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Volume 7, Issue 6

# A Chance to Dance

After 33 years in a North Miami strip mall, Dancemasters studio still swings

By Karen-Janine Cohen  
Photos by Silvia Ros

At 4:00 p.m. on a late June afternoon, the sun hammers down while the humidity steams. But shaded windows mute the glare in Derek Mellman's Dancemasters studio, upstairs in a nondescript North Miami strip mall. Smooth pop music also cuts the heat as a young couple,

Christopher and Deana, practice a nightclub two-step for their upcoming wedding.

They glide, tall and graceful, while longtime Dancemasters teacher Sharon Butler hovers nearby.

"These are my first dance lessons — ever," admits Christopher.

Watching from a nearby table is the dance master himself, Milt Derek Mellman. Even sitting down, Mellman exudes suavity. A trim man in his 60s, his hair is Brillo gray, and he wears a matching mustache and neat goatee. Over the past three decades, Mellman has seen

dozens of couples, wedding-day-bound, dance through his studio. They are only a fraction of the students, social dancers, hobbyists, and aspiring competitors who have found their way to Dancemasters,

.....  
*Continued on page 14*

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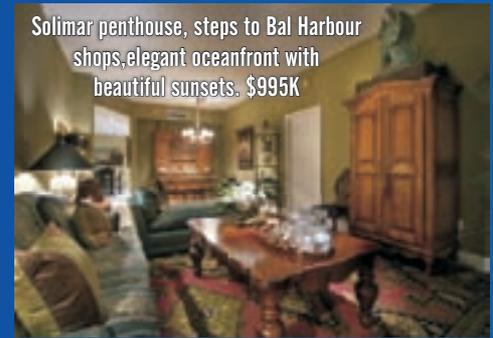


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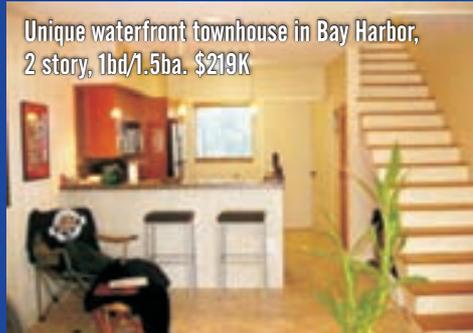
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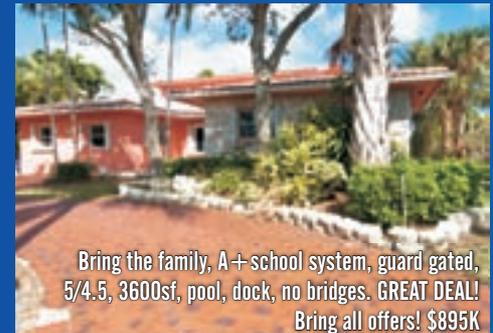
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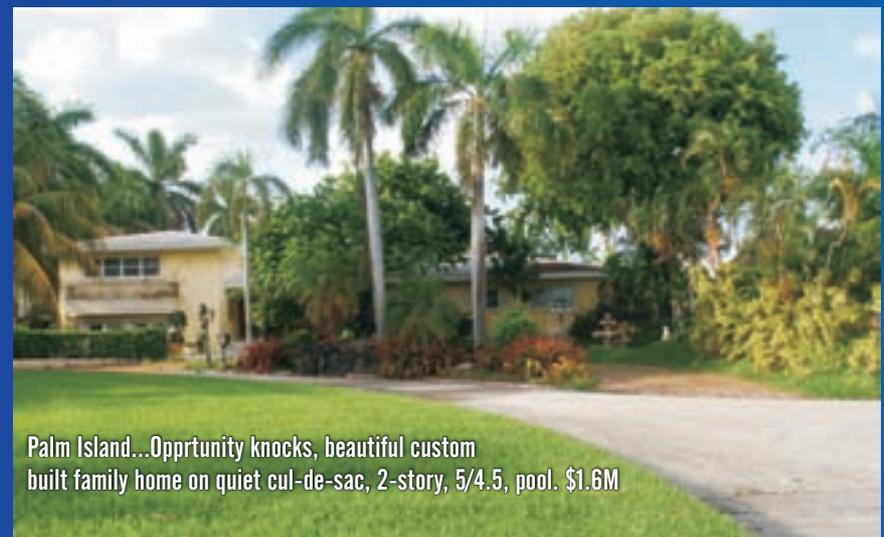
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<p><b>9</b> Fuerza Bruta 7:30PM <b>Z</b></p> <p>"Out of this world!" -Univision</p>					<p><b>14</b> RiseUp Screening 8PM <b>C</b></p> <p>Florida premiere of RiseUp, a documentary film of the triumphs and struggles from today's Jamaican music underground.</p>	<p><b>15</b> The Ecstatic Tour featuring Mos Def and Jay Electronica 8PM <b>K</b></p> <p>"A lyricist whose command of wordplay and delivery has ranked him among hip hop's elite." -Giant Magazine</p> <p>RiseUp Screening 10:45PM <b>C</b></p>
<p><b>16</b> RiseUp Screening 7PM <b>C</b></p> <p>A documentary film by Luciano Blotta, RiseUp is a journey into the heart of Jamaica – the island that gave birth to the worldwide cultural phenomenon of Reggae.</p>					<p>The Ecstatic Tour Featuring <b>MOS DEF</b> and JAY ELECTRONICA AUGUST 15</p>	<p><b>22</b> FREE Arsht Center Tour 12-1PM <b>Z</b></p>
<p><b>23</b></p>					<p><b>29</b> The Harder They Come <b>Z</b> 2 &amp; 8PM</p> <p>A hard-driving irresistible musical celebration, featuring classic songs including "By the Rivers of Babylon", "You Can Get it if You Really Want"!</p>	

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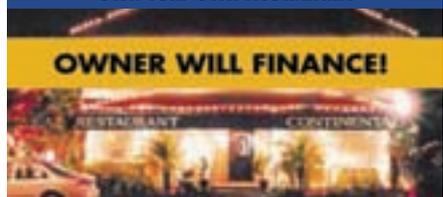
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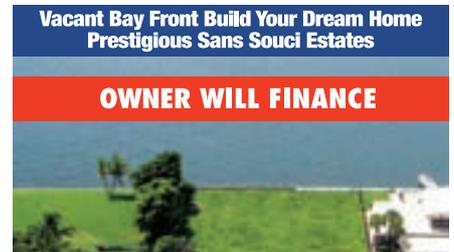
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# LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## Dialing for Dollars in the Digital Age

Allow me to provide a few more details and facts relating to an incident in which a customer at the News Lounge lost her iPhone. It was reported in an item headlined “Clearing Tables — Literally” (“Biscayne Crime Beat,” July 2009).

First of all, when one *loses* something, for whatever reason, it is the responsibility of the person who lost the item. The place where the item is lost has no responsibility for the “loss,” per se. That said, our strict policy for lost items is as follows: Regardless of the value of the item that is found on our property by one of our employees, they are to immediately turn it over to management.

Unfortunately in this case, a News Lounge busboy claims he saw the phone and asked at a nearby table if perhaps the phone belonged to them. According to his account, a gentleman at the table (seeing that it was an iPhone) claimed it was indeed his and asked for the busboy’s cell phone number, which he stored in the found phone so as to “reward” the busboy at some later time.

Now, the busboy, who was thoroughly questioned about the incident, did seem to misstate the facts on one or more occasions, getting confused and nervous during our interviews with him. For sure, this did concern us. But the “proof” that he had consciously taken the phone was circumstantial, and as he had been a good employee since the day we opened almost a year earlier, with no prior incidents, we chose to give him the benefit of the doubt and decided not to terminate his employment. However, he was written up and disciplined for not following company policy.

As for the patron who lost her phone, we profoundly apologized that our lost-and-found policy had not been followed, and only because our staff member had the phone in his possession but did not turn it in to management, we agreed to pay for a replacement phone to the tune of several hundred dollars, even though we were not *obliged* to do so.

All around, I think we handled the matter properly and professionally, and even went beyond our “responsibility” in this case by paying for the replacement phone.

Ryan York, director of operations  
55th Street Station  
Miami

## Headline-Writing Publishing Tycoon Takes a Pass on This One

I just wanted to throw in my two cents in response to the letter from Miami *New Times* editor Chuck Strouse aimed at *BT* publisher and editor Jim Mullin and columnist Jack King (“Full-Force Smackdown Floors Discredited Publishing Tycoon,” July 2009). First some disclosure. Not only was I once the *BT* editor, I’m still an occasional contributor, so I’ll try and be as objective as possible. And since neither Strouse nor Mullin can be objective about their own publications, here’s some honest analysis from street level.

Strouse is no dummy. He knows that Jack King’s columns come with a lot of hyperbole. It’s a style, his style, and for good or ill, he’s come to be known as a fiery curmudgeon whose barbs spare no one. But the thrust of his commentary “Miami’s Media Muddle” (June 2009) reflected

## Calling All Writers! Well, Maybe Not All Writers

We here at Biscayne Times World Headquarters are looking for some new correspondents to supplement our stellar cast. If you live in a condo in downtown Miami (between the river and I-395), and you’d like to chronicle life in that particular frontier, we want to hear from you. Ditto for these areas: Edgewater, North Bay Village, Bay Harbor Islands, and North Miami. Warning: This is *not* a path to riches.

Please send contact information and writing samples (if you have them) to editor Jim Mullin: jim.mullin@biscaynetimes.com.

a widespread perception of *New Times*. It’s journalism lite, and heavy on the snark and sensationalism. It’s a paper that goes out of its way to find trashy, lurid topics. *New Times* is for music and art and “Savage Love,” but not hardcore news. My favorite part is the incendiary letters they have to print each week.

You can’t even fairly compare the *BT* and *New Times*. One is a young, grassroots community paper on a shoestring budget, the latter is much older, and owned by a nationwide media conglomerate with vast resources. The *New Times* is ad space filler, and my copy hits the trash can hours after I pick it up. But I keep the *BT* for a month and read it cover to cover because of the quality and relevance of its community journalism. Since I left as editor, Mullin has raised the paper beyond what I ever envisioned it could be.

Finally, Strouse’s mean-spirited public jibe at Mullin regarding the Art Teele affair is as low as it gets. He crossed over a line of professional decency, responding with a bomb to what was essentially an arrow from a columnist — not the publisher.

You’re a classy guy, Strouse. Keep it up.

Christian Cipriani  
Edgewater

## Ditto

Chuck Strouse’s tone in his “Full-Force Smackdown” letter was angry and bitter. He mentioned that *New Times* has won numerous editorial awards for excellent journalism, while *Biscayne Times* has not. Someone should remind him that most of those awards were won on Jim Mullin’s watch as editor of *New Times*, not his. Mr. Mullin is the man who put that paper on the map and made it into what it became.

In recent years, *Biscayne Times* has grown into a wonderful little community gem. As far as the awards go, give Mr. Mullin time, they’ll come.

Anne Acevedo  
Lake Belmar

## Don’t Forget What Happened When the Times Charged for Online Content

Super-duper new *BT* Website! When can we start paying you for a subscription? We had to resort to a subscription to the *New York Times*.

We’re always looking forward to the next issue.

Linda Cahill  
Miami Shores

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# BizBuzz: August 2009

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

By Pamela Robin Brandt  
BT Contributor

This year August is “Explore Downtown Month,” or at least the **Miami Parking Authority** is hoping to make it so. To attract those who avoid downtown because of parking hassles, three MPA garages (at 190 NE 3rd St., 100 SE 2nd St., and, Friday-Saturday only, 90 SW 1st St.) are offering a flat \$3 daily rate on weekends, and flat-rate parking of \$3 for up to three hours every weeknight after 5:00 p.m. Additionally, street parkers whose meters have expired will be issued a “courtesy citation” explaining they’ve been granted a free hour of parking instead of a ticket. The discounts are good all month, except for special-event parking.

One such special event, says MPA spokesman Tim Dodson, is a brand-new film series at the lovely old Gusman Center for the Performing Arts (174 E. Flagler St.; ), which is managed by the parking authority. Is this city weird or what? Anyway, the theater is hosting “Flickin’ Summer,” three movie musicals we’d guess had been chosen by Coconut Grove’s parking fairy: *Fame* (8/20), *Flashdance* (8/27), and *The Wiz* (9/3). For more details, call 305-372-0925 or visit [www.gusmancenter.org](http://www.gusmancenter.org).

Just when you’d almost given up waiting for Midtown Miami to start becoming that long-promised artsy, mixed-use enclave full of unique, chic design shops and more: Welcome to just such a shop, new *BT* advertiser **MIYO Home Furnishings**, at 47 NE 36th St. (305-576-4172), across the street from the Shops at Midtown Miami. The antithesis of generic chain stores, MIYO (Make It Your Own) is the concept of two interior

decorators who explore Asia, Europe, Latin America for unique treasures, from striking furniture to room-transforming candles — and promise an anecdote behind every piece.

Sprains, fractures, minor burns, fevers: Though usually not life-threatening, everyday emergencies do need medical treatment. So why do they always seem to occur at night or on weekends, when your doctor’s office is closed? Fortunately the new **Medi-Station Urgent Care Center** (9600 NE 2nd Ave., Miami Shores; 305-603-7650) is open every day, with extended hours and no appointments necessary. The center is also well equipped for diagnostic services — EKGs, X-rays, lab work. Check it out on August 7 from 5:00-8:00 p.m. at an open house featuring free health screenings and refreshments.

If you were among the fans of the film *There’s Something About Mary* who fell in love with not just Cameron Diaz but her character’s Biscayne Bay neighborhood, call new *BT* advertiser **1800 Club** condominium (1800 N. Bayshore Dr.; 305-531-3300), which offers some of Miami’s most affordable direct waterfront condos. Aside from having its own pool and fitness center, the 458-unit building is just across the street from Margaret Pace Park, which features numerous outdoor sports facilities and, of course, the bay — viewable through units’ floor-to-ceiling hurricane glass or from spacious balconies.

Everyone’s born with music aptitude (which, if developed, also improves kids’ math, science, language, and communication skills), says music educator Jane Spinney. But the gift diminishes if not nurtured between birth and age nine. And she does mean “birth.” Call new advertiser **Miss Jane’s Music Studio** (155 NE 96th St.; 305-757-6500) when the labor pains start, and newborns can pretty

much drop in for their first group music class on the way home from hospital. New for this fall: private lessons in piano, voice, guitar, flute, and violin for school-age kids. (No discrimination against the elderly here.)

Welcome also to new advertiser **M Power Project**, along with congratulations on the grand opening of the health club’s super new Miami Shores facility (9301 NE 6th Ave.; 305-758-8600). Feeling the burn may not seem like a great idea during Miami’s most scorching month, but no worries. M Power takes a balanced approach to fitness, in an environment conducive to exercising comfortably at your own pace — a policy that applies not just to personal training sessions but to a large variety of classes geared for levels from “power” to “easy-does-it.”

On some lazy-hot mornings, however, even shuffling to the coffee machine seems too much like a workout. Well, can you manage stretching an arm out for your phone? If so, **The Girrrlz of Sandwich** (555 NE 15th St., 2nd floor; 305-374-4305) will bring you breakfast in bed. Just added to the menu, the moveable feasts are bargain-priced at \$7.50-\$9.00 (for one) to \$13.50-\$17 (for two). Featured fare: fresh-baked ham-and-cheese croissants or caper, tomato, and onion-garnished smoked salmon on bagels, plus juice, coffee, and homemade cookies.

Though summer is far from over, most summer camps for kids are already winding down. But not the weekly soccer camps at **MeteGoal Indoor Soccer** (7616 NE 4th Ct.; 305-756-1700 or [Katie@metegoal.com](mailto:Katie@metegoal.com)). The five-day Monday-Friday sessions (9:00 a.m. to noon for kids 4-6, 3:00 to 6:00 p.m. for ages 7-10), have been extended to run through September 4.

While it’s Miami Spice time again, \$35 dinners may not seem like such a

doable deal this year. But the **Royal Bavarian Schnitzel Haus** (1085 NE 79th St.; 305-754-8002) is offering an August special you couldn’t beat eating at home: Mondays through Thursdays 5:00-7:00 p.m. all blackboard specials, plus soup or salad, are just \$12.95 per person. And Friday-Sunday, summer’s unique German BBQ continues: dark-beer-marinated ribs, chicken, and steaks plus steckerlfisch (whole whitefish on a stick) cooked over coals.

If you don’t find the contemporary furniture and/or accessories you like at **Beau Living’s** 4000-square-foot showroom (8101 Biscayne Blvd.; 305-751-1511), you’d better look off-planet. The unusually varied stock ranges from canopied outdoor daybeds to leather tissue holders. A no-middleman relationship with manufacturers enables the company to pass on savings always, but right now a special summer sale offers savings of up to 50 percent off select items.

Speaking of savings, David Cohen of **Bagels & Company** (11064 Biscayne Blvd.; 305-892-2435) has added a fourth coupon special to last month’s three. For eat-in diners: On Fridays, all half-pound deli sandwiches are \$5; on Tuesdays, purchase an entrée and beverage and get another entrée free; and every weekday, all day, enjoy a two-egg breakfast with potatoes and bagel for just \$2.99. Take-out customers score, too — every day. Buy a dozen bagels and get either an additional dozen, a coupon good for a free dozen, or a pound of cream cheese. So bring in their *BT* ad and enjoy.

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# Dead Sharks, Alien Presidents, and the Marlins' Latest Acquisition

*Just when you thought the summer months couldn't get any crazier*

By Jack King  
BT Contributor

Last month I opened this column talking about the "silly season" in Miami, referring to the political machinations of our local politicians. But it turned out that I seriously missed the mark. The silly season should encompass lots of others, here and all across America, and should definitely include the news media.

You know it's a slow news night in Miami when the lead story on every television station, blog, and Miami's Only Daily is about a dead shark in the middle of a street in Overtown. Worse, the story became the lead, or at least the funny closing piece, on countless news outlets throughout the nation.

Channel 7 ("If it bleeds, it leads") had the story first, although it is important to point out in the interest of journalistic integrity that there was very little blood involved. It didn't take long for the rest of the news media to jump on the story. Since it had already been broadcast, I can only assume that, owing to budget cuts at the other media outlets, they now have no police scanners. *They were watching it on television.* It's a sad state of affairs when our local news media cannot afford police scanners.

But local and state authorities wasted no time jumping right in. They immediately investigated (on camera, no less) to determine if the nurse shark is an endangered species. It isn't. After the community breathed a sigh of relief that no threatened, exotic creature had been harmed, they turned to the potential criminal act of leaving a fish in the street.

No doubt it has to be a felony akin to throwing your McDonald's fish sandwich out the window of your car.

Somehow pictures appeared out of nowhere showing the shark riding on the Metromover. Questions abounded as to whether it had purchased a ticket or was riding illegally. Don't ask about this part of the story — it's still under investigation by the local police and the State Attorney's Office. (Note to news editors and prosecutors: The Metromover is *free*. No fare required. And that applies to sharks as well as humans.)

Granted this silly stuff makes Miami look pretty bad, but the shark story was soon overshadowed by an even crazier story — whether President Barack Obama

**If these campaign contributions continue right up to the election, Joe Sanchez could become the highest-paid player in the Marlins organization.**

was actually born in the United States. Forget the fact that just about everyone who has asked to see the president's birth certificate has been provided a copy, and that includes a number of right-wing "news" outlets like WorldNetDaily.

No matter. They'll do anything they can to keep the story alive. This is thanks in no small part to a small group of Republican representatives, led by Bill Posey of Melbourne and nine others (six from Texas), who want to make sure that all presidential candidates can produce proof of birth in a form that meets their extremely high patriotic standards.

Most of these representatives are not really that wacky, but this is a wonderful way to keep their wacky base on the reservation. The Republicans are losing ground in new-voter registrations, and are even losing people from their own party. Right now about 40 percent of the electorate is registered Democrat, 40 percent independent, and 20 percent Republican. Republicans seem to be crawling deeper and deeper down the rabbit hole, so they shouldn't be surprised when their reality starts to become just a little distorted.

This whole Obama birth fable looks like nothing more than a group of media hounds trying to keep a story churning, thus maintaining themselves in the spotlight on the Internet and talk radio.

Seems to be working.

Over the next few months, leading up to the City of Miami's November 3 mayoral election, you will be seeing lots of reports about who gave how much money to whom. It's always been important to identify who is actually paying the politicians' bills and what they might want out of it, but it has not always been easy to get that information in a timely manner. For some odd reason, many campaigns seemed to lose track of their campaign finance records just days before an election, then miraculously recovered them shortly afterward. So we often didn't get a complete accounting until after the votes had been cast.

Fortunately we now have considerably more transparency with campaign contributions, as you can find them on the city's Website. Unfortunately it is boring reading, with thousands of names you wouldn't

recognize interspersed with the usual suspects. But one part of it jumped out at me.

While looking at the campaign contributions to mayoral candidate Joe Sanchez, I couldn't help but notice the large number of them that were coming from people associated with the Florida Marlins, directly and indirectly. I'm no Marlins expert, nor am I a math whiz, but just those names I recognized who'd written checks to Sanchez added up to tens of thousands of dollars.

If this trend continues right up to the election, Sanchez could become the highest-paid player in the Marlins organization. That should give him the right to throw out the first pitch when the new stadium opens in 2012. And the second. And the third.

One loser in the Marlins' stadium vote might very well be Commissioner Michelle Spence-Jones. She essentially sold her vote for the stadium to city manager Pete Hernandez, who needed a third vote for approval. What she wanted was for the city to fund the Overtown/Park West Community Redevelopment Agency to the tune of \$50 million (money the city already owed the CRA). The city manager agreed, and she voted for the stadium. Unfortunately for Spence-Jones, the city is now essentially broke, having overspent its revenues four out of the past five years. And this coming year, revenues will be down an estimated 30 percent. So good luck, Michelle, trying to collect your money.

Take a page out of the playbook of Miami's old cracker politicians: Get the money *before* you vote.

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)



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# What qualities do you look for in a potential mate?

Compiled by Victor Barrenechea — BT Contributor



**Brian Piñeyro**  
Student  
Little Haiti

I like a nice butt, but the face is the most important to me, because you're always going to be looking at the face. The body is just a plus. She can't be smarter than me. She also has to have worse taste than me in everything so I can show her cool stuff. You have to have the upper hand in a relationship. If you don't have the upper hand, you have nothing.



