dr.
305-373-8188

Deep inside the Doubletree Grand, this restaurant, which has panoramic Biscayne Bay views and an outdoor deck, is one of the few upscale dinner spots near the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts. The eclectic menu is more Mediterranean than anything else, from old-fashioned favorites like lasagna to contemporary creations like gnocchi with sun-dried tomatoes, sweet pea purée, pine nuts, and ricotta salata. But a few seafood sauces reflect Asian influences, and tropical Latin touches abound. Some of the most charming dishes are modernized American, and done well enough to make you nostalgic for 1985: creamy (but not gunky) lobster bisque, lump crab cake with fried capers, and a retro arugula salad with caramelized walnuts, bacon, gorgonzola, fresh berries, and raspberry vinaigrette. \$\$\$

Brosia

163 NE 39th St.
305-572-1400

www.brosiamiami.com

The reputation that Arthur Artile amassed after years as executive chef at Norman's and Chispa has made the Design District's Brosia an instant hit. The menu is Mediterranean-inspired, with a few items — like gazpacho Caprese — fusing cuisines, but most retaining regional individuality: Moroccan mussels in curry broth; shrimp and clams (with garlic, chorizo, and sherry) that scream "Spain!" The stylish space is a draw, too. Inside, all mahogany, leather, and luxuriant intimacy; outside, seating on an extensive patio shaded by a canopy of old oaks. And the convenient all-day hours (even breakfast) give it the feel of a real neighborhood restaurant. \$\$\$

Buena Vista Bistro

4582 NE 2nd Ave., 305-456-5909

If a neighborhood eatery like this one — which serves supremely satisfying Italian, American, and French bistro food — were within walking distance of every Miami resident,

we'd be a helluva hip food town. Located in the intimate space that formerly housed Restaurant A, it's the love child of Quebequise chef Claude Postel and his wife Callie, who runs the front of the house with exuberantly friendly charm. Like true Parisian bistros, it's open continuously, every day (until midnight!), with prices so low (starters \$5-8, entrées \$8-15) that one really can drop in anytime for authentic rilletes (a scrumptious spiced meat spread, like a rustic pâté) with a crusty baguette, steak with from-scratch frites, salmon atop ratatouille, or many changing blackboard specials. Portions are plentiful. So is free parking. And it's well worth a drive. \$\$

Charcuterie

3612 NE 2nd Ave., 305-576-7877

This Design District old-timer has hung on for close to 20 years as the District has gone through its mood swings. But it's no worse for the wear. The upstairs/downstairs space looks good as new, and is still almost impossibly cute. The menu, chalked daily on a blackboard, still features well more than a dozen typical French bistro specials like chicken Dijonnaise or almond-crusted trout in creamy, lemony beurre blanc. And the salads, soups, and sandwiches are still, invariably, evocative. Rough-cut pâté de campagne, topped with cornichons on a crusty buttered baguette is an instant trip to Paris. Though weekend nighttime hours were instituted several years ago, dinner is an on-again, off-again thing, so call first. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

The Daily Creative Food Co.

2001 Biscayne Blvd., 305-573-4535

While the food formula of this contemporary café is familiar — sandwiches, salads, soups, breakfast food, and pastries, plus coffee and fruit drinks — a creative concept differentiates the place. Signature sandwiches are named after national and local newspapers (like the Biscayne Times: tuna salad with hummus, cucumber, roasted peppers, arugula, and sprouts on multigrain bread), giving diners something to chat about. For those who'd rather Have It Their Own Way, both sandwiches and salads can be do-it-yourself projects, with an unusually wide choice of main ingredients, garnishes, breads, and condiments for the creatively minded. \$

Delicias Peruanas

2590 Biscayne Blvd., 305-573-4634

Seafood is the specialty at this pleasant Peruvian spot, as it was

at the original Delicias, run by members of the same family, eight blocks north on the Boulevard. There are differences here, notably karaoke on weekends — and a kitchen that doesn't shut down till the wannabe American Idols shut up, around 2:00 a.m. But the food is as tasty as ever, especially the reliably fresh traditional ceviches, and for those who like their fish tangy but cooked, a mammoth jalea platter (lightly breaded, fried seafood under a blanket of marinated onions — the fish and chips of your dreams). As for nonseafood stuff, no one who doesn't already know that Peru practically invented fusion cuisine (in the 1800s) will doubt, after sampling two traditional noodle dishes: tallerin saltado (Chinese-Peruvian beef or chicken lo mein) or tallerin verde (Ital-Latin noodles with pesto and steak). \$\$

18th Street Café

210 NE 18th St.

305-381-8006; www.18thstreetcafe.com

Most of the seating in this cool little breakfast/lunch room is in a sort of giant bay window, backed with banquettes, that makes the space feel expansively light-filled, and quite nicely gentrifies its whole evolving Midtown block. This pioneering place deserves to survive, even if just considering the roast beef sandwich with creamy horseradish — an inspired classic combination that makes one wonder why more places in this town don't serve it. (We'll debate later.) Other culinary highlights of the classic "Six S" repertoire (soups, sandwiches, salads, sweets, smoothies, specials) might include a turkey/pear/cheddar melt sandwich, and really sinful marshmallow-topped brownies. \$

Five Guys Famous Burger and Fries

3401 N. Miami Ave. (Shops at Midtown)

305-571-8345

www.fiveguys.com

Like the West Coast's legendary In-N-Out Burger chain, this East Coast challenger serves no green-leaf faux health food. You get what the name says, period, with three adds: kosher dogs, veggie burgers, and free peanuts while you wait. Which you will, just a bit, since burgers are made fresh upon order, not steam-tabled. Available in double or one-patty sizes, they're well-done but spurtingly juicy, and after loading with your choice of 15 free garnishes, even a "little" burger makes a major meal. Fries (regular or Cajun-spiced) are also superior, hand-cut in-house from sourced potatoes; a changing sign reports the spuds' point of origin. \$

Fratelli Lyon

4141 NE 2nd Ave.

305-572-2901; www.fratellilyon.com

This Italian café has been packed since the moment it opened. No surprise to any who recall owner Ken Lyon's pioneering Lyon Freres gourmet store on pre-gentrified Lincoln Road (1992-97), another joint that was exactly what its neighborhood needed. The restaurant's artisan salumi, cheeses, flavorful boutique olive oils, and more on the ingredient-driven menu are so outstanding that one can't help wishing this restaurant also had a retail component. Well, maybe later. Meanwhile console yourself with the sort of salamis and formaggi you'll never find in the supermarket (as well as rare finds like culatello — prosciutto royalty), including a mixed antipasto esplosione that would feed Rhode Island. Entrées include properly al dente pastas, plus some regional specialties like Venetian-style calves liver, rarely found outside Italy. \$\$\$

Grass

28 NE 40th St.; 305-573-3355

After a couple of years in hiatus, this Design District restolounge has reopened in the same outdoor courtyard space. What's new: "MeditAsian" chef Michael Jacobs and a menu that travels beyond pan-Asian and Mediterranean influences into the Americas. Entrées range from lowbrow comfort food (cunningly reinvented mini pot pies) to high-status extravagance (stone-seared, authentic Kobe steak). For healthy grazers, raw-bar selections include ceviches and a large seafood platter (lobster, shrimp, and lump crab with housemade dipping sauces).

There's also a snack menu (pristine coldwater oysters, a crab salad timbale, parmesan-truffle shoestring fries, mini-Kobe burgers) served till the wee hours, providing a welcome alternative to the Boulevard's fast food chains. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Joey's Italian Café

2506 NW 2nd Ave.

305-438-0488

The first new restaurant in the Wynwood Café District, this stylish indoor/outdoor Italian hangout is as casually cool as one would hope — and as affordable. The highest ticket items are \$24 lamb chops with balsamic reduction, and a few \$1000 wines. For starving artists, there's a five-buck half-serving of spaghetti al pomodoro and respectable vino

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Restaurant Listings

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for under \$30. And few can resist delicately thin, crunchy-crust pizzas like the creative Dolce e Piccante (with figs, gorgonzola, honey, and hot pepper) or orgasmic Carbonara (mozzarella, pancetta, asparagus, and eggs). There are also numerous surprise specials, as the energetic young chef from Italy's Veneto region changes the menu twice daily. Pastas are fresh; produce is largely local; the mosaic-centered décor is minimalist but inviting. And no need to be wary of the warehouse district at night: Valet parking is free. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Kafa Café

3535 NE 2nd Ave.
305-438-0114

www.kafamidtown.com

Opened in late 2007 by a brother/sister team (both originally from Ethiopia, via San Francisco), this casual spot is located in the stylish indoor/outdoor, multi-roomed Midtown space formerly housing Uva and Stop Miami. Nothing on the breakfast and lunch menus tops \$8, and portions feed an army (or several starving artists). Signature item is the formidable Kafa Potato Platter – a mountain of wondrously textured home fries mixed with bacon, ham, peppers, onion, and cheese; eggs (any style), fresh fruit, and bread accompany. Lunch's burgers, salads, and overstuffed sandwiches (like the roast beef supreme, a melt with sautéed mushrooms, onion, sour cream, and cheddar on sourdough) come with homemade soup or other sides, plus fruit. Not full yet? The pair has recently expanded to include night hours with an authentic Ethiopian dinner menu, plus beer and wine selections. \$\$\$

Latin Café 2000

2501 Biscayne Blvd.
305-576-3838

www.latincafe2000.com

The menu is similar to that at many of our town's Latin cafés, largely classic Cuban entrées and sandwiches, with a smattering of touches from elsewhere in Latin America,

such as a Peruvian jalea mixta (marinated mixed seafood), or paella Valenciana from Spain, which many Miami eateries consider a Latin country. What justifies the new millennium moniker is the more modern, yuppified/yaucified ambience, encouraged by an expansive, rustic wooden deck. Delivery is now available. \$\$

Lemoni Café

4600 NE 2nd Ave.
305-571-5080

The menu here reads like your standard sandwiches/salads/starters primer. What it doesn't convey is the sparkling freshness of the ingredients and the care that goes into constructing these mostly healthy snacks. Entrée-size salads range from an elegant spinach salad (with goat cheese, pears, walnuts, and raisins) to chunky homemade chicken salad on a bed of mixed greens – a hefty helping of protein without typical deli-style mayo overload. Sandwiches (cold baguette subs, hot pressed paninis, or wraps, all accompanied by side salads) include a respectable Cuban, but the deceptively rich-tasting light salad cream that dresses a veggie wrap might tempt even hard-core cholesterol fans to stick with the sprouts. \$\$\$

Lost & Found Saloon

185 NW 36th St., 305-576-1008

www.thelostandfoundsaloon-miami.com

There's an artsy/alternative feel to this casual and friendly Wynwood eatery, which, since opening as a weekday-only breakfast and lunch joint in 2005, has grown with its neighborhood. It's now open for dinner six nights a week, serving Southwestern-style fare at rock-bottom prices. Dishes like piñon and pepita-crusted salmon, chipotle-drizzled endive stuffed with lump crab, or customizable tacos average \$5-\$8. Also available: big breakfasts and salads, hearty soups, housemade pastries like lemon-crusted wild berry pie, and a hip beer and wine list. \$

Maino Churrascaria

2201 Biscayne Blvd.
305-571-9044

This very upscale Brazilian steakhouse has all the features one expects at a rodizio-style restaurant, including all-you-can-eat meats carved tableside and a lavish buffet of salads,

sides, salumi, and hot prepared dishes. What sets Maino apart from typical rodizio palaces is its family-run feel, intimate rather than intimidating, plus its attention to every detail (immediately obvious in the classy rustic/elegant décor, high-lighted by striking onyx accents – bars, tabletops, and more). While it's rare at most rodizio joints to get meat done less than medium, Maino's eager-to-please servers here are happy to convey custom-cooking preferences to the kitchen – and they're English-speaking, too. One other welcome difference: As well as the one-price (hefty) feast, there are à la carte starters and pastas for lighter eaters and noncarnivores, and some lunch specials. Free parking, too. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Mario the Baker

250 NE 25th St.
305-438-0228

(See North Miami listing)

Michael's Genuine Food and Drink

130 NE 40th St.
305-573-5550

Long-awaited and an instant smash hit, this truly neighborhood-oriented restaurant from Michael Schwartz, founding chef of Nemo's in South Beach, offers down-to-earth fun food in a comfortable, casually stylish indoor/outdoor setting. Fresh, organic ingredients are emphasized, but dishes range from cutting-edge (crispy beef cheeks with whipped celeriac, celery salad, and chocolate reduction) to simple comfort food: deviled eggs, homemade potato chips with pan-fried onion dip, or a whole wood-roasted chicken. There's also a broad range of prices and portion sizes (\$4-\$8 for snacks and small plates to \$24-\$39 for extra-large plates) to encourage frequent visits from light-bite as well as pig-out diners. Michael's Genuine also features an eclectic and affordable wine list, and a full bar, with cut-rate weekday happy hour cocktails. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Mike's at Venetia

