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September 2011

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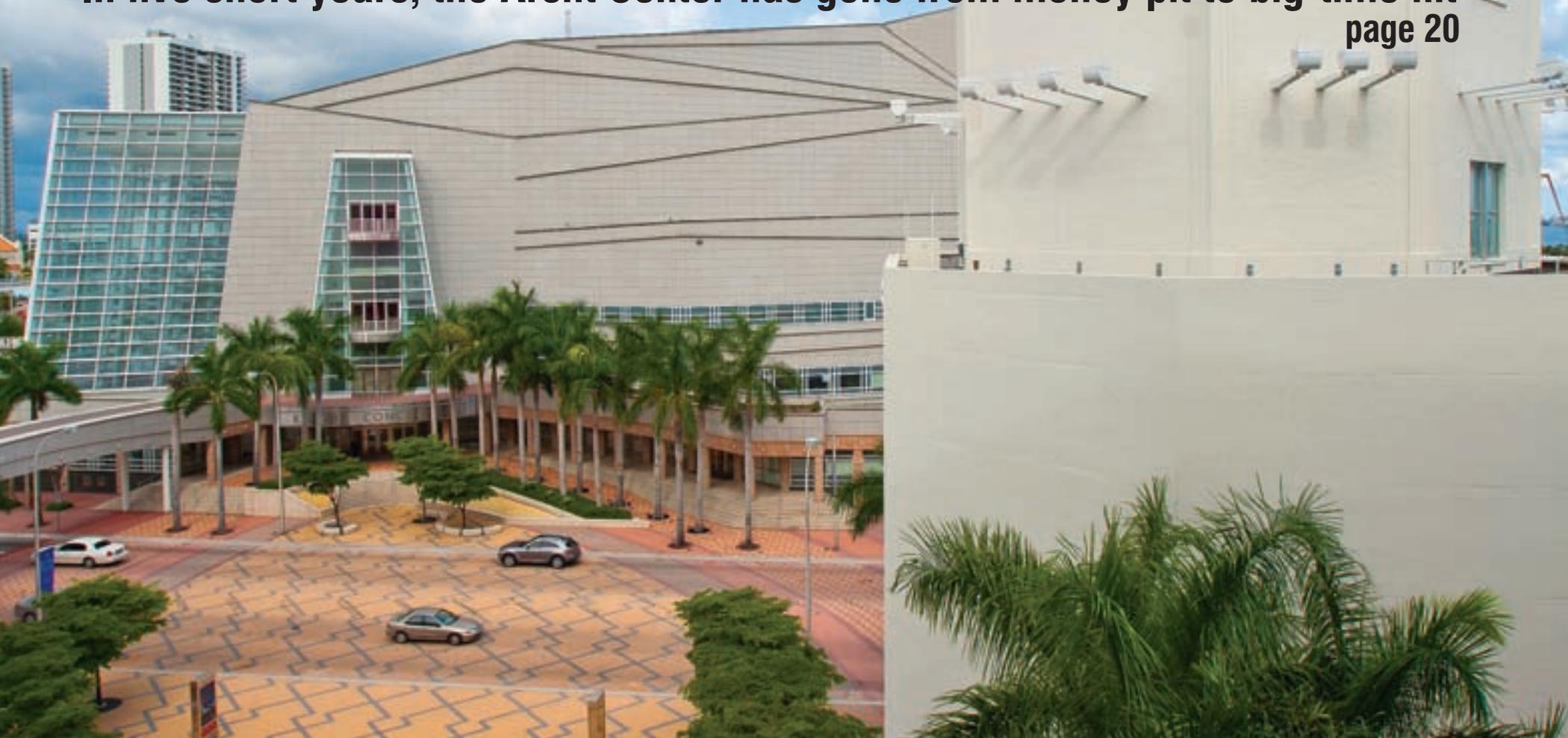
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page 20



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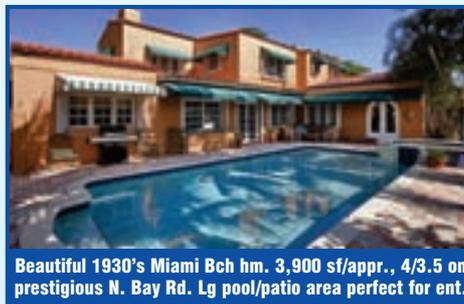
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4

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12

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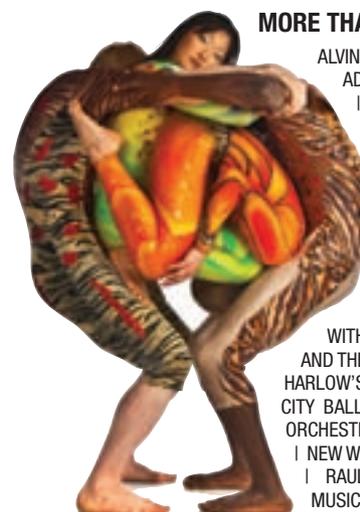
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BISCAYNE *Times*

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www.stuartweb.com

WEBSITE

Polar Web Design
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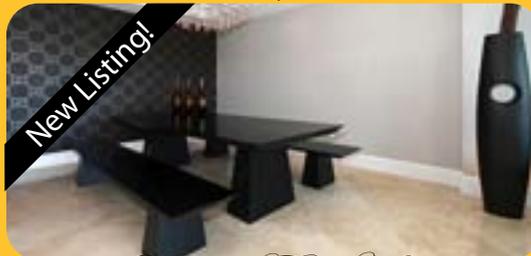
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Commentary: LETTERS

Editor's Note: In last month's cover story by Erik Bojnansky, "Who We Are, Part 2," Tony Cho was misidentified as president of Majestic Properties. He is president and founder of Metro 1 Properties. However, he was correctly identified in an accompanying photo. Also Ira Sheskin was misidentified as an associate professor at the University of Miami. He is a full professor. We regret the errors.

Last month's column by our Aventura Neighborhood Correspondent, Shari Lynn Rothstein-Kramer ("Cat Fight"), generated more letters than we have room to publish in this print edition, so we've posted others on our website, www.biscaynetimes.com.

Can't Wait to Visit the Park, and Especially Those Carnivorous Reptiles

I am a local resident and it is great to see articles like Jim Harper's about nature and how we can keep children out of the malls ("Call of the Wild," August 2011). Nowadays, adolescents want to go to the mall and either shop or eat instead of playing a sport and staying active during the summer.

I had never heard about Highland Oaks Park before reading his "Park Patrol" column, but now that I know about it and what kind of activities it has to offer, I will most likely visit it with my little nephew to keep him active. I'll probably enroll him in the soccer program since he lives around that area.

Although it seems the park is great and has a lot of things to do, I am concerned about the alligator and the rare crocodile. The park should have fences or something that can keep them away.

The county should also install extra water fountains because sometimes people forget water bottles, and around this area, it gets very hot.

Thank very much to Jim Harper for the evaluation. It was a tremendous help and I look forward to visiting the park and to reading more articles on parks in our neighborhoods.

*Tania Centeno
Bay Harbor Islands*

Can't Wait to Visit the Park, Even If I Have to Swim There

I was reading *Biscayne Times* the other day and I ran across a great article by Jim W. Harper called "Forgotten Flagler" (June 2011). I have lived in Miami for most of my 17 years and I have never heard of Monument Island. The way Harper describes it, the park sounds like a great place to visit.

I found the different aspects of the park very fascinating. It's even a landmark destination because of its involvement with a pornographic film.

I love the fact that it is surrounded by water, making a visit there all more adventurous. Also I think it's awesome that the island is so close to Star Island. Maybe I can see Gloria Estefan or Dwayne Wade. The 100-foot-tall obelisk also seems very interesting.

The whole park looks beautiful. It has a certain charm to it. It certainly looks like a place my family, friends, and I can go to have fun and enjoy nature. I'm a very adventurous person, so this would provide me with room to explore, from the sandy beach to the natural earthy areas.

From the looks of it, Harper is very good at what he does. I'll take his three of five trees and set a date to visit Flager.

*Perpetua Bourdeau
North Miami*

Pedestrian Friendliness: It's Not as Easy as You Might Think

I agree with Jack Spirk ("Letters," August 2011) about the need for pedestrian friendliness along Biscayne Boulevard, but I have one amplification. He said the group that helped plan the roadway improvements decided that the medians wouldn't be part of FDOT's reconstruction. That group was the Upper Eastside Miami Council (UEMC), which was made up of all the homeowner associations in the Upper Eastside, as well as businesses and individuals.

The UEMC parceled out FDOT's design section by section to each corresponding neighborhood association. There was fierce feedback from every neighborhood, and especially the businesses, against the medians. Businesses were vehement that they did not want left-turn access compromised, and that medians were in effect barriers to access.

Only Morningside approved the new median and only in the areas where there were fewer businesses. FDOT complied and removed the planned medians from the original design.

Another area of pedestrian friendliness that became controversial was the landscaping. The pedestrian-friendly design (as well as good urban planning, in my opinion) called for shade trees along the widened sidewalks. This again was met with vehement opposition from those who wanted palm trees, especially royal palms. The whole issue became quite contentious.

Continued on page 12

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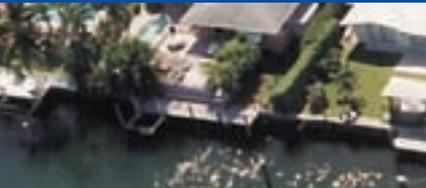
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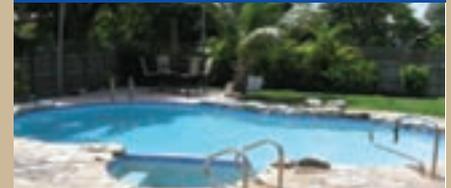
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Commentary: LETTERS

Letters

Continued from page 10

I don't want to open a can of worms again, but suffice to say that pedestrian friendliness is not as simple as it might seem. Either way, we have come a long way in improving the Boulevard. Let's hope the progress continues.