**Stephanie Turchin**  
Store Owner  
Wynwood

This is from somebody who's been married 27 years: Honesty, loyalty, respect, and integrity. My husband is amazing. He's a good man. I got lucky. It's very difficult to find that. I think you need to have these qualities in order to receive them. I've put 27 years into this. I live it day by day and don't take it lightly. It's all what you put out there.



**Ana Colon**  
Store Manager  
Upper Eastside

Honesty. I think honesty is basically everything in a relationship. If you can't feel comfortable saying the truth, you're lying. If you're not honest with other people, you can't be honest with yourself. You don't know who the person really is if they're not honest. Loyalty is definitely a plus. And humor too. You have to be funny.



**Danny Bratkowski**  
Student  
Little Haiti

I look for an ambitious person who is willing to tolerate my habits. I guess sometimes I party too hard and I'm not always responsible. I just need someone who can put up with me. I'm looking for someone who's thoughtful enough to know when I need help. And I need someone who's not serious at all because I hate serious.



**Nuno Grullon**  
Chef  
Keystone

An independent woman who doesn't like to watch reality shows. Reality shows are not real. Reality is on the Discovery Channel. She has to be independent in the sense that we could both hold our own financially, so if I pass away, she doesn't have to stress about money. And a girl who is into music, because music is the way to wake up the soul.



**Lauren Turchin**  
Store Manager  
Wynwood

I look for a sense of humor. I do. You have to have a sense of humor. Otherwise it doesn't work. The longer you're with that person, looks fade and all you're left with is personality. I look for good teeth too, because that's the one thing that sticks out the most when you're looking at your partner.

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## COVER STORY



**The dance master in motion: Derek Mellman and student at the studio.**

### Dance

Continued from page 1

inconspicuous at the Colonial Shopping Center on W. Dixie Highway and 125th Street, where the President Supermarket serves as an anchor for businesses like Hawaii Nails, Super Deals, and Perfect Finish Hair.

This being a Saturday, the weekly evening group lesson and dance party are just a few hours away. The caterer bearing dinner is soon expected. And while Mellman chats with a visitor, he casts an eye toward the door, waiting for Tina Mullen, scheduled for a late-afternoon lesson.

"Come back for the show," he urges as Mullen, a tidy brunette, arrives. There is a twinkle in Mellman's eye as he shepherds Mullen over to Sharon Butler, who has finished her lesson with the engaged couple. "Make sure you're here by 9:00 p.m.," he admonishes.

After the sun sets and the sky darkens, the stifling heat releases its grip and a breeze picks up, making for a pleasant evening. Dancemasters is likewise transformed. Under red lights, men in slacks and women in skirts and sequined dresses sit at tables arranged around the 3000-square-foot, hardwood dance

floor. An upbeat instrumental version of "Bésame Mucho" plays on the sound system. The mirrored walls reflect plenty of gray hair, but also a wide seam of younger people, both black and white, ranging from their early 20s to mid-40s.

Over at a table, Tina Mullen sits with a group of well-acquainted regulars. Following her earlier lesson, she has changed into a black halter top and patterned skirt. Mullen is the executive director of the South Florida Golf Foundation and lives in nearby Biscayne Park. She's been coming to Dancemasters for several years. "I was going somewhere

**The mirrored walls reflect plenty of gray hair, but also a wide seam of younger people, both black and white, ranging from their early 20s to mid-40s.**

else," she says, "but everybody said, 'You have to go to Derek's, the people are nicer, the music is better.' And it is. I've tried every other place in South Florida."

A Roberto Carlos number comes on and the floor begins to fill with dancers.

Mullen, who is in her 50s, watches as friends greet one another. There are

Continued on page 16

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## Dance

Continued from page 14

Paula Liu and Robert Archambault, respectively an insurance agent and retired general contractor. Liu wears a bright, coral-colored dress. Archambault is tall and slim. The couple, she in her 50s, he a few years older, met at Dancemasters and married last year. “You just start dancing,” Liu says, “and then you get to know a little bit about each other.”

Archambault dances away with one of the couple’s friends. He holds his head and back straight, in the style many people know from watching televised competitions.

Richard Ianni, a professional singer from Fort Lauderdale, walks in and greets everyone with a sparkling smile. Ianni, who has worked in venues from Broadway to cruise ships, settled here in part because he simply loves to dance. “I think one of the biggest things about deciding on South Florida is the dance community,” he says. “I don’t know any other place that has the dancing that South Florida does.” He changes into his dancing shoes as he prepares to take to the floor. “This is a wonderful community,” he adds. “Everybody dances with everybody else.” And he’s soon away with a female friend. His style is less formal than Robert Archambault. He leans toward his partner, ardent and attentive.

And then it’s a kaleidoscope of changing partners, couples who ebb and flow in fluid but formal intimacy, sometimes lasting no longer than a song. Other pairs clearly have danced together for years. It’s not a pickup place, but people do meet each other. Sometimes it works out, sometimes it doesn’t. As one regular puts it: “There has been romance, there have been breakups, there have been sorrows.”

After a few dances, Mellman grabs a microphone and addresses the crowd. “We have two birthdays tonight,” he announces. “And we also have cake and champagne.” With that, Mellman and Butler, the dance teacher, take the floor alone.

They’ve danced together for two decades, and their West Coast swing is effortless. Now they’re moving to a bouncy tune by the Love Dogs, a bluesy group with a pumped-up horn section. The groove is definitely on.

Suddenly Tina Mullen jumps up and strides onto the dance floor, surprising everyone by joining Mellman and Butler,

Continued on page 17



Richard Ianni: “This is a wonderful community. Everybody dances with everybody else.”



There really are such things as dancing shoes. Men’s soles are suede.



Lunie William: "It's very clean and peaceful, and you feel safe."



A smattering of celebrity photos, but many more of Mellman with various partners, including his late wife Sari.

## Dance

Continued from page 16

putting her hands on Butler's shoulders and mirroring her steps. What was she thinking? Was the music too much for her to keep still?

But wait! In a moment it's clear. This is a choreographed, three-way, West Coast swing. Mellman steps and turns — over, under, and around both women. So *that's* why he earlier had shooed away his visitor — Mullen was there to put a last bit of polish on their routine.

Everyone catches on, and soon they're clapping and roaring their approval. It's a great act, *Cabaret* with a pinch of cruise-ship kitsch.

The Love Dogs' horn section wails, the dancers step lively, the aroma of savory roasted chicken wafts from a buffet table, and champagne and cake are to come. Another Saturday evening at Dancemasters is under way, and you just know it's going to be good.



That Saturday evening included more than 130 people in the second-floor studio — typical for summer, which is somewhat slower than the winter season, when both Canadian and U.S. snowbirds swell the ranks. Dancemasters, however, stays busy all year, and virtually every day. Parties are Wednesdays and Saturdays. Group lessons, also offered on Mondays, always precede the parties. Mellman, Butler, and other teachers give private lessons, which cost \$65 — less for a series. For \$12 a dancer can attend a group lesson and the party; \$60 per month covers all group lessons and all parties.

The 5000-square-foot studio is quiet on an early Wednesday afternoon, and Mellman graciously offers to give a visitor a salsa lesson. His grip is strong but not overpowering. Dancing, his face lights up, though surely he must have shepherded thousands through these first steps. "Fast, fast, slow," he says. He's patient, and in a few minutes, his partner is doing a credible salsa. "That's it!" he says encouragingly.

With his enthusiasm and his skill as a teacher, it's no wonder Mellman's business remains profitable even after 33

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## Dance

Continued from page 17

years. He opened Dancemasters in 1976 and has been in the same location ever since. “It was successful from day one,” he recalls. Over the years, of course, the customers and the neighborhood have changed. His Jewish clientele, which once predominated, now accounts for about 30 percent of the dancers. Meanwhile, Hispanic and Haitian dancers, from Kendall to West Palm Beach, have become regulars. On the dance floor, you hear German, Russian, Spanish, and Kreyol. Today, Mellman says, “It’s a ballroom for many cultures.”

Cultural diversity comes naturally to Mellman, born to Russian Jewish parents who emigrated to the United States. They settled in Cincinnati, where his father worked in the wholesale clothing business. The four Mellman boys, like many children of immigrants, grew up as all-American kids. “I was a star athlete all my life,” Mellman recounts. “It was just innate to me.” He went to the University of Cincinnati on a swimming and diving scholarship, and studied to be a physical-education teacher.

Another part of his education involved visits to Miami. “I used to vacation here,” he says, “and I saw how much girls liked guys who could dance.” In fact his first professional gig was at the Casablanca hotel on Collins Avenue in Miami Beach. “The floor used to rise



**Tina Mullen: “Everybody said, ‘You have to go to Derek’s, the people are nicer, the music is better.’ And it is.”**

Gloria Gaynor, the Village People, and the Bee Gees swept the nation. “For a good six or eight years I taught nothing but disco,” he says. “I really capitalized on that.”

Not long after opening the studio, he met his future wife Sari — at Dancemasters, of course. Together they built and expanded the business, which allowed them to buy a nice home and put their three sons through college. Sadly, six

months ago Mellman lost Sari to a swift-moving cancer.

As disco ascended, profitably for Dancemasters, ballroom dancing — with its foxtrots, waltzes, and even the sexy salsa — waned. “Latin bands couldn’t get jobs,” Mellman says. But slowly that changed, and over time an eclectic mix of people made their way to Dancemasters — and stayed. The regulars now range from doctors to retired policemen to politicians to artists and college students. The popularity of television shows like *Dancing with the Stars* and *So You Think You Can Dance* has lured even more beginners eager to learn. And

unlike some genre-oriented studios, at Dancemasters they have an opportunity to learn the gamut of styles.



Dancing has always been strong in South Florida, even as dance crazes came and went across the rest of the country. Julie Malnig, professor of dance history at New York University and author of *Dancing Till Dawn: A Century of Exhibition Ballroom Dance*, notes that informal

“social dancing” is a relatively recent phenomenon, encouraged by early 20th-century feminism, the emergence of urban culture, the birth of ragtime and other syncopated music, and the increasing popularity of nightclubs and restaurants. “You had this culture of nightlife, where people were coming out to dance,” Malnig says. “There was much more public display of this kind of social dancing.”

Allen Darnel, a longtime Houston-based dance teacher who has also

authored books on dancing, adds that the rise of the big bands in the 1930s, plus the explosive popularity of Arthur Murray brought out even more people to dance. “Arthur Murray,” he says, “created dance studios where the ordinary person could learn how to dance and go to the big ballrooms — where Tommy Dorsey and other big bands were playing.”

In South Florida, handsome young dance teachers were to be found at resort hotels like the Fontainebleau and Eden Roc, says Darnel, who himself taught for a year in the 1980s at The Breakers hotel

**The influx of Cuban and other Latin American immigrants, many of whom cherish dancing, helped keep dance alive and lively in South Florida.**

in Palm Beach. “Even in the 1930s, they had dance teachers teaching the tourists how to do the mambo and the rumba.”

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**Dancemasters’ regulars are an eclectic mix, ranging from doctors to retired policemen to politicians to artists and college students.**

up,” he marvels. He taught salsa, mambo, and the pachanga, one of the dance rages of the late 1950s and early 1960s, when Americans went wild for all things Cuban and Latin.

Though his brothers urged him to join their successful scrap metal business, young Derek had found his calling. He moved to Miami, where he was soon hired by a local Arthur Murray dance studio franchise. But he wanted his own business.

“I knew I had the talent and the background,” he says. He also had the timing. He opened Dancemasters at the dawn of the disco era, and soon the music of

## Dance

Continued from page 18

The influx of Cuban and other Latin American immigrants, many of whom cherish dancing as an integral part of their culture, helped keep dance alive and lively in South Florida.

Malnig attributes the current surge in dance's popularity in part to nostalgia by those who grew up in the 1940s and 1950s, plus interest from younger Baby Boomers. "I think there is still a sort of romantic appeal," she says. "When the revival first happened, people just liked going back to contact dancing as opposed to rock-and-roll or disco dancing." Today's emphasis on healthful exercise has also prompted people of all ages to seek out dance studios. In addition, the appeal can be seen as a reaction to workdays often spent in the company of electronic devices. "With increasingly busy lives, people are working more and more in isolation," Malnig says. "Dancing offers the individual contact people are really yearning for."

Back at Dancemasters, most people aren't thinking about trends. They may be gazing at a wall of photos depicting



**Dancing offers the individual contact people are really yearning for."**

the history of both Derek Mellman and the studio. Here Mellman clowns with Matt Damon, whom he taught for the *Bourne* movies. Here he's laughing it up with Harrison Ford. A younger Mellman in a bullfighter's outfit dances what must have been a steamy *paso doble*.

They also could be gathering near a shoe boutique Mellman opened eight years ago, filled with red, gold, and silver high heels, plus men's shoes with suede soles, cobbled especially for dancing. ("You slip on leather and you stick on rubber," Mellman explains.)

And they definitely are changing into those dance shoes, greeting friends, and getting ready for their dance party. If people like Lunie William are any indication, Mellman need not worry about attracting attendees.

Earlier the 21-year-old William, who has been coming to Dancemasters for the past few years, was partnered with teacher Hugues Napoleon as he led a group class. Despite the hour-long workout, William was ready for more dancing.

"I started three years ago," she recalls. "I did my own research. I was looking for a place so badly. It's very clean and peaceful, and you feel safe." Dancing at Dancemasters, she adds, is the perfect antidote to her intense schedule of Miami-Dade College nursing classes and her work at a mortgage company. "It's really relaxing," she says. "It's where I take out my stress."

*For more information about Dancemasters classes, call 305-893-3010 or visit [www.dereksdancemasters.com](http://www.dereksdancemasters.com)*

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# Out With the Manicured Lawn

— And in with landscaping for wildlife —

By Jen Karetnick  
BT Contributor

I don't know about yours, but our lawn is a wreck. First there was the drought and the watering restrictions. Then came the prolific rains and floods. After that a hail of mangoes pummeled the ground. Now we have the detritus that comes after the trees have shed their harvest — dried-up mango stems, the dead branches. To top it off, the canopies of our mango, avocado, sapodilla, and live oak trees — about 24 all told — are so dense they block anything from growing beneath them.

All this makes for a very patchy yard. We have a lot of pure dirt where there once was grass, the landscape version of male-pattern baldness.

Given that my husband and I have an acre, replacing the grass via sod would be really expensive. We don't have the money, and quite frankly, we

don't have the inclination. The last time we did so, on our swale, Miami Shores Public Works managed to eat about \$800 worth of it from where our gardeners (and sometimes other peoples' gardeners) dump their organic debris.

As for using grass seed, when the thunder and rain coordinate like a drum circle, I watch puddles that look more like ponds accumulate under my office window, and realize seeding would be, pardon the pun, a washout.

Besides, I have a better idea: landscaping for a certified wildlife refuge.

The first step in creating such a refuge involves reducing lawn turf. According to the University of Florida Wildlife Extension article "Landscaping Backyards for



Wildlife: Top Ten Tips for Success," a mowed grass lawn "is like concrete to most species of animals. It offers very little food or cover... By simply not mowing, you will be creating shelter and food for many animal species."

Naturally Miami Shores Village is not going to allow any of us to simply stop mowing our lawns. (I remember

all too clearly the fines imposed on our closing costs because the former homeowner had quit caring for the property months before we moved in.) But we can reduce turf in a multitude of other ways, including planting native groundcover or creating rock gardens. Now instead of bald spots, I see places for sundials and birdbaths.

In addition to reducing mowed lawn areas, the main precepts of maintaining a wildlife-friendly environment are simple. Provide food for birds and animals by planting bushes that bear berries or nectar-producing flowers, which attract bees, birds, caterpillars, and butterflies. You can also hang seed, nut, and suet feeders.

Give wildlife a place to raise their young via groundcover vertical layering (plants and shrubs of different sizes throughout the yard). Offer shelter through rock walls, hedges, bird houses,

Continued on page 21

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### Wildlife

Continued from page 20

and bat boxes. Allow water for bathing and drinking by way of pools, fountains, and bird baths. Go green by reducing the use of chemicals, gas mowers, and pesticides — remember, birds and bats eat insects. Compost, mulch, conserve, and catch water with rain barrels. Destroy nonnative plants.

I think you'll be surprised, as I was, to realize how many requirements you might already meet. For instance, with the prevalence of fruit and nut trees around here, we provide plenty of food. We've never used fertilizer, so we're good on the green. We have an area of the yard filled with spreading overgrowth we've always simply referred to as "the jungle" — that's where I've found kittens over the years, so I guess it's appropriate for breeding. We have huge chunks of calcareous stones in piles and walls, left over from excavations needed for additions to the house. The only elements we'll have to add to qualify for certification are the water ones, and perhaps a bat and owl box or two.

Just so you know, though, certification isn't mandatory. It doesn't get you a tax break or anything of monetary value, really. In fact it might actually cost you money to meet the requirements. A do-it-yourself pond kit can run \$1400, for example. On the other hand, installing a bird bath takes only \$50 or so.

Indeed, landscaping for wildlife appeals to me in less tangible ways, and the rewards are that much greater. Simply put, I have a love of the beasties, both wild and domestic, but I'm too much a softy to be a rescuer. Every time I've tried to save and/or foster an animal, I've kept it. Creating a wildlife refuge out of my backyard seems an ideal solution: I can "house" more birds and animals naturally without having to literally give them a home.

Keep in mind that I'm not turning my yard into a retreat for feral cats (neighbors, insert sigh of relief here). Cats and dogs, whether pets or strays, kill or scare off other species and work against turning your backyard into such a haven.

If you decide to go the certification route, several programs are available that will help you get started on your backyard

or even your balcony, whether you rent or own. For instance, the Humane Society has an arm called the Urban Wildlife Sanctuary Program (<https://gateway.hsus.org/uwsp/>). It costs \$25 to join as an individual home, and when you qualify, you receive a certificate, a sign for your yard, and a decal for your window.

The National Wildlife Federation will also be delighted to help you create an official Certified Wildlife Habitat (<http://www.nwf.org/gardenforwildlife/create.cfm>). This one is more kid-friendly (<http://www.nwf.org/kidsgardenforwildlife/>), so if planning this kind of project is something that appeals to you as a family activity, I recommend starting here.

Because of our unique climate, however, you might receive better advice from local agencies. Sydney Park Brown, author and horticulture specialist at the University of Florida, recommends beginning with Certification Programs for Florida's Backyard Habitats ([www.nsis.org/garden/backyard-certification.html](http://www.nsis.org/garden/backyard-certification.html)), which in turn will link you to two Florida-based programs, Florida Backyard Landscapes for Wildlife ([www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/landscaping/fblw](http://www.wec.ufl.edu/extension/landscaping/fblw)) and Florida Yards and

Neighborhoods, which is "designed to educate homeowners and other community members about the techniques and benefits of Florida-Friendly Landscaping with the help of nine key principles" (<http://fyn.ifas.ufl.edu/>).

Each one of those nine principles — Right Plant, Right Place; Manage Yard Pests Responsibly; Attract Wildlife; and Recycle among them — is accompanied by a few pages of easy-to-follow advice.

The Florida Backyard Landscapes for Wildlife program, administered by the Florida Wildlife Extension, is the most inexpensive — only \$5 — and perhaps the most extensive, recommending books and articles on everything from identifying nonnative plants to bird-watching to getting your town certified. That's right. Not only can you landscape your backyard for wildlife, you can do it for your school, your park, your business, your entire neighborhood. Should Miami Shores choose to go that green route, it would be the first and only community in all of Miami-Dade County to be certified as a wildlife-friendly town.

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)



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# Local Legal Eagle Makes Good

*Jesse Diner, a truly honest attorney, now heads the Florida Bar*

By Frank Rollason  
BT Contributor

On June 26, my wife and I, along with some neighborhood friends from Morningside, trekked up to Orlando for the swearing-in of our dear friend Jesse Diner as the new president of the Florida Bar. Jesse is one of our almost home-grown locals, as he was a resident of Morningside for more than 27 years. I first met him when I was working for the City of Miami and he and a couple of other Morningside residents came to me seeking assistance with landscaping problems for their street barricades, installed to cut down on vehicular traffic tearing through Morningside.

I knew who he was because he served on the pension board for Miami's police officers and firefighters, but I'd never dealt with him directly. The contingent from Morningside was led by Patrick McCoy, aided by Jesse along with Alyce Robertson, who now serves as the executive

director of Miami's Downtown Development Authority. (They're damn lucky to have her!)

The group was very frustrated in dealing with the city (can you imagine that?) over promises not kept to assist the Morningside Civic Association in their quest to beautify the barricades. It seems the plants could not get a foothold because pedestrians and bike riders just trampled whatever was being planted. There was no method of keeping people "off the grass," so to speak.

I, not being a Morningside insider, suggested that we place temporary chain-link fences through the middle of each



barricade — supplied by the city — until the plants had a chance to become established, and remove them later. This is where Jesse the attorney explained to me what a dumb ass I was, but in the most eloquent terms, because I didn't realize that Morningside was an historic neighborhood, and you couldn't install chain-link fencing anywhere for whatever reason. Heaven forbid!

We worked around those rules and pushed it through the Historic Preservation Board on a temporary basis, with the promise that the city would remove the fences one year from the

date they were installed. I had only held the position of assistant city manager for a short time at that point, but already I was struck by the number of individuals and groups — in this case the preservation board — who asked, "How do we know the city will remove the fences in one year? They never do what they say they're going to do!"

What a reputation for a local government to have.

But the fences went in, the plants grew and thrived, and one year later I had a crew from public works remove the fences. In the meantime, however, our friendship with Jesse and his wife Adele grew. We would get together and discuss various city issues. I loved to hear Jesse's take on the incredible period we went through in the late 1990s and early 2000s, when a number of our leaders in the city administration were convicted of various crimes and packed off to prison.

Continued on page 23

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**Jesse**

Continued from page 22

The high and the mighty fell. Cesar Odio, Miller Dawkins, Bert Hernandez, Don Warshaw, and others checked into the Gray Bar Motel, while the political scene was just as raucous: the mayoral fiasco between Xavier Suarez and Joe Carollo, the hiring and firing of multiple city managers in a very short period of time, and more. Even I had my turn as city manager, and lasted 27 days — until I was terminated because I wouldn't fire police Chief Don Warshaw, who himself later became city manager. Eventually he ended up in jail for misuse of the children's fund Do the Right Thing.

It was a crazy time, and through it all Jesse Diner was there as a sounding board. We would sit around his dining room table with others not to be mentioned, jaws agape as the story du jour unfolded.