555 NE 15th St., 9th floor, 305-374-5731
www.mikesvenetia.com

There's no sign out front, but this family-owned Irish pub, on the pool deck of a waterfront condo building across from the Miami Herald, for more than 15 years has been a popular lunch and dinner hang-out for local journalists – and others who appreciate honest cheap eats and drinks (not to

mention a billiard table and 17 TV screens). Regulars know daily specials are the way to go. Depending on the day, fish, churrasco, or roast turkey with all the trimmings are all prepared fresh. Big burgers and steak dinners are always good, and happy hour appetizers (like meaty Buffalo wings) are always half-price. Additionally, a limited late-night menu provides pizza, wings, ribs, and salad till 3:00 a.m. \$\$\$

Moriano

3221 NE 2nd Ave., 786-953-8003
<http://moriano.wordpress.com>

Ultra-thin, crisp-crust pizzas as good as Piola's in South Beach. Made-from-scratch daily specials like green bean and parmesan soup, or prosciutto and mozzarella-stuffed gnocchi that you really have not seen on every other menu in town. A homemade white chocolate/raspberry cake, chocolate ganache cake, and other pastries to die for. High-quality ingredients, wine and beer, low prices, enthusiastic hands-on owners committed to arts-oriented creativity. A comfortable hang-out atmosphere. This tiny café, where "processed food" is a dirty word, has it all – except a high-visibility location or media hype. So discover it for yourselves. (There's ample free street parking, too.) \$\$\$

Orange Café + Art

2 NE 40th St., 305-571-4070

The paintings hanging in this tiny, glass-enclosed café are for sale. And for those who don't have thousands of dollars to shell out for the local art on the walls, less than ten bucks will get you art on a plate, including a Picasso: chorizo, prosciutto, manchego cheese, baby spinach, and basil on a crusty baguette. Other artfully named and crafted edibles include salads, daily soups, several pastas (like the Matisse, focchi pouches filled with pears and cheese), and house-baked pastries. \$

Out of the Blue Café

2426 NE 2nd Ave., 305-573-3800
www.outofthebluecafe.net

Forget impersonal chain coffeehouses. This artist-friendly, independent neighborhood café serves a full selection of coffee drinks made with the award-winning beans of Intelligentsia, a roasting company that works directly with

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artisan growers to encourage sustainable agriculture – and one helluva good cup of java. Also served: breakfast and lunch sandwiches, imaginative salads, soups, homemade pastries and creamy fresh-fruit smoothies. With tables, sofas, and lounge chairs inside an old Midtown house, plus free wireless Internet access, the space is also just a pleasant place to hang out. Owner Carmen Miranda (real name) says beer and wine will soon be available. \$

Pacific Time

35 NE 40th St.
305-722-7369

www.pacifictimemiami.com

Everyone knows Jonathan Eismann's original, now-defunct Pacific Time, for many years Lincoln Road's only serious contemporary restaurant. The question is: How different is its new incarnation? Very, and it's all good, starting with far superior acoustics (no more voice-shredding conversations!), an admirably green ecological policy, and a neighborhood-friendly attitude (including kid-oriented dishes, plus continuous service of inventive small plates and bar snacks). The food is also more intriguing – simultaneously complexly refined and accessibly clean. While the addition of Mediterranean influences to PT's former Pacific Rim menu may sound confusing on paper, trust us: A meal that includes a butter-grilled asparagus with prosciutto, soft-cooked egg Milanese, and preserved lemon; plus an Asian-accented creamy corn/leek soup with Peeky Toe crab dumplings, coriander, and mustard oil makes perfect sense on the tongue. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Pasha's

3801 N. Miami Ave.
305-573-0201

(See Brickell/Downtown listing)

Pizzafiore

2905 NE 2nd Ave.
305-573-0900

Those seeking dainty designer pizzas can fuhgeddaboutit here. At this New York-style pizzeria (which has roughly the same menu as North Beach's original Pizzafiore, but independent ownership), it's all about heftiness. A special slice/soda deal features two pizza triangles bigger than most Miami mini-skirts. Whole pies come medium (large), large (huge), and extra-large (think truck tire). And with fully loaded pizzas like the Supreme Meat Lover priced only a few bucks more than a basic tomato/cheese, it pays to think big about toppings too. Other Italian-American fare is also available, notably pastas and subs. \$\$\$

Primo's

1717 N. Bayshore Dr.
305-371-9055

Relatively few people except hotel guests and condo residents are familiar with the Grand's restaurants (except for Tony Chan's). The imposing, cavernous lobby just doesn't have that "do drop in" locals' hangout vibe. But this lively Italian spot is actually a great addition to the neighborhood. The pizzas alone – brick-oven specimens with toppings ranging from classic pepperoni to trendy prosciutto/arugula – would be draw enough. But pastas are also planned to please: diners' choice of starch, with mix-and-match sauces and extras. And the price is right, with few entrées (whether traditional veal piccata or seared ahi

tuna) topping \$20. The capper: It's open past midnight every day but Sunday. \$\$

Sake Room

275 NE 18th St., 305-755-0122
www.sakeroom.com

Sake takes a back seat to sushi – and sophisticated décor – at this small but sleek restorlounge, which offers South Beach sophistication without the prices or attitude, thanks to charming proprietor Mario Cicilia. Among the seafood offerings, you won't find exotica or local catches, but all the usual sushi/sashimi favorites are here, but in more interesting form, thanks to sauces that go beyond standard soy – spicy sriracha, garlic/ponzu oil, and many more. Especially recommended: the yuzu hamachi roll (chopped Pacific yellowtail with scallions, sesame, roe, citrusy dressing, and refreshing shiso leaf), the lobster tempura maki (with veggies, chive oil, and an oddly wonderful tomato sauce), and panko-coated spicy shrimp with hot-and-sour mayo and a salad. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

S & S Diner

1757 NE 2nd Ave.
305-373-4291

Some things never change, or so it seems at this diner, which is so classic it verges on cliché. Open since 1938, it's still popular enough that people line up on Saturday morning, waiting for a seat at the horseshoe-shaped counter (there are no tables) and enormous breakfasts: corned beef hash or crab cakes and eggs with grits; fluffy pancakes; homemade biscuits with gravy and Georgia sausage – everything from oatmeal to eggs Benedict, all in mountainous portions. The lunch menu is a roll call of the usual suspects, but most regulars ignore the menu and go for the daily blackboard specials. \$\$\$

Sra. Martinez

4000 NE 2nd Ave.
305-573-5474

No Biscayne Corridor resident needs to be told that this lively tapas bar, in the historic former Buena Vista Post Office, is the second restaurant that Upper Eastside homegirl Michelle Bernstein has opened in the area. But know this: It's not one of her absentee celebrity-chef gigs. She is hands-on at both places on any given night. Bernstein's exuberant yet firmly controlled personal touch is obvious in nearly four dozen hot and cold tapas that, except for a few conventional entrées for die-hards, make up the whole menu. Items are frequently reinvented, depending on seasonal ingredients and diner feedback. Keepers include wild mushroom/manchego croquetas with fig jam (different from Michy's, but equally flawless); white bean stew (duck/foie gras sausage and favas in an intense port wine reduction); crisp-coated artichokes with lemon/coriander dip; simple but addictive Padron-style shishito peppers; and buttery bone marrow piqued with Middle Eastern spices and balanced by tiny pickled salads. \$\$\$

Tony Chan's Water Club

1717 N. Bayshore Dr.
305-374-8888

The décor at this upscale place, located in the Grand, a huge bay-side condo/resort hotel, looks far too glitzy to serve anything but politely Americanized Chinese food. The presentation is indeed elegant, but the American dumbing-down is minimal. Many dishes are far more authentic and skillfully prepared than those found elsewhere in Miami, like delicate but flavorful yu pan quail (minced with mushrooms in lettuce cups). Moist sea bass fillet has a beautifully balanced topping of scallion, ginger, cilantro, and subtly sweet/salty sauce. And Peking duck is served as three traditional courses: crêpe-wrapped crispy skin, meat sautéed with crisp veggies, savory soup to finish. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

W Wine Bistro

3622 NE 2nd Ave., 305-576-7775

Both bistro and retail wine shop, this Design District spot is run by Florent Blanchet, an energetic young Frenchman who was previously a wine distributor. His former gig led to connections that mean if wine lovers don't find the bottle they want in W's selection of roughly 200-labels (which emphasizes boutique and organic growers), Blanchet can probably get it within 24 hours. Food is sophisticated light bites like a shrimp club sandwich with pancetta and sun-dried tomato aioli; smoked duck salad with goat cheese crostons and a poached egg; and chocolate fondant. At night there are tapas. \$\$\$

Zuperpollo Biztro Reztocafe

3050 Biscayne Blvd.
305-573-8485

www.zuperpollo.com

Occasionally there's a sign out front of the office building housing this bistro, indicating that a branch of the popular Uruguayan eatery Zuperpollo (on Coral Way, since 1986) is within. Otherwise, since the restaurant opened in 2006, locals have basically had to intuit its presence – way in back, past a guard desk and an elevator bank, behind an unmarked door. Once there, diners discover an extensive pan-Latin menu of breakfast food, salads, substantial meat and fish entrées, homemade pastas and soups, desserts, and sandwiches, including Uruguay's famed chivito, sometimes called "a heart attack on a bun": beef, bacon, ham, eggs, mozzarella, plus sautéed mushrooms and red peppers. And naturally, from the rotisserie, there's the signature zuper chicken. \$\$\$

Upper Eastside

Andiamo

5600 Biscayne Blvd.
305-762-5751

www.andiamopizza.com

Sharing a building with a long-established Morningside car wash, Andiamo is also part of Mark Soyka's 55th Street Station – which means ditching the car (in the complex's free lot across the road on NE 4th Court) is no problem even if you're not getting your vehicle cleaned while consuming the brick-oven pies (from a flaming open oven) that are this popular pizzeria's specialty. Choices range from the simple namesake Andiamo (actually a Margherita) to the Godfather, a major meat monster. Extra toppings like arugula and goat cheese enable diners to create their own designer pies. Also available are salads and panini plus reasonably priced wines and beers (including a few unusually sophisticated selections like Belgium's Hoegaarden). \$\$

Anise Taverna

620 NE 78th St.
305-758-2929

www.anisetaverna.com

In the past 15 years this river shack has housed at least five different restaurants. Now new owners Liza and Gigi are banking on Greek food and festivity being the concept that sticks – a good bet, judging from their wildly popular previous eatery, Ouzo. The mainly mezze menu ranges from traditional Greek small plates like the pikilia (combo dip plate of tzatziki, tarama, hummus, and smoky eggplant purée) or tender grilled octopus to creative Mediterranean-inspired dishes (like anise-scented fish croquettes with spicy aioli) that never stray too far from the fold to remain evocative. But don't neglect large plates like whole grilled Mediterranean fish (dorade or branzino), filleted tableside. The interior décor is charming, and the outdoor deck on the Little River is positively romantic. \$\$\$

Boteco

916 NE 79th St., 305-757-7735

This strip of 79th Street, formerly known for its live bait and auto repair shops, is rapidly becoming a cool alt-culture enclave thanks to inviting hangouts like this rustic indoor/outdoor Brazilian restaurant and bar. Especially bustling on nights featuring live music, it's even more fun on Sundays, when the fenced backyard hosts an informal fair and the menu includes Brazil's national dish, feijoada, a savory stew of beans plus fresh and cured meats. But the everyday menu, ranging from unique, tapas-like pastéis (shrimp and hearts of palm-stuffed turnovers) to hefty Brazilian entrées, is also appealing – and budget-priced. \$\$\$

Le Café

7295 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-6551

For anyone who can't get over thinking of French food as intimidating or pretentious, this cute café with a warm welcome, and family-friendly French home cooking, is the antidote. No fancy food (or fancy prices) here, just classic comfort food like onion soup, escargot, daily fresh oysters, boeuf bourguignon (think Ultimate Pot Roast), Nicoise salad, quiche, and homemade crème brûlée. A respectable beer and wine list is a welcome addition, as is the housemade sangria. Top price for entrées is about \$14. \$\$\$

Canela

5132 Biscayne Blvd., 305-756-3930

When this atmospheric little neighborhood oasis opened, the formula was Cuban cooking at lunch, Catalan tapas at night. The menu is now more uniform: contemporary Spanish and pan-Latin tapas, sandwiches, salads, sides, and entrées at all hours, just a far more elaborate selection at night. The tapas list is especially impressive, with all the usual Hispanic meat and cheese favorites but also an unusually large selection of seafood and vegetarian items such as espinaca à la catalana (spinach sautéed with pine nuts and raisins). Must-not-miss items include ultra-creamy croquetas (ham, cheese, chicken, spinach, or bacalao), grilled asparagus with aioli, and habit-forming Brazilian cheese bread. \$\$\$