*David Treece
Upper Eastside*

Joey Tees Off on Immigrants, Female Athletes

Hey, no one will ever accuse me of reading the *BT* the first day it comes out, but I finally read Jim W. Harper's excellent cover story on the future of golf courses in South Florida ("The Trouble With Golf," April 2011).

To add to the story, at one time the Fontainebleau community's two golf courses provided tons of green space to the high-end community that, in the 1980s, was home to professors from Florida International University, pilots, and airline flight attendants and personnel.

But as Harper alluded in his story, the immigrant community moved in and, as they say, "there goes the neighborhood!" The courses slowly fell into a state of overgrowth and the owner eventually sold them off to developers. They started new housing, and then the economy killed it! I wonder how the people who originally bought "golf course view" dwellings feel now.

Also while the story mentions that Barry University has a men's golf team and Johnson and Wales has a golf management program, Harper fails to mention that the men's golf programs at University of Miami and FIU are deceased — a huge golf travesty here in South Florida. Thanks, Title IX!

*Joey Corona
Edgewater*

Claws: If You Want a Declawed Cat, Adopt One

Shari Lynn Rothstein-Kramer oversimplifies a complex, emotional, and deeply personal issue — declawing cats ("Cat Fight," August 2011). While declawing is legal throughout most of the United States, it is illegal in many European countries, as well as Australia and New Zealand.

It is difficult for me to understand why Ms. Rothstein-Kramer feels that an organization like Adopt A Stray, or foster parent(s) who choose to spend their time, energy, and financial resources rescuing homeless animals should not have the right to establish adoption parameters

While the kitten she wanted for her mother-in-law may not have been placed in a home by the time Ms. Rothstein-Kramer returned to the store, a highly "marketable" feline such as a Siamese will undoubtedly find a fabulous home. Waiting a little longer to find the right family is a small price for the kitten to pay to avoid undergoing painful, unnecessary orthopedic surgery, particularly when there are humane alternatives such as the application of rubber nail caps that prevent damage to skin or furniture.

I encourage people who want a declawed cat to consider adopting a feline that is already declawed. If they are unable to find a suitable declawed feline, then I advise them to find out if the organization prohibits declawing before even looking at the available kittens and cats.

While the decision might have been communicated more diplomatically, or a full discussion of alternatives may have resolved the issue, Ms. Rothstein-Kramer's combative approach did not enhance the chances of finding a mutually acceptable resolution.

In addition, I suspect that getting into an argument and attempting to demand the organization change its policy did little to diminish her mother-in-law's disappointment.

*Cindy Hewitt
S.A.F.E. Pets, Inc.
Miami*

Claws: Apologize, See a Shrink, and Stay Away from Me

Thank you, Shari Lynn Rothstein-Kramer, for your insightful piece! Your inane ranting has me convinced that you should be shut out of polite society, but I digress. You owe PetSmart a public apology for bringing them into this. They graciously host adoption events for a variety of nonprofits in our area, and because you feel it is okay to chop off a cat's fingers at the knuckles and deprive them of the only self-defense mechanism they possess, you drag their name through the mud.

You should also apologize to the people at Adopt A Stray for wasting their time with your barbaric intentions. If you knew anything at all about pet rescues, you would know that when you suggest declawing a cat, you may as well tell them you are planning on cooking it in a stew as well.

And you should also apologize to Marlene Blauder personally for printing comments about her husband's foreskin (or lack thereof).

Continued on page 52

exclusive

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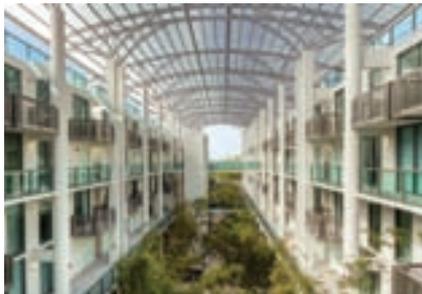
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Islands on Demand

A view of our past from the archives of HistoryMiami

By Paul George
Special to the BT

This early 20th-century photograph of Miami (at the top) and Miami Beach (near the bottom) provides a glimpse of the island-building mania of that era. Just left of center is an undeveloped Fisher Island, which was severed from Miami Beach in the early 1900s in the process of creating Government Cut and the deep-water channel from the old Port of Miami on the city's bayfront.

Fisher Island, named for Miami Beach's first great developer, Carl Fisher, did not experience significant development until the 1980s. Above Fisher Island are a series of small spoil islands, later called the Dodge Islands, from which the new, bustling Port of Miami emerged in the 1960s.

The County Causeway, later known as the MacArthur Causeway, connects Miami and Miami Beach. Opened in 1920, it was only the second roadway to connect the two cities. On its north side are Star Island, Palm Island, and Hibiscus Island, each created in the 1910s.

Monument Island and the emerging Venetian Islands are located farther north of the causeway. While the cities of Miami and Miami Beach experienced rapid growth in the boom-time 1920s, these islands in Biscayne Bay had to await the developmental surge that followed World War II.

To order a copy of this photo, please contact HistoryMiami archives manager Dawn Hugh at 305-375-1623, dhugh@historymiami.org.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



Photo courtesy of Miami News Collection, HistoryMiami, #1983-026-249

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✓ **We Promised To Reform Pensions**

We reduced pension obligations by more than \$43 million, salaries by more \$30 million, and found an additional \$7 million in savings from healthcare costs. This exercise helped save the City of Miami and its taxpayers approximately \$80 million. Together, we will continue to work towards a plan that would provide a fair and reasonable solution for the city, residents, and its employees.

✓ **We Promised To Stop Government Waste**

We are now aggressively looking at reducing the size of government by streamlining the City's departments in order to provide a better product to our residents.

✓ **We Promised To Improve Quality of Life**

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Political advertisement paid for and approved by Marc Sarnoff for City of Miami Commissioner, District 2

BizBuzz

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

By **Pamela Robin Brandt**
BT Contributor

With the kids back in school, it doesn't feel much like summer anymore. But a record number of *BT* advertisers have special deals and entertaining events to offer this month to ensure that it does still feel like summer vacation.

Looking for an after-school/weekend activity for the kids that's not only fun but confidence-building? AfterSchool & Saturdays@ThePlayGround, acting classes (divided into age-appropriate groups: 6-9, 9-12, or 12-16, depending on day) that incorporate dance and music, are back again at Miami Shores's **PlayGround Theatre** (9806 NE 2nd Ave., 305-751-9550). Session 2 starts October 4. Call or visit www.theplaygroundtheatre.com to register.

When we were little, we took ten years of piano lessons owing to parents who insisted they'd make us the life of every party. We weren't. But the lessons did change our life for the better, forever. It's hard to explain, but new advertiser **Richard Foltz** will make it clear at his Pianopresto music studios. The experienced public-school music teacher, musical theater accompanist, and music therapist has reasonably priced lessons to accommodate ages from three to adult. Call 786-468-9871.

For more fun for all ages, hit the Design District on September 24, from

1:00-3:00 p.m., for the sixth **Family Day**, presented by Miami Design District Associates (with participation this time from the Adrienne Arsht Center). For the kids there'll be supervised pizza making, temporary tattoos, and more, while the district's galleries and shops will be open for grown-ups.

Want a family activity that's uniquely Miamian? Visitors are welcome every day at the nonprofit **Pelican Harbor Seabird Station** (1279 NE 79th Street Cswy.; www.pelicanharbor.org for directions), which has been saving pelicans and other injured seabirds for 31 years. Sadly, Wendy Fox, the station's longtime director, died of cancer last month. But her son Brian, a wildlife biologist who began volunteering at the station as a third-grader, has been confirmed as new director. It's fascinating to get up close and personal with these prehistoric-looking birds, so come by — and perhaps volunteer.

Summer is still going strong at downtown's historic **Gusman Center** (174 E. Flagler St.) till September 22, when the cheesy/chic, dress-up-and-dance movie series "Flickin' Summer" closes with *The Breakfast Club*. Break out your dorkiest 1980s clothes for the 6:00 p.m. happy hour, followed by the flick and a DJed dance party onstage. Tickets, \$10, are available at the box office (305-374-2444) or from Ticketmaster; use promo code DWNT-WNR for 50% off.



Film of a more alternative nature will be featured September 8 at 7:00 p.m., when hip **O Cinema** (90 NW 29th St., 305-571-9970) premieres *Voices from the Mariel*. Enjoy a night featuring a Q&A with the filmmakers, plus rum cocktails, pastries, and Cuban standards from Arlin & the Avant Gardes. And September 29-October 2, another premiere, of the film *The Weird World of Blowfly*, will feature live performances by legendary Miami musician Clarence "Blowfly" Reid. See the story by *BT* arts editor Anne Tschida in this issue (page 64) or check www.o-cinema.org for more details.

It's "Curtain Up!" at the **Aventura Arts & Cultural Center** (3385 NE 188th St., 877-311-7469) on September 25, noon to 4:00 p.m. That'd be the new waterfront center's second annual preview festival — a free event featuring performances by the Arts Ballet Theatre and Miami International Piano Festival artists, plus puppeteers, chances to win tickets to this second season's programs,

and refreshments for picnickers.