But this story is about Jesse and why it's important to us as Upper Eastside residents that a man like him now sits in such a powerful position at the state level. Jesse is honest *and* he is a lawyer. Some would say that's an oxymoron,

but enough of the lawyer jokes. There is a story told about Jesse when he was a youngster — no, it doesn't involve a cherry tree, but it's almost as good.

Seems Jesse's parents were taking a train trip on which children under the age of seven rode for free. The boy's parents coached him to say he was six years old just in case anyone asked. When the conductor came by, he casually asked

**Severe sanctions can be imposed for lawyers' misdeeds. Jesse will be setting the tone for what is expected of those who truly serve the public as attorneys.**

Jesse his age and the youngster dutifully replied, "I am six now, but when I get off the train, I'll be seven again!"

That pretty much sums up how Jesse responds today, and will be how he responds for the rest of his life. At the ceremony where Jesse was sworn into office, the accolades kept flowing. It seems that everyone who'd dealt with Jesse over

the years had good things to say and a little story about how he'd touched their lives — including an incident involving a Speedo swimsuit, but we shall not go into that here. As penance, though, we may force him to don his Speedo and vacation in Canada just to get even — if you get my drift.

As Florida Bar president, Jesse has several noble goals in his sights, number one being increased funding for the judicial branch of government so the average citizen has access to the courts. As Jesse puts it: "If you don't have an adequate court system in a civil society, it is chaos. How else can people solve their disputes?"

Another of his goals is to bring the court-filing system into the computer age, e-filing as it's called. He will push for e-filing to become mandatory statewide, with the goal of eliminating or at least greatly reducing the enormous amount of paperwork the courts now generate.

Finally and most important to me will be his push for more pro-bono

work by his fellow attorneys for those unable to afford representation. For our system of justice to work, it is imperative that access be truly equal across the board. Jesse and his wife are big advocates of expanding this practice throughout the state.

Jesse will be good for us because he will always be Jesse. Keep in mind that many of our politicians are also lawyers, and their actions are accountable before the Florida Bar. So such scandals as Miami's fire-fee fiasco, which involved not only our mayor but also our city attorney allegedly misrepresenting the so-called affected class, eventually would come before the Florida Bar to be held accountable. Severe sanctions can be and often are imposed for such misdeeds. Jesse will be setting the tone for what is expected of those who truly serve the public as attorneys.

Congratulations, my boy, and good luck to you. It will be a hectic year, but as we all know, if you want to get something done, give it to a busy person. Jess will be very busy indeed.

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# Creatures Mythical and Real

Herewith, a tale so weird it couldn't be true — but was!

By Wendy Doscher-Smith  
BT Contributor

The Chupacabra. Now *there* was a fine monster worthy of Miami. The Puerto Rican-born Chupacabra was a mythical “manpire” whose name in Spanish translates roughly to “goat sucker.” Though reputed as a travelin’ man, Chupacabra likes to visit Miami, leaving his customary fang marks on goats and other not-so-lucky mammals. Chupa, as his fans and followers nicknamed him, stands in contrast to the garden-variety villains who regularly torment Miami residents (corrupt politicians, defiant road-ragers, under-cooked Media Noches), without the likes of which Miami-Dade County would make far fewer international headlines and suffer maybe half as many water-cooler jokes.

Chupa garnered attention because, like his brethren Bat Boy, Sasquatch, Nessie, and the Jersey Devil (“horselike head, long neck and tail, leathery wings, cloven hooves, blood-curdling scream,”



according to Wikipedia), he gives great story. Well, as luck would have it, I recently heard another great story right here in Binghamton, New York, our home away from Biscayne Park, or as others might know it, the Merciless Frozen Tundra (MFT), which exists in a parallel universe.

Unlike Chupa and other globally celebrated creatures, this piece of lore does not involve any living, prowling monsters, unless you include human, living relatives of mine. And it solely existed as familial urban legend — that is until recently, when, in an attempt to disprove it, I ended up proving it.

So at the risk of sounding like I married into the biggest redneck — er, people of rural descent who work in the sun — family in the hemisphere, I will share it.

It goes like this: When my husband Jeremy was five-years-old, he and Family Smith acquired Catty, his first pet. When he was ten, Family Smith packed up and moved from Rhode Island to upstate New York. While they looked for a house, they spent the summer in a camper on the property of Uncle Bob, in a rural town called Apalachin, which is west of Binghamton, where Jeremy and I currently live, and east of where his family bought a house that fall, in Owego.

During this summer, and shortly after the move, Catty went missing. As Jeremy remembers it, Catty, by then eight or ten years old, did not take kindly to Family Smith going on vacation.

Described by Jeremy as a “tough street cat that didn’t put up with any

Continued on page 25

BT photo by Wendy Doscher-Smith

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## Alex Saá 305-495-8712

**Creatures**

Continued from page 24

guff,” Catty wouldn’t let many people pet her. In fact only Jeremy could pick her up without getting scratched. But I guess even street cats (Catty had been homeless) don’t like to be surprised.

One day Catty, a large, meaty, black-and-white outdoor feline, wandered off. The search was on, but to no avail. Jeremy feared she had been run over. And that was, for the time being, the end of the story. Until 20 years later, when Uncle Bob decide to redo his porch. And there lay Catty. She was under the house, where she apparently once went exploring. Or to die. Nobody knows.

Uncle Bob was so proud he found her that he called the Smith clan to tell them the happy news. However, here is where it gets a little weird. Catty had been lying on her side when she expired. Uncle Bob being, well, Uncle Bob, decided to pose Catty in a standing position, which wasn’t that difficult because Catty was well preserved — mummified, if you will.

This story was first told to me over dinner at a Thai restaurant. I persisted

with questions despite protests from Uncle Bob’s wife Sylvia, and while Bob’s son Mike cringed, elbows stiff on table, hands crossed. Jeremy and his parents just laughed.

It occurred to me that Uncle Bob was not above playing me, the curious city girl. I mean, there were also stories about a post-World War II goat feast and a mention of a mysterious homing pigeon. Those I could sort of buy. But this? Still I listened with rapt attention, my noodles gone cold.

“So Catty is still there then, under your house?” I asked.

“I guess,” came Uncle Bob’s response and stoic look.

“Bullshit!” I coughed into my water glass. “I wanna see her.”

Chuckles erupted from around the table, forks jabbed into curried chicken chunks. However, I was undeterred.

One day recently Jeremy and I went down to the house o’ Catty. We went to go wading in the creek (pronounced “crick” by those who do not know any better) to get stones. I swear. For our garden. After sloshing about, I found my way out of the “crick” (which I

mistakenly thought was simply a smaller version of a creek) and sat on the side doorsteps. Then it occurred to me.

“I want to see Catty,” I announced, wiping my muddy hands on my jeans and standing tall in my Pepto-Bismol pink Wellingtons.

Mike, Jeremy’s cousin, said he wasn’t sure Catty was still there. To which I replied, “Where would she go?” So he looked.

“There she is! Up against the wall, to the right!” he shouted.

That was all I needed.

I squatted down, careful to not squish treasured perennials, cupped my hands, and peered through the white slats that crisscrossed between the bottom of the house and the ground.

It was dark under there, but I could make out a dusty form. Then the form came into focus. First the torso, then the legs, and finally, as I pitched forward, trying not to plunge through the lattice, the head.

There was Catty. A rather large, flattened Catty. Despite the fact that Jeremy did describe Catty as a “large, burly” cat, the mere size, the presence of this

mountain lion of a feline befuddled me. But Mike, who is an archeologist, attributes it to the decomposing process. Loss of fluids equals a flatter surface. However, he has no clue as to why she preserved so well under the house. Nobody does. Once you realize that the MUFT (Merciless Unfrozen Tundra — soon enough to return to M-Frozen-T) plays by its own rules, you learn to accept or at least expect that things are often not as they seem or as they should be.

In truth, Catty looked more like some artifact that belongs in the Museum of Natural History than that of a house cat decomposing under a house in rural upstate New York. The shrunken head perched atop a somehow simultaneously bloated and emaciated body gave Catty an almost comically skeletal look, like a fictitious creature ripped from the pages of an old *Creepshow* comics. No matter. For however strange Catty may have looked there, I can think of no better place for her to spend the rest of her days than under the house of people who cared for her. RIP, Pancaked Catty.

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# The Ultimate Ugly Neighbor

*Now we know what happens when towering condos are built next to modest homes*

By Christian Cipriani  
Special to BT

Last month's *BT* cover story about the creative possibilities of a reimagined Edgewater ("Dirt & Dreams," July 2009) drew its share of praise and — at least in theory — support. (Full disclosure: I wrote the story.) But for others, it was a painful reminder of how much the area suffered at the hands of overzealous developers and a city government yearning for tax dollars. This was the case for Edgewater residents Kathleen and Jaime Cuartas of 708 NE 26th St.

Their new 28-story neighbor has continued to terrorize their single-family home long after the last construction crane came down.

In late 2005, major work began on two sides of the Cuartas home. Onyx on the Bay, a 118-unit luxury tower between NE 25th and 26th Streets, was the brain-child of Willy Bermello and Luis Ajamil, of BAP Development, and Gustavo Micuslitzki of Argentina's GGM Developers. (They referred us to Onyx's project manager, who didn't return calls for comment.) BAP is also behind the unrealized 50-story Onyx 2, which was to rise on the bay at NE 28th Street — right where

the *BT* suggested someone build a public marina.

Sitting in the living room of their pink 1920s home, which they had previously rented out, the Cuartases sift through four-inch-thick binders of correspondence with politicians and various department heads, engineering reports, and a mass of photos — documentation of a years-long struggle to force the city to do something about Onyx's code violations, poor drainage, and debris.

In photo after photo, their property itself looks like a construction site: boards and cell phones crashing into the roof, along with helmets, chunks of cement, heavy steel parts, boards with nails sticking out, and in one photo, a hammer and the deep impression it left in the grass. Here the couple's adult son



Courtesy of Jaime and Kathleen Cuartas

**Because the Onyx condo was built at a higher elevation, this is what happens when it rains.**

stands dwarfed by a fallen seven-foot board, and in another, the crew's portable toilets lean against the Cuartas's sagging fence, just feet from their window. (Jaime even has a video of workers hosing them down and letting the water drain onto their property.) Things fell, damage was done, and the construction crew would come by to patch it up.

The situation became so bad that the middle-age couple moved in full-time when their tenants threatened to sue over unsafe living conditions. Their son's girlfriend took to doing laundry out back in a motorcycle helmet, and their grandchildren once mistook flecks of cement on the window for snow. And through it all, the family kept notes and pictures of the mess, even storing the most offending and dangerous debris as souvenirs.

"I'm Colombian," says Jaime Cuartas, "and that's a Third World country. Even there they have nets around construction sites to protect neighboring properties from this sort of thing."

Kathleen Cuartas has an endless log of e-mails to public officials begging for safety enforcement, but most correspondence went nowhere. The county and state said it's the city's problem. And each time, the city's response was: "The developers said they would..." while the developers replied, "The city said we could..." Everyone pointed at one another until Hector Lima, head of the city's building department, summed it up best in an e-mail: The contractors fix the things they break and promise to be safe, and besides, the building is almost done.

Continued on page 29

## School Dazed in El Portal, Part 2

*Charter school proponents are smacked down again, but still have one last chance*

By Brandon Dane  
Special to BT

The El Portal planning and zoning board threw another wrench into the works of MG3 Developer Group during their July 15 meeting, and this time MG3's plan to expand and convert the Rader United Methodist Church property into a charter school was probably sunk. This past April, MG3 of Hollywood began their efforts to transform the vacant, 58-year-old church into a 50-classroom charter school with about 900 students. Imagine Schools, a nonprofit organization, would operate the facility. The proposal was met with strong resistance from El Portal residents concerned about possible traffic congestion, litter, and crime in their tiny village of 2500.

Likewise the planning and zoning board, which is actually the elected Village Council in another role, questioned whether MG3 could ask for a needed zoning variance because the company didn't actually own the property at the corner of NE 2nd Avenue and 87th Street. All they could show was a contract to buy it from the Catholic Archdiocese of Miami.

By the July meeting, MG3 representatives had met twice with residents in hopes of addressing their fears, but residents and council members, sitting as the planning and zoning board, remained dubious. The question was whether the board would recommend to the council (themselves) granting a special exception for the property and approving the site plan to expand the building. According

to village manager Jason Walker, village staff and the traffic consultant they hired recommended denial of the site plan but approval of the special exception — but only if the number of students was reduced to 470.

MG3's attorney, Ben Fernandez, assured the board and assembled residents that the original site plan had been modified to reduce impacts on El Portal. He also said the number of students had been reduced to 750.

Educators from Imagine Schools in Broward County explained how their facilities operated, contending there would neither be discipline problems nor traffic jams, and that the school would be an educational asset to the community, especially to young families. As previously reported in the *BT* ("School Dazed in El

Portal," July 2009), Imagine Schools is the nation's largest and fastest-growing charter organization, operating 72 schools in 13 states, with 18 in Florida.

El Portal villagers nonetheless remained agitated. The main issue: feared heavy traffic and concern that the traffic studies from the village and MG3 were so conflicted. Mayor Joyce Davis asked, "People are not coming down on 2nd Avenue because the street is closed. This is not a clear picture. How can you use this traffic study?"

Attorney Fernandez attempted to answer, but passed the question to MG3's traffic-study consultant, Joaquin Vargas, whose detailed technical response didn't seem to satisfy anyone. That prompted El Portal resident Jairo Ribero to interject,

Continued on page 29

# Bring on the Green

At long last, Boulevard landscaping resumes — with spectacular results!

By Erik Bojnansky  
BT Contributor

The Florida Department of Transportation is warning of lane closures and flying dust, and asks for your indulgence as the agency commences “beautification” work along Biscayne Boulevard between 67th and 87th streets. “We ask for your patience and cooperation while this work is under way, since planting and other project-related work might require closing travel lanes and sidewalks at various times and locations,” states an FDOT advisory sent out at the end of July.

“Thank you for your patience is a standard thing to say to assure people that we appreciate their cooperation,” explains FDOT spokeswoman Monica Diaz.

But patience may be in short supply as some area stakeholders question the quality of past work done along the Boulevard by FDOT.

Joseph Canale, a Bayside resident, just wants to see something planted in Miami’s northern gateway already. “Our communities have spent over ten years dealing with the restoration of Biscayne Boulevard,” he says, “months and months of traffic congestion during construction, dust, dirt, noise, and we’re still waiting for completion.”

While landscaping has been completed along other parts of Biscayne Boulevard, the stretch between 67th Street and the Miami-Miami Shores border at 87th Street resembles, in Canale’s view, “a



Looking north from 69th Street: FDOT’s decision to plant new “hyper-growth” trees on the Boulevard has been widely praised.

desert. We’re still waiting for our abundance of sidewalk trees.”

Diaz insists the “sidewalk trees” are on the way. FDOT hired Miami-based Superior Landscaping to plant 211 gumbo limbo, black ironwood, live oak, royal palm, sabal palm, and Montgomery palm trees along those 20 blocks. The project, which officially began July 20 and is slated to be completed in spring 2010, also includes steel tree grates and those loopy “decorative sidewalk patterns” inspired by MiMo-era design.

Fran Rollason, president of the MiMo Biscayne Association, is glad FDOT will

be installing *steel* tree grates instead of the concrete ones used in an earlier round of landscaping work between 36th and 67th streets. Less than two months after contractors Vila and Sons completed \$1.5 million in work on that part of the Boulevard, Rollason was e-mailing city and FDOT officials about cracked tree grates. “They are definitely a tripping hazard,” she warned Enrique Tamayo, a consulting engineer for FDOT.

The cracked grates, however, had already become the problem of Miami’s Public Works Department. An agreement

between Miami and FDOT puts the responsibility on the city to maintain the trees, grates, irrigation, and lighting that FDOT installed. So far the city has replaced six broken grates at a cost of \$3900. Public Works director Stephanie Grindell says her department “advised FDOT that there is a design flaw. We have asked them to redesign the tree grates.”

FDOT’s Diaz denies any defects in the tree grates and blames inconsiderate delivery drivers. “The concrete tree grates were part of a coordinated effort to provide a distinctive treatment within the historic district,” she says, referring to the MiMo Historic District between 50th Terrace and 77th Street. “They are not defective for the purpose they were intended — that is, tree grates within a sidewalk. There are 194 tree grates on the project and only four have broken. This is because trucks have driven illegally on the sidewalk and broken them, as well as sections of sidewalk.”

For Dany Sebaaly, the tree-grate flap is irrelevant. It’s the landscaping that matters to him. Four years ago Sebaaly purchased a ground-floor retail space in The Bank lofts at 8101 Biscayne Blvd. Soon after he and his brother Hadi opened their Beau Living furniture store in 2007, FDOT began tearing up the Boulevard in front of them. Not only did FDOT remove what few trees had been there, the construction disrupted vehicular traffic and ripped open sidewalks for months at a time. “It was *very bad*,”

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## Village Place: Flush with Promise

Miami Shores’s spiffy new downtown lacks one critical thing: sewers

By Mark Sell  
Special to BT

This past April, county construction crews finished their work on NE 2nd Avenue in downtown Miami Shores. After 18 months, the roadway had its first coat of asphalt in 20 years, improved drainage, wider sidewalks, and a string of young live-oak trees. Village crews had worked on the sidewalks and landscaping as part of a \$1.3 million village beautification project. (The village has a \$12 million budget.) All that

work was setting the table for a new, vibrant downtown, abrim with cafés, shops, galleries, bookstores, organic markets, professional offices — and *people*. Village worthies have even come up with a snappy name: Village Place at Miami Shores.

And while NE 2nd Avenue, with its many vacant storefronts and eerie absence of pedestrians, may not yet be fully beautified, change is in the humid air. Medi-Station Urgent Care Center just opened at 96th Street, an AT&T store has opened two blocks north, next to the

Playground Theatre. And by the end of August, veteran Miami Beach restaurateur Sean Saladino will open Miss Moo, an ice cream and panini shop complete with free Wi-Fi and outdoor seating, at the busy southeast corner of 96th and NE 2nd Avenue.

Village Place, however, still lacks the vital ingredient needed to transform itself: sewers. Miami Shores is one of the few municipalities in Miami-Dade that is not tied into to the county’s sewer system. As every Shores resident and business owner knows, it’s all about septic

tanks, which have limited capacity to process waste water. Various county and state laws require a range of businesses to have sewer hookups, among them restaurants and many medical facilities. Without sewers, a bustling Village Place is not likely to materialize.

But perhaps — just perhaps — the stars are starting to align, largely because of the determination of the husband-and-wife team of Ruben and Gladys Matz. The Matzes, who own three of the most

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## Village Place

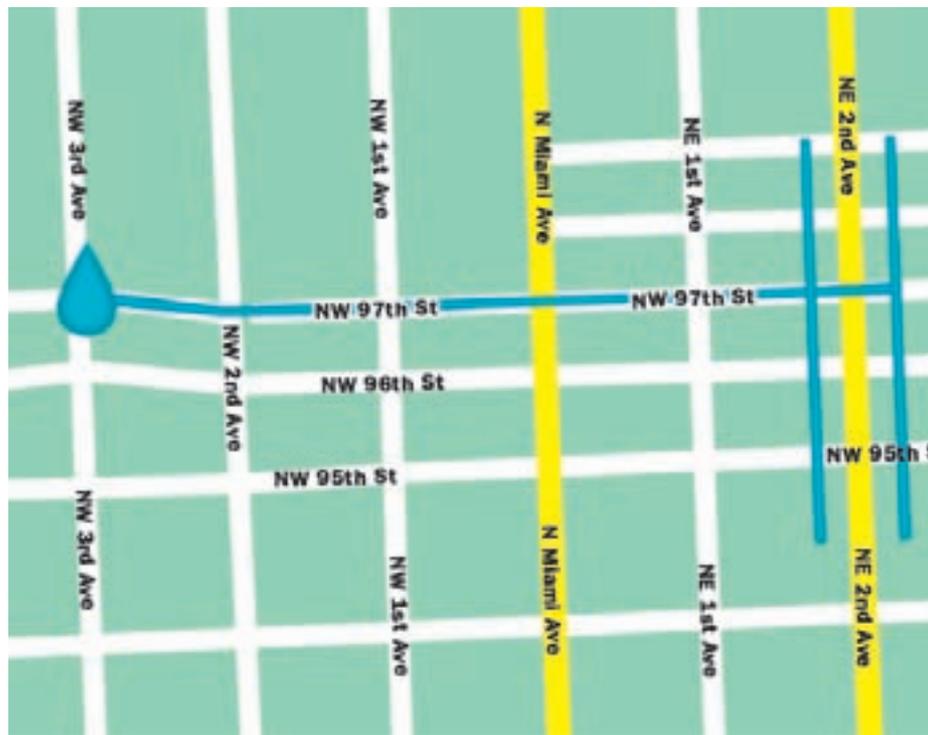
Continued from page 27

strategic blocks along NE 2nd Avenue, are gathering support to create a taxing district for downtown property owners, who would privately pay for the installation of sewers. (Intractable logistical problems prevented sewers from being installed during the reconstruction of 2nd Avenue.) “I am constantly getting phone calls from good prospective tenants and have to turn them away,” says 68-year-old Ruben Matz, a Realtor who bought into the area some five years ago with Gladys, his wife of 44 years. “The reason? No sewers. A doctor tried to move into a mortgage broker’s office but the health department wouldn’t let him.”

Twenty years ago, 2nd Avenue property owners, principally George Bennett and Henry Everett, said no to sewers. Bennett, who sold his building at 95th and 2nd Avenue to Matz in 2004, has since changed his mind. Today he says yes. “The new owners would like to have retail, and I agree with them 100 percent. Sewers are the only practical way to accommodate any retail trade. I want them to succeed. You know, I still have a stake in the property.”

If the Great Recession seems an odd time to harbor such ambitions, the Matzes are betting that the present Darwinian churn of layoffs, foreclosures, spooked business lenders, and property vultures will abate within two or three years. They believe this sleepy village within easy sight of downtown Miami’s thrusting skyscrapers offers something unique in the middle of one of America’s densest urban concentrations. And it has grown clear to the Matzes and others that the system of downtown septic tanks is not sustainable.