Captain Crab's Take-Away

1100 NE 79th St., 305-754-2722

The drive-through window says "fast food," and so do this long-lived seafood shack's low prices. And indeed there are three Captain Crab's Take-Aways (the others are in Carol City and Fort Lauderdale), all related to the sit-down Crab House restaurants. But there the resemblance to McFauxFood ends. For about the price of a bucket of the Colonel's chicken you can get a bucket of the Captain's savory garlic crabs. The King's burger meal or the Captain's similarly priced fried (or garlic boiled or New Orleans-spiced) shrimp meal? No contest. Also popular: crab cakes and conch (fried or in fritters and chowder). For fish haters, spicy or garlic chicken wings are an option; for kids, cut-price "first mate" meals. \$\$\$

Casa Toscana

7001 Biscayne Blvd., 305-758-3353

www.casatoscanamiami.com

Tuscan-born chef/owner Sandra Stefani cooked at Norman's (and briefly ran the Indian Creek Hotel's restaurant) before opening this Upper Eastside jewel, a wine market/eatery whose 30 original seats have been supplemented by a wine room/garden for tasting events and private dining. Stefani travels regularly to Italy to find exciting, limited-production wines and inspiration for truly Tuscan-tasting daily special dishes with honest, authentic flavors, such as grilled wild boar

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sauces with lentil croquettes. Favorites that show up often on the menu include pear and ricotta raviolini with sage butter sauce, grilled eggplant slices rolled around herbed goat cheese and sun-dried tomatoes, and a light ricotta tart with lemon and rosemary. \$\$\$

Che Sopranos

7251 Biscayne Blvd.
305-754-8282

This branch of a Miami Beach Italian/Argentine pizzeria, housed in a charming bungalow and featuring a breezy patio, covers multicultural bases. If the Old World Rucola pizza (a classic Margherita topped with arugula, prosciutto, and shredded parmesan) doesn't do the trick, the New World Especial (a Latin pie with hearts of palm and boiled eggs) just might. Also available are pastas, salads, sandwiches, dinner entrées (eggplant parmigiana with spaghetti, lomito steak with Argentinian potato salad), and desserts (tiramisu or flan). \$

Chef Creole

200 NW 54th St.
305-754-2223

Sparkling fresh Creole-style food is the star at chef/owner Wilkinson Sejour's two tiny but wildly popular establishments. While some meatier Haitian classics like griot (fried pork chunks) and oxtail stew are also available – and a \$3.99 roast chicken special is a hard deal to resist – the glistening fish display that greets diners as they walk in makes it clear that seafood is the specialty here: crevette en sauce (steamed shrimp with Creole butter sauce), lambi fri (a mountain of perfectly tenderized fried conch), poisson gros sel (local snapper in a spicy butter sauce), garlic or Creole crabs. Note for ambiance-seekers: The Miami branch has outdoor tiki-hut dining; North Miami's outlet, a former Carvel, has the same food but lacks the tropical charm. \$\$\$

Dogma Grill

7030 Biscayne Blvd.
305-759-3433

www.dogmagrill.com

What could induce downtown businessmen to drive to the Upper Eastside to eat at a few outdoor-only tables just feet from the busy Boulevard? From the day it opened, people have been lining up, even in summer's sweltering heat, for this stand's sauce-garnished, all-beef, soy veggie, turkey, and chicken hot dogs. The 22 varieties range from simple (the Classic, with ketchup, relish, and chopped onion) to the elaborate (the Athens, topped with a Greek salad, including extra-virgin olive oil dressing) to near-unbelievable combinations like the VIP, which includes parmesan cheese and crushed pineapple. \$

East Side Pizza

731 NE 79th St.
305-758-5351

Minestrone, sure. But a pizzeria menu with carrot ginger soup? Similarly many Italian-American pizzerias offer entrées like spaghetti and meatballs, but East Side also has pumpkin ravioli in brown butter/sage sauce, wild mushroom ravioli, and other surprisingly upscale choices. The East Side Salad includes goat cheese, walnuts, and cranberries; quaffs include imported Peroni beer. As for the pizza, they are classic pies, available whole or by the slice, made with fresh plum tomato sauce and Grande mozzarella (considered the top American pizza cheese). Best seating for eating is at the sheltered outdoor picnic tables. \$

El Q-Bano Palacio de los Jugos

8650 Biscayne Blvd.
305-758-2550

In case you were wondering if it's too good to be true – it isn't. El Q-Bano's owners are indeed related to the family that operates the original three Palacios de los Jugos – which means no more schlepping way out west for the chicharrones against which all others pale. Also recommended are moist tamales, tasty sandwiches (especially the drippingly wonderful pan con lechon), rich flan, and the fresh tropical juices that justify the aforementioned excesses. For even heartier eaters, there's a changing buffet of daily specials and sides. And those ordering the combo platter of, basically, Cuba's Greatest Hits had better take advantage of the free delivery, since waddling home will be difficult. \$\$\$

Europa Car Wash and Café

6075 Biscayne Blvd.
305-754-2357

Giving new meaning to the food term "fusion," Europa serves up sandwiches, salads, car washes, coffee with croissants, and Chevron with Technon. Those who remember this former no-frills filling station only as one of the Boulevard's cheapest sources of brand-name gas will be astonished at the invitingly expanded interior. Snacks match the casual chicness: sandwiches like the Renato (prosciutto, hot capicola, pepper jack cheese, red peppers, and Romano cheese dressing); an elaborate almond-garnished Chinese chicken salad; H&H bagels, the world's best, flown in from NYC. And the car cleanings – done by hand, not finish-scratching machines – are equally gentrified, especially on Wednesday's "Ladies Day," when women are pampered with \$10 detail washes and glasses of sparkling wine while they wait. \$

Garden of Eatin'

136 NW 62nd St.
305-754-8050

Low profile would be an understatement for this place. Housed in a yellow building that's tucked in back of a parking lot behind a small grocery store, it's nearly invisible from the street. Inside, though, it has the comfortable feel of a beach bar, and generous servings of inexpensive Afro-Caribbean vegan food. Rastafari owner Immanuel Tafari cooks up meat and dairy-free specials, like Jamaican pumpkin/chayote stew in coconut milk, that depend on what looks good at that morning's produce market. Large or small plates, with salad and fried sweet plantains (plus free soup for eat-in lunchers), are served for five or seven bucks. Also available are snacks like vegetarian blue corn tacos, desserts like sweet potato pie, and a breakfast menu featuring organic blueberry waffles with soy sausage patties. \$

Gourmet Station

7601 Biscayne Blvd.
305-762-7229

Home-meal replacement, geared to workaholics with no time to cook, has been trendy for years. But the Gourmet Station has outlasted most of the competition. Main reason: deceptive healthiness. These are meals that are good for you, yet taste good enough to be bad for you. Favorite items include precision-grilled salmon with lemon-dill yogurt sauce, and lean turkey meatloaf with homemade BBQ sauce – sin-free comfort food. For lighter eaters, there are wraps and salads with a large, interesting choice of dressings. Food is available à la carte or grouped in multimeal plans customized for individual diner's nutritional needs. \$\$

Hiro's Sushi Express

5140 Biscayne Blvd.
305-759-0914

(See North Miami Beach listing)

Jimmy's East Side Diner

7201 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-3692

Open for more than 30 years, Jimmy's respects the most important American diner tradition: Breakfast at any hour. Admittedly the place closes at 4:00 p.m., but still. There are blueberry hot cakes and pecan waffles for sweet-tooth eaters; eggs any style, including omelets and open-face frittatas for those preferring savory; and a full range of sides: biscuits and sausage gravy, grits, hash, hash browns, even hot oatmeal. Also available are traditional diner entrées (meat loaf, roast turkey, liver and onions), plus burgers, salad platters, and homemade chicken soup. \$\$\$

Karma

7010 Biscayne Blvd., 305-759-1392

A real car wash with meticulous detailing takes time. But killing an hour is a pleasure at this stylish car wash/tapas bar, where the elegant light fare occasionally even outshines the hand-washed automobiles. Vegetarians do especially well, with crusty baguette sandwich combos like brie, walnuts, and honey, or another featuring grilled artichokes and buttery St. Andre cheese. Lower carb items range from an imported olive assortment to an antipasto platter with Spanish Cantimpalo chorizo, manchego cheese, and garbanzos. There are breakfast and dessert pastries too. Beverages include organic coffee and soy chai lattes, as well as wines and an extensive beer list featuring Belgian brewskis. On Thursday nights the car wash transforms into a chic lounge until 2:00 a.m. \$\$\$

Kingdom

6708 Biscayne Blvd., 305-757-0074

This newly renovated, indoor/outdoor sports bar serves low-priced but high-quality steaks, plus more typical bar food that's actually far from the usual premade, processed stuff. Philly cheese steak sandwiches, big enough for two, are made from hand-sliced rib eye; sides include fries and beer-battered onion rings, but also lightly lemony sautéed spinach. And the burgers rule, particularly the Doomsday, a cheese/ bacon/mushroom-topped two-pound monster that turns dinner into a competitive sport. But even the smallest Queenburger (a half-pounder that's no sissy) is a perfectly seasoned contender. No hard liquor, but the beer list makes up for it. \$\$

Luna Café

4770 Biscayne Blvd., 305-573-5862
www.lunacafemidtown.com

The ground floor of the Wachovia Bank building may not seem a particularly evocative locale for an Italian eatery, but once inside, the charming décor and the staff's ebullient welcome indeed are reminiscent of a café in Italy. The kitchen's outstanding feature is a brick oven, which turns out designer pizzas (greater in variety, lesser in cost on the lunch menu, in effect till 4:30 p.m.) and crisp-skinned roast chickens. Otherwise the menu holds few surprises – except the prices, surprisingly low for such a stylish place. No dish exceeds \$22. \$\$\$

The Lunch Room

7957 NE 2nd Ave., 305-722-0759

Hidden in Little Haiti, this Thai/Japanese spot, which opened in 2005, remains one of the Upper Eastside's best-kept secrets. But chef Michelle Bernstein (of Michy's) and other knowledgeable diners wander over from the Boulevard for simple but perfect pad Thai, chili grouper (lightly battered fillets in a mouthwatering tangy/sweet/hot sauce), silky Asian eggplant slices in Thai basil sauce, and other remarkably low-priced specialties of Matilda Apirukpinyo, who operated a critically acclaimed South Beach Thai eatery in the 1990s.

Though the casually cute indoor/outdoor place is only open for weekday lunches, "cantina" dinners can be ordered and picked up after hours. \$

Michy's

6927 Biscayne Blvd., 305-759-2001

Don't even ask why Michele Bernstein, with a résumé that includes top-chef gigs at upscale eateries like Azul, not to mention regular Food Network appearances, opened a homey restaurant in an emerging (but far from fully gentrified) neighborhood. Just be glad she did, as you dine on white almond gazpacho or impossibly creamy ham and blue cheese croquetas. Though most full entrées also come in half-size portions (at almost halved prices), the tab can add up fast. Table-to-table conversations about the food are common, something that only happens at exciting, if not flawless, restaurants. And at this one, the star herself is usually in the kitchen. Parking in the rear off 69th Street. \$\$\$

Moonchine

7100 Biscayne Blvd., 305-759-3999

Like its Brickell-area older sibling Indochine, this friendly indoor/outdoor Asian bistro serves stylish fare from three nations: Japan, Thailand, and Vietnam. Menus are also similar, split between traditional dishes like pad Thai and East/West fusion creations like the Vampire sushi roll (shrimp tempura, tomato, cilantro, roasted garlic). But the café also carves out its own identity with original creations, including yellow curry-spiced Moonchine fried rice or Popeye's Salad (spicy tuna, avocado, spinach, masago roe, sesame seeds, and a scrumptious sweet/hot kimchee dressing). Nearly everything is low in sodium, fat, and calories – except desserts (notably the chocolate bomb). There's also an impressive sake list, too. Coming soon: a large rear patio for dining and entertainment. \$\$\$