If you prefer your waterfront adventures to be on a boat, check out **Sunny Isles Marina's** new digs (400 Sunny Isles Blvd., 305-945-6000), which include the expected (like storage/repair facilities) plus extras like jet-ski rentals and a tiki bar. New customers who mention the *BT* get one month free storage.

Need a space for your own ultimate event, be it birthday party, concert, fashion shoot, banquet, or maybe just a business meeting where no one will fall asleep — guaranteed? Artist Bruce Grayson's **WhereHouse 2016** (2016 NE 155th St., North Miami Beach, 786-489-2478) is 4600 square feet of eye-popping space with floor-to-ceiling wall murals, dozens of light sculptures, custom-painted chairs and tables, widescreen TVs, catering kitchen, four bars, 300 parking spaces, and more. This new advertiser's motto: "We Put the ART in Party." Call Diane at 786-489-2478.

Continued on page 18

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 4 Bed | 3 Baths | 2,630 sq. ft. | Pool | AC Garage A+ Location - Move right in! | Walking distance to Lincoln Road | **\$1,199,999**



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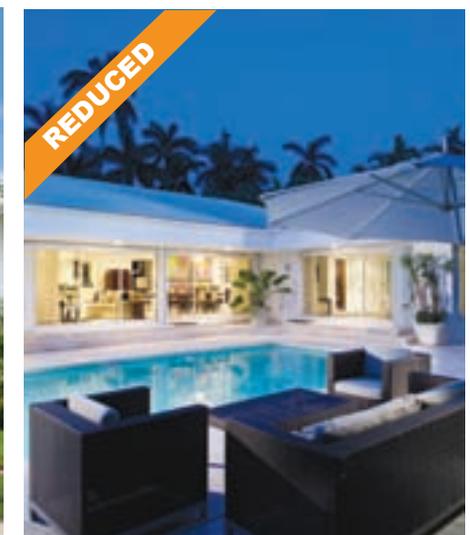


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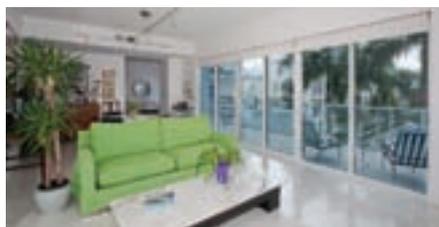
3 Bed /3.5 Baths with 2,895 sq. ft. interior space. Spectacular design by Henry Hohausser. Exceptional Terrazzo floors. Formal living and dining room + separate family room area facing tropical pool + patio. 2 car garage. - **5363 La Gorce Drive - Miami Beach**



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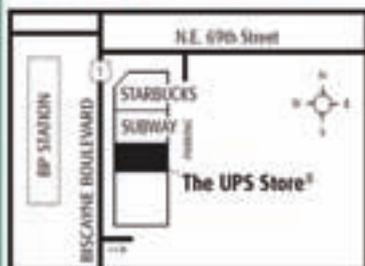
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Our Sponsors: SEPTEMBER 2011

Biz Buzz

Continued from page 16

If music's your thing, save September 3 for I-Swing's album debut at **Club Tipico Dominicano** (1344 NW 36th St., 305-634-7819). Advance tix are available at the club for \$15. And every Sunday in September from 5:00-8:00 p.m. happy hour drink specials are 2-4-1.

No time for a happy hour where you just eat and drink? Drop into **Salon No. 1** (6909 Biscayne Blvd., 305-757-7662) any Thursday in September for a happy hour — with free wine and champagne — where you can also get yourself looking good. Mention the *BT* for 20% off future services booked that day, too.

There's something seriously charming about salons with a connection to more traditional arts. This month **Control Hair Salon & Gallery** (2814 N. Miami Ave., 305-573-6910) is throwing an "After ArtWalk Affair" on September 10 from 8:00 p.m. to 1:00 a.m., featuring music, beverages, and hair art/styling demos.

And drop in on September 15 from 4:00-8:00 p.m. for "Client Appreciation Night," when the salon will provide free hair product samples and treatments to regulars and *BT* readers.

Big news this month at **Hannah and Her Scissors** (611 NE 86th St., 305-772-8426) Owner and hair artist/fine artist Hannah Lasky has finally found a top-quality manicurist plus a waxing technician, making her salon full-service. To celebrate, *BT* readers who get a mani/pedi can take \$5 off their next waxing, facial, or cut.

Indulge yourself at home with September's mobile massage deal from **Body Well Therapy** (786-239-7202). A one-hour, in-home therapeutic massage for \$79, \$20 off the regular price. Other services the traveling company offers (every day, morning through night) include couples massages, in-office chair massages, prenatal massage, and therapeutic massages for accident victims.

If your pet needs in-home care this month, **Smiling Pets Animal Clinic's** mobile vet, Dr. Avi Adulami, has a deal for new clients He'll waive his house call fee (\$40-\$75) for his first visit to treat three or more pets. Call 305-754-0844.

How about a spa day for your pooch? **Rio's Pet Spa & Boarding** (19030 W. Dixie Hwy., 305-935-5551) has a couple of deals that will turn a treatment into a mini vacation. Groom your dog in September and get four hours of doggie

daycare free; or get a free night in Rio's kennel with play day when you bring your dog in for grooming.

At Biscayne Pet House (10789 Biscayne Blvd., 305-895-6164), proprietors Tom and Bonnie report major interest in their new line of **By Nature** natural dog and cat food — and with flavors like duck and sweet peas, fish and yogurt, or pork and sweet potatoes, it's no wonder. Drop in this month and mention the *BT* for a free sample of dry food in a measuring cup.

As for alluring people food, welcome to new advertiser **Sparky's Roadside Barbecue** (204 NE 1st St., 305-377-2877). You know those cartoons where the smoke from a cooking fire turns into a beckoning finger, and hungry people just sorta float horizontally through the air to whatever's sending out the irresistible aroma? That's how Sparky's moist, mouth-watering brisket or pork makes us feel. At this downtown place, the 'cue is the real thing.

At **Heavy Burger** (19004 NE 29th Ave., 305-932-7555), where the "heavy" refers to both the metal/hard rock music and the whopping 10 oz. Angus burgers, there's now another temptation to take time off a new happy hour, Monday-Friday from 4:00-7:00 p.m. Check their ad for different food or beverage specials each night.

On the same Aventura backstreet — which seems to have turned into a sort of secret restaurant row — **Mr. Chef's Fine Chinese Cuisine & Bar** (18800 NE 29th Ave. #10, 786-787-9030 or 305-787-9070) is celebrating its one-year anniversary with three coupon offers for lovers of authentic upscale Chinese food. Bring in this issue's ad from September 22-30 for a free glass of house wine per diner, or all month long, for either \$3 off checks of \$30 or more, or 10% off for tables of eight or more.

Why watch football games at home, over a frozen pizza, when you can celebrate the season with other fans and snazzy snacks at **The Playwright Irish Pub** (801 Silks Run in the Village at Gulfstream Park, 501 S. Federal Hwy., Hallandale Beach, 954-457-7563)? During this month's games (which you'll be watching on 22 HD flat screens plus two 30-foot and 18-foot projection screens), food/drink deals include \$10 pitchers, \$15.95 beer towers, and a \$5 football food menu.

And this year, as usual, the **Royal Bavarian Schnitzel Haus** (1085 NE 79th St., 305-754-8002) isn't making partiers wait till next month for Oktoberfest. The

revelry kicks off on September 17 at 8:00 p.m. with special grill pans for two or more, four Oktoberfest brews, live DJ, and theme decorations. Speaking of kicking off, *Monday Night Football* is also in the biergarten, with beer bucket specials and game food.

Even if the parties get outta control, please don't open those beer bottles with your teeth. Sigh. But if you do, **Biscayne Dental Center** (14771 Biscayne Blvd., 305-945-7745) is excited to announce that orthodontics has just been added to its comprehensive list of services.

Home improvements just got a lot easier with the grand opening of new advertiser **Jako Architectural Hardware** (14460 Biscayne Blvd., 305-971-5322). Founded in Cancun in 2001 (and now present in all major Mexican cities), the company specializes in innovative hardware — cabinet handles, locks and panic bars, cutlery trays, closet organizers, wall safes, mailboxes — pretty much everything, and all of it discounted 10% this month.

Sometimes just one definitive focal piece is all that's needed to transform a room from frumpy to fashionable. And those are the specialty at **The Collection German Furniture** (15400 Biscayne Blvd., 305-944-3727). As a grand-opening special, the high-end shop is offering *BT* readers a 10% discount through September.

Some advertisers are looking beyond September with their deals and news items. While it's hard to imagine cold weather yet, for instance, **DownRite Pool & Spa** (305-668-9778) wants to ensure that frigid water doesn't prevent you from enjoying your pool, so pool heaters are this month's pre-winter special. A 100,000 BTU Jandy heater pump for \$3214, or a 1,300,000 BTU Aqua Pro for \$3214, plus tax. And for *BT* readers this month, the installation is free.

Wouldn't it be great, when your high-season guests descend from the north, not to worry about your basic household comforts — A/C, plus major appliances — going on the fritz? Welcome new advertiser **Broward Factory Service** (954-797-0799). The company's very reasonable silver contract (\$129-\$219 per year) covers unlimited service calls and all labor plus functional parts. The gold plans (\$197-\$427 per year) include replacement of nonrepairable equipment. Call for a free home inspection.

It's possible you've already visited **Medi-Station Urgent Care Center** (9600 NE 2nd Ave., 305-603-7650) for back-to-school physicals, since they couldn't be more convenient. No appointments are

necessary, and the center is open seven days with evening hours. But Medi-Station reminds you that flu season is coming. So protect yourself and your social life by getting your shots early.