The Matzes have more than \$11 million invested in three blocks of property from 95th to 98th streets, but they say



The proposed sewer lines would run up and down the alleys, tunnel under NE 2nd Avenue, and hook up with the county line on NW 3rd Avenue.

their real goal is to realize a certain creative vision. “We don’t just want the rent. Downtown Miami Shores is a labor of love for us,” says Gladys Matz, who, with her husband, founded the Exit Shops chain of upscale clothing stores, for which she served as creative director. “We want a successful downtown for the next generation to remember. I’m excited about Miss Moo and the urgent care center. Miss Moo is going to start the whoop in traffic. You’ll start to see the strollers, the bicyclists, the people who want ice cream after dinner. I am reserving a space in the 9600 Building for an organic food store. We’re creating ‘lifestyles’ for all the vacant spaces. We want everyone to enjoy this town, and we can’t realize our vision until the sewer problem is taken care of.”

Under their plan, the sewer lines would run north and south under the rear service alleys on either side of NE 2nd Avenue between 94th and 99th streets. The line would tunnel under 2nd Avenue and run west to NW 3rd Avenue and 97th Street, in an unincorporated area about a block west of the village limits, where it would tap into a major county sewer line also used by Barry University. So far, the Matzes say, they’re getting an excellent reception from their fellow property owners, and “extraordinary” cooperation from Miami Shores manager Tom Benton and other senior staff.

Miami Shores itself would pay nothing. The property owners would foot the bill for the project by selling bonds to construct the system, then taxing themselves to retire the bonds over time.

Map by Marcy Mock

Ruben Matz estimates the cost would be around \$2 to \$3 million, although past estimates for sewer systems have run \$6 million or more. Still, a \$4 million bond issue could be affordable when amortized over 20 or 25 years among 12 or 15 property owners. Matz envisions this special taxing district becoming a reality in 12 to 18 months.

“After we sold Exit Shops,” Ruben says, “Gladys fell in love with the possibilities of downtown Miami Shores. This is an affluent community, with a changing demographic. It has so many families, and a large gay community with double earners with disposable income. I am also optimistic that times will get better.”

Sean Saladino hit upon the idea for Miss Moo after observing the sea of children who converged on the Miami Shores Country Club for an Easter egg hunt. The Matzes jumped at his idea, choosing to rent to the fledgling restaurant over blue-chip AT&T, which instead opened its new store further up the avenue. “These people are amazing,” Saladino says of the Matzes. “They put in a 900-gallon septic tank so I could open. Usually landlords just make it the tenant’s responsibility.”

Miami Shores Mayor Al Davis, fresh from squirming through some painful budget meetings, likes the idea of privately financed sewers for Village Place. “I have no objection to what they’re doing,” he says, “as long as it doesn’t cost the village any money.”

Despite the challenges, the Matzes, devout Jews who emigrated from Cuba, are pushing ahead with a sense of mission. “I walk with God,” says Ruben. “Whatever is possible, you can do right away. Whatever is impossible, takes a little time.”

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)



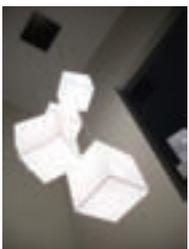
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## Green

Continued from page 27

Hadi Sebaaly says. “The Boulevard was closed. We didn’t have *any* business.”

At least Beau Living survived. Other businesses were less fortunate, says Rollason, who helped create the MiMo Biscayne Association to promote the interests of the MiMo Historic District’s residents and business owners. “We became incorporated in May 2007. By that summer we started getting phone calls,” she remembers. How many

businesses closed down during the reconstruction she can’t say, but six died within a single month. “It was pretty bloody, I’ll tell you.”

Now that the construction is over, Dany and Hadi Sebaaly say business has improved at Beau Living. Dany is optimistic that the Boulevard will flourish, especially if FDOT delivers on its promise of trees. “We need some shade. It is *very* important,” he stresses. “I’m not sure what kind of landscaping FDOT is planning to do here, but if it’ll be similar

to Miami Shores, it’ll definitely help.”

In the meantime, Rollason’s priorities have shifted from aesthetics to safety. “It will be nice when the trees are in and everything is done,” she says, “but until it is a safer place, it’s going to be hard to make the commercial district get to its potential.”

By safety, Rollason means the ability of pedestrians to cross the street without the risk of being mowed down by a speeding vehicle. Toward that end, Upper Eastside activists have been

telling city, county, and state officials about the need for FDOT to install crosswalks and build medians.

FDOT is looking into it, Diaz says. “We are conducting a pedestrian safety and mobility study,” she writes via e-mail. “Until we are further along with the study, we will not know which pedestrian enhancements are needed and which ones are feasible. The study is expected to be completed in September.”

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## Neighbor

Continued from page 26

This has been, in a nutshell, the city’s building-boom position over the past five years: The developers say their doing the right thing, and we’re making fast progress here, so back off.

With Onyx finally finished, the Cuartases replaced their roof and transformed the backyard into a miniature paradise of tropical plants, but their problems are far from over. Reports from multiple engineers who reviewed the site and building plans agree that it has no underground tanks to absorb rainfall, nor was it built to grade-level. Onyx’s property line, which encloses

two side of the Cuartas home, is one to three feet higher. As a result, Miami’s torrential summer rain has been flooding their yard and eroding the foundation of their house. The condo developers even drilled holes 30 feet up the west wall, so even more water pours into the narrow gap between the two properties.

In May 2009, the *South Florida Business Journal* reported that Corus Bank began foreclosure proceedings on 41 unsold Onyx units. The bank’s attorney, Paul Shelowitz of Akerman Senterfitt, didn’t return calls for comment. With too few units sold to even start a homeowners association, and the building going to the bank, it’s unclear

who is overseeing the property’s general maintenance. The bank needs to get this depreciating asset off its books as fast as possible, so investing in improvements probably isn’t part of the plan.

With the building in receivership, there’s not much else for the Cuartases to do, and few people left to whom they can complain. Both Miami Commissioner Linda Haskins and her District 2 successor Marc Sarnoff have “forwarded” their complaints to the building department over the past several years, and only Commissioner Tomas Regalado, now running for mayor, personally responded with a promise to help enforce the drainage issue. Whether he will — or even can — remains to be seen.

The Cuartas’s experienced — and continue to experience — the reality of being regular citizens of little influence caught between the well-greased gears of politics and development. Much good came out of the building boom, especially in Edgewater, but wildly out-of-scale towers and fast-and-loose oversight created a black mark on this neighborhood that isn’t going away. Maybe next time the city will get it right, but for residents like the Cuartas family, there isn’t going to be a next time. They’re very close, very big new neighbor is here to stay, and every time it rains, they are reminded of that immutable fact.

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## School

Continued from page 26

“How dare you say there’s not enough traffic in this community. When the church was open and there was a school there, we had a nightmare.”

Resident Joanie Hector, taking the discussion in a different direction, asked, “What benefit are we going to gain tax-wise from this?”

The answer from village manager Walker could not be precise because he

didn’t know the exact sale price of the property. “Between 25 and 30 thousand dollars,” he said. (The Archdiocese purchased the property for \$3.6 million in 2007. Archdiocese communications director Mary Ross Agosta said that her organization had been negotiating with MG3 to sell for “close to the purchase price.”)

The lobbying efforts by Imagine Schools did produce some results. Resident Vincent Biscombe said he was fortunate because his wife taught at a private school and was entitled to reduced tuition

for his children. But he was still happy that there might be a charter school that seemed to be “concerned with quality education.” Another young parent, Jenny King, said she was “willing to look past the traffic issues for the potential educational value.” She lives one block from the church property.

But the overall sentiment at the meeting was pessimistic. “This is not [about] education. It’s a business. This is not a community-support project. It’s just another way to make a buck,” concluded

El Portal resident Doug Cunningham. And with that, the board voted to recommend that the Village Council deny MG3’s request for both a variance and site approval.

When the Village Council met on July 28, however, members decided to give the MG3 team another chance to respond to traffic issues, which they will do on September 15, at the next meeting of the planning and zoning board.

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# Biscayne Crime Beat

Compiled by Derek McCann

## Crime or Scam?

*Belle Meade*

Victim secured his home (a relative term in this city) and when he later returned, many high-end items were missing: a Frank Muller gold watch valued at \$33,000, a diamond ring for \$5800, a shark tooth estimated at \$700, and a 60-inch television purchased for \$8000. Because of the substantial loss, fingerprints were lifted from the scene. But when the analysis came back, all the prints belonged to the victim. Guess that insurance payment won't be happening anytime soon.



spied exiting her apartment and locking the door. When finally confronted, the condo president erupted: "I'll enter your apartment anytime I want!" So much for that monthly maintenance fee going toward building improvements. How about investing in a video surveillance security system

## Taking Ownership

*100 Block of NE 19th Terrace*

A woman had purchased a home, the American Dream, and was in the process of remodeling it. However, this snowbird had to return to New York, and during her absence, an enterprising Miami burglar made his rounds. The locks of the house were changed and a ratty mattress was placed in the middle of the floor. The burglar had moved in! So much for the mantra "change the locks." Now our clever crooks are doing it for you. The man never did return for his mattress.

Continued on page 31

## Kitchen Sink Is Next

*Design District*

In the mistaken belief she was living in rural America, a Miami woman had left her sliding doors open, only to discover that her refrigerator — yes, her refrigerator — was missing from her home. There were no signs of forced entry and amazingly, no witnesses, save for the mice,

whose front door to their home in the wall, had become exposed. The victim will be having take-out tonight.

## Condo Board Hell

*Edgewater*

At some condominiums, you have to deal with harassment on a daily basis. But

stealing too? This condo owner, who is also an art collector, had noticed that, over the past few years, artworks had mysteriously disappeared from her home. (Another mystery: Why didn't she immediately call the police?) The only person with access to her unit was the president of the condo board, whom she had once

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**Crime Beat**

Continued from page 30

**Where Would Jesus Bank?**

*Omni*

Thinking she could use God as a kind of burglar alarm, a woman hid \$2000 in cash behind a picture of Jesus. Unfortunately, a sinner entered her home while she was at work and, in a possible act of contrition, removed the framed Jesus and placed it on the bed. Maybe he was going to pray for forgiveness? Not! He stole the money and made his way out. Note to area residents (and Republicans): Jesus was poor, so he's not watching over your money.

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*5700 Block of N. Miami Avenue*

We have many special types of criminals in Miami, but perhaps none as daring as our Fumigation Felons. In yet another incident involving gaseous infiltration, the victim tented his home but neglected to take adequate security precautions. The door was literally left open for violation. His home was robbed and ransacked,

and the criminal(s) did not seem to care about the toxic chemicals. *BT* readers, please keep this in mind when getting rid of little critters. The big critters are watching.

**Take My Wife — Please!**

*1800 Block of N. Bayshore Drive*

Sound asleep, the victim heard a noise and awoke to find a man hiding behind his door. The victim asked him what he was doing there (a rational question you might put to any intruder). The trespassing man said he was spying on his wife because she was cheating on him and apologized because he seemed to have jumped onto the wrong balcony. At which point the victim directed him to the proper balcony so he could continue his spying mission. Then the victim called police. The cuckolded spy was arrested.

**So Much for Working from Home**

*500 Block NE 69th Street*

A seemingly loyal employee had taken work files home with her, some of which were very important to her employer.

Two weeks later she quit, but never returned the files. A police report was filed, and a warrant issued for her arrest.

**Give Them an Inch...**

*Palm Grove*

A kindly man let a stranger into his home to use the bathroom. When nature calls, after all, who are we to judge, regardless of the shabby dress and gold teeth? The guest spent quite a bit of time in the bathroom, and when he finally finished his business, he refused to leave and asked to sleep in the gracious man's bed. The now horrified homeowner chased the man out of his house, and ran after him for a couple of blocks, but eventually could not keep up. At press time there had been no arrests, so it's best to beware gold-toothed men seeking bathrooms.

**The Kindness of Strangers: Reality Check**

*7800 Block of NE 2nd Avenue*

This wheelchair-bound victim had just gotten out of the hospital only to discover that his roommate had moved out. But the roommate was thoughtful

enough to leave behind a strange couple who already had keys to the apartment. One of them, a man called George, offered to drive the victim to the local Walgreens to fill a prescription. The victim handed George a bag filled with valuables for safekeeping. George helped him get out of the car and pushed his wheelchair. and then said, "I'll be right back." Of course he never came back, nor did he return the valuables. The victim was left stranded — in his wheelchair, at Walgreens, waiting to have his prescription filled.

**Smile, You're on Six Different Cameras**

*401 Biscayne Blvd.*

An employee at a Bayfront Marketplace business went on his morning break but never returned. When the boss later checked the cash register, he saw that it had been compromised the tune of \$400. As the employee must have known, security cameras were everywhere. No surprise that he was quickly arrested and sent to jail. One possible charge: felony dumb.

*Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com*

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# Big, Wet, and Fast

*That would be the TM Sisters' new performance extravaganza*

By Victor Barrenechea  
BT Contributor

Our town may never escape the DayGlo graphic stereotypes it established for itself in the 1980s, when *Miami Vice* imprinted on the nation's consciousness, the Miami Sound Machine ignited pop music with Latin rhythms, and roller rinks were booming with young people dancing on their skates to the sounds of Miami bass music.

It's only natural that some of this would eventually seep into the aesthetic vocabulary of our local contemporary arts, and there may be no better example than the Miami-based TM Sisters art duo. Later this month at Locust Projects, the two actual sisters will be unveiling *WHIRL CRASH GO!* a half-hour production that will meld athleticism with performance art. It promises to be a quintessentially Miami spectacle.

The sisters, Tasha and Monica Lopez De Victoria, have been working together since 2002, and have become known for their interactive video installations that sometimes mimic the mechanics of classic video games; elaborate performance pieces that often incorporate video backdrops; and brightly colored collages, loaded with angular shapes, photocopied found images, fabrics, and paint. They have exhibited internationally, everywhere from Great Britain to Russia, from Poland to Turkey. A big break came in 2005 with their inclusion in the widely publicized traveling group exhibition "Uncertain States of America: American Art in the 3rd Millennium."

While much of their work, and the favorable notice it has garnered, occurs outside South Florida, the two have participated in countless local group shows, and have also had successful solo shows in now defunct art spaces like Rocket Projects Gallery and the Moore Space, as well as a recent one at Broward's Art and Culture Center of Hollywood. These days you can catch them at various nightclubs and parties VJ-ing or "video mixing," the visual equivalent of what a DJ does with two turntables, providing stunning visual backdrops on large screens for late-night partygoers.



Photo courtesy of TM Sisters

**TM Sisters Tasha and Monica will use their sports passions — speed skating and synchronized swimming — as Miami metaphors.**

Though it seems like they've been as busy as ever, the sisters say they've actually been in a kind of a self-imposed exile for nearly a year, turning down a variety of exhibition offers to concentrate on making new work. "For almost a year we said no to practically everything," Tasha notes.

Their creative time off has been productive, they say, and led to the development of one major project that had been percolating for some three years. "It's been a while since we've dreamt of this," says Monica, describing the work as something that had been floating around

in their heads but never coalesced in a way that allowed for presentation on a grand scale — until now.

The opportunity finally arrived when they won the Locust Projects' second annual Hilger Artist Project Award, named for Austrian collector and benefactor Ernst Hilger. More than

70 artists from around the globe submitted proposals. As winners, the TM Sisters were given six summer weeks of free

reign over Locust Projects' expansive new Design District space in order to create an ambitious, site-specific work that would be unveiled as the first

**The sisters were given six weeks of free reign over Locust Projects' expansive new Design District space in order to create an ambitious, site-specific work.**

exhibition of the art season. The \$2000 honorarium is almost an afterthought compared to the prestige and artistic possibilities presented by a big empty space just waiting to be transformed.

Last year's winner, Miami-based filmmaker Clifton Childree, showed what could be done with such an opportunity when he turned Locust's then-Wynwood location into an abandoned amusement park movie set, complete with interactive fun house and loops of his short films running throughout the space.

Speaking with the *BT*, the sisters are cautious, careful not to reveal too much about the performance's narrative. Monica explains the evasiveness this way: "I don't want to tell the story in a way that it's not meant to be communicated."

Tasha adds, "It needs to be expressed in the actual medium it's meant for." Being too forthright about the project, she says, would be "like a watching a movie trailer that says too much."

They did allow that at least 20 to 30 people would be working on the production, including some behind the scenes. Tasha boasts that it's their biggest and most enterprising performance to date. For one thing, it involves the use of an above-ground swimming pool in the gallery space, filled with water and capable of accommodating a number of people. The only collaborators the sisters would mention by name were electronic sound artist Otto Von Schirach, who would be composing a booty-bass-infused soundtrack for the project, and Karelle Levy, owner of the Miami-based KREL-wear fashion line, who will be contributing to costume design.

One of the overriding themes of the project addresses the sisters' own heritage. Their mother is half German and half Swedish, while their father is Puerto Rican. To Tasha and Monica, the different backgrounds present opposing traits and values, a kind of dynamic tension, with the Germanic/Scandinavian side representing staunchness and responsibility and the Caribbean side characterized by brightness, fluidity, and liveliness.

Other *WHIRL CRASH GO!* collaborators share similarly mixed

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## TM Sisters

Continued from page 32

backgrounds, including Von Schirach, who is of Cuban/German descent. "Miami is this big combination of cultures," says Monica. "All of us are really proud of our city and our backgrounds." The sisters hint that the work itself will be a microcosm of Miami's ethnic and cultural diversity.

To that end, the performance will involve two competing teams, each personifying one side of their heritage, and each engaged in an athletic pursuit near and dear to the sisters' hearts: synchronized swimming with its orderly grace, and freestyle roller skating with its carefree spontaneity.

"We wanted to do a big production combining our two biggest sports," says Tasha, an avid speed skater since the age of 11. A few years ago she tried to start her own roller derby team here in Miami. Though that never materialized, she briefly became a "jammer" (the designated skater on a roller derby team who scores points) for a Fort Lauderdale team known as the Broward County Derby Grrls. Unfortunately her constant traveling as an artist



Photo courtesy of Otto von Schirach

**Sound artist Otto Von Schirach will create a soundtrack for the performance piece.**

kept her from properly dedicating herself to the team. Nevertheless she continues to skate, mostly at Super Wheels Skating Center in Kendall (formerly Hot Wheels), where she skates along to classic freestyle and bass music in a less constrained manner. "The most fun part," she says, "is



Photo courtesy of Karelle Levy

**Karelle Levy, of KRELwear fashions, is designing the performers' costumes.**

having the Miami bass and everyone skating in rhythm."

Meanwhile Monica has been involved in the world of synchronized swimming also since she was 11. She competed until the age of 20, and was among the nation's top-ranked athletes, with sponsorships

by Nike and Speedo. Monica describes the sport as being "very technical and artistic." Although she no longer competes, she remains a member of a professional synchronized swimming troupe that performs at celebrity parties and on television commercials.

The two sisters are approaching *WHIRL CRASH GO!* energetically, citing their stints video-mixing at parties and clubs a huge inspiration. "All of it," says Tasha, "is going to look a lot like the style, feel, and flow of video DJ-ing." Together they hope to put on a seminal performance that will not only reflect the idiosyncrasies of their colorful personalities, but also that of their beloved city.

*Performances will take place on August 29 and October 10 at 8:00 p.m., Locust Projects, 155 NE 38th St., Miami. For more information call 305-576-8570 or visit [www.locustprojects.org](http://www.locustprojects.org). The production's set construction will be open to the public every Wednesday through Saturday from noon to 5:00 p.m. until the performance date.*

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233 NW 36th St., Miami  
305-576-4278  
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**ALEJANDRA VON HARTZ FINE ARTS**

2630 NW 2nd Ave., Miami  
305-438-0220  
www.alejandravonhartz.net  
Through September 5:

"Luna Park" with Daniel Arsham, Luis Gispert, Gean Moreno, Martin Oppel, Ernesto Oroza, and Gavin Perry

**AMAYA GALLERY**

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

**ARNO VALERE ART GALLERY BY RICART**

3900 NE 1st Ave., Miami  
305-576-5000  
www.valericartgallery.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**ART FUSION**

1 NE 40th St., Miami  
305-573-5730  
www.artfusiongallery.com  
Through September 23:  
"Esoteric Illusions" with various artists  
**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**ART GALLERY AT GOVERNMENT CENTER**

111 NW 1st St., Suite 625, Miami  
305-375-4634  
www.miamidadearts.org  
Through August 7:  
Solo show by Robert Chambers

**ARTFORMZ**

171 NW 23rd St., Miami  
305-572-0040  
www.artformz.net  
Through September 5:  
"Hotter Than a Match Head" with Natasha Duwin, Sibel Kocabasi, Ray Paul, PJ Mills, Alette Simmons-Jimenez, Rosario Rivera-Bond, Rai Escale, Anja Marais, Ramón Williams, Guillermo Portieles, Donna Haynes, and Gisela Savdie

**BAKEHOUSE ART COMPLEX**

561 NW 32nd St., Miami  
305-576-2828  
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**BAS FISHER INVITATIONAL**

180 NE 39th St., #210, Miami  
By appointment: info@basfisherinvitational.com  
www.basfisherinvitational.com  
Through August 8:  
Solo show by Kathleen Hudspeth  
**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**BERNICE STEINBAUM GALLERY**

3550 N. Miami Ave., Miami  
305-573-2700  
www.bernicesteinbaumgallery.com  
Through September 5:  
"Nine Lives: Dog Days of Summer" with various artists  
**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**CAROL JAZZAR CONTEMPORARY ART**

158 NW 91st St., Miami Shores  
305-490-6906



Tim Davis, *Rainbow Bread*, 2006, at World Class Boxing.

www.cjazzart.com  
By appointment: carol@cjazzart.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**CENTER FOR VISUAL COMMUNICATION**

541 NW 27th St., Miami  
305-571-1415  
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Ongoing:  
Solo show by Clarence Laughlin

**CHAREST-WEINBERG GALLERY**

250 NW 23rd St., Miami  
305-292-0411  
www.charest-weinberg.com  
Through August 31:  
Pedro Barbeito and Jason Gringler

**CHELSEA GALLERIA**

2441 NW 2nd Ave., Miami  
305-576-2950  
www.chelseagalleria.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.  
Through August 1:  
"Cosmos" by Tonel

**CS GALLERY**

787 NE 125th St., North Miami  
305-308-6561  
www.chirinosanchez.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**DAMIEN B. CONTEMPORARY ART CENTER**

282 NW 36th St., Miami  
305-573-4949  
www.damienb.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**DAVID CASTILLO GALLERY**