Moshi Moshi

7232 Biscayne Blvd., 786-220-9404

"Spruced up" is a supreme understatement for the space, formerly the Haitian hole-in-the-wall Fidele. Now a boutique Japanese eatery, this younger sibling of South Beach old-timer Moshi Moshi is a cross between a sushi bar and an izakaya (Japanese tapas bar). Even more striking than the hip décor is the food's unusually upscale quality. But this isn't surprising given the owners' previous work: Toshi Furihata and Hiro Terada were executive chefs at SushiSamba and Doraku; Yani Yuhara is an ex-Benihana manager. Sushi ranges from pristine plain individual nigiri (all the usuals plus rarer finds like toro) to over-the-top maki rolls like the signature Moshi Moshi (tuna, white tuna, salmon, avocado, masago, tempura flakes, spicy mayo). Tapas also go beyond standards like edamame to intriguing dishes like arabiki sausage, a sweet-savory pork fingerling frank with a superior pop/spurt factor; rarely found in restaurants even in Japan, they're popular Japanese home-cooking items. And rice-based plates like Japanese curry (richer/sweeter than Indian types) satisfy even the biggest appetites. \$\$\$

Pineapple Blossom Tea Room

8214 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-8328
www.pineappleblossom.com

The interior of this pineapple-yellow building is a soothing oasis offering traditional full English tea service – or a more zingy tropical fruit-flavored Caribbean variation. Whether your chosen brew is steaming Earl Grey or pineapple-mint iced tea, the scones (with thick cream and jam), tea cakes, cookies, and desserts, are hometown treats. Owner Frances Brown is a pastry chef. There's more substantial fare, too. Innovative wraps like Caribbean shrimp salad with tropical fruit salsa;

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salads such as warm goat cheese with fresh greens, tomatoes, dried cranberries, and candied cashews. Also offered are tempting take-out baskets like the Tea for Two (with tea, jam, scones, and cookies), great for gifts or for at-home teas. \$-\$\$

Red Light

7700 Biscayne Blvd., 305-757-7773

Only in Miami: From the rustic al fresco deck of chef Kris Wessel's intentionally downwardly mobile retro-cool riverfront restaurant, located in a refurbished old motel, you can enjoy regional wildlife like manatees (Florida's own half mamma/half meatloaf) while enjoying eclectic regional dishes that range from cutting-edge (sour-orange-marinated, sous-vide-cooked Florida lobster with sweet corn sauce) to comfort (crispy-breaded Old South fried green tomatoes). The menu is limited, which makes sense with a chef-driven place; and it changes daily, which also makes sense at an ingredient-driven place. But several signature specialties, if they're available, are not to be missed: BBQ shrimp in a tangy Worcestershire and cayenne-spiked butter/wine sauce, irresistible mini conch fritters, and homemade ice cream. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Royal Bavarian Schnitzel Haus

1085 NE 79th St., 305-754-8002

With Christmas lights perpetually twinkling and party noises emanating from a new outdoor biergarten, this German restaurant is owner Alex Richter's one-man gentrification project, transforming a formerly uninviting stretch of 79th Street one pils at a time. The fare includes housemade sausages (mild veal bratwurst, hearty mixed beef/pork bauernwurst, spicy garlicwurst) with homemade mustard and catsup; savory yet near-greaseless potato pancakes; and, naturally, schnitzels, a choice of delicate pounded pork, chicken, or veal patties served with a half-dozen different sauces. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Soyka

5556 NE 4th Court

305-759-3117; www.soykarestaurant.com

This expansive, contemporary hangout was often credited with almost single-handedly sparking the revitalization of the Biscayne Corridor's Upper Eastside. Now that the hype has calmed down, Soyka remains a solid neighborhood restaurant that, like restaurateur Mark Soyka's previous ventures (notably Ocean Drive's pioneering News Café and the Van Dyke on Lincoln Road) is a perfect fit for its area. Comfortably priced yuppie comfort food like meatloaf with mashed potatoes, crab cakes with spicy-sweet slaw, a wild mushroom/smoked mozzarella pizza, or a Cobb salad may not be revolutionary fare, but Soyka continues to thrive while more ambitious, nationally publicized restaurants like OLA have come and gone. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Sushi Siam

5582 NE 4th Ct., 305-751-7818

On the fairly standard menu of sushi-bar specialties plus a small selection of Thai and Japanese cooked dishes, there are a few surprises, such as a unique lobster maki that's admittedly huge in price (\$25.95), but also in size: six ounces of crisp-fried lobster chunks, plus asparagus, avocado, lettuce, tobiko (flying fish), masago (smelt) roes, and special sauces. Also popular are red and orange dragon rolls, similarly sauced makis of fried shrimp plus veggies, topped with, respectively, raw tuna and salmon. Thai dishes come with a choice of more than a dozen sauces,

ranging from traditional red or green curries to the inventive, such as an unconventional honey sauce. \$\$\$

UVA 69

6900 Biscayne Blvd.

305-754-9022

www.uva-69.com

Owned by the Vega brothers (chef Michael and artist Sinuhé) of Cane á Sucre – now defunct, but one of Midtown Miami's first cool, contemporary cafés – this more ambitious yet casual outdoor/indoor Euro-café and lounge serves the same purpose on the Upper Eastside, helping to transform a commuter strip into a hip place to hang out. The menu has grown more sophisticated along with the neighborhood. Lunch includes a variety of salads and elegant sandwiches like La Minuta (beer-battered mahi-mahi with cilantro aioli and caramelized onions on housemade focaccia). Dinner features a range of small plates (poached figs with Gorgonzola cheese and honey balsamic drizzle) and full entrées like sake-marinated salmon with boniato mash, Ponzu butter sauce, and crispy spinach. Drink specials and live music on weekends. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Ver-Daddys Taco Shop

7501 Biscayne Blvd.

305-303-9755

At this soulful taco shop, the menu descriptions are in common English ("cinnamon puffs" drizzled with honey and lime, not "buñuelos"). But taco fillings range from the commonplace (ground beef, shredded chicken) to more unusual pork in chili verde, fried potato, or Baja battered fish (authentically garnished with Mexican crema and cilantro-spiked cabbage). And all offerings can be loaded with other garnishes from the kitchen (refried beans, cheese, crema) or less perishable offerings from a salsa bar. For the health-minded, oils are nonhydrogenated, and sauces/seasonings are all housemade and free of preservatives. \$

Wine 69

6909 Biscayne Blvd.

305-759-0122

From the name, one might think this is just a wine shop. It's actually about wine, food, and art, and how they work together. Wines, about 200 labels, are available retail (at 35-50 percent of their marked prices, which are for in-house drinkers), with 40 sold by the glass. But the place's specialty is comparative flights of various wine types from different regions. Food, designed for pairing, includes a new \$25 three-course dinner. But the menu is mostly light bites with intriguingly inventive touches: a seared Cajun tuna salad with wasabi sauce; crab cakes with Asian sriracha chili sauce; a three-cheese soufflé. Especially impressive are some nicely priced cheese/charcuterie platters, served with fig tapenade, cornichons, fresh fruits, bread, and multiple sauces. And the art part encompasses revolving exhibits, plus an art lecture series featuring wines picked by owner Ben Neji to compliment the art. \$\$

NORTH BAY VILLAGE

Barchetta on the Bay

1601 79th St. Causeway, 305-861-2228

Location, location, location. The truth of the old real estate cliché could not be better illustrated than at this reasonably priced Italian restaurant. While pastas like lobster ravioli in tomato/cream vodka sauce are under \$20, and no meat or seafood entrée exceeds \$30, the spectacular setting on

Biscayne Bay is priceless. Floor to ceiling picture windows serve as the expansive indoor dining space's rear wall, but the primo seats are outdoors, in sheltered banquettes and patio tables where the water view, and carefree tropical party feel, is unimpeded. \$\$-\$\$\$

Bocados Ricos

1880 79th St. Causeway; 305-864-4889

Tucked into a mall best known for housing the Happy Stork Lounge, this little luncheonette joint services big appetites. Along with the usual grilled churrascos, there's an especially belly-busting bandeja paisa (Colombia's sampler platter of grilled steak, sausage, chicharron, fried egg, avocado, plantains, rice, and beans). But do not miss marginally daintier dishes like sopa de costilla, if this rich shortrib bowl is among the daily changing homemade soups. Arepas include our favorite corn cake: the hefty Aura, stuffed with chorizo, chicharron, carne desmechada (shredded flank steak), plantains, rice, beans, and cheese. Garnished with even more over-the-top abandon are Colombian-style hot dogs like the Perro Rico, topped with chicharron, chorizo, cheese, a quail egg, and pineapple to cancel out the cholesterol. Ha! But who cares? Strap on the med emergency bracelet and bring it on. \$\$\$

Edy's Chicken & Steak

1624 79th St. Causeway

305-864-9958

It might initially seem that the steaks (sirloin, filet, or a chewy "marucha" top round) are what differentiate Edy's from Miami's many other chicken joints. But what really makes the place stand out is the signature Peruvian pollo a la brasa, char-broiled in a wood-fired rotisserie rather than simply plonked on a grill. The rotation makes the bird self-baste, keeping even the delicate white meat juicy under its crispy, nearly fat-free skin. Spicing is also superior. The original recipe of owner Edy Demovsek's secret dozen-ingredient marinade came from a visit to Peru, but has been tweaked with typical spices from her hometown – Chiang Mai, Thailand. The result is subtly mouth-warming heat absent from average chain chickens. Nothing leaps out at you, but there's just enough of a taste-bud tease to make the poultry's own flavors jump. For serious fire, green chili sauce comes with all orders. \$\$\$

Japanese Market and Sushi Deli

1412 79th St. Causeway; 305-861-0143

Inside a small market that is, nevertheless, widely considered Miami's premier source of Japanese foodstuffs, the "Sushi Deli" restaurant component is nothing more than a lunch counter to the left of the entrance. But chef Michio Kushi, who worked for years at the Sushin, Miami's first full-service Japanese restaurant, serves up some sushi found nowhere else in town. Example: traditional Osaka-style sushi – layers of rice, seasoned seaweed, more rice, and marinated fresh mackerel, pressed into a square box, then cut into lovely one-bite sandwich squares. While raw fish is always impeccable here, some unusual vegetarian sushi creations also tempt, as do daily entrées, like curried beef stew, that typify Japanese home cooking. \$

Mario the Baker

1700 79th St. Causeway

305-867-7882

(See North Miami listing)

Oggi Caffè

1666 79th St. Causeway

305-866-1238; www.oggicaffe.com

This cozy, romantic spot started back in 1989 as a pasta factory (supplying numerous high-profile restaurants) as

well as a neighborhood eatery. And the wide range of budget-friendly, homemade pastas, made daily, remains the main draw for its large and loyal clientele. Choices range from homey, meaty lasagna to luxuriant crab ravioli with creamy lobster sauce, with occasional forays into creative exotica such as seaweed spaghetti (with sea scallops, shitakes, and fresh tomatoes). For those tempted by too much, ultra-accommodating servers have been known to allow half orders of two pastas. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Shuckers Bar & Grill

1819 79th St. Causeway, 305-866-1570

"Cheap eats and a million-dollar view" is the sound bite manager Philip Conklin uses to describe this outdoor beach bar, hidden in back of a bayfront motel. The joint dates from South Beach's late 1980s revival, but the kick-off-your-shoes vibe – not to mention the pool tables and jukebox – couldn't be farther from SoBe glitz. The food ranges from classic bar favorites (char-grilled wings, conch fritters, raw or steamed shellfish) to full dinners featuring steak, homemade pasta, or fresh, not frozen, fish. And since about half of the establishment is sheltered, the bites and bay view rock even when the weather sucks. \$\$\$

Sushi Siam

1524 NE 79th St. Causeway, 305-864-7638

(See Miami / Upper Eastside listing)

NORTH BEACH

Ariston

940 71st St., 305-864-9848

It took a Greek place (Ouzo's, which moved to bigger SoBe quarters in 2007) to break the curse of this former restaurant jinx location. And Ariston continues the lucky streak with classical Greek cuisine based on recipes of co-owner Thanasis Barlos's mom Noni Barlou, and executed by CIA-trained chef Alexia Apostolidis. Skip the menu's puzzling Italianesque and generic Euro-American selections and concentrate on authentic treats like the lightest, most savory whipped tarama (caviar spread) west of Athens; ultra-rich tzatziki (Greek yogurt with cukes, garlic, and olive oil); bracing avgolemono (egg-thickened chicken/lemon soup); char-grilled sardines with greens and citrus dressing; or an inspired eggplant/ground beef moussaka, bound here with an almost sinfully custardy béchamel. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Café Prima Pasta

414 71st St., 305-867-0106, www.primapasta.com

Opened in 1993 with 28 seats, this family-run North Beach landmark has now taken over the block, with an outdoor terrace and multi-roomed indoor space whose walls are full of photos of their clientele (including national and local celebs). Particularly popular are homemade pastas, sauced with Argentine-Italian indulgence rather than Italian simplicity: crab-meat raviolotti in lobster cream sauce, black squid ink linguini heaped with seafood. Veal dishes, such as piccata with white wine-lemon-caper sauce, are also a specialty. Though romantic enough for dates, the place is quite kid-friendly – and on the terrace, they'll even feed Fido. \$\$\$