Speaking of beyond September, how about your whole future? If you've dreamed of being a massage therapist, investigate new advertiser **Educating Hands School of Massage** (3883 Biscayne Blvd., 305-285-6991), whose roots in holistic massage therapy go back almost 30 years. There are both full-time day and part-time evening programs. Check out their open house on September 8, 6:30-8:30 p.m.

Welcome back to the **MiMo Biscayne Association**, whose big upcoming art-in-the-park event (that'd be at Legion Park at 66th Street and Biscayne Boulevard) doesn't happen till December 4. But it's already time to register for the Great MiMo Chalk-In Festival, whose idea is for neighborhood artists of all ages, including you, to create the largest chalk mural in the Boulevard's history. Call 305-469-2849 to sign up.

To make sure you have the stamina to enjoy all the above, pump up at **Idol's Gym** (5580 NE 4th Ct., 305-751-7591), long a favorite of power lifters but now sporting new equipment and trainers. Through September, the facility is offering a 13-month membership for \$399 (or start with an upgradable two-month membership for \$99). While you're there, ask about the contest for best motivational DVD; the winner gets a free six-month membership.

Alternatively — or at this month's low prices, additionally — prepare at **Bikram Yoga North Miami** (2222 NE 123rd St., 305-892-0266), where the September special, for new students only, is \$39 for a month of "hot yoga" classes. The hot part refers to the studio's temperature, kept deliberately warm to accelerate the detoxing process. The hot *looks* will follow.

Finally welcome to new advertiser **Aventura Jewelry & Coin** (19275 Biscayne Blvd. booth #22, 305-933-2646), where shoppers will find an astonishing array of collectibles. These could include a Judith Lieber purse or Versace sunglasses, but the shop specializes in fine watches. Owner Michael Freiman is one of Florida's foremost experts in gold and silver products. So whether you're looking to buy or sell, you'll be in good hands.

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Arts Ascending

Miami's audacious performing arts center got off to a very bad start,
but then things changed — in a big way

By Anne Tschida

BT Arts Editor

Photos by Silvia Ros

On one evening this past January, crowds arrived at the Adrienne Arsht Center for the Performing Arts to see the Florida Grand Opera's *Tales of Hoffman* at the Ziff Ballet Opera House; three works performed by the Cleveland Orchestra in the Knight Concert Hall; and two home-grown pieces from the contemporary Rosie Herrera Dance Company in the Carnival Studio Theater.

Suits and gowns intermingled with pork-pie hats and tank tops. Just the week before, Whoopie Goldberg, the Brazilian dance group Balé Folclórico da Bahia, and the free Family Fest Day had pulled in similarly diverse audiences.

That's a pretty good snapshot of the downtown performing arts center five years after it opened.

In a relatively short time, the center has, on many levels, lived up to its promise. Local, national, and international groups, big and small, have been given a hearing and a viewing at the Cesar Pelli-designed complex, one of the biggest and newest of its kind anywhere in the world. Attendance has increased despite a severe recession and several management overhauls, the loss of some resident companies, and a name change. The formerly derelict area in which it sits looks to become a focal point, literally and culturally, owing to dramatic changes in the urban core.

Although originally envisioned through rose-colored glasses, the first few years of one of Miami's most ambitious civic projects were anything but rosy. And a successful future will require a tightly controlled operation that sustains meaningful engagement with the community that helps pay for it. In fact, without continued support from that community, there can be no future.

Five years ago, in October 2006, the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts opened its stage doors, a little tardy and more than a little over budget. A cultural arts center for Miami had been promoted more or less continuously by civic leaders since the 1980s, as a first-rate venue — with great acoustics, sight-lines, and capacity — was nonexistent. Downtown's Gusman Center was too small, imperfectly designed, and had suffered from neglect.

By the mid-1990s, the area around 1300 Biscayne Blvd. was targeted, and land from Sears and the media company



Arsht Center CEO John Richard says Miami is rising fast: "This is not a renaissance. This is a new cultural Mecca."



Scott Shiller was part of the new team, brought aboard as executive vice president.

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Arsht Center

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Knight Ridder was donated. The Performing Arts Center Trust (PAC) was formed to raise money, and Pelli won the competition to design the center. Ted Arison's company, Carnival Cruise Lines, doubled its initial contribution of \$10 million, and the center added Carnival to its name.

But this being Miami, delays and miscalculations accrued, and deadline after deadline was missed. One of the proposed resident organizations, the Florida Philharmonic, folded. By the time the complex opened, its cost had doubled to \$472 million, and in the next several months, the cost of operating the facility also skyrocketed above original estimates, to \$616,000 per month.

Although the first season was filled with top-notch performances, including a world premiere from the Merce Cunningham Dance Company, attendance also fell below expectations. It didn't help that the center had no parking of its own, which resulted in unhappy patrons having to navigate sometimes threatening streets.

Only nine months after opening, the Carnival Center rang the alarm bells: Without emergency funding, it would have to close its doors. It was an inauspicious beginning in a city that was cynically becoming accustomed to white elephants and failed visions — the center looked like another sinkhole for taxpayer money. Miami-Dade County, which owns the complex, came to the rescue, pouring in \$4 million. The show would go on, but with an uneasy feeling.

And then the unexpected happened. The center's CEO, perceived as out of touch and ineffective, was fired, and the former president of Washington, D.C.'s Kennedy Center, Lawrence Wilker, was brought in as an interim leader, along with a new management and marketing team.

Ricky Arriola, a Miami direct-marketing executive, was the newly elected chairman of the PAC back in 2007 (he's since been appointed by President Obama to the Committee on the Arts and Humanities). He's the one who finagled these moves. It worked.

Arriola doesn't want to look back and cast aspersions. "Look, what in life comes out of the gate completely successful?" he asks. "You have to look at mistakes, and then fix them." The



Marketing whiz Andrew Goldberg knew the territory: Years earlier he'd added sizzle to the Florida Grand Opera.

mistakes, it seemed, were a fundamental lack of outreach and communication with the diverse Miami community; a lack of long-term planning; and mediocre fundraising.

Wilker, along with newcomers like Scott Shiller as executive vice president and Andrew Goldberg as vice president of marketing, hit the ground running. "We hired great leadership," Arriola says, "and we set goals." The ship began to right itself.

All that heavy lifting might have been for naught, however, without another unexpected change of course. In early 2008, former chief executive and chairwoman of TotalBank, Adrienne Arsht, donated a whopping \$30 million, with naming rights, to the center. Asked why, she tells the *BT*: "To save it! It's an extraordinary center." She's in a position to know, sitting as she does on the board of directors for the Kennedy Center and the Metropolitan Opera in New York, among others.

Earned revenues and private support increased, and the newly christened Arsht Center moved from a \$2.5 million deficit in fiscal year 2007 to a modest surplus in 2008. (After the initial bailout, taxpayer money on a yearly basis has remained at an average of about \$7.6 million.)

While the performing arts center struggled to open its doors, a seismic shift in the cultural landscape was taking place. Art Basel Miami Beach arrived in 2002, putting South Florida on the international contemporary arts map.

At the same time, the Miami International Film Festival and the International Hispanic Theatre Festival continued to garner worldwide attention as two of the biggest festivals of their kind. Miami's Cuban-American playwright Nilo Cruz became the first Latino to win the Pulitzer Prize for Drama in 2003, while Edward Villella's Miami City Ballet and the New World Symphony headed by Michael Tilson Thomas also grabbed national headlines — and performance dates all across America.

The time was indeed ripe for a classy performance center to show off all this talent. But how would the numerous groups and individuals who had worked long and hard to shape this new cultural ground fit in? Especially those with limited financial resources? How would the Arsht Center attract this often fractured, disparate, multi-ethnic community to what could be seen as an elite, expensive venue?

These were very significant challenges the center faced — then and today.

In the third floor offices at the Arsht Center, CEO John Richard, who replaced interim president Wilker in October 2008, talks about these challenges, which he says are 24-7. He is joined by Shiller and Goldberg — a threesome that Arriola and Arsht say made all the difference between a failed shell of a performing arts center and a burgeoning national attraction. They are adamant, and enthusiastic, about several points.

One, says Richard, who came from the New Jersey Performing Arts Center in Newark, is that the public investment — tax dollars — will pay off. Currently that equals about one-fourth of the center's income. Another quarter comes from private donations, and about 50 percent from earned income, which

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Arsht Center photos

So why did former banker Adrienne Arsht donate \$30 million? "To save it! It's an extraordinary center."

Arsht Center

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includes tickets sales, food and beverage, rental, and parking receipts. The center also gets tax breaks from the city. Richard says that's a good ratio for the return on investment: "A successful [performing arts center] not only promotes the arts, but it will be an economic engine for development of the whole area. And that's already happening."

That could be coming true. The Arsht Center is used as a selling point to fill the new condos nearby and to attract Biscayne Boulevard businesses. Malaysia's Genting Group recently announced its plans for a huge, \$3 billion resort project on 14 acres of adjacent land it purchased from the McClatchy Company, owner of the *Miami Herald*. Genting says the waterfront project will be mix-used, involving commercial, residential, and casino development. "This is not a renaissance," says Richard about the rise of Miami. "This is a *new* cultural Mecca."

In order to keep this equation stable, Richard and his team know that

successful fundraising is a key element, and one that so far has made local politicians comfortable in continuing to fund the public part of the bargain. "This is an ongoing collaborative," says Richard. "Everybody has to fundraise, market, and program."