2234 NW 2nd Ave., Miami  
305-573-8110  
www.castilloart.com  
Through August 1:  
Group show with Adler Guerrier, Aramis Gutierrez, Quisqueya Henriquez, Susan Lee-Chun, Pepe Mar, Glexis Novoa, Javier Piñón, Leyden Rodriguez-Casanova, Frances Trombly, and Wendy Wischer

**DELUXE ART GALLERY**

2051 NW 2nd Ave., Miami  
786-200-4971  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**DIANA LOWENSTEIN FINE ARTS**

2043 N. Miami Ave., Miami  
305-576-1804  
www.dfinearts.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**DIASPORA VIBE GALLERY**

3938 NE 39th St., Miami  
305-573-4046  
www.diasporavibe.net  
Through August 5:  
"My Space: Miami" by Jorge Rojas  
August 8:  
"Low Lives" with various artists  
August 13 through September 24:  
"Caribbean Crossroads Series — Clay" Michael Layne, Caroline Holder, and Erman Gonzalez  
**Reception August 8, 6 to 9 p.m.**  
**Reception August 13, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**DORSCH GALLERY**

151 NW 24th St., Miami  
305-576-1278  
www.dorschgallery.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**DOT FIFTYONE ART SPACE**

51 NW 36th St., Miami  
305-573-9994  
www.dotfiftyone.com  
Through August 30:  
"home work" with various artists and "Operation – WORKLOAD" by Magnus Sigurdarson  
**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**EDGAR ACE GALLERY**

7520 NE 4th Ct., Miami  
305-877-2401  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**EDGE ZONES CONTEMPORARY ART**

47 NE 25th St., Miami  
305-303-8852  
www.edgezones.org  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**ELITE ART EDITIONS GALLERY**

151 NW 36th St., Miami  
305-403-5856  
www.elitearteditions.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**ETRA FINE ART**

10 NE 40th St., Miami

305-438-4383  
www.etrafineart.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**FACHE ARTS**

750 NE 124th St., North Miami #2  
305-975-6933  
www.fachearts.com  
Through August 28:  
"Green Art" by Carla Fache  
**Reception August 28, 7 to midnight**

**FREDRIC SNITZER GALLERY**

2247 NW 1st Pl., Miami  
305-448-8976  
www.snitzer.com  
August 8:  
"Child Foundation Charity Event" with Zack Balber, Hernan Bas, Loriel Beltran, Timothy Buwalda, COOPER, Naomi Fisher, Jacin Giordan, Jiae Hwang, Natalya Laskis, Beatriz Monteavaro, José Felix Perez, Gavin Perry, Bert Rodriguez, Cristina Lei Rodriguez, Jordan Service, Jen Stark, Alex Sweet, Tatiana Vahan, and Michael Vasquez  
**Reception August 8, 8 to 10 p.m.**

**GALLERY DIET**

174 NW 23rd St., Miami  
305-571-2288  
www.gallerydiet.com  
Through August 1:  
"Oh Nancy" curated by Brian Burkhardt with various artists

**GARY NADER FINE ART**

62 NE 27th St., Miami  
305-576-0256  
www.garynader.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

**HARDCORE ARTS CONTEMPORARY SPACE**

3326 N. Miami Ave., Miami  
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**HAROLD GOLEN GALLERY**

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**KELLEY ROY GALLERY**

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305-447-3888  
www.kelleyroygallery.com  
Through September 30:  
"Handmade Horizons and Songs" by Sebastian Spreng  
**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**KEVIN BRUK GALLERY**

2249 NW 1st Pl., Miami  
305-576-2000  
www.kevinbrukgallery.com  
Through August 31:  
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**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**KUNSTHAUS MIAMI**

3312 N. Miami Ave., Miami  
305-438-1333  
www.kunsthhaus.org.mx  
Through August 30:  
Group show with Armando de la Garza, Ivan Puig, and Leonardo Ramirez  
**Reception August 8, 7 to 10 p.m.**

**LEITER GALLERY**

6900 Biscayne Blvd., Miami

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## Art Listings

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305-389-2616  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### LOCUST PROJECTS

155 NE 38th St., Miami  
305-576-8570  
www.locustprojects.org  
August 29 through October 17:  
"WHIRL CRASH GO!" by the TM Sisters  
Performance August 29, 8 p.m.

### LUIS ADELANTADO GALLERY

98 NW 29th St., Miami  
305-438-0069  
www.luisadelantadomiami.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### LURIE — KAVACHNINA GALLERY

46 NW 36th St., Miami  
305-448-2060  
www.lurie-kavachnina.com  
Through August 7: "Pieles" by Andres Dominguez

### 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  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### MIAMI CENTER FOR THE PHOTOGRAPHIC ARTS

1601 SW 1st St., Miami  
305-649-9575  
www.mcpagallery.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.



Ivan Puig, *Crecimientos Artificiales*, digital print, 2008, at Kunsthau Miami.

### MIAMI ART GROUP GALLERY

21 NW 36th St., Miami  
305-576-2633  
www.miamiartgroup.com  
Ongoing: Solo exhibition by James Kitchens

### MIAMI ART SPACE

244 NW 35th St., Miami  
305-438-9002  
www.miamiartspace.com  
August 8 through August 21:  
"Art Axis: An Art Exhibit Benefiting the Children's Home Society of Florida" curated by Adad Balcacer, with Roger B. Josafat Miranda, Newton Wallace, Phil Fung, and more  
Reception August 8, 6 to 10 p.m.

### MIAM-DADE COLLEGE, CENTER GALLERY

300 NE 2nd Ave.,  
Bldg. 1, Room 1365, Miami  
305-237-3696  
www.mdc.edu  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### MIAMI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN

1501 Biscayne Blvd., Miami  
305-428-5700  
www.mymiu.com  
Through August 14:  
"Like Cats and Dogs" with various artists

### MUSEO VAULT

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www.museovault.com  
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### OUR HOUSE WEST OF WYNWOOD

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305-490-2976  
www.oh-wow.com  
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### PANAMERICAN ART PROJECTS

2450 NW 2nd Ave., Miami  
305-573-2400  
www.panamericanart.com  
Through August 13:  
Shows by Leopoldo Romafiach and the Cuban Vanguardia and Héctor Molné  
Reception August 8, 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.

### PRESSITON ART GALLERY

4100 N. Miami Ave., Miami  
786-925-2930  
www.pressitonart.com  
August 27 through September 19:  
New works by Laura DiNello, Elena Madden, Tobia Makover, Cedric Smith, Terry Strickland, and Jamie Baldrige

### PUZZLEMENT GALLERY

81 NW 24th St., Miami  
917-929-8559  
www.puzzlementart.com  
Ongoing show with Kevin Brady, Manuel Carbonell,

Continued on page 36

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Continued from page 35

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  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### STASH GALLERY

162 NE 50 Terr., Miami  
305-992-7652  
www.myspace.com/stashgallery  
Through August 10:

"I don't think he gave her the time that night but damn near — damn near" by Joseph O'Neal  
**Reception August 10, 7 to midnight**

### STEVE MARTIN STUDIO

66 NE 40th St., Miami  
305-484-1491  
www.stevemartinfineart.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI PROJECTS SPACE

2200 NW 2nd Ave., Miami  
305-284-2542  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### UNTITLED 2144

2144 NE 2nd Ave., Miami  
305-576-2112  
www.untitled2144.com  
Call gallery for exhibition information.

### WALLFLOWER GALLERY

10 NE 3rd St., Miami  
305-579-0069

www.wallflowergallery.com  
myspace.com/  
wallflowergallery  
Call gallery for  
exhibition information.

### WOLFGANG ROTH & PARTNERS FINE ART

201 NE 39th St., Miami  
305-576-6960  
www.wrpfineart.com  
Call gallery for  
exhibition information.

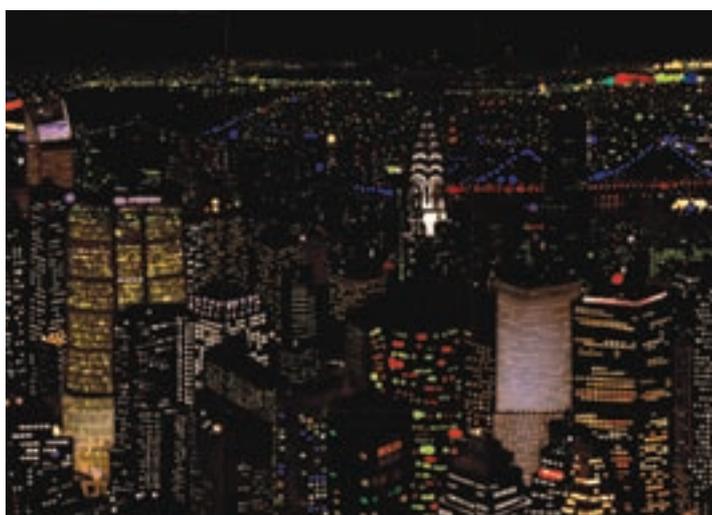
### MUSEUM & COLLECTION EXHIBITS

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http://thefrost.fiu.edu/  
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Through August 23:  
"2009 Cintas Finalist Fellowship Exhibition" with various artists  
Through September 16:  
"Genetic Portraits" by Nela Ochoa  
Through September 20:  
"What Comes After" by Nancy Friedemann



Courtney Johnson, *New York*, pigment prints from *Cliché-Verre, 2009*, at Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

### LOWE ART MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

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www.lowemuseum.org  
Through October 4:  
"Through the Lens: Photography from the Permanent Collection" with various artists

### MIAMI ART MUSEUM

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# Culture Briefs

## From French Aristocrats to Blubbery Elvis

Written more than 300 years ago by master French comedic playwright Jean Baptiste Poquelin (better known as Molière), *Le Bourgeois gentilhomme* (*The Bourgeois Gentleman*) has been transformed by Miami's own Paul Tei, retitled *Viva Bourgeois!*, and is now onstage **Thursday-Saturday through August 22** at Miami Light Project's Light Box Studio (3000 Biscayne Blvd.). Veteran director Tei has kept much of Molière script but has ingeniously set it in a place that looks a lot like Graceland with a main character who resembles Elvis. Like the original, though, it mercilessly mocks just about everyone, from upper-class snobs to country bumpkins. Tickets are \$25-\$30. Students \$10 Thursdays. For reservations call 305-576-6377 or visit [www.madcattheatre.org](http://www.madcattheatre.org).



**Silky Smooth Hair Relaxer by Cristina Molina**

## Short Films Long on Originality

After reviewing short films (under five minutes) submitted by more than 50 of South Florida's most creative filmmakers, an independent jury has chosen the best of the bunch to be featured at the Museum of Contemporary Art's "Optic Nerve XI" festival. The screenings take place at the museum (770 NE 125th St., North Miami) on **Friday, August 7**. Find out which short gains admission to the museum's permanent collection, courtesy of funding by Starbucks Coffee Company, the festival's sponsor. The films unspool at 7:00 and 9:00 p.m., and museum admission gets you in, but seating is limited and *reservations are required*, so don't delay. Call 305-893-6211 or visit [www.mocanomi.org](http://www.mocanomi.org).

## If 50 Is the New 30, Do I Really Need to See This Play?

Upon reaching middle age, some men develop an irresistible urge to own a

sports car. Some women of a certain age become obsessed with anything that sags. Many of the trials and tribulations of aging are shown for the nonsense they are in the irreverent *Midlife! The Crisis Musical*, playing at the Main Street Players (6766 Main St., Miami Lakes) **August 7-23**. This stage play confronts the existential angst that often accompanies midlife, and slays it with rip-roaring laughter. Tickets are \$15-\$20. Shows are Friday and Saturday at 8:00 p.m., Sunday at 5:00 p.m. Call 305-558-3737 or visit [www.mainstreetplayers.com](http://www.mainstreetplayers.com).

## Storm Prep? We Don't Need No Stinkin' Storm Prep...

The Historical Museum of Southern Florida (101 W. Flagler St.) wants you to be well prepared for the hurricane that, sooner or later, is going to huff and puff and try to blow your house down. You probably think you're already prepared, which is why the museum wants to lure you in for *free* on **Saturday, August 8**. As part of Hurricane History 101, kids can make a hurricane in bottle that works like a snow globe. Adults will be vividly reminded how our area has fared in past storms. And you'll get fresh new tips on how to prepare smartly. Don't miss the Storm Gourmet demonstrations: elegant meals you can make after the electricity goes off. From noon to 4:00 p.m. Parking discount available. Call 305-375-1492.

## Kiddie Karts on Steroids

Remember go-karts? How about the Malibu Grand Prix off the Palmetto? Low-slung little cars that you could get up to 40 mph or so? Try this: Super souped-up competition karts tearing through real grand prix tracks and hitting 150 mph on straight-aways. Just 1.5 inches off the ground. Wow! That's what awaits you at the 2009 South Florida Rmax Challenge at Homestead-Miami Speedway (1 Speedway Blvd., Homestead) on **Saturday, August 8, and Sunday, August 9**. Saturday is qualifying. On Sunday the feature races start at 3:00 p.m.. Top two winners in each class will head to the U.S. national championships. The track opens at 8:00 a.m. Pit passes are a mere \$10. *Free* general admission.

Call 305-230-5000 or visit [www.homesteadkarting.net](http://www.homesteadkarting.net).

## Miami's Kinky Art Scene Revealed

*Death Print*, Aiden Dillard's darkly humorous feature film starring Miami classic-car mogul Ted Vernon and fetish queen Rubber Doll, takes viewers into the seamy side of Miami's burgeoning art scene, where murder and revenge paint the city a bloody mess. Taking liberty with Charles Bronson and *Death Wish*, this fourth feature of Dillard's adeptly shows the writer/director's attention to detail with the dangerous, offbeat, and kinky. The film's premiere is **Saturday, August 8** at the Colony Theater (1040 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach). Tickets are \$12. Screening starts at 8:00 p.m. Call 305-674-1040 or go to [www.ticketmaster.com](http://www.ticketmaster.com).



## Fairchild Flings Open Its Gates — For Free

If you have never been to Fairchild Tropical Botanic Garden (10901 Old Cutler Rd., Coral Gables), you must be new to Miami, and you can't possibly imagine how enchantingly beautiful is this lushly landscaped oasis. So **every Sunday this August** admission is *free*. With more than 80 acres of rain forests, butterfly gardens, glistening lakes, flower gardens, exotic and magnificent flowering trees, a two-story indoor garden, and more species of palms and bamboo than you knew existed — well, this is the best chance to finally see what you've been missing. Open 9:30 a.m. to 4:30 p.m. Call 305-667-1651 or visit [www.fairchildgarden.org](http://www.fairchildgarden.org).

## Snakes in a Museum!

For those not averse to legless creatures that slither and hiss, the Miami Science Museum (3280 S. Miami Ave.) presents this year's Snake Day on **Sunday,**

**August 16**. Got a snake? Bring it. Enter contests for prizes. Two free admissions are given for each snake competing. Speak with experts and see snakes galore, including the monstrous Anaconda, one of the largest on earth. Try the edible crispy ants, stir-fried mealworms (we dare you), and other delicacies cooked up by creepy crawler expert Kat Duran. Admission is \$15.30 adults. \$13.60 students with ID. Open 10:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Call 305-646-4256 or visit [www.miamisci.org](http://www.miamisci.org).

## Land of Oz, Students of Dance, and Quite a Splash

Michael Jackson was just 19 when he played the scarecrow in the movie *The Wiz*. Two years later *Fame* hit theaters, spawning a television series, and now a film remake out later this year. Three years after that, 1983's *Flashdance* won the Academy Award for Best Song with "Flashdance: What a Feeling." Now all three original movies (two of them 35mm prints) return to the *really* big screen for "Flickin' Summer," a new film series at the gorgeous Gusman Center for the Performing Arts (174 E. Flagler St., downtown). All screenings are on Thursdays at 7:00 p.m. August 20: *Fame*. August 27: *Flashdance*. September 3: *The Wiz*. Ticket prices not set at press time, so call 305-372-0925 or visit [www.gusmancenter.org](http://www.gusmancenter.org).

## Reggae: From Music to Film to Stage

A new stage musical brings the poignant story and all the remarkable music from a landmark film credited with helping to create a worldwide love of reggae. *The Harder They Come* plays at the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts (1300 Biscayne Blvd.) **August 29-September 13**. When a young singer in Jamaica hits it big time in reggae, the music industry and the drugs accompanying it cause him to lose his way. Even with the law after him, he risks everything to keep singing the music he loves. Tickets are \$50-\$95. Shows begin at 8:00 p.m. Matinees at 2:00 p.m. Call 305-949-6722 or visit [www.arshtcenter.org](http://www.arshtcenter.org).

Compiled by BT intern Brian Horowitz

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)

# Lots of Potential, All of It Unrealized

Note to City of Miami: It's called Eaton Park, remember?

By Jim W. Harper  
BT Contributor

**S**leepy little Eaton Park is a study in the art of transitional space. On one side are the FEC railroad tracks and the warehouses and loading docks of the Little River Industrial District. On the other side and farther east from the tracks you'll find the 85-year-old private Cushman School, where the annual tuition for preschool kids is \$12,000.

The residents north and west of the park are, by and large, poor and Haitian. Not far to the east, both north and south, the prosperous residents of Morningside enjoy the security of guard gates and barricaded streets as they sip cocktails poolside or congregate and relax at 55th Street Station.

In between the extremes sits humble Eaton Park. It is so humble, in fact, that the City of Miami does not include it on the Website of the Parks and Recreation Department. Even the name "Eaton" fails to register on the Miami meter.

What does register is the Lemon City Branch Library on the northern border of the park. This tidy building provides the restrooms and rain shelter that the park lacks. Just don't visit on Fridays or Sundays, when it is closed.

Swirls of barbed wire cover the rear roof of the library, which overlooks the park. This imposing defense system indicates that those windows have been breached in the past. (Vandals? Or people so desperate to use the library



**Tempting:** All that nice grass just begs for a pick-up game, but the city says no go.

they'll break glass to get in?)

Security is the biggest question mark swirling around the park. The single night light near the basketball courts was not working during July visits, and the fence cannot be locked. It might be fair to assume that at night the park may attract some unsavory elements.

But during the day it appears peaceful and calm, except for the traffic along NE 4th Court. This busy alternative to Biscayne Boulevard divides the park into two distinct sections.

Eaton Park can be summarized in three words: grass, dominoes, and basketball.

The main section of Eaton, adjacent

BT photos by Jim W. Harper

pick-up game, you have to pay the city its cut. But when no one is looking, illicit games of soccer may erupt. One eyewitness, who shall remain nameless, told me as much.

Besides the annoying signs warning of "field use by permit only," Eaton Park does not offer much in terms of direction or identity. The imposing and ugly totems announcing the Little River Industrial District dwarf the park's small metallic signs along NE 4th Court. Um, when is Little River Pride Day?

Activity in the park's main section follows distinct schools of thought: Either you play dominoes or you sleep. The small playground pit seems to get little attention. But the benches and the limited shade attract plenty of snoozers.

The seven burgundy-colored gaming tables placed along the park's sturdy



**Tot lot and barbed wire:** Sharp contrasts, just like the neighborhoods around Eaton Park.

to the library, features a large grass field. The field shows little sign of usage because A) the lack of shade makes it nearly unbearable in the summer months, and B) it requires a permit from the Parks and Recreation Department before it can be used for team sports. This permit must be filed ten days before the "event," thereby killing the American concept of the pick-up game.

In Miami, if you want to have a

green fence draw a regular crowd, although most of the tables remain empty owing to that relentless lack of shade. An oversize checkerboard is built into the middle of each four-person table. This is BYOD — bring your own dominoes.

Across the street and adjacent to the train tracks is the other third of the park, taken up mostly by two basketball

Continued on page 39

## EATON PARK

**Park Rating**  
  
**6015 NE 4th Ct.**  
**Miami**  
**305-416-1350**  
**Hours:** Sunrise to sunset  
**Picnic tables:** Yes  
**Barbecues:** Yes  
**Picnic pavilions:** No  
**Tennis courts:** No  
**Athletic fields:** Yes  
**Night lighting:** No  
**Swimming pool:** No  
**Playground:** Yes  
**Special features:** Library branch

## Eaton Park

Continued from page 38

courts. A tall fence surrounds the court closer to the railroad tracks, whereas the other court remains open. One open, one fenced? Perhaps a misguided safety measure to designed keep basketballs from bouncing onto the tracks? That stretch of the FEC tracks only rarely carries a train, and then usually at night. North of the courts, an odd-shaped patch of grass sits idle. It looks abandoned, forlorn.

Trash accumulates around the fences and under the benches. This park must be popular with the “lunch and dump” crowd.

The park seems to draw a distinctly masculine crowd, although there is a very nurturing element in the park’s northeast corner. There stands the brightly painted Eaton Park Day Care center, which accepts children as young as one.

The upside of Eaton Park is its accessibility. Near several schools, a library, and a high-density neighborhood, not to mention within walking distance of the



**On the west side of NE 4th Court: Two basketball courts and maybe a community garden?**

Boulevard, the park could be the neighborhood’s heart.

It could also be one of those inner-city parks that offers just enough green space and shade to keep area residents sane. But with restrictions on usage of the field and very limited shade, the park is most likely not fulfilling its destiny.

Here’s where Eaton Park could clean up its act and compete with nearby

Legion Park, Morningside Park, and the Little Haiti Soccer Park. Number one, fix the new fence. People pass in and out of the gap where it was broken at the library’s southeast corner.

Number two, create a community garden in the passive space north of the basketball courts. That would get all types of residents to visit regularly. This area will need a combination of fencing

and landscaping to separate it from the train tracks.

Once people start gardening, they could also be enlisted to beautify the area south of the courts, where an apartment building looks out over a field of weeds. Not pretty.

Put one of the park’s “regulars” on litter patrol. One of their own will get them to clean up their act.

Install a complimentary lemonade stand where visitors can also rent pillows and blankets to assist with their park power naps.

Cover the barbed wiring with green glitter.

Okay, so there is only so much that can be done to make this park more appealing. But please, City of Miami, replace the angry “permit only” signs with a more humane version. Something like “fields of children encouraged.”

Maybe Miami’s preschoolers from across the economic spectrum will finally put Eaton Park on the map. Or at least help it find its way onto the city’s Website.

*Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com*

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# Canaries in the Oceanic Coal Mine

*When sea turtles struggle to survive, it means big trouble*

By Jim W. Harper  
BT Contributor

Miami-Dade remains the only county in South Florida without a lighting ordinance to protect sea turtles. Monroe County adopted its ordinance in 1994, Broward County in 1989, and Palm Beach County in 1987. Along Florida's Atlantic coast, only Miami-Dade and Duval counties (Jacksonville) lack countywide laws.