Tamarind Thai

946 Normandy Dr.

305-861-6222; www.tamarindthai.us

When an eatery's executive chef is best-selling Thai cookbook author Vatcharin Bhumichitr, you'd expect major media hype, fancy South Beach prices, and a fancy SoBe address. Instead

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Bhumichitr joined forces with Day Longsomboon (an old Thai school pal who'd moved to Miami) at this unpretentious, authentic (no sushi) neighborhood place. Some standout dishes here (like shrimp and corn cakes with plum sauce, deep-fried sweet and sour fish, and roast duck with tamarind sauce) are featured in the chef's latest tome, *Vatch's Thai Kitchen*, but with Tamarind's very affordable prices (especially at lunch), you might as well let the man's impeccably trained kitchen staff do the work for you. \$\$-\$\$\$

MIAMI SHORES

Iron Sushi
9432 NE 2nd Ave.
305-754-0311
www.ironosushi.com

With three Biscayne Corridor outlets (plus several branches elsewhere in town), this mostly take-out mini chain is fast becoming the Sushi Joint That Ate Miami. And why do Miami eat here? Not ambiance. There isn't any. But when friends from the Pacific Northwest, where foodies know their fish, tout the seafood's freshness, we listen. And though the bargain prices, and many menu items, are similar to those at other fast-food sushi places, there are some surprisingly imaginative makis, like the Maharaja, featuring fried shrimp and drizzles of curry mayo. And where else will you find a stacked sushi (five assorted makis) birthday cake? \$-\$\$

Village Café
9540 NE 2nd Ave.
305-757-6453; www.villagecaferestaurant.com

There's an official Village Hall a few blocks up the road, but a popular vote would probably proclaim Village Café the community center of Miami Shores. Few residents can resist starting the workday with unique breakfast treats like a pressed panini of ham, Brie, and caramelized apples. Later locals gather over a balsamic-dressed cranberry blue chicken salad (a grilled breast on romaine with gorgonzola, walnuts, and dried cranberries), pan-fried blue crab cakes with beurre blanc and crisp cayenne-fried onions, wonton-topped salmon Oriental, or homemade pasta. As for dessert, the pastry case speaks for village residents: Let them eat (fresh-baked) cake! \$\$\$

Côte Gourmet
9999 NE 2nd Ave., #112
305-754-9012

If every Miami neighborhood had a neighborhood restaurant like this low-priced little French jewel, it'd be one fantastic food town. The menu is mostly simple stuff: breakfast croissants, crêpe, soups, sandwiches, salads, sweets, and a few more substantial specials like a Tunisian-style brik (buttery phyllo pastry stuffed with tuna, onions, potatoes, and tomatoes) with a mesclun side salad. But everything is homemade, including all breads, and prepared with impeccable ingredients, classic French technique, and meticulous attention to detail, down to the stylish plaid ribbons that hold together the café's baguette sandwiches. \$\$\$

NORTH MIAMI

Los Antojos
11099 Biscayne Blvd.; 305-892-1411
If it's Sunday, it must be sancocho de gallina, Colombia's

national dish. If it's Saturday, it must be ajijaco. Both are thick chicken soups, full meals in a bowl. But veggies and garnishes vary, and this modest Colombian eatery is a handy spot to comparison-test such typical stews. Adventurous eaters may want to try another Saturday special, mondongo (tripe soup, similar to Mexico's menudo). For Colombian-cuisine novices, a Bandeja Paisa (sampler including rice, beans, carne asada, chicharron, eggs, sautéed sweet plantains, and an arepa corn cake) is available every day, as are antojitos - "little whims," smaller snacks like chorizo con arepa (a corn cake with Colombian sausage). And for noncarnivores there are several hefty seafood platters, made to order. \$\$

Bagels & Co.
11064 Biscayne Blvd., 305-892-2435

While this place is often referred to as Guns & Bagels, one can't actually buy a gun here. The nickname refers to its location next to a firearms shop. But there's a lot of other stuff aside from bagels here, including a full range of sandwiches and wraps. Breakfast time is busy time, with banana-walnut pancakes especially popular. But what's most important is that this is one of the area's few sources of the real, New York-style water bagel: crunchy outside, challengingly chewy inside. Those puffy half-donuts most places pass off as bagels aren't even contenders. \$

Bamboche
13408 Biscayne Blvd, 305-947-6339

Buried in a strip mall perpendicular to the Boulevard, Bamboche is worth the hunt on one of those head-splitting Saturdays, for a Haitian specialty not found in many area restaurants: bouillon tet cabrit, a soup packed with greens (like spinach, cabbage, cress, string beans) and root veggies that is reputed to be a miraculous hangover remedy. Along with bouillon, weekend specials include more unusual dishes like fritay, fried street snacks. Haitian standards (griot, tassot) are available daily, as are fresh-squeezed juices, lattes, and almost two dozen desserts. \$

Bar-Que Beach Sports Bar & Grill
12599 Biscayne Blvd., 305-895-3141

On Friday nights, there's karaoke at this expansive eatery, though from the décor - mixing Wild West rusticity with Key West flip-flops dangling from the ceiling - it's hard to know whether to brush up your Jimmy Buffett medley or "Tumbling Tumbleweeds." There are specials the other six days of the week as well, from early-bird discounts to open-mike nights to kids-eat-free Tuesdays. But don't forget the biggest draw: the barbecue, honest stuff that has been low-temperature smoked for 12 to 14 hours till tender yet resilient. Ribs are meaty (except for the aptly named, bargain-priced "bucket of bones," and while chopped pork may not totally satisfy North Carolina pulled pork purists, nothing within a 1000-mile drive ever does. Biggest winners: succulent sliced brisket and delightfully juicy chicken. \$\$

Burritos Grill Café
11717 Biscayne Blvd., 305-891-1041
www.burritosgrillcafe

Originally a friendly little 125th Street hole-in-the-wall that garnered raves for its limited menu of terrifically tasty treats, Mario and Karina Manzanero's café is now in more sizable and atmospheric quarters. But the friendly, family-run (and kid-friendly) ambiance remains, as do the authentic Yucatan-style specialties. Standouts include poc-chuc, a pork loin marinated in sour orange juice and topped with pickled onions and chiltomate sauce (roasted tomato/chili); tacos al pastor, stuffed with subtly smoky steak, onion, cilantro, and pineapple; sinful deep-fried tacos dorados (like fat flautas); and signature burritos, including the Maya, filled with juicy

cochinita pibil, refried beans, and pickled onions. \$\$

Canton Café
12749 Biscayne Blvd.
305-892-2882

Easily overlooked, this strip-mall spot serves mostly Cantonese-based dishes, ranging from all the old Chinese-American classics (chop suey, moo goo gai pan, pu pu platters) through newer Americanized fusion favorites like honey garlic chicken, teriyaki beef, and crab Rangoon. But there are also about two dozen spicier, Szechuan-style standards like kung po shrimp, ma po tofu, and General Tso's chicken. And there are a few imaginative new items, like the intriguingly christened "Shrimp Lost in the Forest," Singapore curried rice noodles, crispy shrimp with honey-glazed walnuts, and Mongolian beef (with raw chilis and fresh Oriental basil). Delivery is available for both lunch and dinner. \$\$

Captain Jim's Seafood
12950 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-892-2812

This market/restaurant was garnering critical acclaim even when eat-in dining was confined to a few Formica tables in front of the fish counter, owing to the freshness of its seafood (much of it from Capt. Jim Hanson's own fishing boats, which supply many of Miami's most upscale eateries). Now there's a casual but pleasantly nautical side dining room with booths, and more recently added, a sushi bar stocked largely with flown-in Japanese fish just as pristine as the local catch. Whether it's garlicky scampi (made with sweet Key West shrimp), housemade smoked fish dip, grilled yellowtail (or some more exotic local snapper, like hog or mutton), perfectly tenderized cracked conch, or conch fritters (with just enough batter to bind the big chunks of Bahamian shellfish), everything is deftly prepared and bargain-priced. \$\$

Casa Mia Trattoria
1950 NE 123rd St.
305-899-2770

Tucked away, off to the side on the approach to the Broad Causeway and the beaches, this charming indoor/outdoor trattoria seems to attract mostly neighborhood regulars. But even newcomers feel like regulars after about ten minutes here, thanks to the staff's genuinely Italian ebullience. The delightful Italian accents don't hurt, either. As for the menu offerings, they're mostly classic comfort foods with some contemporary items as well. Housemade pastas are good enough that low-carb dieters should definitely temporarily fuhgeddaboutit, especially for the tender gnocchi with pesto or better yet, delicate fagottini - "beggar's purses" stuffed with pears and cheese. \$

Chéen-huyae
15400 Biscayne Blvd., 305-956-2808

Diners can get some of the usual Tex-Mex dishes at this cute spot, if they must. But the specialty is Mayan-rooted Yucatan cuisine. So why blow bucks on burritos when one can sample Caribbean Mexico's most typical dish: cochinita pibil? It's currently LA's trendiest taco filling (and morning-after hangover remedy). But that city couldn't have a more authentically succulent version of the pickle-onion-topped marinated pork dish than Chéen's - earthily aromatic from achiote, tangy from bitter oranges, meltingly tender from slow cooking in a banana leaf wrap. To accompany, try a lime/soy/chili-spiced michelada, also authentically Mexican, and possibly the best thing that ever happened to dark beer. \$\$\$

Chef Creole
13105 W. Dixie Hwy.; 305-893-4246
(See Miami listing)

Chipotle Mexican Grill
14776 Biscayne Blvd., 305-947-2779
www.chipotle.com

Proving that national fast-food chains don't have to be bad for either diners or the environment, Chipotle serves what the company calls "food with integrity." The fare is simple, basically tacos and big burritos: soft flour or crisp corn tortillas stuffed with chipotle-marinated steak or chicken chunks, bolder shredded beef barbacoa, or herb-scented pork carnitas, all with choice of fresh garnishes. But these bites contain no evil ingredients (transfats, artificial color/flavor, antibiotics, growth hormones). Additionally, all pork, plus a large and growing percentage of the grill's beef and poultry, is raised via humane and ecologically sustainable methods. And the food, while not the authentic Mex street stuff dreams are made of, is darned tasty, too. \$

D.J.'s Diner
12210 Biscayne Blvd., 305-893-5250

Located in a Best Western motel, this place, run by a Chinese-American family, serves mostly basic American diner fare - burgers, sandwiches, about a dozen dinner entrées, fresh-baked apple pie, and, oddly, a whole section of Caesar salad variations. But it's also a secret source for Chinese food, mostly chow mien/chop suey-type dishes, but also a few dishes such as eggplant with garlic sauce and ma po tofu that are a step up in authenticity. \$-\$\$

Hanna's Gourmet Diner
13951 Biscayne Blvd., 305-947-2255

When Sia and Nicole Hemmati bought the Gourmet Diner from retiring original owner Jean-Pierre Lejeune in the late 1990s, they added "Hanna's" to the name, but changed little else about this retro-looking French/American diner, a north Miami-Dade institution since 1983. Customers can get a cheeseburger or garlicky escargots, meatloaf in tomato sauce or boeuf bourguignon in red wine sauce, iceberg lettuce and tomatoes, or a mushroom and squid salad with garlic dressing. For oysters Rockefeller/tuna-melt couples from Venus and Mars, it remains the ideal dinner date destination. \$\$\$

Here Comes the Sun
2188 NE 123rd St.
305-893-5711

At this friendly natural foods establishment, one of Miami's first, there's a full stock of vitamins and nutritional supplements. But the place's hearty soups, large variety of entrées (including fresh fish and chicken as well as vegetarian selections), lighter bites like miso burgers with secret "sun sauce" (which would probably make old sneakers taste good), and daily specials are a tastier way to get healthy. An under-ten-buck early-bird dinner is popular with the former long-hair, now blue-hair, crowd. Frozen yogurt, fresh juices, and smoothies complete the menu. \$\$\$

Ichi
13488 Biscayne Blvd.
305-944-9334

Half sushi/sashimi, half cooked Japanese dishes, the menu is relatively small but covers most of the traditional favorites and a few surprises. Popular makis include the Dream (shrimp tempura, avocado, Japanese mayo, and masago), the vegetarian Popeye spicy spinach roll, and the

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From the folks that brought you Ouzo's

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deep-fried Crispy, a riceless salmon and veggie roll. Among cooked items, there's a large list of teriyakis, and a few dishes prepared with a different twist – panko-breaded pork or chicken katsu cutlets, for instance, that eschew the standard sweet sauce for curry. \$\$