The programming aspect is where some other troubles arise.

Shiller stresses that nights like the ones last January need to be the norm: national luminaries combined with resident performances from the likes of the Miami City Ballet or Florida Grand Opera; along with World music or dance and locally generated productions. All of which are required to pull in Miami's uniquely diverse audience.

Blockbusters such as last year's *Wicked* bring in big-ticket sales, while the resident companies draw a dedicated following. But the center has come under criticism in the past from local groups for being unaffordable, and therefore delinquent in its mission to promote home-grown arts.

It's a tricky situation.

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Ricky Arriola: "What in life comes out of the gate completely successful? You have to look at mistakes, and then fix them."

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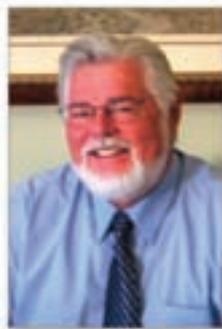
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Arsht Center

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Delma Iles is the artistic director of one of Miami's oldest dance companies, Momentum Dance, which also produces the annual Miami Dance Festival. Its performances have been held at smaller venues throughout Miami-Dade, but not at the Arsht Center. Iles says the rental rates are not outrageous, but additional costs at the Arsht can keep small companies with little money off the stage — for instance, charges for security and insurance. But that is the nature of running something so big, Iles realizes.

Ideally, she suggests, a separate subsidy should be set aside for development and production of local work, maybe a private-public grant, so that a dedicated stream of money would be available for discounts to local performing groups and presenting organizations.

The dance professor at Miami-Dade College, however, thinks that the Arsht already has had a substantial impact on the cultural community, and with the new management team, has made

important inroads in promoting the arts. "They have been wonderful in working with me in order to get my students in [at reasonable prices] to see performances," she says.

This has given them exposure to a wide variety of professional dance that they never would have seen without the center. She points to several from last year alone, from Alvin Ailey (a company that has become a yearly fixture) and the Mexican dance troupe of Tania Perez-Salas to the hip-hop of Rennie Harris. Iles says this mixture makes her students feel that the arts, and the Arsht Center, are for everyone, not just stuffy shirts. "The students just love going there," she says. "They look out of the windows at the downtown skyline. The views are always good no matter where we're seated. It's just a nice place."

In fact most agree that the Arsht Center has excelled in promoting dance, often considered a money-losing step-child in the culture world. "The focus on dance has been tremendous, and has really developed an

Continued on page 28



Photos courtesy of the Arsht Center

Itzhak Perlman thinks the Arsht Center is *the* best place to perform.



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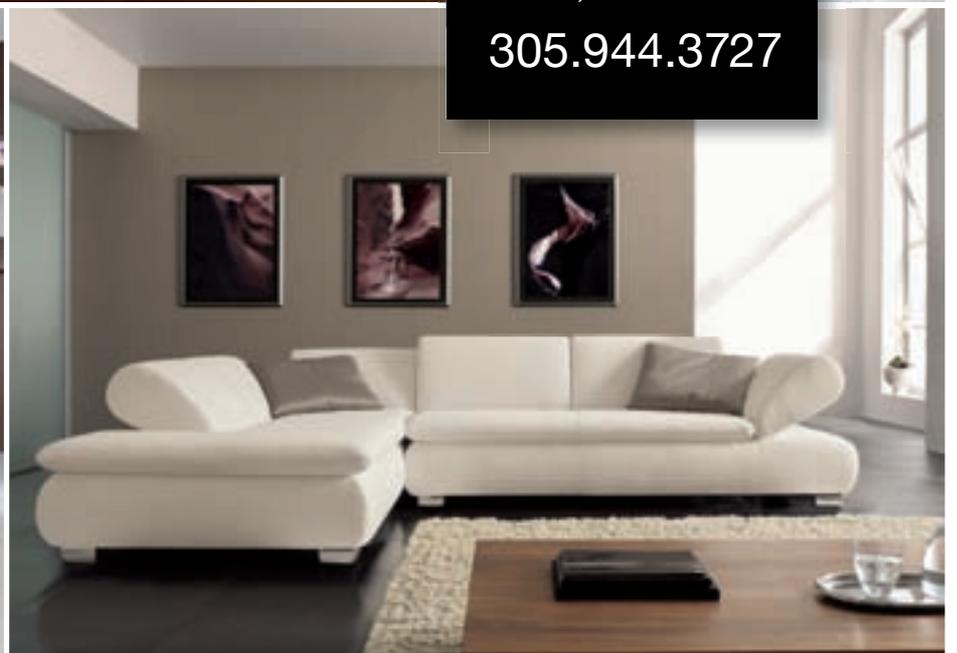
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The Merce Cunningham Dance Company performed a world premiere for the center's opening season.

Arsht Center

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audience in a short time," says Michael Spring, director of Miami-Dade's Department of Cultural Affairs. Spring is

not alone in pointing out that both the Arsht Center and Miami as a cultural center itself are very young, so the progress thus far has been "enormous," he says: "The center really has been a catalyst in introducing people to the



The internationally renowned Japanese percussion group Kodo came to town in 2009 for one night only.

cultural arts here, and they're getting people through those doors" despite troubled economic times.

It doesn't hurt that one of the most established organizations around, the Miami City Ballet, is a resident company

at the center and has recently received the international laurels locals always knew it deserved, in rave reviews from New York to Paris.

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Acclaimed local choreographer Rosie Herrera was commissioned to create *Pity Party*, which debuted this past January.

Arsht Center

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One of the Arsht Center's own local success stories involves dance as well — its support, along with that of

the Miami Light Project, of the Rosie Herrera Dance Company. Hialeah's Herrera wowed the American Dance Festival with one work developed here in 2010, and in return the Dance Festival, along with the Arsht, co-commissioned



Classical music superstar Joshua Bell performed in January, evidence that the Arsht is "on the major circuit."

another piece, *Pity Party*, which premiered on the Carnival Studio stage this past January to a packed house. It was a triumphal homecoming.

One dedicated local weekend has become an annual event: Miami Light's

Here & Now festival, which presents works in development, and has been on-stage at the Arsht since 2007. This past February admission was *free* — hard

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Arsht Center

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to beat that price. Last season also saw Miami's Brazz Dance at the center, along with a play during Art Basel week written by South Floridian Michael McKeever, *South Beach Babylon*.

However, that strikes some in the artistic community as not enough.

Octavio Campos is a performer and choreographer who had parts in both the McKeever play and Herrera's *Pity*. In fact he has been in 12 productions and has witnessed the Arsht's development since its birth. Campos believes that at the beginning, the center was more open to experimental local works and to taking on more risky challenges, but "once the recession hit... there was a big shift in programming ideas in order to keep the center open and operating at a level where it could still be the 'crown jewel' of culture for our city — but at the same time keep a balanced budget by providing a more commercially driven, classically based programming structure."

Today Campos says he sees a shift back. "Great collaborations are now forming again with the more adventurous artists and companies in town. That makes me very happy," he says, "not only because it gives me a renewed spirit to create for our city, but to create for the center." He thinks that as the Arsht Center has grown, so have local artists. "The bar for new work has been raised," he says. "Performing, producing, or creating for the center is now a really big deal, and it forces the artists who work there or aspire to work there to hone in on their craft to create the strongest work they can come up with."

Shiller and Richard are aware of the continuing need to be part of the community by helping develop its art and artists. This upcoming season, they point out, a new series called "Theater Up Close" will be launched. It will include several plays from Miami's Zoetic Stage, the ten-year anniversary presentation of local Teo Castellanos's internationally acclaimed *NE 2nd Avenue*, and an intriguing partnership with the University

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Jazz legend Sonny Rollins appeared in 2009 as part of the center's successful Jazz Roots series.

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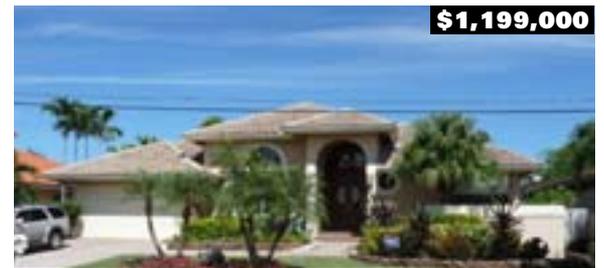


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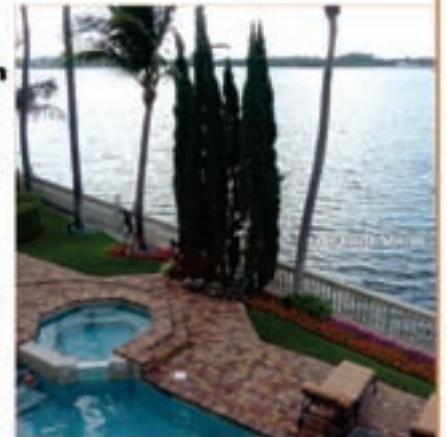
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Arsht Center

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of Miami involving a new interpretation by Nilo Cruz of Federico García Lorca's *The House of Bernarda Alba*, with UM students in starring roles. For the first time, this past July, most all of the 26th annual International Hispanic Theatre productions moved to the Arsht.

Just as the physical landscape around the center is in the midst of big change, so is the cultural one. Drastic funding cuts for arts groups that may be on the horizon likely will have an impact on the center. While the New World Symphony will still play some concerts at the Arsht Center, most will now be held at its own new, gleaming center in Miami Beach.

The path of a performing arts center will never be completely smooth. That's the nature of the artistic beast. But Adrienne Arsht thinks the center, and Miami, have reached a turning point. "We are on the major circuit" in the world of cultural arts, she says. Highly acclaimed new venues such as the New World Center only add to the appeal.