To remedy this embarrassment, the Miami-Dade County Commission can simply copy and paste the state's lighting ordinance, available online here: [www.myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/Seaturtle\\_Protection.htm](http://www.myfwc.com/WILDLIFEHABITATS/Seaturtle_Protection.htm). Send the link to your county commissioner at [www.miamidade.gov/commiss/](http://www.miamidade.gov/commiss/).

The ordinance can be adopted as is or customized to the Miami-Dade's needs. "The Florida Wildlife Commission would be pleased to guide them in drafting the ordinance," offers Blair Witherington, research scientist with the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission. He can be reached at 321-674-1801.

But perhaps Miami-Dade has no will to protect endangered species. Perhaps it is trying to follow the example of Cuba, where it is legal to hunt loggerhead turtles. Cuba = sea turtle death. Miami = sea turtle ...? The commissioners can complete that equation.

A lighting ordinance in Miami-Dade County would not single-handedly save sea turtles, but it would be a very important step symbolically. It would show the world that Miami cares.

Both nesting females and newly hatched sea turtles are distracted by

artificial light. Females may abandon attempts to lay eggs, and hatchlings may crawl toward the artificial light instead of toward a moonlit ocean. Every year disoriented baby sea turtles try to cross coastal A1A. Do not relate this story to your children as the ending is not happy.

Two local municipalities along A1A have already proven their will to protect sea turtles: Golden Beach in 1997 and Miami Beach in 2006. Their lighting ordinances protect a few miles of beaches, but most of the county's shoreline remains unaffected.

Sea turtles face many other threats besides beachfront lighting, but it is one of the challenges within our control. New coastal construction must comply with state law and obtain a permit from the state's Department of Environmental Protection, which has guidelines for lighting. Existing structures, however, are not covered.

Beach visitors may have noticed the yellow tape and signs marking current sea turtle nests. The nests are marked by volunteers and county workers who scan the beaches every morning. In addition to providing some protection, the marking of nests allows for accurate data collection and the review of hatched nests, which takes place in late summer. Humans should keep their distance from the marked nests.

"You wouldn't want to drive an umbrella stand in there," notes Beth Brost, a biological scientist with the Florida Wildlife Research Institute. "The best thing the public can do for sea turtles is to keep trash off the beaches, keep lights off at night, and respect the nests that are marked off."

Current data show that loggerhead turtle nests are declining in Florida. Our beaches are ground zero for loggerheads as

they nest here in the greatest numbers. If their decline continues, loggerhead turtles will join the other six sea turtle species on the U.S. list of endangered species. In U.S. waters they are listed as "threatened," but internationally they are endangered owing to low numbers in the Pacific.

In the past 20 years, the number of loggerhead nests counted on Florida's beaches has declined significantly, according to Witherington, the lead author of a 2009 scientific paper on the topic published by the Ecological Society of America. The causes are likely multiple, but not irreversible. Other species that nest in Florida, such as the green turtle, have shown an increase in nesting activity.

But as Florida's flagship species, the loggerhead is of particular concern. Reasons for its decline may include artificial lighting, industrial offshore fishing, and beach renourishment projects. Beaches in Miami-Dade being fortified with new sand may discourage nesting sea turtles. "More is not better for sea turtles," says Witherington. "The best beaches have steep slopes and are not very wide."

Pollution is a major concern, as sea turtles are regularly found wrapped in netting or having ingested plastic, which they may mistake for jellyfish.

As loggerheads take 30 years to reach sexual maturity, the effects on current populations may not be noticeable for decades. Witherington's research speculates that if current trends continue, between 1998 and 2017 loggerhead nests will have declined by 80 percent.

Poaching of eggs is not a major problem statewide, although it may be of more concern in Miami-Dade, where many residents hail from countries

where turtle eggs are eaten.

A recent case in Miami demonstrates that the capture of sea turtles is also a concern. Ramon Puente of Miami was charged with a third-degree felony in April after a routine inspection of his fishing equipment revealed a young green sea turtle, an endangered species, hidden inside his cooler. The funny thing about this particular sea turtle is that it had been caught before. The injured creature was rehabilitated by the Miami Seaquarium in 2008 and released in March 2009. After being rediscovered, it was returned to the Seaquarium.

Sick and disoriented sea turtles have another nearby option for treatment: the Sea Turtle Hospital on Marathon Key. This hospital discovered sea turtle "bubble butt" syndrome, a malady that makes it difficult for turtles to dive. A current resident of the hospital with the syndrome, caught on January 20, Inauguration Day, is named Obama.

Encounters with injured or harassed sea turtles should be reported to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission at 1-888-404-3922.

To see live sea turtles, visit the Miami Seaquarium, the Sea Turtle Hospital, or join one of the local events in August or September when rescued baby sea turtles will be released. Contact the Miami-Dade County sea turtle program in the Parks and Recreation division for details: 305-365-3018.

Because of their worldwide distribution and migration patterns, sea turtles are canaries in the oceanic coal mine. Their decline indicates that something is wrong with the deep blue sea.

The least we can do for them, in word and in deed, is turn out the lights.

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)

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# Never Too Busy for Fun

Public parks and after-school programs are good for kids and parents alike

By Jenni Person  
BT Contributor

Last month my sister and I took our mother on a cruise to celebrate a special birthday. It was just us chicks. As such we were seated at a dinner table with two other women travelling without men, Pearl and Blanche from *Inverrary*. Pearl was very clear about her opinions. For example, she thought *all* our schools are no good and that all students “today” carry weapons. One of the biggest problems, she pointed out, is working mothers.

With that, my sister’s otherwise calm tone got surprisingly terse. “That’s just *not* true,” she said. In response to Pearl invoking of the infamous 1980s term “latch-key kid,” she responded, “That’s a very dated idea.”

That prompted me to speak my mind, and I told her that women need to have careers, need to be counted, and especially these days, need to provide a second income. It’s a continuing paradigm shift in which we’re learning to balance career and family, and redefine parenting to account for the schedules of two people rather than just one. It’s a change that has led to the growth of after-school programs, which are more dynamic and educational than ever. And it has made weekend time more sacred for families than ever before.

My kids see two responsible adults accomplishing their visions, supporting their family, and making time to be there for them, loving and cherishing them, and we hope, feeling our pride in them. We maneuver our schedules, sacrifice as generations of parents before have



sacrificed, and work as a team to find every available moment of kid coverage and family time to develop and model a strong sense of confidence and responsibility in our children.

As my kids get older, I have come to rely on their after-school experiences to provide the enrichment I believe rounds out their development. I am looking for ways to bring arts education and sports into their lives in strong ways, and in doing so, I’m always looking around the neighborhood for new opportunities, and for activities we can experience as a family.

One thing I’ve learned in my parenting pursuits over the years is that Morningside Park in Miami’s Upper Eastside has an extraordinary and accessible enrichment program and lots of great offerings for families. The overall after-school program runs Monday through Friday from 2:30 to 7:00 p.m. For Miami residents the cost is \$60 per child per

month and includes homework assistance and recreational games. Competitive sports are organized as intramural leagues that involve no travel. And here’s the cool part of that: Kids not participating in the full after-school program can join the sports leagues for only a \$10 registration fee, which covers the entire year. And kids who attend the Ada Merritt K-8 Center in East Little Havana ([adamerritt.dadeschools.net](http://adamerritt.dadeschools.net)) can be picked up there daily and brought to the park for after-school programs and league play for just \$60 per month.

Sports programs include football and soccer in the fall and basketball and baseball in the spring. In addition, there is the tennis center at Morningside Park. After-school lessons for kids in the new school year will be held Mondays and Wednesdays or Tuesdays and Thursdays at 3:30, 4:30, or 5:30 p.m., depending on age and level. There will also be kids’ classes on Saturday mornings. All

programs are \$35 a month. And don’t feel left out, parents. There are adult clinics for \$10 an hour Tuesdays and Thursdays, as well as monthly tournaments for adults. You can fit it in while your kids are having their lessons or league play.

Although the park is facing budget cuts and will limit some daily activities to weekends only, you can still fit in some family fun now, before school starts, if you’re taking time off in August. The kayak center is currently open 9:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. As of August 24, it will be open only on weekends, but that’s the best time for family activity anyway. Kayak rental is \$5 per person per hour. Sailboats are also available and rent for \$35 for two hours. By the way, August is also the time to get in your park swimming as the pool closes after the Labor Day weekend. For more information about all park activities call 305-754-1242. You can get there via NE 50th Terrace east from Biscayne Boulevard.

One last thing about weekend time. My Morningside friends Sandy and David have been telling me about the Bookmobile in Morningside Park, and I recently had a chance to go. What an awesome experience it was as my kids entered the mobile library full of excitement about all the books in the park they love. We chose books and videos and sat and read together, a very nice family weekend moment. It’s waiting for you every Saturday from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. It’s a terrific way to instill the library habit in our *post-latch-key* kids.

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)

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# Big People with Little Dogs

*From Fifi's perspective, it's a world full of scary giants*

By Lisa Hartman  
BT Contributor

I received a lot of great questions from readers following last month's column, "Why Do Dogs Bark?" We'll get to some of those soon, but this month I decided to ask a couple of questions of my own, questions you may not often hear. I put them to a few friends and to *Biscayne Times* readers who've contacted me.

*What do you think is the hardest thing about owning a small dog?*

Jennifer Phillips answered: "They can fit under the table when they grab a piece of clothing or other miscellaneous item and it's hard to get it back. Ha ha ha!"

A friend of Jennifer added: "Smaller dogs are more nervous and have trouble adapting to large groups of people and socializing in public, and also when many people come to the house." (Jennifer agreed.)

Jane Pontarelli responded with this: "Nothing. Small dogs live longer, have fewer illnesses, and you can take them almost anywhere. The older I get, the smaller the dog (lol). The one problem is, small dogs think they are big and will attack everything and everyone that comes near you. I think that's the best part...."

Annie Hawkins wrote: "It looks kind of scary to me to see a one-pound dog walking on a city street. Someone could step on it. Maybe neon-colored leashes would help."

Larry Keigwin observed that small dogs "think their owners are their slaves."

Here are my own comments: One

of the things I hear most from owners is that their small dog is very demanding, and that they feel guilty if they don't give their pets almost everything they want. Another is that they're difficult to housebreak. One other comment I hear frequently is that their small dog is not social, "protects" them, and growls and/or snaps at people trying to say hello to them.

My response is always: "Wouldn't you act that way if people treated you like a toy?"

Small dogs are expected to be petted and held by anyone at any time. (Wrong!) They are expected to be stuffed animals come to life. One minute they are sleeping on their bed and the next — whoosh! — they're flying through the air and into someone's arms. People are trying to kiss them. Children are chasing them. They're forced to wear goofy little clothes and shoes. Just when they think they're safe in their owner's arms, a stranger's hand comes at their face to pet them and rub their ears!

Imagine standing 12 inches tall (or less) and having to look up at everything. (This is actually a good experiment. Lie on your stomach on the floor and look up at everything. Now imagine giants picking *you* up!)



Of course, many little dogs are considered babies by their owners, and are a source of pride, garnering admiration and adoration from everyone they encounter. However, this can have undesirable consequences, in part because most small dogs' anti-social behavior is well rewarded by the owners.

Here is an example: The dog is brought to a social event and, after the fifth stranger pets him (the owner being unaware the dog is not comfortable with this or has had enough), the dog growls at the person. The loving owner then tells Little Precious: "It's okay, it's okay," pets and kisses the dog, and thus rewards the bad behavior.

Many owners often follow this with one or more counterproductive behaviors of their own, such as:

- Telling the person on the receiving end of the growl: "It's okay, she's really friendly. Here, you can hold her." This puts the poor dog right in the jaws of the big human they find scary.

- Scolding their dog for embarrassing them. "Mimi, how could you! Bad dog!" Which now punishes the dog twice.

- Rationalizing the anti-social behavior of their little ball of fluff. "She's trying to *protect* me!" Um, possibly. But usually you have just been rewarding bad behavior, and not reading your dog properly to know when he or she has had enough. All your attention has reinforced the growling and snapping, which is further reinforced by keeping people away. And so a vicious cycle is born.

One thing many small dogs do *not* have is choice, something much more common to a Rottweiler or German shepherd. By and large, people are likely to *ask first* if they can pet your Rottweiler (if they're interested in meeting him at all), and they certainly will not be swooping him up into their arms.

Your fluffy little Maltese doesn't always have that choice, but should. You are your pet's first line of defense, and you need to monitor your dog for stress. The same rules of socialization apply to small dogs and big ones alike. They should be gently and positively exposed to new people, places, and things at a very young age. And it should be their *choice* to say hello. (Of course, strangers bearing yummy treats makes them seem

*Continued on page 43*

**Little Dogs**

Continued from page 42

all the more friendly.) Don't be afraid to tell people "no" once in awhile when they say they want to pet your pup.

On the flip side of my recent poll, I asked friends and BT readers: *What is the easiest thing about owning a big dog?*

Not surprisingly, I received fewer responses to this one.

Kerri Dennis wrote: "Is there anything easy about owning a big dog? How about two

dogs? For me, they scare away people I don't like! Even though they are my gentle giants."

I would like to add that, overall, big dogs are easier to housebreak, easier to reach (no need to bend down), and easier to find since they can't hide as easily. But in truth, it's really hard to identify something easy about owning them. Still, it's nice to look on the bright side.

As for small dogs, I would say that the hardest thing about them is their very

size, the constant bending down to get them — which is why mine is trained to

**One thing many small dogs do not have is choice. By and large, people are likely to ask first if they can pet your Rottweiler.**

jump into my arms.

Here's something funny: One of

the most common calls for help I get is to housebreak small dogs. Yet not one person I polled even mentioned that. Way to go, clients and readers!

*Lisa Hartman is head dog trainer for Pawsitively Pets. You can reach her at pawsitivelypetsonline@yahoo.com or www.pawsitivelypetsonline.com. You can also keep up with her and her dogs on Facebook at www.profile.to/dogtrainer.*

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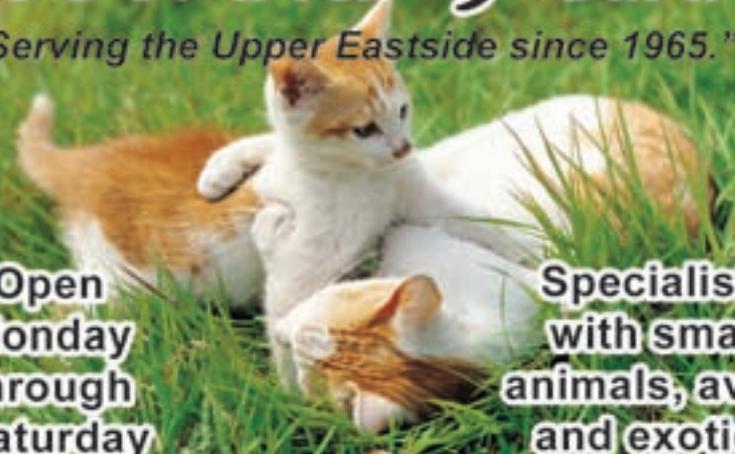
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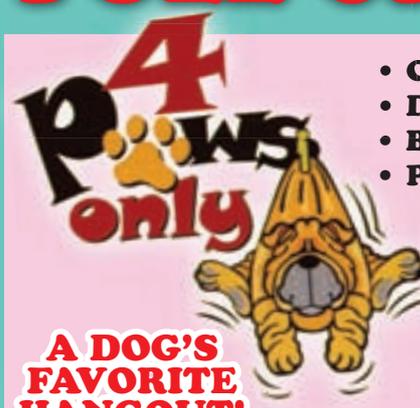
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# First the Rain, Then the Pain

After the deluge come the vines, lovely but loathsome

By Jeff Shimonski  
BT Contributor

The rainy season is upon us with a vengeance. In June we recorded 25 inches of rainfall at Jungle Island, with the rain gauge actually overflowing on at least one occasion. Everywhere you look the landscapes seem so green and lush. All this lushness, of course, means lots of pruning is in order. This time of year is also when all manner of vines pop up and start to cover your garden at what seems to be an unbelievable rate of growth. Many of these vines may be quite attractive — with brightly colored flowers, odd-looking fruit, or distinct foliage — but they are insidious.

Some of the weedy vines we are seeing belong to the cucumber family. The creeping cucumber vine (*Melothria pendula*) has tiny green fruit that may reach one inch long and turn black when they ripen. These are perfect replicas of the large, delicious cucumbers we just harvested at home in our containerized organic garden. But I don't know if these tiny cucumber relatives are safe for us to eat, so leave them to the birds.

Another relative of the cucumber that crops up here in the rainy season is the wild balsam apple or *conde amor*, as my older Cuban friends call it. This Old World vine has very attractive, bright-orange or yellow fruit that opens to show numerous red seeds within. The fine soft foliage has a distinct fragrance, especially when handled. I know some folks from the Caribbean who utilize the leaves to make a medicinal tea.

We have an abundance of Ipomoea species, or Morning-glory vines,

growing here, from the beaches to our hammocks. There are hundreds of Ipomoea species that grow in tropical climates, and I'm sure everyone is familiar with a few. The common sweet potato is an Ipomoea. It can be an attractive ground cover, with either red or green leaves. The flowers are usually white with a reddish throat. Sweet potatoes can be grown from cuttings or seed. If from cuttings, you will have the same plant and tuber as the parent plant; if from seeds, variation in tuber quality or foliage color can occur.

There are many other annual Ipomoea species with very colorful flowers found in our area. Two of the more diminutive vines with very small, distinct leaves are the scarlet Morning glory (*Ipomoea hederifolia*) and the cypress vine (*Ipomoea quamoclit*). They have tiny reddish-orange, trumpet-shaped flowers. Several other species have silver-dollar-size flowers in brilliant blue or purple.

Growing on the sand of our beaches, we often find the railroad vine (*Ipomoea pes-caprae*). This species has funnel-shaped lavender flowers and large coarse leaves. I've utilized this vine successfully to stabilize slopes where other vegetation would not grow. Other Ipomoea species



The Glades morning-glory (*Ipomoea sagittata*) likes wet areas and grows like crazy.

BT photo by Jeff Shimonski

have flowers in yellow, orange, or white. The common Morning glories in our area can be very weedy, and if not controlled, they can completely cover a large shrub or small tree, causing that plant to lose all its foliage for lack of sunlight.

Whenever heavy rainfall occurs here, there are two species of Discorea we need to watch for. They have attractive, light-green, heart-shaped leaves. The leaves of the air potato (*Discorea bulbifera*) can reach dinner-plate size, while winged yam (*Discorea alata*) leaves are similar but remain smaller. These vines are not related to the edible potato or the Morning glories. They grow from round tubers in the ground that I've seen as large as softballs.

The tubers can also grow on the plant among the foliage, hence the names air potato and winged yam. These

tubers will drop off and start growing. They are extremely aggressive vines and should be removed. Make sure to remove the tubers from the ground. If not, the vine will grow back immediately. Cold weather or a very dry winter will cause Discorea vines to disappear, but the tubers can remain underground for years, waiting for the optimum time to produce foliage.

Many species of Discorea are included in a group of plants known as caudiciforms. This is a horticultural appellation for plants from many different families that produce a caudex, a large tuber or thick stem that, in their native habitat, stores water or food to enable them to survive in some very harsh environments. There are many interesting Discoreas with this peculiar growth habit. They make great potted plants but should never be allowed to wander off into the landscape.

I had written in a column a while back about a passion vine that we at Jungle Island were controlling because it is very aggressive. We were allowing the vine to grow because it is a larval food plant for Julia butterflies. Which is a reminder that many of the vines we see cropping up in our backyards during the rainy season are invasive species that need to be controlled or eliminated before they overwhelm our landscapes.

Jeff Shimonski is an ISA-certified municipal arborist, director of horticulture at Jungle Island, and principal of Tropical Designs of Florida. Contact him at [jeff@tropicaldesigns.com](mailto:jeff@tropicaldesigns.com).

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# Dining Guide

## RESTAURANT LISTINGS

The Biscayne Corridor's most comprehensive restaurant guide. Total this month: 203.