Jerusalem Market and Deli

16275 Biscayne Blvd.
305-948-9080

Specialties like shawarma, spinach pies, kebabs, hummus, and kibbeh (a savory mix of ground lamb and bulgur, arguably the world's most interesting meatball) are native to many Middle East countries, but when a Lebanese chef/owner, like this eatery's Sam Elzoor, is at the helm, you can expect extraordinary refinement. There are elaborate daily specials here, like lemon chicken or stuffed cabbage with a variety of sides, but even a common falafel sandwich is special when the pita is also stuffed with housemade cabbage and onion salads, plus unusually rich and tart tahina. For home cooks, there's also a limited selection of imported spices and staples. \$-\$\$

Le Griot de Madame John

975 NE 125th St.
305-892-9333

When Madame moved her base of operations from her Little Haiti home to a real restaurant (though a very informal one, and still mostly take-out), she began offering numerous traditional Haitian dishes, including jerked beef or goat tassot and an impressive poisson gros sel (a whole fish rubbed with salt before poaching with various veggies and spices). But the dish that still packs the place is the griot: marinated pork chunks simmered and then fried till they're moistly tender inside, crisp and intensely flavored outside. \$

Lime Fresh Mexican Grill

14831 Biscayne Blvd.
305-949-8800

Like its South Beach predecessor, this Lime was an instant hit, as much for being a hip hangout as for its carefully crafted Tex-Mex

food. Though Lime is now franchising, the chain's concept is "fast casual" rather than fast food – meaning nice enough for a night out. It also means ingredients aren't canned-type crapola. Seafood tacos are about as exotic as the standard menu gets, but the mahi mahi for fish tacos comes fresh, never frozen, from a local supplier, and salsas are housemade daily. Niceties include low-carb tortillas for dieters and many Mexican beers for partiers. \$

Little Havana

12727 Biscayne Blvd.
305-899-9069

www.littlehavanarestaurant.com
In addition to white-tablecloth ambiance that's several steps up in elegance from the majority of neighborhood eateries, this place features live Latin entertainment and dancing, making it a good choice when diners want a night out, not just a meal. It's also a good choice for diners who don't speak Spanish, but don't worry about authenticity. Classic Cuban home-style dishes like mojo-marinated lechon asado, topped with onions, and juicy ropa vieja are translated on the menu, not the plate, and fancier creations like pork filet in tangy tamarind sauce seem universal crowd-pleasers. \$\$\$

Maleewan Thai & Sushi

2224 NE 123rd St.
305-895-0393

Redecorated (tasteful bamboo-matted walls, silk flowers) since the days – many days – this space was occupied by the kosher sushi spot Tani Guchi's Place, Maleewan is now a cozy, neighborly nook at which to enjoy all the standard Japanese and Thai selections. Cooked sushi is the strong suit here, particularly the signature mammoth-size Maleewan roll, given zing by pickled Japanese squash and savor by a crispy yellowtail tempura topping. If you're craving more creative fare, check out the handwritten specials board on your way in. \$\$

Mama Jennie's

11720 NE 2nd Ave.
305-757-3627

For more than 35 years this beloved red-sauce joint has been drawing students and other starvation-budget diners with prodigious portions of lasagna, spaghetti and meatballs (the latter savory yet light-textured), veal marsala topped with a mountain of mushrooms, and other Italian-American belly-busters. All pasta or meat entrées come with oil-drenched garlic rolls and

either soup (hearty minestrone) or a salad (mixed greens, tomatoes, cukes, brined olives, and pickled peppers) that's a dinner in itself. Rustic roadhouse ambiance, notably the red leatherette booths, add to Mama's charm. \$-\$\$

Mario the Baker

250 NE 25th St.
305-891-7641

www.mariothebakerpizza.com
At this North Miami institution (opened in 1969) food is Italian-American, not Italian-Italian: spaghetti and meatballs, lasagna, eggplant parmigiana, and hot or cold subs. No imported buffalo, arugula, or other chichi stuff on the New York-style medium-thin-crust pizzas; the top topping here is the savory housemade sausage. And no one leaves without garlic rolls, awash in warm parsley oil and smashed garlic (\$4 a dozen, \$3 per half-dozen, which won't even last the ride home). New branches are now open in Miami's Midtown neighborhood and in North Bay Village. \$

The Melting Pot

15700 Biscayne Blvd.
305-947-2228

www.meltingpot.com
For 1950s and 1960s college students, fondue pots were standard dorm accessories. These days, however, branches of this chain (originating in Maitland, Florida, in 1975) are generally the only places to go for this blast-from-the-past eating experience. Fondues are available à la carte or as full dip-it-yourself meals. Start with a wine-enriched four-cheese fondue; proceed to an entrée with choice of meat or seafood, plus choice of cooking potion – herbed wine, bouillon, or oil; finish with fruits and cakes dipped in your favorite melted chocolate. Fondue etiquette dictates that diners who drop a skewer in the pot must kiss all other table companions, so go with those you love. \$\$\$

North One 10

11052 Biscayne Blvd.
305-893-4211

www.northone10.com
For most chefs a Miami-to-Manhattan move is generally considered one of those offers you can't refuse. But after helping several NYC restaurants for China Grill Management, the homegrown married team of chef Dewey and sommelier Dale LoSasso returned to do their own thing in their own neighborhood. The menu is "creative comfort food": a shrimp waffle with basil butter; "steak and eggs" (a grilled NY strip with truffled goat cheese frittata, herb demiglace, and hash browns); a stone crab hot dog the chef invented for a Super Bowl party. The award-winning wine list inspires playfully themed pairing events like an Italian food/wine "Godfather" dinner. But it's not South Beach, so prices are reasonable, and parking is free. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Nuvo Kafe

13152 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-892-1441

Though the neighborhood is decidedly ungentrified, the interior of this café is an oasis of cultivated Caribbean cool and subtly sophisticated global fare. Haitian-born, Montreal-schooled chef Ivan Dorval formerly cooked at the Oasis Café in Miami Beach, as well as the Delano, and the varied background is reflected in cuisine that's chiefly creative Caribbean but with influences from the Middle East, Asia, Greece, and Italy. Homemade, health-oriented dishes include velvety ginger pumpkin bisque, unusually refined conch fritters (light batter, monster chunks of conch), West Indies crab cakes with citrus aioli, and a signature lavish, but only slightly sinful, Citadel Raw Fruit Pie. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Oishi Thai

14841 Biscayne Blvd.
305-947-4338

www.oishithai.com
At this stylish, dramatically minimalist Thai/sushi spot, the regular Thai and Japanese dishes are as good as anywhere in town. But the way to go is the menu of specials, many of which clearly reflect the young chef's fanatic devotion to fresh fish, as well as the time he spent in the kitchen of Knob: broiled miso-marinated black cod; rock shrimp tempura with creamy sauce; even Nobu Matsuhisa's "new style sashimi" (slightly surface-seared by drizzles of hot olive and sesame oil). Formerly all Japanese-influenced, the specials menu now includes some Thai-inspired creations, too, such as veal massaman curry, Chilean sea bass curry, and sizzling filet mignon with basil sauce. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

La Paloma

10999 Biscayne Blvd.
305-891-0505

Step into La Paloma and you'll be stepping back in time, circa 1957. Adorned with antiques (some even real) and chandeliers, the over-the-top plush décor was the American fine-dining ideal – half a century ago (though actually the place only dates from the 1970s). Cuisine is similarly retro-luxe: old-fashioned upscale steaks, chops, and lobster, plus fancier Continental fare. If you have a yen for chateaubriand, duck à l'orange, oysters Rockefeller, French onion soup, trout almonde, wiener schnitzel, and peach Melba, it's the only place in town that can deliver them all. A huge wine list fuels the fantasy. \$\$\$

Paquito's

16265 Biscayne Blvd.
305-947-5027

From the outside, this strip-mall Mexican eatery couldn't be easier to overlook. Inside, however, its festivity is impossible to resist. Every inch of wall space seems to be covered with South of the Border knickknacks. And if the kitschy décor alone doesn't cheer you, the quickly arriving basket of fresh (not packaged) taco chips, or the mariachi band, or the knockout margaritas will. Food ranges from Tex-Mex burritos and a party-size fajita platter to authentic Mexican moles and harder-to-find traditional preparations like albóndigas – spicy, ultra-savory meatballs. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Pasha's

14871 Biscayne Blvd.
786-923-2323

www.pashas.com
(See Miami: Brickell / Downtown listing)

Paul Bakery Café

14861 Biscayne Blvd.
305-940-4443

www.paulusa.com
From one rural shop in 1889, the French bakery known simply as Paul has grown to a worldwide chain, which fortunately chose to open its first U.S. outlet in our town. One bite of the crusty peasant loaf, the olive-studded fougasse, or another of the signature artisan breads transports you right back to France. As authentic as the boulangerie breads are, the patisserie items like flan normande (a buttery-crust, almond-topped apple-and-custard tart) are just as evocative. For eat-in diners, quite continental soups, salads, and sandwiches are equally and dependably French. \$\$

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Sara's
2214 NE 123rd St.
305-891-3312
www.saraskosherpizza.com

While this mainly vegetarian kosher place is best known for its pizza (New York-style medium crust or thick-crust Sicilian, topped with veggies and/or "meat buster" imitation meats), it's also offers a full range of breakfast/lunch/dinner vegetarian cuisine of all nations, with many dairy and seafood items too. Admittedly the cuties names of many items – baygels, berger-bite, Cezarr salad, hammm, meat-a-ball, schmopperrr – may cause queasiness. But the schmopperrr itself is one helluva high-octane veggie burger. \$-\$\$

Scorch Grillhouse and Wine Bar
13750 Biscayne Blvd.
305-949-5588
www.scorchgrillhouse.com

Though some food folks were initially exasperated when yet another Latin-influenced grill replaced one of our area's few Vietnamese restaurants, it's hard to bear a grudge at a friendly, casual neighborhood place that offers monster ten-ounce char-grilled burgers, with potatoes or salad, for \$8.50; steaks, plus a side and a sauce or veg topper, for nine bucks at lunch, \$15 to \$18.75 (the menu's top price) at night; and three-dollar glasses of decent house wine. Many other grilled meat and seafood items are also offered, plus pastas, salads, gooey desserts, and specials (events as well as food). \$-\$\$

Steve's Pizza
12101 Biscayne Blvd.
305-891-0202

At the end of a debauched night of excess, some paper-thin designer pizza with wisps of smoked salmon (or similar fluff) doesn't do the trick. Open till 3:00 or 4:00 a.m., Steve's has, since 1974, been serving the kind of comforting, retro pizzas people crave at that hour. As in Brooklyn, tomato sauce is sweet, with strong oregano flavor. Mozzarella is applied with abandon. Toppings are stuff that give strength: pepperoni, sausage, meatballs, onions, and peppers. \$

Sun City Café
15400 Biscayne Blvd.
305-940-6955

Super-stuffed crêpes, made to order from scratch, are the main specialty here – some sweet (the Banana Split: fresh strawberries, sliced bananas, candied walnuts, ice cream, and Nutella or dulce de leche), some savory (the Sun City Steak: beef, mushrooms, onions, red peppers, Swiss cheese, and A1 sauce). But there's also a smaller selection of custom-crafted wraps, salads, sandwiches, and sides, plus smoothies, coffee drinks, even beer or wine. Free Wi-Fi encourages long, lingering lunches. \$

Sushi House
15911 Biscayne Blvd.
305-947-6002

In terms of décor drama, this sushi spot seems to have taken its cue from Philippe Starck: Delano-like sheer floor-to-ceiling drapes, for starters. The sushi list, too, is over the top, featuring monster makis: the Cubbie Comfort (spicy tuna, soft-shell crab, shrimp and eel tempura, plus avocado, jalapeños, and cilantro, topped with not one but three sauces: wasabi, teriyaki, and spicy mayo); the Volcano, topped

with a mountain of tempura flakes; the spicy/sweet sauce-drenched Hawaiian King Crab, containing unprecedented ingredients like tomatoes, green peppers, and pineapple. To drink there are boutique wines, artisan sakes, and cocktails as exotic as the cuisine. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Tokyo Bowl
12295 Biscayne Blvd.
305-892-9400

This fast-food drive-thru (unexpectedly serene inside) is named for its feature item, big budget-priced bowls of rice or noodles topped with cooked Japanese-style items like teriyaki fish (fresh fish sautéed with vegetables), curried chicken and veggies, spicy shrimp, or gyoza dumplings in tangy sauce. There's also an all-you-can-eat deal – sushi (individual nigiri or maki rolls) plus tempura, teriyaki, and other cooked items for \$14; three bucks more for sashimi instead of sushi. \$-\$\$

Venezia Pizza and Café
13452 Biscayne Blvd.
305-940-1808

No frozen pizza crusts or watery mozzarella here. No imported designer ingredients either. The pies are New York-style, but the dough is made fresh daily, and the cheese is Grande (from Wisconsin, considered America's finest pizza topper). Also on the menu are Italian-American pastas, a large selection of hot and cold subs, simple salads, and a few new protein adds – grilled chicken breast, fried fish, or a steak. \$-\$\$