The Miami Light Project's "Here and Now Festival" has found a home at the Arsht Center.

As someone who calls New York, Washington, D.C., and Miami home, Arsht claims that people who used to go to Palm Beach now come here — for the culture.

Performances once exclusive to the vaunted Kennedy and Lincoln centers regularly show up at the center, and will do so more often in the future. Plus the center and the

city are fresh. Says Arsht proudly: "Itzhak Perlman says it's *the* best place to perform."

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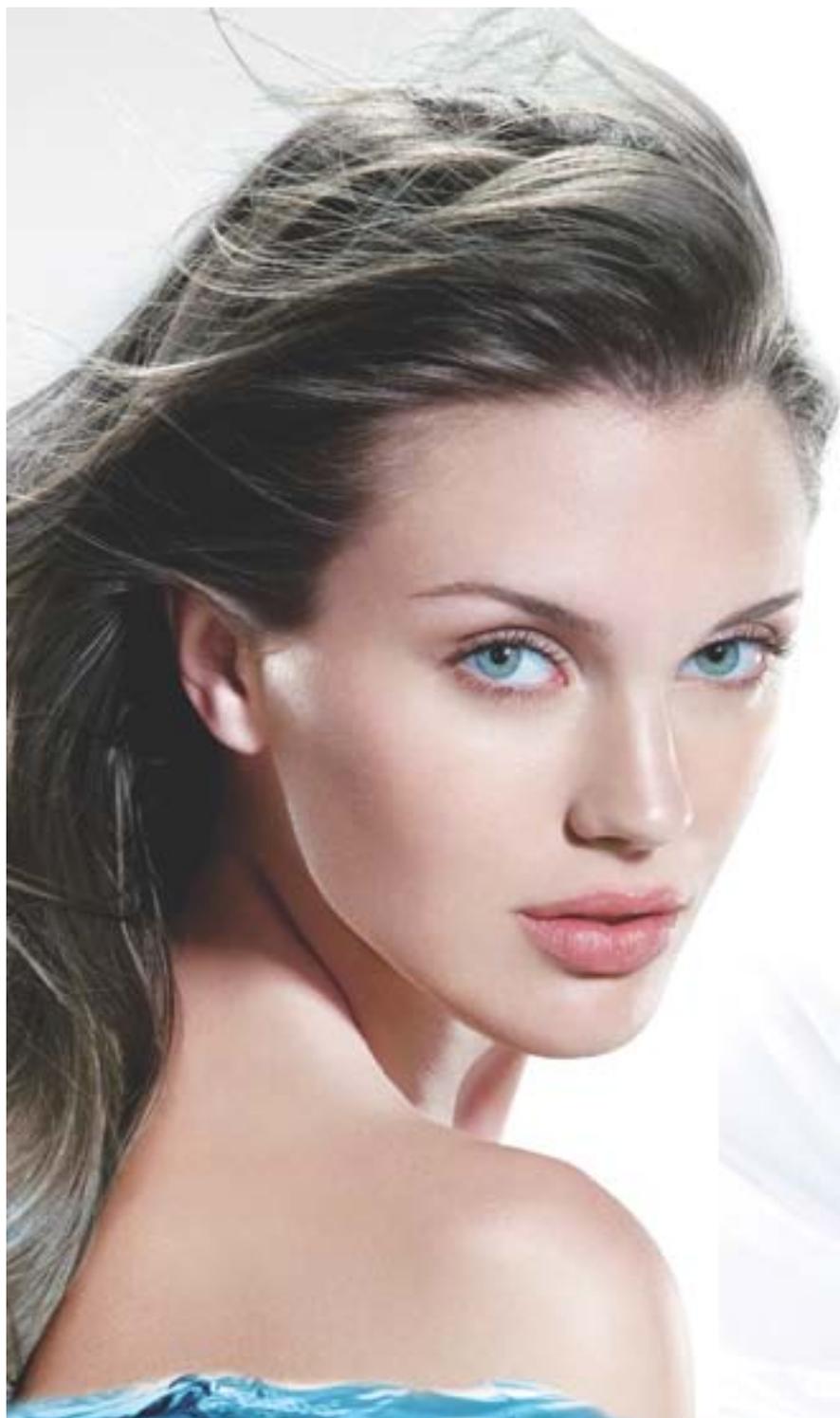
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Arsht Center

Continued from page 34

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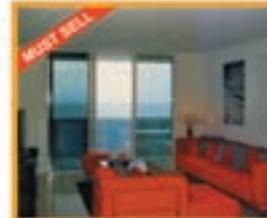
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Traffic Cameras: Money Loser for Some, Gold Mine for Others

Despite legal and political wrangling, pioneering Aventura still rakes in the cash

By Erik Bojnansky
BT Senior Writer

In October 2008, Aventura made history when it became the first municipality in South Florida to install red-light cameras. Now, as the third anniversary of Aventura's "Intersection Safety Camera Program" approaches, more than 65 Florida cities have red-light cameras.

That trend disturbs traffic attorney Bret Lusskin. "The idea of government surveillance and cameras flashing away all night is terribly Orwellian for me," says Lusskin, founder of the Ticket Cricket law firm.

But Eric Soroka, Aventura's city manager, has no plans to remove the nine cameras that snap photographs at five intersections in Aventura. "People take red lights more seriously now," he says.

Soroka credits motorists' newfound respect for traffic lights with a 15-percent drop in car accidents throughout the city between January 2008 and August 2010. At intersections with red-light cameras, accidents fell by as much as 60 percent during that period, according to statistics provided by the Aventura Police Department.

Aventura's traffic education comes at a cost — to drivers. As of last month, more than 62,368 tickets had been issued. Between September 2009 and July 2011, Aventura collected nearly \$3 million in fines. About \$100,000 per year in red-light ticket fines are funneled to Aventura's charter school, with the rest of the money going to the city's general fund.

But the cameras aren't there just to make money for Aventura, Soroka insists. "The intended purpose is to improve safety at intersections," he says, adding that the fines are a tiny portion of Aventura's \$47 million annual budget.

Lusskin argues that red-light cameras are not about safety, but revenue, especially for American Traffic Solutions (ATS), an Arizona-based company that operates traffic-camera systems in 300 municipalities across North America. Lusskin claims ATS enticed Florida cities with promises of easy funds through traffic tickets just as the state sank into a recession. "The whole background on it is quite nefarious," he says. "They [ATS] waited for the opportunity when all municipalities were strapped for cash in 2007." As a result, ATS is Florida's largest provider of red-light cameras, a fact that has Lusskin fuming: "They really are an evil company."

But ATS did not take the initiative to approach Aventura.

Aventura City Commissioner Bob Diamond says his wife was almost killed in a car accident at an Aventura intersection caused by a motorist who ran a red light. After reading that car accidents were slashed by half in New York following the installation of cameras, Diamond contacted ATS and other traffic-camera companies. "My only interest," he recalls, "was saving lives."

ATS spokesman Charlie Territo asserts that his company is making Florida safer even as it complicates the work of traffic attorneys. "In South Florida, 97 percent of the violations issued are eventually found guilty," he says. Territo claims an even more impressive record in Aventura. Of the 19,325 tickets issued from July 2010 to May 2011, only 330 were found not guilty, he reports. "These violations come with video and pictures of the violations, irrefutable evidence that the driver of the vehicle has broken the law," he says.

Except that it's not the *driver* of the vehicle who is ticketed. It's the *owner*. That is because red-light cameras photograph the license plate of a vehicle,

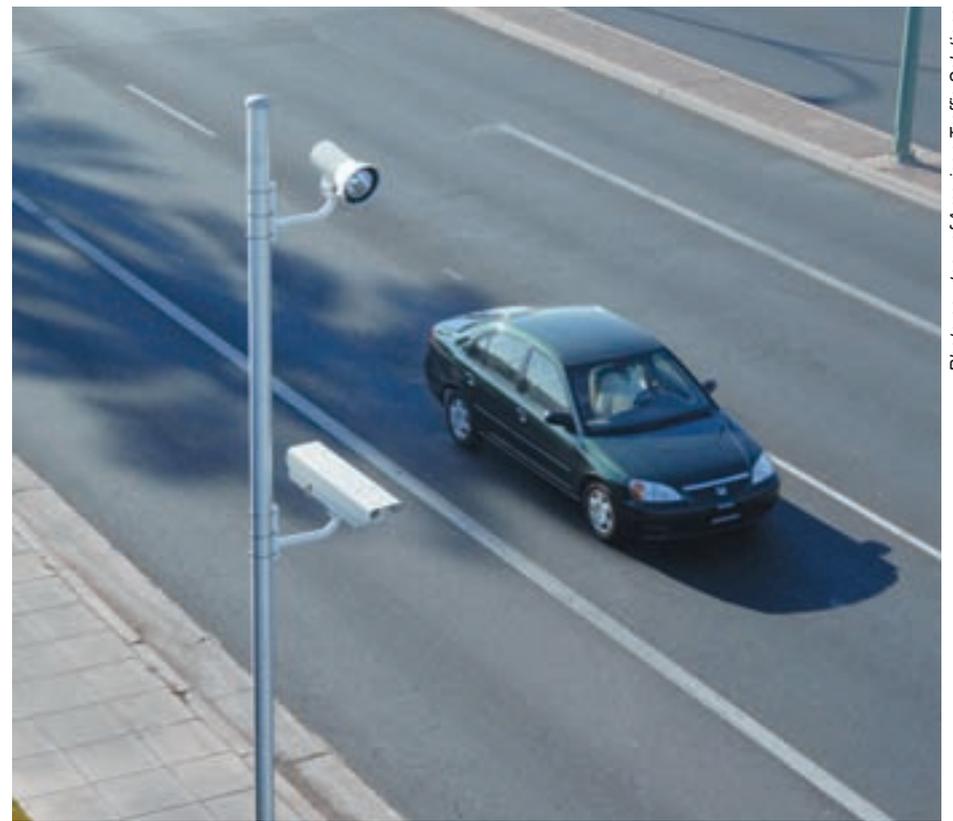


Photo courtesy of American Traffic Solutions

An ATS camera and flash like those used in Aventura.

which then mails the ticket to the owner or lessee. "Technically speaking, *you're* not violating the law by running a red light. It is the registered vehicle," Lusskin maintains. He also claims that 90 percent of camera tickets go to vehicles that fail to make a full stop before turning right on a red light.