### MIAMI

#### Brickell / Downtown

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

#### Abokado

900 S. Miami Ave., 305-347-3700  
www.abokadosushi.com

Hamachi chiles rellenos? Shiso leaf "nachos" topped with raw spicy tuna, kaiware sprouts, and other Asian ingredients? The Viva, a sushi roll that starts with standard Japanese (spicy tuna, cucumber, avocado), adds Latin sabor (jalapeño, cilantro), wraps it in a flour tortilla, and garnishes it with heat (spicy snow crab mix)? Miami hasn't tended to initiate too many food "firsts," but this Japanese/Pan-Latin fusion place is surely one. Prices are higher than at neighborhood sushi spots, but in keeping with Abokado's Mary Brickell Village neighbors. \$\$\$

#### Acqua

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

Originally an Italian/Mediterranean restaurant, this comfortably elegant, upscale spot switched chefs in 2006, 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, a tender pork shank glazed with spicy Szechuan citrus sauce, 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. \$\$\$

#### 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 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. 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. The cocktails are genuinely creative. Luckily you don't have to choose one or the other. \$\$\$

#### 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. \$\$\$

#### Bali Café

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 cruise-ship and construction workers. 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. Note: bring cash. No plastic accepted here. \$\$

#### The Bar at Level 25 (Conrad Hotel)

1395 Brickell Ave., 305-503-6500

On the Conrad's 25th floor, The Bar's picture-windowed space 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 here there's nothing mere about the generously portioned small plates. They range from traditional items like cod fish equixada and saffron-sautéed Spanish artichokes to inventive inspirations like foie gras and goat cheese-stuffed empanadas. \$\$\$

#### Blu Pizzeria e Cucina

900 S. Miami Ave. (Mary Brickell Village)  
305-381-8335; www.blurestaurantsgroup.com

If the super-sleek interior is too formal for you, opt for a casual patio table while studying the menu over an order of warm gnocchetti bread sticks, or creamy-centered suppli alla romana (porcini-studded tomato and mozzarella rice croquettes). The place looks upscale, but prices of even the fanciest entrées don't exceed \$20. The fare is wide-ranging, but 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. For the health-conscious, the menu includes low-cal choices. For hedonists there's a big selection of artisan sakes. \$\$\$

#### Miami's Finest Caribbean Restaurant

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

### NEW THIS MONTH

#### MIAMI

##### BRICKELL / DOWNTOWN

#### Ecco Pizzateca & Lounge

168 SE 1st St.  
305-960-1900

www.eccomiami.com

Masterminded by Aramis Lorie (of PS14) and partner Brian Basti, this hip hangout was designed to entice downtown workers to linger after office hours. And even without the expansive, casual-chic space as bait, internationally award-winning Italian pizza chef Massimo Fabio Bruni's exquisitely airy, burn-blistered pies, made from homemade dough, could do the trick. The rest of the organically oriented menu may also great, but with pizzas like the cream/mushroom-topped Bianca beckoning, we'll never know. \$\$\$

#### MIAMI

##### MIDTOWN / WYNWOOD / DESIGN DISTRICT

#### Bay View Grille

1633 N. Bayshore Dr. (Marriott Hotel)  
305-536-6414

This expansive restaurant has no outdoor component, but floor-to-ceiling windows and a multi-level layout means every table has a Biscayne Bay view, which we find particularly enjoyable in the morning, over a fresh asparagus and Boursin cheese omelet or huevos à la cubana (fried eggs and cheese on black beans). Lunch and dinner menus are a "greatest hits" mix (steaks, pasta, Caesar salad), featuring appealing local accents like a hefty fried or blackened grouper sandwich on ciabatta roll, with remoulade sauce. \$\$\$

#### MIAMI

##### UPPER EASTSIDE

#### Revaes Italian Ristorante

8601 Biscayne Blvd.  
305-758-1010

Owned by two couples (including former Village Café chef Marlon Reyes), this eclectic eatery occupies the former space of Frankie's Big City Grill, and fulfills much the same purpose in the neighborhood as an all-day, family-friendly place with affordable prices. The menu includes wraps and elaborate salads of all nations. But simple yet sophisticated Italian specialties like spaghetti ai fume (with pancetta,

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. \$

#### Dolores, But You Can Call Me Lolita

1000 S. Miami Ave., 305-403-3103  
www.doloreslolita.com

From the stylish setting in Miami's historic Firehouse No. 4, one would expect a mighty pricy meal. But entrées, which range from Nuevo Latino-style ginger/orange-glazed pork tenderloin to a platter of Kobe mini-burgers, all cost either \$18 or \$23. And

tomato, garlic, basil, and a touch of cream) or yellowtail française (egg-battered, with lemon-caper-wine sauce) are the must-haves here. \$\$\$

### NORTH BAY VILLAGE

#### The Crab House

1551 79th St. Causeway  
305-868-7085

www.crabhouseseafood.com

Established in 1975, this Miami fish house was acquired by Landry's in 1996 and is now part of a chain. But the classic décor (knotty pine walls, tile floors, booths, outdoor waterfront deck) still evokes the good old days. Though the all-you-can-eat seafood/salad buffet (\$20 lunch, \$30 dinner) is a signature, freshness fanatics will be happiest sticking to à la carte favorites like the All-American fisherman's platters, or global specials like Szechuan shrimp, that change seasonally. \$\$\$

### MIAMI SHORES

#### Village Café

9540 NE 2nd Ave.  
305-759-2211

After closing for several months in early 2009, this café, spruced up to look like a bistro rather than a luncheonette (but with the same bargain prices), has been reopened by Shores resident Massimo DeLuca, original chef/owner Curtis Whitticar's charismatic maitre d'. The kitchen has also been rejuvenated, with head honcho Adam Holm (Whitticar's original sous chef) serving up new, globally influenced dishes like mint/pistachio-crust lamb or tuna tartare with sriracha aioli, plus reviving old favorites like pork tenderloin with ginger-caramel sauce. \$\$\$

### NORTH MIAMI

#### Petit Rouge

12409 Biscayne Blvd.  
305-892-7676

From the mid-1990s (with Neal's Restaurant and later with Il Migliore), local chef Neal Cooper's neighborhood-oriented Italian eateries have been crowd-pleasers. While this cute 32-seat charmer is French, it's no exception, avoiding pretense and winning fans with both classic and nouvelle bistro fare: frisée salad with lardons, poached egg, and bacon vinaigrette; truite Grenobloise (trout with lemon/caper sauce); consommé with black truffles and foie gras, covered by a buttery puff pastry dome; perfect pommes frites, and equally perfect apple or lemon tarts for dessert. \$\$\$

the price 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. The best seats are on the glam 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. To the familiar Latin American/Italian

Continued on page 46

# Red, White, and You

Agreeable wine (and occasionally beer) for \$12 or less

By Bill Citara  
BT Contributor

If there's anything good that has come from our current economic Armageddon, it's the opportunity to cry in our beer. Sure, this space has mostly been a forum to whine in our wine, and you can certainly scream in your scotch, rant in your rum, or vent in your vodka. But crying in your beer — well, that's as Amurkin as Mom, apple pie, and driving while texting your best friend about all the idiots on the road.

Not just any beer, though. As all true hopheads know, there are plenty of artisanal alternatives to the insipid brews of Anheuser-Everything, beers produced to maximize flavor, character, and complexity rather than sell 10 bazillion gallons to thirsty suburbanites at 7-Eleven.

Of course, that doesn't make choosing among these high-quality brewskis any easier. Go to your average liquor store and you'll find more obscure craft beers lurking on the shelves than there are Goldman Sachs executives sucking at the taxpayer tit. So to make sobbing in

your suds a more satisfying and buzz-worthy endeavor, we hereby present this small roster of first-rate craft beers — all ales of various types, because even hopheads have to know their limits.

We'll start with India Pale Ales, a name derived from the practice of British brewers in the late 18th Century to boost the level of hops and alcohol in their beers so they'd survive shipping to such far-off outposts of the British empire as India. So IPAs tend to be big, bold, manly-man brews, the kind that would mug a wussy brew like Corona in an alley.

Manlier still are the "double" or "Imperial" IPAs, like **Maximus** from Lagunitas Brewing Co., Mad River's **Steelhead** and **Maharaja** from Colorado's Avery Brewing Co. The Maximus is typical of that style, with malty, floral aromas, a deep bronze color, thick, creamy texture, and flavors of fruit and spice with sweetish caramel overtones. Steelhead cranks it up even more, a dark viscous brew with earthy, nutty, cherry flavors and faintly floral finish.

The Maharaja is something different, smelling more astringent and grainy, with

spicy notes reminiscent of Belgian beers and a pronounced but pleasantly bitter aftertaste. Great Divide Brewing's **Titan IPA** does the Belgian spice and citrus thing too, and though lighter in heft, it is equally intense in hoppy flavor.

On the lighter side is Rogue Brewery's **Dead Guy Ale**. It's an easy-drinking brew that starts off with toasty and delicately caramel aromas, then moves on to crisp, cleansing hop flavors. On one of our brutal South Florida summer days, nothing refreshes like an ice-cold Dead Guy.

Sierra Nevada is not exactly a boutique brewery, but its signature **Pale Ale** stands its own against any artisanal competition. It's an elegant brew, light on the palate, with a pleasing amber color, well-balanced between hops and malt, and the kind of beer you can drink without feeling overpowered.



Of all the beers guzzled — I mean, sampled — for this tasting, the hands-down favorite was Stone Brewing Co.'s **Arrogant Bastard Ale**. "Luscious" describes it quite nicely, bursting with nutty, toffee-like aromas and a complex array of flavors — nutty, toasty, spicy, malty — that fill the mouth and are far too compelling to, you know, cry into.

**The North Miami Total Wine & More (14750 Biscayne Blvd., 305-354-3270) offers Arrogant Bastard for \$4.99 (24 oz.), Steelhead and Titan for \$1.99 (12 oz.), and Sierra Nevada for \$1.29 (12 oz.). Dead Guy Ale is available at the Biscayne Commons Publix (14641 Biscayne Blvd., 305-354-2171) for \$6.49 (24 oz.), while the Maximus and Maharaja can be found at the North Miami Crown Wine & Spirits (12555 Biscayne Blvd., 305-892-9463) for \$4.25 (24 oz.) and \$8.95 (24 oz.), respectively.**

Feedback: [letters@biscaynetimes.com](mailto:letters@biscaynetimes.com)

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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. \$\$\$

### 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 dining deck overlooking the Miami River, diners can view the retail fish market. Best preparations 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. \$\$\$

### Grimpa Steakhouse

901 Brickell Plaza, 305-455-4757  
[www.grimpa.com](http://www.grimpa.com)

This expansive indoor/outdoor Brazilian eatery is sleekly contemporary, but no worries. The classic sword-wielding gauchos are here, serving a mind-reeling assortment of skewered beef, chicken, lamb, pork, sausages, and fish. 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. 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](http://www.ilgabbianomiami.com)

Its location at the mouth of the Miami River makes this ultra-upscale Italian spot (especially the outdoor terrace) the perfect

power lunch/business dinner alternative to 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. 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](http://www.indochinebistro.com)

Indochine has succeeded by morphing from mere restaurant into hip hangout. Copious special events 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. 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](http://www.laloggia.org)  
This luxuriantly neo-classical yet warm Italian restaurant was unquestionably a pioneer in revitalizing downtown. With alternatives like amaretto-tinged pumpkin agnolotti in sage butter sauce and cilantro-spiced white bean/vegetable salad dressed with truffle oil, 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 quiets the munchies like a Crazy Burger, a Colombian take on a trucker's burger:

beef patty, bacon, ham, mozzarella, lettuce, tomato, and a fried egg, with an arepa corn pancake "bun." While this tiny place's late hours (till 6:00 a.m. Friday and Saturday) are surprising, the daytime menu is more so. In addition to Colombian classics, there's a salad Nicoise with grilled fresh tuna, seared salmon with mango salsa, and other yuppie favorites. \$\$\$

### Le Boudoir Brickell

188 SE 12th Terr. 305-372-2333  
[www.leboudoirmiami.com](http://www.leboudoirmiami.com)

At this French bakery/café, mornings start seriously, with choices ranging from quality cheese, charcuterie/pâté, or smoked salmon platters to chic Continental and complete American breakfasts. At lunch, generously salad-garnished, open-faced tartines are irresistible. But sophisticated salads and homemade soups make the choice tough. And do not skip dessert. Superb sweets include rich almond/fresh raspberry or properly tangy lemon tarts, traditional Madeleines, airy layered mousses, and addictive mini-macaron sandwich cookies with daily-changing fillings. \$\$\$

### Miami's Chophouse

300 S. Biscayne Blvd.  
305-938-9000  
[www.mannyssteakhouse.com](http://www.mannyssteakhouse.com)

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. \$\$\$\$

### Novecento

1414 Brickell Ave., 305-403-0900  
[www.bistronovecento.com](http://www.bistronovecento.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 lime-marinated grouper with jalapeños, basil, and the refreshing sweet counterpoint of watermelon), or crab ravioli with creamy saffron sauce. Especially notable are the entrée salads. \$\$\$\$

### Oceanaire Seafood Room

900 S. Miami Ave.  
305-372-8862  
[www.theoceanaire.com](http://www.theoceanaire.com)

With a dozen branches nationwide, Oceanaire may seem more All-American seafood empire than Florida fish shack, but menus vary significantly according to regional tastes and fish. Here in Miami, chef Sean Bernal 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 flow-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 Lincoln Road was instantly popular, and the same healthy Middle Eastern fast food is served at several newer outlets. The prices are low enough that you might suspect Pasha's was a tax write-off rather than a Harvard Business School project, which it was by founders Antonio Ellek and Nicolas Cortes. Dishes range from falafel and gyros to more unusual items like muhammara (tangy walnut spread) and silky labneh yogurt cheese. 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](http://www.peoplesbarbque.com)

Oak-smoked, falling-off-the-bone tender barbecued ribs (enhanced with a secret sauce whose recipe goes back

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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. 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. \$-\$\$

### Perricone's

15 SE 10th St.

305-374-9449; [www.perricones.com](http://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 is a favorite; dinner's strong suit is the pasta list, ranging from Grandma Jennie's old-fashioned lasagna to chichi flocchi 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. \$\$

### Provence Grill

1001 S. Miami Ave., 305-373-1940

The cozy dining room (and even more charming outdoor terrace) evoke the south of France. But the menu of French bistro classics covers all regions: country-style pâté maison with onion jam, roasted peppers, and cornichons; steak/frites (grilled ribeye with peppercorn cream sauce, fries, and salad); and four preparations of mussels. 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](http://www.rivermiami.com)

This casually cool 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 find it difficult to resist stuffing themselves silly on the unusually large selection, especially since oysters are served both raw and cooked – fire-roasted with sofrito butter, chorizo, and manchego. There's also a thoughtful wine list and numerous artisan beers on tap. \$\$\$

### Rosa Mexicano

900 S. Miami Ave., 786-425-1001

[www.rosamexicano.com](http://www.rosamexicano.com)

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-habane-ro-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. There are salads and sandwiches, too. The most enjoyable place to dine is the secret, open-air courtyard. Alfano serves dinner on Thursdays only to accompany local musicians and artists. \$-\$\$

### Taste of Bombay

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

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](http://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 week-ends till 4:00 a.m.). The kitchen is especially known for its chili, budget-priced steaks, and burgers. There's also surprisingly elegant fare, though, like a Norwegian salmon club with lemon aioli. A meat-smoker in back turns out tasty ribs. \$\$

## 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, this one sticks close to the source and proves a crowd-pleaser. On weekends especially, the 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. \$

### Bengal

2010 Biscayne Blvd.

305-403-1976

At this Indian eatery the décor is cool and contemporary: 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. America's favorite familiar north Indian flavors are here, though dishes are generally more mildly spiced and presented with modern flair. 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, the décor is a stylish mix of contemporary (high loft ceilings) and Old World (tables made from wine

barrels). Cuisine is similarly geared to the area's smart new 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, chef Alfredo Patino offers sophisticated snacks like the figiutto: arugula, gorgonzola dolce, caramelized onions, pine nuts, fresh figs, and prosciutto. Free parking behind the building. \$\$

### Buena Vista Bistro

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

If a neighborhood eatery like this one – which serves supremely satisfying bistro food – were within walking distance of every Miami resident, we'd be a helluva hip food town. Like true Parisian bistros, it's open continuously, every day, with prices so low that you can drop in anytime for authentic rillettes (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. \$\$

### Captain Joe Seafood & Pasta Grill

3401 N. Miami Ave. (Shops at Midtown)

305-573-6111

This Shops at Midtown eatery begins at 8:00 a.m. with with eggs, pancakes, French toast, and bagels. After that it's a seafood-oriented menu of fast-casual food. Best values are combo platters 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. \$

### 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, including Biscayne Times, giving diners something to chat about. Sandwiches and salads can also be do-it-yourself projects, with an unusually wide choice of main ingredients, garnishes, breads, and condiments for the creatively minded. \$

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## Restaurant Listings

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### Delicias Peruanas

2590 Biscayne Blvd., 305-573-4634

Seafood is the specialty at this pleasant Peruvian spot, as it was at the nearby original Delicias, run by members of the same family. 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. As for nonseafood stuff, Peru practically invented fusion cuisine (in the 1800s), such as two traditional noodle dishes: tallerin saltado and tallerin verde. \$\$\$

### 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 expansive. 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. Other culinary highlights 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

No green-leaf faux health food here. 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. Available in double or one-patty sizes, they're well-done but spurtingly juicy, and after loading with your choice of 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. \$

### 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 Frères gourmet store on 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 are so outstanding that you can't help wishing it also had a retail component. 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

Chef Michael Jacobs's menu travels beyond pan-Asian and Mediterranean influences into the Americas. Entrées range from 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. 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. There's a five-buck half-serving of spaghetti al pomodoro and respectable vino for under \$30. And few can resist delicately thin, crunchy-crustured pizzas like the creative Dolce e Piccante or orgasmic Carbonara. 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

Operated by a brother/sister team (both originally from Ethiopia), 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 – home fries mixed with bacon, ham, peppers, onion, and cheese; accompanied by eggs, fresh fruit, and bread. Lunch's burgers, salads, and overstuffed sandwiches come with homemade soup or other sides, plus fruit. Dinner features an authentic Ethiopian 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/yucafied ambiance, encouraged by an expansive, rustic wooden deck. \$\$

### 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 freshness of the ingredients and the care that goes into their use. Entrée-size salads range from an elegant spinach (goat cheese, pears, walnuts, raisins) to chunky homemade chicken salad on a bed of mixed greens. Sandwiches (cold baguette subs, hot pressed paninis, or wraps, all accompanied by side salads) include a respectable Cuban and a veggie wrap with a deceptively rich-tasting light salad cream. \$\$-\$\$\$

### Lime Fresh Mexican Grill

3201 N. Miami Ave. (Shops at Midtown)

305-576-5463

Like its South Beach predecessor, this Lime was an instant hit, as much for being a hip new Midtown hangout as for its carefully crafted Tex-Mex food. The concept is "fast casual" rather than fast food – meaning nice enough for a night out. It also means ingredients are always fresh. Seafood tacos are about as exotic as the menu gets, but the mahi mahi for fish tacos comes from a local supplier, and salsas are housemade daily. Niceties include low-carb tortillas and many Mexican beers. \$

### 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-crustured salmon, chipotle-drizzled endive stuffed with lump crab, or customizable tacos average \$5-\$8. Also available: big breakfasts and salads, hearty soups, homemade pastries like lemon-crustured 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 you expect, including all-you-can-eat meats carved tableside and a lavish buffet. What sets Maino apart from typical rodizio palaces is its family-run feel, intimate rather than intimidating, plus its attention to every detail. While it's rare at most rodizio joints to get meat done less than medium, Maino will cook to order. One other welcome difference: 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

An instant smash hit, this truly neighborhood-oriented restaurant from chef Michael Schwartz 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 to encourage frequent visits. Michael's Genuine also features an eclectic, affordable wine list and a full bar. \$\$-\$\$\$\$

### Mike's at Venetia

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

www.mikesvenetia.com

This family-owned Irish pub, on the pool deck of the Venetia condo, 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. 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. A limited late-night menu provides pizza, wings, ribs, and salad till 3:00 a.m. \$\$\$

### Moriano

3221 NE 2nd Ave., 786-953-8003

moriano.wordpress.com

Ultra-thin, crisp-crustured pizzas. Made-from-scratch 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. 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, fiocchi 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 artisan growers to encourage sustainable agriculture. 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. \$

### Pacific Time

35 NE 40th St., 305-722-7369

www.pacifictimemiami.com

Everyone knew Jonathan Eismann's original Pacific Time, for many years Lincoln Road's only serious restaurant. How different is its new incarnation? Very, and it's all good, starting with far superior acoustics, an admirably green ecological policy, and a neighborhood-friendly attitude. While the addition of Mediterranean influences to the Pacific Rim menu may sound confusing, 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 Pecky 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

Dainty designer pizzas? At this New York-style pizzeria, 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

The imposing, cavernous lobby of the Grand 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 prosciutto/arugula – would be draw enough. But pastas also please: diners' choice of starch, with mix-and-match sauces and extras. And the price is right, with few entrées 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 restolounge. Among the

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# DINING GUIDE

## Restaurant Listings

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seafood offerings, you won't find exotica or local catches, but all the usual sushi/sashimi favorites, though 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, the lobster tempura maki, 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 classic diner. Open since 1938, people still line up on Saturday mornings, waiting for a seat at the counter 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. 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 is the second restaurant that Upper Eastside homegirl Michelle Bernstein has opened in the area. But it's no absentee celebrity-chef gig. Bernstein is hands-on at both places. Her exuberant yet firmly controlled personal touch is obvious in nearly four dozen hot and cold tapas on the menu. Items are frequently reinvented. Keepers include wild mushroom/manchego croquetas with fig jam; white bean stew; crisp-coated artichokes with lemon/coriander dip; 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, looks too glitzy to serve anything but politely Americanized Chinese food.