Wong's Chinese Restaurant
12420 Biscayne Blvd.
305-891-4313

This old-timer's menu reads like a textbook on how to please everyone, with food ranging from traditional Chinese to Chinese-American to just plain American. Appetizers include honey garlic chicken wings or Buffalo wings. A crab-claw starter comes with choice of pork fried rice or French fries. Seafood lovers can get shrimp chop suey, or salty pepper shrimp (authentically shell-on). And snowbirds will be pleased to find a number of dishes that are mainstays of Manhattan Szechuan menus but not common in Miami: cold sesame noodles, Hunan chicken, twice-cooked pork, Lake Tung Ting shrimp, and peppery kung po squid. \$\$

Woody's Famous Steak Sandwich
13105 Biscayne Blvd.
305-891-1451

The griddle has been fired up since 1954 at this indie fast-food joint, and new owners have done little to change the time-tested formula except to stretch operating hours into the night and expand its classic griddled-or-fried-things menu to include a few health-conscious touches like Caesar salad, plus a note proclaiming their oils are free of trans fats. Otherwise the famous steak sandwich is still a traditional Philly – thin-sliced beef, cheese, and onions on a buttered Italian roll (with tasty housemade sour cream/horseradish sauce served on the side so as not to offend purists). Extras like mushrooms are possible, not imposed. Drippin' good burgers, too. And unlike MacChain addicts, patrons here can order a cold beer with the good grease. \$-\$\$

Zipang
14316 Biscayne Blvd.
305-919-8844

It's appropriate that the name of this small strip-mall sushi spot refers to Japan's first and only sparkling sake – something most Americans have never heard of, making the

reference pretty much an insider's joke. Since opening several years ago, the restaurant itself has been one of our town's best-kept secrets. But the perfectionist chef/owner's concentration on quality and freshness of ingredients has made Zipang the pick of sushi cognoscenti like Loews's executive chef Marc Ehrler, who has named the unpretentious place his favorite Miami eatery, while admitting the obvious: "Nobody knows it." \$\$-\$\$\$

NORTH MIAMI BEACH

Bamboo Garden
1232 NE 163rd St.
305-945-1722

Big enough for a banquet (up to 300 guests), this veteran is many diners' favorite on the 163rd/167th Street "Chinatown" strip because of its superior décor. But the menu also offers well-prepared, authentic dishes like peppery black bean clams, sautéed mustard greens, and steamed whole fish with ginger and scallions, plus Chinese-American egg foo young. Default spicing is mild even in Szechuan dishes marked with red-chili icons, but don't worry; realizing some like it hot, the chefs will customize spiciness to heroic heat levels upon request. \$\$

Blue Marlin Fish House
2500 NE 163rd St.
305-957-8822

Located inside Oleta River State Park, this casual outdoor eatery (which is covered, but otherwise open-air) is a rare surprise for nature lovers, especially since an eager-to-please young couple took over the daytime-only concession, upgrading the menu, at the start of 2008. The featured item is still the house-smoked fish this historic venue first started producing in 1938 – three varieties (salmon, mahi mahi, and the signature blue marlin), available in a sampler, salads, sandwiches/wraps, or a delightfully mild smoked fish dip that may be Miami's best. But the smoke-house now also turns out ribs and delectable brisket. Other new additions include roasted red pepper hummus, crab cakes, a delightfully light homemade Key lime chiffon pie, daily specials, and on weekends, fish fries (with live music).

For basic diners there are burgers and hot dogs. Entry is directly from 163rd Street, not through the main park entrance. No admission fee. \$

China Restaurant
178 NE 167th St.
305-947-6549

When you have a yen for the Americanized Chinese fusion dishes you grew up with, all the purist regional Chinese cuisine in the world won't scratch the itch. So the menu here, containing every authentically inauthentic Chinese-American classic you could name, is just the ticket when nostalgia strikes – from simple egg rolls to pressed almond duck (majorly breaded boneless chunks, with comfortingly thick gravy). \$-\$\$

Christine's Roti Shop
16721 NE 6th Ave.
305-770-0434

Wraps are for wimps. At this small shop run by Christine Gouvela, originally from British Guyana, the wrapper is a far more substantial and tasty roti, a Caribbean mega-crepe made from chickpea flour. Most popular filling for the flatbread is probably jerk chicken, bone-in pieces in a spiced stew of potatoes, cabbage, carrots, onions, and more chickpeas. But there are about a dozen other curries to choose from, including beef, goat, conch, shrimp, trout, and duck. Take-out packages of plain roti are also available; they transform myriad leftovers into tasty, portable lunches. \$

El Gran Inka
3155 NE 163rd St.
305-940-4910

www.graninka.com
Somehow, when setting off to try Key Biscayne restaurants (like Miami's original Gran Inka), we never make it past Jimbo's. So luckily, the newer branch of this upscale Peruvian eatery offers the same menu. Though diners will find ceviches, a hefty fried-seafood jalea, and Peru's other expected traditional specialties, all presented far more elegantly than most in town (notably a picture-perfect causa con camarones, mashed potatoes layered with shrimp),

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the contemporary Peruvian fusion creations are unique. Especially recommended are two dishes adapted from recipes by Peru's influential nikkei (Japanese/Creole) chef Rosita Yimura: an exquisite, delicately sauced tiradito de corvina, and for those with no fear of cholesterol, pulpo de oliva (octopus topped with rich olive sauce). \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Hiro Japanese Restaurant

3007 NE 163rd St., 305-948-3687

One of Miami's first sushi restaurants, Hiro retains an amusing retro-glam feel, an extensive menu of both sushi and cooked Japanese food, and late hours that make it a perennially popular snack stop after a hard night at the area's movie multiplexes (or strip clubs). The sushi menu has few surprises, but quality is reliable. Most exceptional are the nicely priced yakitori, skewers of succulently soy-glazed and grilled meat, fish, and vegetables; the unusually large variety available of the last makes this place a good choice for vegetarians. \$\$

Hiro's Sushi Express

17048 W. Dixie Hwy., 305-949-0776

Tiny, true, but there's more than just sushi at this mostly take-out spin-off of the pioneering Hiro. Makis are the mainstay (standard stuff like California rolls, more complex creations like multi-veg futomaki, and a few unexpected treats like a spicy Crunch & Caliente maki), available à la carte or in value-priced individual and party combo platters. But there are also bento boxes featuring tempura, yakitori skewers, teriyaki, stir-fried veggies, and udon noodles. Another branch is now open in Miami's Upper Eastside. \$

Hiro's Yakko-San

17040 W. Dixie Hwy., 305-947-0064

After sushi chefs close up their own restaurants for the night, many come here for a bite of something different. The specialty is Japanese home cooking, served in grazing portions so diners can enjoy a wide variety of the unusual dishes offered. Standard sushi isn't missed when glistening-fresh strips of raw tuna can be had in maguro neta – mixed with scallions and dressed with habit-forming honey-miso mustard sauce. Dishes depend on the market, but other favorites include goma ae (wilted spinach, chilled and dressed in sesame sauce), garlic stem and beef (mild young shoots flash-fried with tender steak bits), or perhaps just-caught grouper with hot/sweet/tangy chili sauce. Open till around 3:00 a.m. \$\$

Heelsha

1550 NE 164th St., 305-919-8393

www.heelsha.com

If unusual Bangladeshi dishes like fiery pumpkin patee (cooked with onion, green pepper, and pickled mango) or Heelsha curry (succulently spiced hilsa, Bangladesh's sweet-fleshed national fish) seem familiar, it's because chef/owner Bithi Begum and her husband Tipu Raman once served such fare at the critically acclaimed Renaisa. Their new menu's mix-and-match option also allows diners to pair their choice of meat, poultry, fish, or vegetable with more than a dozen regional sauces, from familiar Indian styles to exotica like satkara, flavored with a Bangladeshi citrus reminiscent of sour orange. Early-bird dinners (5:00 to 6:30 p.m.) are a bargain, as some dishes are almost half-price. Lunch is served weekends only except by reservation, so call ahead. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Iron Sushi

16350 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-945-2244

(See Miami Shores listing)

JC Food

1242 NE 163rd St.
305-956-5677

Jumbo's regular menu offers a large percentage of hard-to-find traditional Chinese home-cooking specialties (many using fresh and preserved Asian vegetables): pork with bitter melon, beef with sour cabbage, chicken with mustard green, cellophane noodle with mixed-vegetable casserole. Still, most diners come for dim sum, a huge selection served at all hours. These small plates include chewy rice noodle rolls filled with shrimp or beef, leek dumplings, crisp-fried stuffed taro balls, savory pork-studded turnip cake, pork/peanut congee, custard croissants, and for the brave, steamed chicken feet. \$\$

Kyung Ju

400 NE 167th St.
305-947-3838

Star of the show at this long-lived Korean restaurant (one of only a handful in Miami-Dade County) is bulgogi. The name translates as "fire meat," but isn't a reference to Koreans' love of hot chilis. Rather it refers to Korean-style barbecue, which is really not barbecued but quickly grilled after long marination in a mix of soy sauce, sesame, sugar, garlic, and more. Lovers of fiery food can customize with dipping sauces, or the eatery's many little banchan (included side dishes, some mild, others mouth-searing). Pa jun, a crispy egg/scallion-based pancake, is a crowd-pleasing starter. And if the unfamiliarity seems too scary altogether, there's a selection of Chinese food. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Kebab Indian Restaurant

514 NE 167th St.
305-940-6309

Since the 1980s this restaurant, located in an atmospheric mini strip mall but surprisingly romantic inside (especially if you grab one of the exotically draped booths) has been a popular destination for reasonably priced north Indian fare. Kormas are properly soothing and vindaloes are satisfactorily searing, but the kitchen will adjust seasonings upon request. They aim to please. Food arrives unusually fast for an Indian eatery, too. \$\$

King Buffet

316 NE 167th St.
305-940-8668

In this restaurant's parking lot, midday on Sundays, the colorful display of vivid pinks, greens, and blues worn by myriad families arriving for dinner in matching going-to-church outfits is equaled only by the eye-poppingly dyed shrimp chips and desserts displayed inside on the buffet table. Though there's an à la carte menu, the draw here is the 100-item (according to advertisements) all-you-can-eat spread of dishes that are mostly Chinese, with some American input. It's steam-table stuff, but the price is right and then some: \$5.95 for lunch, \$8.95 for dinner. \$\$\$

King Palace

330 NE 167th St.
305-949-2339

The specialties here are authentic Chinatown-style barbecue (whole ducks, roast pork strips, and more, displayed in a glass case by the door), and fresh seafood dishes, the best made with the live fish swimming in two tanks by

the dining room entrance. There's also a better-than-average selection of seasonal Chinese veggies. The menu is extensive, but the best ordering strategy, since the place is usually packed with Asians, is to see what looks good on nearby tables, and point. Servers will also steer you to the good stuff, once you convince them you're not a chop suey kinda person. \$\$\$

Laurenzo's Market Café

16385 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-945-6381

www.laurenzosmarket.com

It's just a small area blocked off by grocery shelves, buried between the wines and the fridge counters – no potted palms, and next-to-no service in this cafeteria-style snack space. But when negotiating this international gourmet market's packed shelves and crowds has depleted your energies, it's a handy place to refuel with eggplant parmesan and similar Italian-American classics, steam-tabled but housemade from old family recipes. Just a few spoonfuls of Wednesday's hearty pasta fagirole, one of the daily soup specials, could keep a person shopping for hours. \$\$\$

Lemon Fizz

16310 W. Dixie Hwy.
305-949-6599

www.lemon-fizz.com

Like wraps? Then you'll love this Middle Eastern café's version made with saj, a circular Syrian flatbread similar to pita but much thinner, moister, and all-around better. Upon order, diners can watch the chef custom-cook their saj (on a scorching-hot, flying-saucer metal dome of the same name), then roll the beautifully surface-blistered bread around one of 27 stuffings, including za'atar and EV00, brined olives and labneh (creamy yogurt cheese), falafel, steak, even dessert fillings like strawberries and Nutella. Also available: soups, salads, and substantial globally topped rice bowls, plus fresh fruit juices and smoothies. \$

Little Saiwwgon

16752 N. Miami Ave.
305-653-3377

This is Miami's oldest traditional Vietnamese restaurant, but it's still packed most weekend nights. So even the place's biggest negative – its hole-in-the-wall atmosphere, not encouraging of lingering visits – becomes a plus since it ensures fast turnover. Chef/owner Lily Tao is typically in the kitchen, crafting green papaya salad, flavorful beef noodle pho (served with greens, herbs, and condiments that make it not just a soup but a whole ceremony), and many other Vietnamese classics. The menu is humongous. \$\$\$