Tickets for right turns on a red light are given only to vehicles traveling in excess of ten miles per hour, Territo insists. He adds that car owners can contest a charge by providing the name and address of the driver at the time of the infraction.

Commissioner Diamond contends the subject of revenue rarely came up during his five-year quest to get red-light cameras in Aventura. Interpretations of the law, however, were a constant sticking point. In 2006 he asked state Sen. Gwen Margolis to introduce a red-light camera bill in the Florida legislature. "A year and a half later, she told me: 'I can't get it through. There are right-of-privacy concerns,'" he recounts. That answer frustrated Diamond, a former judge: "There is no right of privacy when you are driving a car!"

While Margolis tried again, Aventura officials installed their cameras and took a cue from Gulf Breeze, Florida, issuing tickets not as traffic violations but as code infractions. Automobile owners wishing to contest the tickets had to appear before a city-paid special master. From January to July of 2009, Aventura

issued 15,875 code violations with fines ranging from \$125 to \$500.

Though the state had yet to legalize red-light cameras, at least 11 other Miami-Dade County municipalities, including Miami Shores, North Bay Village, and North Miami, followed in Aventura's footsteps and installed ATS cameras.

That chapter ended in February 2010, after Lusskin sued Aventura on behalf of Richard Masone, a Hallandale Beach resident cited twice for turning right at a red light without making a full stop. Lusskin argued that state law only allowed sworn police officers to issue red-light tickets. Miami-Dade Circuit Court Judge Jerald Bagley agreed.

Five months later, the state legislature finally passed a red-light bill, called the Mark Wandall Traffic Safety Act, thanks in part to a \$1.5 million lobbying effort by ATS. (The law was named after a Bradenton resident who died in a car crash caused by a red-light runner in 2003.) Under the new law, red-light camera tickets start at \$158. After 30 days, fines increase to \$277 each. Traffic judges, not special masters, now decide the fate of contested tickets. Cities, however, only collect between \$45 and \$75 for each ticket; the rest of the funds flow into the state's coffers.

With a cut as high as 53 percent going to the state, red-light cameras

Continued on page 44

Down by the Riverside

May we all live long enough to witness the completion of the Miami River Greenway

By Erik Bojnansky
BT Senior Writer

The dream is for an 11-mile linear park that runs along both banks of the Miami River. Right now that dream is interrupted by fences, bridges, marinas, gated communities, sales centers, and other obstacles that prevent continuous walking or biking along the river.

In exchange for the right to build next to the Miami River, developers promised to include a publicly accessible “riverwalk” on their properties, complete with benches, descriptive signs, and other amenities. The idea was that, over time, the riverwalks would be linked to form the Miami River Greenway, reaching from Bayfront Park and Brickell Key to Palmer Lake near NW South River Drive and 25th Street. “This is what we wanted for the river,” Mayor Tomás Regalado tells the *BT*, “to have a public space where people can walk and people can gather.”

However, the developers of ten sites along the river never completed their promised riverwalks, according to City of Miami officials. The ten sites include high-rise condo towers, two office buildings, and a couple of parking lots.

“In some cases, it was a bench or two, in others the [shortcomings] are more important,” says Ernest Martin, a member of the Miami River Commission, a state body that advises on policy for the Miami River. He says property managers often use an alleged lack of funds as a pretext for incomplete projects. “They say they don’t have the money right now,” Martin recounts. “Maybe next year.”

The excuses may soon come to an end. Last month officials from the city and the Miami River Commission toured the sites and contacted property owners. On September 13, at 6:30 p.m., city officials will present an action plan for how they intend to get all ten sites in full compliance.

Already the city has denied certificates of occupancy (CO) for three

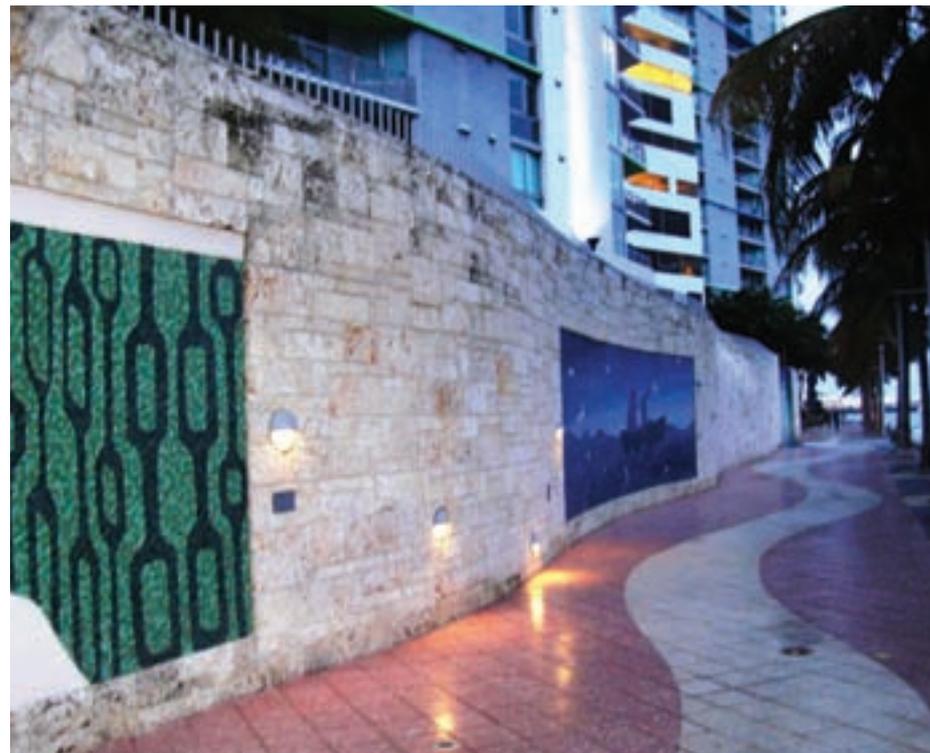
residential towers along the Miami River until their promised riverwalks are complete: Mint at Riverfront West, Neo Vertika, and River Oaks Marina and Condominium. Currently this trio of towers possesses only a temporary certificate of occupancy (TCO) that must be renewed every 90 days by a city or county official. Without a TCO or CO, according to the South Florida Building Code, a structure can’t be occupied and anyone living in them will be forced out.

“It’s the only leverage the city has, the denial of a certificate of occupancy,” Martin says. And while the revocation of a TCO is unlikely, Martin points out that without a CO, there’s a “cloud over the property.” Other options available to the city, and suggested during a June 22 Miami River Commission meeting, include citing projects for code infractions.

Horacio Aguirre, chairman of the Miami River Commission, is optimistic the riverwalks will be completed after city administrators toured the ten sites recently. “When the property owners saw five or six department heads and their junior colleagues with them in uniform, writing down names, religion came upon them really fast,” Aguirre recalls with a smile. “The mayor of Miami, the city manager, and the administration are totally committed to make this a reality.”

But it’s not just the ten sites missing riverwalks. Of the Miami River Greenway’s 11 proposed miles, only scattered segments totaling three miles are completed. “There are some gaps,” acknowledges Martin, who has sought a continuous riverwalk since 1992, the year he retired as the county’s director of community development. But with at least two miles of riverwalk now under construction, he says progress is being made. “We are filling the gaps, but it’s just going to take a while,” he says. How long? “Hopefully it will happen within my lifetime,” he answers.

The nonprofit Trust for Public Land proposed the Miami River



The way it should be: Riverwalk at One Miami, with commissioned public art by the likes of José Bédia, Glexis Novoa, Michelle Weinberg, and Edouard Duval-Carrie.



Neo Vertika and Latitude, on the south side of the river, are linked by their sections of riverwalk.

Greenway in 1998. In 2001 Greenways Incorporated, a North Carolina firm specializing in environmental planning and landscape architecture, presented a plan that would embrace the mixed residential and “working” nature of the Miami River while encouraging the creation of restaurants, shops, and tourist-related venues. A year later,

city, county, and state officials committed themselves to fund the creation of riverwalks whenever possible. In 2002 the Miami City Commission also began requiring new construction projects to include a public riverwalk paid for by the developer.

Continued on page 42

Coming to a Storefront Near You: “Deal of a Lifetime! Call now!”

Miami’s mayor wants even more outdoor advertising, and in some unlikely locations

By Erik Bojnansky
BT Senior Writer

If at first you don’t succeed, try, try again. Five times the Miami City Commission has deferred a proposed ordinance that would allow outdoor advertising companies to place ads on the windows of up to 50 vacant business storefronts for 90 days at a time. The Downtown Development Authority (DDA), a quasi-independent city agency charged with improving the quality of life for downtown-area businesses, residents, and visitors, declined to vote on supporting or not supporting the proposed law. Twice.