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. Moist sea bass fillet has a beautifully balanced topping of scalion, 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, 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, and smoked duck salad with goat cheese croutons and a poached egg. At night there are tapas. \$\$-\$\$

### Zuperpollo Biztro Reztocafe

3050 Biscayne Blvd.  
305-573-8485www.zuperpollo.com

This bistro is a branch of the popular Uruguayan eatery Zuperpollo, on Coral Way since 1986. It's way in back, past a guard desk and an elevator bank, behind an unmarked door. Diners who find it 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, overstuffed chivito, sometimes called "a heart attack on a bun." And naturally, from the rotisserie, there's the signature super 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, along with executive chef Frank Crupi's famed Philly cheese steak sandwiches. 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

The new owners of this river shack are banking on Greek food and festivity for success – a good bet, judging from their wildly popular previous eatery, Ouzo. The mainly mezze menu ranges from traditional Greek small plates to creative Mediterranean-inspired dishes like anise-scented fish croquettes with spicy aioli. But don't neglect large plates like whole grilled Mediterranean fish (dorade or branzino), filleted tableside. The interior 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 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 pastais 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 intimating 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 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 impressive, with an unusually large selection of seafood and vegetarian items such as spinach sautéed with pine nuts and raisins. Don't miss the ultra-creamy croquetas, 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. But there the resemblance 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. For fish haters, spicy or garlic chicken wings are an option. \$\$\$

### Casa Toscana

7001 Biscayne Blvd., 305-758-3353  
www.casatoscana.com

Tuscan-born chef/owner Sandra Stefani cooked at Norman's before opening this Upper Eastside jewel, 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 specials with honest, authentic flavors, such as grilled wild boar sausages with lentil croquettes. Menu favorites include pear and ricotta raviolini, grilled eggplant slices rolled around herbed goat cheese and sun-dried tomatoes, and a light ricotta tart with lemon and rosemary. \$\$\$

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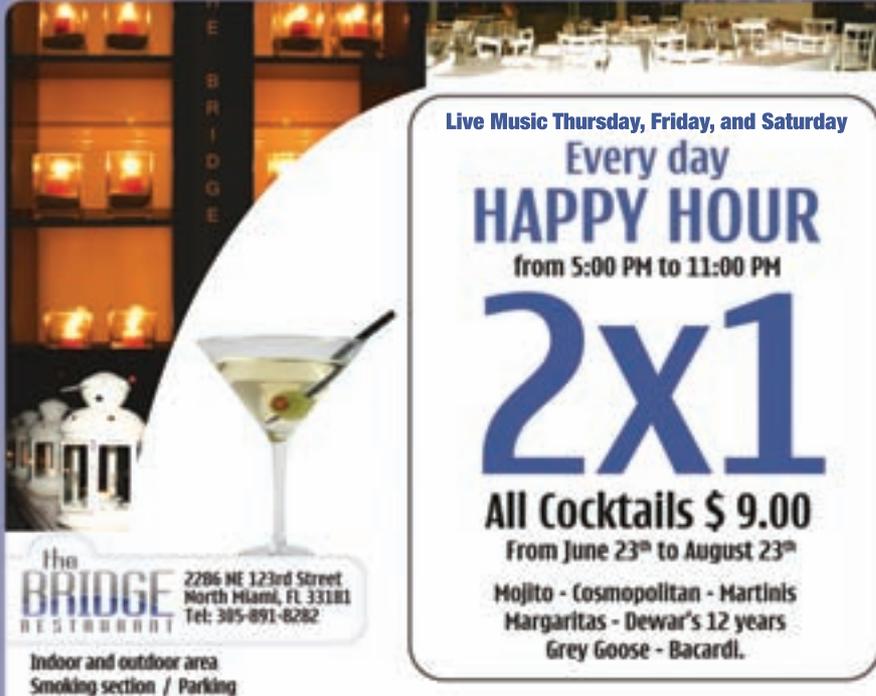


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## Restaurant Listings

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### 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 Argentinean 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 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 – seafood is the specialty here: crevette en sauce (steamed shrimp with Creole butter sauce), lambi fri (perfectly tenderized fried conch), poisson gros sel (local snapper in a spicy butter sauce), garlic or Creole crabs. The Miami branch has outdoor tiki-hut dining. \$-\$\$

### 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 for this stand's sauce-garnished, all-beef, soy veggie, turkey, and chicken hot dogs. The 22 varieties range from simple 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. New addition: thick, juicy burgers. \$

### 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, including 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. Recommended are moist tamales, tasty sandwiches (especially the dripping 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. \$\$\$

### 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. Snacks match the casual chichness: sandwiches like the Renato (prosciutto, hot cappicola, 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 are equally gentrified, especially on Wednesdays, when ladies are pampered with \$10 washes and glasses of sparkling wine while they wait. \$

### Garden of Eatin'

136 NW 62nd St., 305-754-8050

Housed in a yellow building that's nearly invisible from the street, the Garden has the comfortable feel of a beach bar, and generous servings of inexpensive Afro-Caribbean vegan food. 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 popular 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. Food is available à la carte or grouped in multimeal plans customized for individual diner's nutritional needs. \$\$

### 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; eggs any style, including omelets and open-face frittatas; 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. \$-\$\$

### Kingdom

6708 Biscayne Blvd., 305-757-0074

This indoor/outdoor sports bar serves low-priced but high-quality steaks, plus more typical bar food that's actually far from the usual 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. 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 and crisp-skinned roast chickens. Otherwise the menu holds few surprises – except the prices, unusually low for such a stylish place. No dish exceeds \$22. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Magnum Lounge

709 NE 79th St., 305-757-3368

It's a restaurant. It's a lounge. But it's decidedly not a typical Miami restoulounge, or like anything else in Miami. Forbidding from the outside, on the inside it's like a time-trip to a cabaret in pre-WWII Berlin: bordello-red décor, romantically dim lighting, show-tune live piano bar entertainment, and to match the ambiance, elegantly updated retro food served with style and a smile. For those feeling flush, home-style fried chicken is just like mom used to make – in her wildest dreams. \$\$\$

### Metro Organic Bistro

7010 Biscayne Blvd., 305-751-8756

Big changes have come to Karma the car wash, the first being a separate new name for the revamped restaurant: Metro Organic Bistro, an all-organic fine-dining restaurant where simple preparations reveal and enhance natural flavors. An entirely new menu places emphasis on grilled organic meat and fish dishes. Try the steak frites – organic, grass-fed skirt steak with organic chimichurri and fresh-cut fries. Vegetarians will love the organic portabella focaccia. Dine either inside the architect-designed restaurant or outdoors on the patio. Beer and wine. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Michy's

6927 Biscayne Blvd., 305-759-2001

Don't even ask why Michele Bernstein, with a top-chef résumé, 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 croquettes. Though most full entrées also come in half-size portions (at almost halved prices), the tab can add up fast. 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 sibling Indochine, this friendly Asian bistro serves 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 it also carves out its own identity with original creations, including yellow curry-spiced fried rice. Nearly everything is low in sodium, fat, and calories. A large rear patio is inviting for dining and entertainment. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Moshi Moshi

7232 Biscayne Blvd.

786-220-9404

This offspring 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. Sushi ranges from pristine individual nigiri to over-the-top maki rolls. Tapas are intriguing, like arabiki sausage, a sweet-savory pork fingerling frank; 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### News Lounge

5582 NE 4th Ct.

305-758-9932; www.the55thststation.com

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 menu of light bites is – along with other lures like an inviting outdoor patio and rest rooms that resemble eclectic art galleries – part of the reason visitors stay for hours. Especially recommended 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. \$

### Red Light

7700 Biscayne Blvd., 305-757-7773

From the rustic al fresco deck of chef Kris Wessel's intentionally downwardly mobile retro-cool riverfront restaurant, you can enjoy regional wildlife like manatees 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). Not surprisingly, the chef-driven menu is limited, but several signature specialties, if 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 bauerwurst, 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. Soyka remains a solid neighborhood restaurant that 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 have come and gone. Take-out orders and breakfast are now available. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Sushi Siam

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

On the 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. 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. \$\$\$

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## Restaurant Listings

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### UVA 69

6900 Biscayne Blvd.  
305-754-9022; [www.uva-69.com](http://www.uva-69.com)

Owned and operated by brothers Michael and Sinuhé Vega, this casual outdoor/indoor Euro-café and lounge has helped to transform the Boulevard into a hip place to hang out. Lunch includes a variety of salads and elegant sandwiches like La Minuta (beer-battered mahi-mahi with cilantro aioli and caramelized onions on housemade foccacia). 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 and Ponzu butter sauce, and crisp spinach. \$\$-\$\$\$

### 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 ground beef and shredded chicken to more unusual pork in chili verde 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

You might think this is just a wine shop, but it's actually about wine, food, and art, and how they work together. Wines are available retail (discounted 35-50 percent for in-house drinkers), with 40 sold by the glass. Food, designed for pairing, includes a \$25 three-course dinner. 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. The art involves revolving exhibits, plus an art lecture series featuring wines picked by owner Ben Neji. \$\$

### Yiya's Gourmet Cuban Bakery

646 NE 79th St., 305-754-3337

A true community jewel, this bakery is also a most welcoming café, serving lunch specials from chef Delsa Bernardo (who co-owns the place with attorney Abbie Cuellar) that are home-made right down to the herbs grown on the bakery's window sills. Bernardo's pan con lechon sandwiches and flaky-crust Cuban pastries are legend. But she also crafts treats not found at average Cuban bakeries, like pizzas using housemade Indian naan bread. Additionally Bernardo carries unique treats produced by a few friends: candies, cupcakes, and exotically flavored fians. \$

## NORTH BAY VILLAGE

### Bocados Ricos

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

Tucked into a mall best known for its Happy Stork Lounge, this little luncheonette services big appetites. Along with the usual grilled churrascos, there's bandeja paisa, Colombia's sampler platter of grilled steak, sausage, chicharron, fried egg, avocado, plantains, rice, and beans. Don't miss marginally daintier dishes like sopa de costilla, if this rich shortrib bowl is among the daily 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. \$\$-\$\$\$

### Edy's Chicken & Steak

1624 79th St. Causeway  
305-864-9958

What differentiates Edy's from other chicken joints is the signature Peruvian pollo a la brasa, char-broiled in a wood-fired rotisserie. The rotation makes the bird self-baste, keeping even the white meat juicy under its crispy, nearly fat-free skin. Spicing is also superior. Owner Edy Demovsek's dozen-ingredient marinade recipe came from a visit to Peru, but has been tweaked with spices from her hometown — Chiang Mai, Thailand. The result is subtly mouth-warming heat absent from average chain chickens. \$\$\$

### Japanese Market and Sushi Deli

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

Inside a small market that is widely considered Miami's

premier source of Japanese foodstuffs, the "Sushi Deli" restaurant component is nothing more than a lunch counter. But chef Michio Kushi serves up some sushi found nowhere else in town. Example: traditional Osaka-style sushi — layers of rice, seasoned seaweed, 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. \$

### 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](http://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. \$\$\$

### 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 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. \$\$\$

### Sushi Siam

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

(See Miami / Upper Eastside listing)

## NORTH BEACH

### Ariston

940 71st St., 305-864-9848

Ariston's classical Greek cuisine is based on recipes of co-owner Thanasis Barlos's mom Noni and executed by CIA-trained chef Alexia Apostolidis. Concentrate on the menu's 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](http://www.primapasta.com)

Opened in 1993 with 28 seats, this family-run 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: crabmeat raviolotti in lobster cream sauce, black squid ink linguini heaped with seafood. 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](http://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 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 are featured in the chef's latest tome, but with Tamarind's very affordable prices, you might as well let the man's impeccably trained kitchen staff do the work for you. \$\$-\$\$\$

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## Restaurant Listings

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### 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. 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? \$-\$\$

#### Côte Gourmet

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

If only every Miami neighborhood could have a neighborhood restaurant like this low-priced little French jewel. 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 ajiaico. Both are thick chicken soups, full meals in a bowl. 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. \$

#### 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-B-Que Beach Sports Bar & Grill

12599 Biscayne Blvd.  
305-895-3141

On Friday nights, there's karaoke, 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, 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. Menu winners: succulent sliced brisket and delightfully juicy chicken. \$\$

#### Bulldog Barbecue

15400 Biscayne Blvd., 305-940-9655  
www.bulldog-bbq.com

The BBQ master at this small, rustic room is pugnacious Top Chef contender Howie Kleinberg, whose indoor electric smoker turns out mild-tasting 'cue that ranges from the expected pulled pork, ribs, brisket, and chicken to hot-smoked salmon and veggie plates. There are also creative comfort food starters like BBQ chicken flatbread, salads, and sweets. Sides include refreshing slaw; beans studded with "burnt ends" (the most intensely flavored outer barbecue chunks); and sweet potato or chipotle-spiced fries. The cost is comparatively high, but such is the price of fame. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

#### Burritos Grill Café

11717 Biscayne Blvd., 305-891-1041  
www.burritosgrillcafe.com

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 marinated pork loin; tacos al pastor, stuffed with subtly smoky steak, onion, cilantro, and pineapple; sinful deep-fried tacos dorados; and signature burritos, including the Maya, filled with juicy cochinilla 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. However, 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 top restaurants. Now there's a casual but pleasantly nautical side dining room with booths. Whether it's garlicky scampi, smoked-fish dip, grilled yellowtail or hog or mutton snapper, perfectly tenderized cracked conch or conch fritters, 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 a few minutes, thanks to the staff's Italian ebullience. Menu offerings are mostly classic comfort foods with some contemporary items as well. Housemade pastas are good enough that low-carb dieters should take a break, 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 Tex-Mex dishes here, 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: cochinilla pibil? Chéen's authentically succulent version of the pickle-onion-topped marinated pork dish is earthily aromatic from achote, tangy from bitter oranges, and 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)

#### 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. \$\$\$

#### 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. \$-\$\$

#### 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. \$

#### Little Havana

12727 Biscayne Blvd., 305-899-9069  
www.littlehavanarestaurant.com

In addition to white-tablecloth ambiance, 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, wash in warm parsley oil and smashed garlic. New branches are now open in Miami's Midtown neighborhood and in North Bay Village. \$

#### North One 10

11052 Biscayne Blvd., 305-893-4211  
www.northone10.com

After helming several NYC restaurants for China Grill Management, the homegrown married team of chef

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## Restaurant Listings

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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 and herb demiglace); a stone crab hot dog the chef invented for a Super Bowl party. The award-winning wine list inspires playfully themed pairing events. Prices are reasonable and parking is free. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

**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 cutesie names of many items - baygels, bergerrbite, Cezarrrr salad, hammm, meat-a-ball, schmopperrr - may cause queasiness. But the schmopperrr itself is one helluva high-octane veggie burger. \$-\$\$

**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. \$

**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

The 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 New Yorkers will 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. \$\$

**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 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. Drippin' good burgers, too. And unlike MacChain addicts, patrons here can order a cold beer with the good grease. \$-\$\$

## 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 is a rare surprise for nature lovers. The featured item is still the house-smoked fish this historic venue began producing in 1938, available in three varieties: salmon, mahi mahi, and the signature blue marlin. But the smokehouse now also turns out ribs and delectable brisket. Other new additions include weekend fish fries. 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). \$-\$\$

**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. But these bites contain no evil ingredients (transfats, artificial color/flavor, antibiotics, growth hormones). And the food, while not the authentic Mex street stuff dreams are made of, is darned tasty, too. \$

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

Wraps are for wimps. At this small shop run by Christine Gouvella, originally from British Guyana, the wrapper is a far more substantial and tasty roti, a Caribbean megacrepe 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 from which to choose. 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

Though diners at this upscale Peruvian eatery will find ceviches, a hefty fried-seafood jalea, and Peru's other expected traditional specialties, all presented far more elegantly than most in town, 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). \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

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**"Benihana.....  
without all the fanfare."  
- The Miami Herald**

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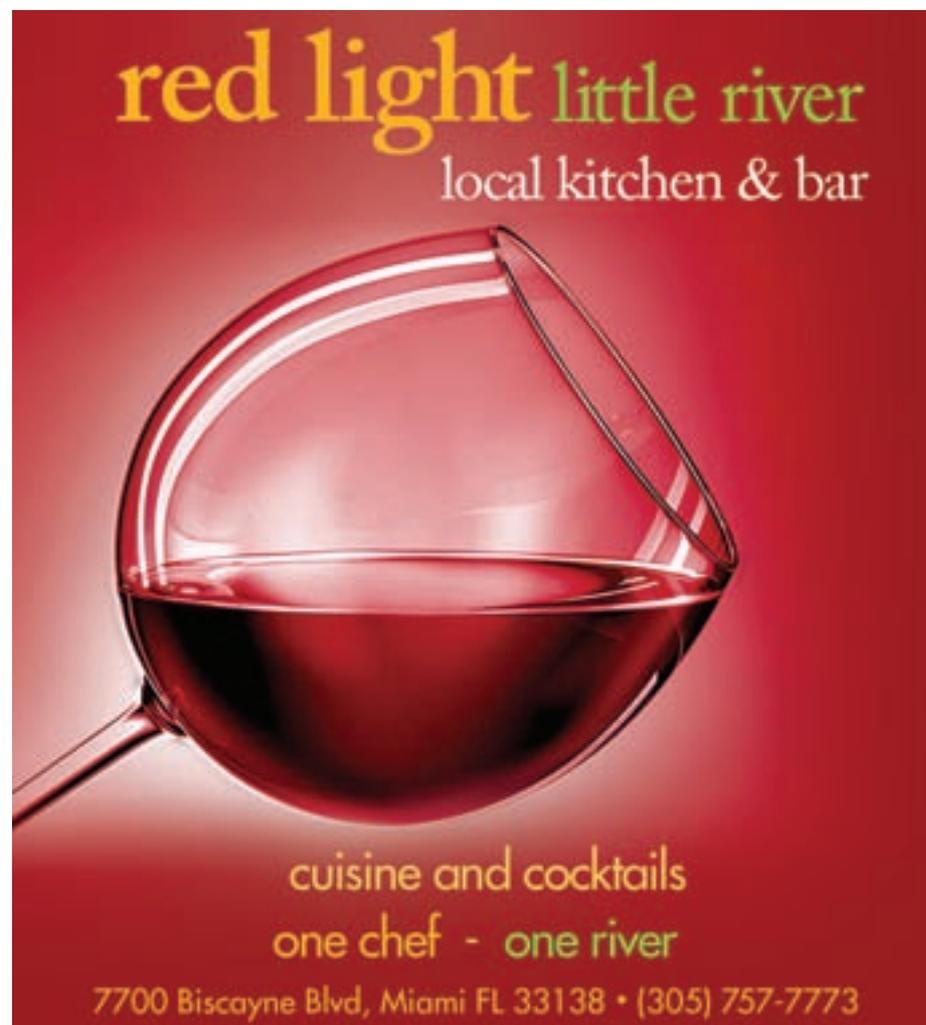
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## Restaurant Listings

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### 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### 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 after-hours snack stop. 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 rare taste of Japanese home cooking, served in grazing portions. Try glistening-fresh strips of raw tuna can be had in maguro neta – mixed with scallions and dressed with habit-forming honey-miso mustard sauce. 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 *Renaissance*. Their menu's mix-and-match option 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 sarkara, flavored with a Bangladeshi citrus reminiscent of sour orange. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Iron Sushi

16350 W. Dixie Hwy.  
305-945-2244

(See Miami Shores listing?)

### 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) 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. \$\$\$

### Kabobji

3055 NE 163rd St., 305-354-8484  
www.EatKabobji.com

This place makes a very good tahini sauce. In fact that alone is reason enough to visit. We prefer ours with this bright, cheery eatery's delightfully oniony falafel or a veg-garnished wrap of thin-sliced marinated beef schwarma. They also do a beautifully spiced, and reassuringly fresh-tasting, raw kibbi naye (Middle Eastern steak tartare). It's hard to resist putting together a grazing meal of starters and wraps, but there's also a roster of full entrées (with soup or salad plus starch), including tempting vegetarian and seafood meals for noncarnivores. \$\$

### Kebab Indian Restaurant

514 NE 167th St.

305-940-6309

Since the 1980s this restaurant, located in an unatmospheric 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 vindaloos 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 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. \$\$

### Lime Fresh Mexican Grill

14831 Biscayne Blvd., 305-949-8800

(See Midtown / Wynwood / Design District listing)

### Laurenzo's Market Café

16385 W. Dixie Hwy.

305-945-6381

www.laurenzomarket.com

It's just a small area between the wines and the fridge counters – no potted palms, and next-to-no service in this cafeteria-style 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, 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. And now that pizza master Carlo is manning the wood-fired oven, you can sample the thinnest, crispiest pies outside Napoli. \$\$\$

### Little Saigon

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. \$

### 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 are generally the only places to go for this eating experience. Start with a wine-enriched four-cheese fondue; proceed to an entrée with meat or seafood, plus choice of cooking potion (herbed wine, bouillon, or oil); finish with fruits and cakes dipped in 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. \$\$\$

### Oishi Thai

14841 Biscayne Blvd.

305-947-4338

www.oishithai.com

At this stylish Thai/sushi spot, try the menu of specials, many of which clearly reflect the young chef's fanatical 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). The specials menu includes some Thai-inspired creations, too, such as veal massaman curry, Chilean sea bass curry, and sizzling filet mignon with basil sauce. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### 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); broad rice noodles stir-fried with eye-opening chili/garlic sauce and fresh Thai basil; and chili-topped Diamond Duck in tangy tamarind sauce. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### 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 albondigas – 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 are just as evocative. For eat-in diners, quite continental soups, salads, and sandwiches are equally and dependably French. \$\$

### Pizza Fusion

14815 Biscayne Blvd., 305-405-6700

www.pizzafusion.com

"Saving the earth one pizza at a time" is the motto at this franchise of the only pizza chain to require third-party organic restaurant certification at all locations. Their gluten-free crusts make it mighty friendly to pizza fanatics with food allergies. Starters, salads, desserts, and organic wines/beers are also served. And delivery is available – in hybrid cars, of course. Specials unique to this NMB franchise include Sunday-Thursday happy hours, a free Kids Organic Club class on Saturdays, 10:00-11:00 a.m., and varied Monday-Wednesday freebies. \$\$\$

### PK Oriental Mart

255 NE 167th St., 305-654-9646

Unlike other Asian markets on this strip between I-95 and Biscayne Boulevard, PK has a 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, 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 porn one of the Carnegie Deli's mile-high pastrami sandwiches? Well, Roasters will dwarf them. Consider the "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

Continued on page 55

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## Restaurant Listings

Continued from page 54

other Jewish deli classics are here too, including perfectly sour pickles, 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  
Sang's has three menus. The pink menu is Americanized Chinese food, from chop suey to honey garlic chicken. The white menu permits the chef to 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 live tank allows seasonal seafood dishes like lobster with ginger and scallion. Recently installed: a Chinese barbecue case, displaying savory items like crispy pork with crackling attached. \$\$\$

### Shing Wang Vegetarian, Iced & 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. As for the rest of the name: iced 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, 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. \$\$\$

### 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. \$\$\$

### 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: sheer floor-to-ceiling

drapes, for starters. The sushi list, too, is over the top, featuring monster makis like 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. Hawaiian King Crab contains unprecedented ingredients like tomatoes, green peppers, and pineapple. Boutique wines, artisan sakes, and cocktails are as exotic as the cuisine. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Tuna's Raw Bar and Grille

17850 W. Dixie Hwy., 305-932-0630  
www.tunasrawbarandgrille.com  
The reincarnated Tuna's has gained new owners, a new name, and 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, Malpecos, 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.anthonyscoal-firedpizza.com  
Coal is 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 mere minutes, a pie with the classic thin, crisp-bottomed, beautifully char-bubbled crust that fans of the above legendary pizzerias crave. Expect neither bargain-chain prices, a huge selection of toppings, nor much else on the menu. 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 nearly 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 — dishes like carpaccio al salmone (crudo, with portobellos, 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 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### 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. 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 desert soufflé's flavor changes daily, but it always did. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Il Migliore

2576 NE Miami Gardens Dr., 305-792-2902  
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 overcomplicate, 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. And even low-carb dieters happily go to hell in a hand basket when faced with a mound of potatoes alla Toscana, herb-sprinkled French fries. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Mahogany Grille

2190 NW 183rd St., 305-626-8100  
Mahogany Grille has drawn critical raves and an international clientele since retired major league outfielder Andre Dawson and his brother transformed this place in 2007. Today it's white tablecloths and, naturally, mahogany. The menu is a sort of trendy yet traditional soul fusion of food 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### 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 proven. Floribbean-style seafood is the specialty: fresh hearts of palm slaw and Caribbean curry sauce, rock shrimp spring rolls with sweet soy glaze, yellowtail snapper with tomato-herb vinaigrette. Forget its strip-mall location. The restaurant itself is elegant. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

### Pizza Roma

19090 NE 29th Ave., 305-937-4884  
Despite its name, this homey hidden eatery serves not Rome's wood-cooked, crunchy-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 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. 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. \$\$\$

### Sushi Siam

19575 Biscayne Blvd., 305-932-8955  
(See Miami / Upper Eastside listing)

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