Mary Ann Bakery

1284 NE 163rd St.
305-945-0333

Don't be unduly alarmed by the American birthday cakes in the window. At this small Chinese bakery the real finds are the Chinatown-style baked buns and other savory pastries, filled with roast pork, bean sauce, and curried ground beef. Prices are under a buck, making them an exotic alternative to fast-food dollar meals. There's one table for eat-in snackers. \$

Matador Argentinean Steakhouse

3207 NE 163rd St.
305-944-6001

With Latin parilla places spreading here as fast as kudzu,

it's hard to get excited about yet another all-you-can-eat meat spread. But Matador offers far more for the money than most. One dinner price (\$24.95, \$27.95 weekends) includes a salad bar of more than 30 items, unlimited grilled proteins (many cuts of beef, sausages, chicken, pork, assorted veggies, and even fish upon request), crunchy steak fries, a dessert (typically charged extra elsewhere), and even more fun, a bottle of quite quaffable wine per person. \$\$\$

Panya Thai

520 NE 167th St.
305-945-8566

Unlike authentic Chinese cuisine, there's no shortage of genuine Thai food in and around Miami. But Panya's chef/owner, a Bangkok native, offers numerous regional and/or rare dishes not found elsewhere. Plus he doesn't automatically curtail the heat or sweetness levels to please Americans. Among the most intriguing: moo khem phad wan (chewy deep-fried seasoned pork strips with fiery tamarind dip, accompanied by crisp green papaya salad, a study in sour/sweet/savory balance); broad rice noodles stir-fried with eye-opening chili/garlic sauce and fresh Thai basil; and chili-topped Diamond Duck in tangy tamarind sauce. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

PK Oriental Mart

255 NE 167th St.
305-654-9646

While there are three other sizable Asian markets on this strip between I-95 and Biscayne Boulevard, PK has the only prepared-food counter, serving authentic Chinatown barbecue, with appropriate dipping sauces included. Weekends bring the biggest selection, including barbecued ribs and pa pei duck (roasted, then deep-fried till extra crisp and nearly free of subcutaneous fat). Available every day are juicy, soy-marinated roast chickens, roast pork strips, crispy pork, and whole roast ducks – hanging, as tradition dictates, beaks and all. But no worries; a counterperson will chop your purchase into bite-size, beakless pieces. \$

Roasters & Toasters

18515 NE 18th Ave.
305-830-3354

Attention ex-New Yorkers: Is your idea of food pornography one of the Carnegie Deli's mile-high pastrami sandwiches? Well, Roasters will dwarf them. Even a mouth like Angelina Jolie's couldn't fit around a "Carnegie-style" monster containing, according to the menu, a full pound of succulent meat (really 1.4 pounds; we weighed it), for a mere 15 bucks. All the other Jewish deli classics are here too, including just-sour-enough pickles, just-sweet-enough slaw, silky hand-sliced nova or lox, truly red-rare roast beef, and the cutest two-bite mini-potato pancakes ever – eight per order, served with sour cream and applesauce. \$\$

Sang's Chinese Restaurant

1925 NE 163rd St.
305-947-7076

Open late (12:30 a.m. most nights) since 1990, Sang's has an owner who previously cooked in NYC's Chinatown, and three menus. The pink menu is Americanized Chinese food, from chop suey to honey garlic chicken. The white menu permits the chef to

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show off his authentic Chinese fare: salt and pepper prawns, rich beef/turnip casserole, tender salt-baked chicken, even esoterica like abalone with sea cucumber. The extensive third menu offers dim sum, served until 4:00 p.m. A limited live tank allows seasonal seafood dishes like lobster with ginger and scallion. More recently installed: a Chinese barbecue case, displaying savory items like crispy pork with crackling attached. \$\$\$

Shing Wang Vegetarian, Isee & Tea House

237 NE 167th St.

305-654-4008

www.shingwangrestaurant.com

At this unique Taiwanese eatery, run by a trio of Taipei-trained female chefs, all seafood, poultry, and meats in the budget-priced entrées (\$6.95) are mock – imitations made from wheat gluten, tofu, and vegetables. But don't mock it till you try the quite beefy pepper steak, or smokin' duck, with slices that mimic the charcuterie item down to convincing faux fat. Other main dishes feature recognizable veggies or noodles, including appealingly chewy curried chow fun. As for the rest of the name: icee is shaved ice, an over-the-top dessert that's a sort of a slurpee sundae, with toppings that vary from the familiar (fresh fruits) to the weird (grass jelly, sweet corn, kidney beans, rice balls, chocolate pudding). And the bubble tea is a must-not-miss. Using homemade syrup (as opposed to most establishments' store-bought stuff), the cold, refreshing boba comes in numerous flavors (mango, taro, even actual tea), all supplemented with signature black tapioca balls that, slurped through large-diameter straws, are a guaranteed giggle. \$

Siam Square

54 NE 167th St.

305-944-9697

Open until 1:00 a.m. every day except Sunday (when it closes at midnight), this relatively new addition to North Miami Beach's "Chinatown" strip has become a popular late-night gathering spot for chefs from other Asian restaurants. And why not? The food is fresh, nicely presented, and reasonably priced. The kitchen staff is willing to customize dishes upon request, and the serving staff is reliably fast. Perhaps most important, karaoke equipment is in place when the mood strikes. \$-\$\$

Tuna's Raw Bar and Grille

17850 W. Dixie Hwy.

305-932-0630

www.tunasrawbarandgrille.com

When Tuna's moved in 2006 from the marina space it had occupied for more than 30 years, it lost its waterfront location, its old-fashioned fish-house ambiance, and its outdoor deck. But now it has gained new owners, a new name, a dazzling outdoor bar and dining area, and a newly impressive selection of raw-bar specialties: cold-water oysters from the Northeast, plus Blue Points, Malpecs, Island Creeks, and more. Traditional house favorites remain, and the emphasis is still on fresh fish from local waters. Open daily till 2:00 a.m., the place can get rather festive after midnight, but since the kitchen is open till closing, Tuna's draws a serious late-night dining crowd, too. \$-\$\$\$

AVENTURA / MIAMI GARDENS

Anthony's Coal-Fired Pizza

17901 Biscayne Blvd.

305-830-2625

www.anthonyscoalfiredpizza.com

The last four digits of the phone number actually spell "COAL." And that's what it's all about here – a coal-fired oven (like that at Lombardi's, Patsy's, John's, or Grimaldi's in New York) producing the intense 800-degree heat to turn out, in a mere three or four minutes, a pie with the classic thin, crisp-bottomed, beautifully char-bubbled crust that fans of the above legendary pizzerias crave – at any cost. Expect neither bargain-chain prices, a huge selection of toppings (these aren't the kind of clunky crusts you overload), nor much else on the menu except a hefty salad and some onion-topped chicken wings that are also coal-oven tasty. Anthony's does just a few things, and does them right. \$\$

Bella Luna

19575 Biscayne Blvd. Aventura Mall,

305-792-9330

www.bellalunaaventura.com

If the menu here looks familiar, it should. It's identical to that at the Upper Eastside's Luna Café and, with minor variations, at all the rest of Tom Billante's eateries (Rosalia, Villaggio, Carpaccio), right down to the typeface. But no argument from here. In a mall – a setting more accustomed to food court, steam-tabled stuff – dishes like carpaccio al salmone (crudo, with portobello, capers, parmesan slices, and lemon/tomato dressing) and linguine carbonara (in creamy sauce with pancetta and shallots) are a breath of fresh, albeit familiar, air. \$-\$\$\$

Bourbon Steak

19999 W. Country Club Dr.

(Fairmont Hotel, Turnberry Resort)

786-279-0658

www.michaelmina.net

At Bourbon Steak, a venture in the exploding restaurant empire of chef Michael Mina, a multiple James Beard award winner, steakhouse fare is just where the fare starts. There are also Mina's ingenious signature dishes, like an elegant deconstructed lobster/baby vegetable pot pie, a raw bar, and enough delectable vegetable/seafood starters and sides (duck fat fries!) for noncarnivores to assemble a happy meal. But don't neglect the steak – flavorful dry-aged Angus, 100-percent Wagyu American "Kobe," swoonworthy grade A5 Japanese Kobe, and butter-poached prime rib, all cooked to perfection under the supervision of on-site executive chef Andrew Rothschild, formerly of the Forge, meaning he knows his beef. (Mina himself is absentee.) \$\$\$\$

Chef Allen's

19088 NE 29th Ave; 305-935-2900

www.chefallens.com

After 20 years of success in the same location, many chefs would coast on their backlog of tried-and-true dishes. And it's doubtful that kindly Allen Susser would freak out his many regulars by eliminating from the menu the Bahamian lobster and crab cakes (with tropical fruit chutney and vanilla beurre blanc). But lobster-lovers will find that the 20th anniversary menus also offer new excitements like tandoori-spiced rock lobster, along with what might be the ultimate mac'n'cheese: lobster crab

macaroni in a Fris vodka sauce with mushrooms, scallions, and parmesan. The famous dessert soufflé's flavor changes daily, but it always did. \$\$\$\$

Il Migliore

2576 NE Miami Gardens Dr., 305-792-2902

Reminiscent of an intimate Tuscan villa, chef Neal Cooper's attractive trattoria gets the food right, as well as the ambiance. As in Italy, dishes rely on impeccable ingredients and straightforward recipes that don't over-complicate, cover up, or otherwise muck about with that perfection. Fresh fettuccine with white truffle oil and mixed wild mushrooms needs nothing else. Neither does the signature Pollo Al Mattone, marinated in herbs and cooked under a brick, require pretentious fancification. And even low-carb dieters happily go to hell in a hand basket when faced with a mound of potatoes alla Toscana, fried herb-sprinkled French fries. Located west of Biscayne Boulevard in the Davis Plaza shopping mall, across from Ojus Elementary School. \$-\$\$\$

Mahogany Grille

2190 NW 183rd St.

305-626-8100

Formerly Ruby and Jean's Soul Food Cuisine, a popular but strictly neighborhood cafeteria, Mahogany Grille has drawn critical raves – and an international as well as local clientele – since retired major league outfielder Andre Dawson and his brother Vincent Brown acquired the place in early 2007. The diner décor is gone, replaced by white tablecloths and, naturally, mahogany. The food is a sort of trendy yet traditional soul fusion, heaping platters from several African diaspora regions: Carolina Low Country (buttery cheese grits with shrimp, sausage, and cream gravy), the Caribbean (conch-packed fritters or salad), and the Old South (lightly buttermilk-battered fried chicken). The chicken is perhaps Miami's best, made even better with the Grille's waffles. \$-\$\$\$

Pilar

20475 Biscayne Blvd.

305-937-2777; www.pillarrestaurant.com

Chef/owner Scott Fredel previously worked for Norman Van Aken and Mark Militello. He has been executive chef at Rumi, and cooked at NYC's James Beard House. Armed

with those impressive credentials, Fredel and his wife launched Pilar (named for Hemingway's boat) aiming to prove that top restaurants can be affordable. Consider it now proven. Floribbean-style seafood is the specialty, dishes fresh hearts of palm slaw and Caribbean curry sauce, rock shrimp spring rolls with sweet soy glaze, and yellowtail snapper with tomato-herb vinaigrette and a potato/leek croqueta. Don't let the strip-mall location fool you. The restaurant itself is elegant. \$-\$\$\$

Pizza Roma

19090 NE 29th Ave.

305-937-4462

Despite its name, this homey hidden eatery serves not Rome's wood-cooked, crunchily-crust pizzas but New York-style pies with medium-thick crusts pliable enough to fold in half for neat street eating. Unlike chains, though, this indie is accommodating, so if you want your crust thin and crisp, just ask. Also featured are Italian-American entrées like baked manicotti (that's "mani-goat", for those not from NJ) big enough to share, and sub sandwiches, here called "bullets," to put you in a Sopranos frame of mind. The neighborhood friendliness extends to kids, and there's a TV, plus coolers of beer and plonk, for sports fans. \$\$

The Soup Man

20475 Biscayne Blvd. #G-8

305-466-9033

The real soup man behind this franchise is Al Yeganeh, an antisocial Manhattan restaurant proprietor made notorious, on a Seinfeld episode, as "the soup Nazi." On the menu: ten different premium soups each day (from a rotating list of about 50). The selection is carefully balanced among meat/poultry-based and vegetarian; clear and creamy (like the eatery's signature shellfish-packed lobster bisque); chilled and hot; familiar (chicken noodle) and exotic (mulligatawny). All soups come with gourmet bread, fruit, and imported chocolate. Also available are salads, sandwiches, and wraps, à la carte or in soup-plus combos. \$\$\$

Sushi Siam

19575 Biscayne Blvd.

305-932-8955

(See Miami / Upper Eastside listing)

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Chocolate

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