Yet Mayor Tomás Regalado is undeterred.

On September 16, city administrators will present the latest draft of Regalado’s so-called window-dressing ordinance to the DDA. If the DDA endorses the concept, the ordinance will be voted on by the city commission, perhaps as early as September 27.

Regalado says he is bringing the proposal to the DDA again as a “courtesy,” since such storefront ads will target areas with substantial pedestrian traffic, such as Brickell, downtown, and Omni — all within the DDA’s jurisdiction.

“There are a lot of people on the DDA board who really like the ordinance,” Regalado insists, “because it gives income to property owners and it addresses the empty storefront windows.”

But Peter Ehrlich, co-founder of Scenic Miami, an organization advocating greater controls on outdoor advertising, believes most downtowners don’t want storefront ads. “They [DDA board members] didn’t even want to discuss it,” remembers Ehrlich, who



Photo illustration by Marcy Mock

Can’t get your fill from billboards alone? Then the mayor’s “window dressing” proposal is for you!

was present at the July 15 DDA meeting, when the ordinance was last introduced. “There was no motion to defer, no motion to deny, no motion to approve. Sometimes someone will make a motion for

“It’s just another visual assault,” says Barbara Bisno. “They have never done a study to see if this kind of signage will do anything to improve economic activity.”

purposes of discussion, but everybody just sat on their hands.”

Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, who also chairs the DDA board, says he was

ready to support the ordinance if the DDA had backed it. Yet after the July meeting, Sarnoff doubts there is any support in the downtown area for the law. “The DDA does not agree with the storefront ordinance,” he asserts.

Critics of the ordinance say the city is already inundated with visual pollution from murals, billboards, and digital LED signs. “It’s just another visual assault,” says Barbara Bisno, a Venetian Islands resident and active member of Scenic Miami. “They [city officials] have never done a study to see if this kind of signage will do anything to improve economic activity.”

Regalado argues that visual pollution is subjective. “I see visual pollution as an empty store,” he argues. “You’re walking

on the sidewalk and you see the debris inside the store. It looks ugly.”

Regalado’s aesthetic preference for outdoor advertisements over empty stores is reflected in the “whereas” preamble to the ordinance’s latest draft, which states that “utilizing creative and attractive window signage, on a temporary basis,” will provide income for distressed landlords, ward off vandals, and prevent the portrayal of a “negative business synergy” that could scare off other prospective tenants.

The proposed law, Regalado says, is patterned after similar codes in New York, Chicago, and Los Angeles. Under

Continued on page 46

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Riverside

Continued from page 39

“There are a number of properties that worked out quite well,” Martin says. “Near One Miami [the downtown condo], there is a beautiful walkway.”

But Regalado claims that enforcement of the riverwalk, and other regulations expected of developers, was lax under his predecessor, Manny Diaz. “The developers were not pushed to do this,” the mayor asserts, because the previous administration believed in helping developers.

“Diaz has been gone for two years,” retorts publicist Seth Gordon, a former Diaz advisor, “so it’s hard to see how he can have any impact on what has or has not happened since he left office.”

Orlando Toledo, former director of building and zoning for the City of Miami, places the blame for the incomplete riverwalks on scattered planning and a bad economy. In some buildings, barely half the units are occupied or purchased, he notes. Indeed some projects are mired in litigation or foreclosed by banks. “When you need to ask those condo owners to take up the cost of [building a riverwalk], that’s where



Latitude’s riverwalk is supposed to meet the pathway under the NW 2nd Avenue bridge, but it doesn’t.

everything goes to hell,” says Toledo, who was laid off in July. “Nobody wants to pay. They *can’t* pay. It is a miracle they are able to pay the actual maintenance fees.”

Martin says the city’s big mistake was allowing developers to make a “pledge” to construct a riverwalk. “What we should have done,” he says, “and no

one had the political will to do it, was insisted on easements rather than pledges.” That way the city and county could have completed the riverwalk if necessary, he continues. As it stands now, many of the riverwalks are on private property.

So far the only developers who have outright refused to build a riverwalk are

brothers Bernard and Jerome Herskowitz, who obtained a permit to pave two parking lots along the river at SW 6th Street for a daycare center. Toledo told the Miami River Commission on June 22 that the original permit required a 13-foot-wide riverwalk. After the Herskowitz brothers and their attorney balked, a city administrator granted a revised permit not requiring the riverwalk, Toledo claimed.

According to Commissioner Marc Sarnoff, whose district encompasses the Herskowitz brothers’ land, “This has been a little bit mired in he-said and she-said.” Nevertheless Sarnoff says he intends to ensure that the riverwalk is enforced. (Jerome Herskowitz did not return a phone call from the *BT* by deadline.)

At a few of the other incomplete riverwalks, there has been some progress. During a recent visit to the Miami River Oaks Marina and Condominium, located at 1951 NW South River Drive, a small bulldozer was busily clearing a path behind the recently completed Grapeland Heights high-rise condo. “We’re doing it,” says Veronica Escobedo, marketing

Continued on page 48

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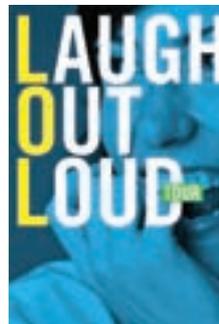
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Traffic Cameras

Continued from page 38

are bringing in less money for municipalities. The City of Miami installed ATS red-light cameras last year in hopes of collecting \$8 million from tickets. Instead Miami received less than \$3 million.

Under the new state law, cities are also required to pay a fee, not a percentage, to red-light-camera companies. In Aventura's case, that fee amounts to \$4750 per month for each camera covering four lanes of traffic, unless the camera costs exceed the fines collected from a camera.

Even with ATS's fees as high as \$513,000 a year, Aventura still manages to make a profit. From September 2010 to July 2011, the city collected \$867,126 from red-light cameras. That figure, however, pales in comparison to the \$2 million in fines Aventura collected earlier, between September 2009 and August 2010.

Territo attributes the revenue decline to compliance. In Aventura, he says, there has been a 49-percent reduction in red-light-running between 2008 and 2010, adding that 89 percent of those

violators live outside Aventura.

Still, red-light cameras continue to cause legal chaos throughout Florida, says Ted Hollander, an attorney with the Ticket Clinic law firm. Broward Judge Fred Breman, for example, ruled that police officers couldn't legally issue red-light tickets if cameras are also doing so. "The interpretation in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties depends on what judge or magistrate you get," says Hollander, whose argument that red-light cameras are unconstitutional was recently rejected by a Broward court.

Hollander also claims there's no clear-cut evidence that red-light cameras prevent accidents. Instead they may actually cause *more* accidents. He points out that a 2008 study from the University of South Florida warns that rear-end collisions increase in places with red-light cameras because some drivers slam their breaks when approaching intersections.

But Karen Morgan, manager of public policy for AAA Auto Club South, says evidence shows red-light cameras *do* improve roadway safety. According to a June 2011 study by the Insurance Institute for Highway Safety, cities that installed red-light cameras saw injury-related crashes decline by up to 29 percent.

Nevertheless, AAA urged then-Gov. Charlie Crist to veto the red-light camera bill, fearing the law was more about

revenue than safety. "AAA is supportive of the use of red-light cameras, but not without certain safeguards,"

Morgan says. Among the safeguards spelled out in a May 2010 letter to Crist is a requirement that all ticket money be used for public-safety purposes.

With the law already passed in the legislature, though, Morgan says AAA is now working to improve it: "We would rather work with the legislature and put safeguards in it — but not get rid of it."

Many U.S. communities are opting to get rid of cameras. According to an Associated Press report last month, more than a dozen cities and nine states outright ban the use of red-light cameras. This past May, Florida's House of Representatives approved a bill revoking the Wandall Act. The measure failed to pass the state Senate.

Cities all over Florida are finding out that red-light cameras are more money pits than gold mines, attorney Hollander says. Hialeah, Davie, Fort Lauderdale, and Pembroke Pines are just a few of the South Florida municipalities planning to ditch red-light cameras because they cost more than they generate. "If it's all about safety, why are these cities pulling the plug when there is no money?" Hollander asks.

Charlie Territo of ATS argues that more and more cities are seeking out red-light cameras. "This is an industry that has seen tremendous growth over the last five years," he explains. "As the benefits of the programs become more well known, we expect legal challenges to become fewer and fewer, and we expect support for cameras to increase."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

Hialeah, Davie, Fort Lauderdale, and Pembroke Pines are just a few of the South Florida municipalities planning to ditch red-light cameras.

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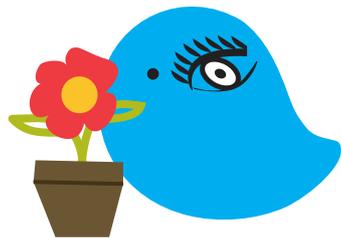
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Advertising

Continued from page 40

the current draft, 50 permits would be offered to outdoor-advertising firms that have operated since 2003. Another requirement is not as clear; in fact it's open to interpretation: "At least 50% of said applicant's business consists of storefront advertising activities."

These ads will only appear in "non-residential districts" and can cover no more than 75 percent of the window's frontage. The ads also must be "generally composed of a non-residue forming, vinyl, plastic film or similar material."

Regalado admits that money is another reason he's pushing for window-dressing ads. The 90-day permits, issued on a first-come, first-serve basis, will each cost \$1000, which Regalado estimates would bring at least \$200,000 a year for the cash-strapped city. "It's something that would not make or break the budget," he acknowledges, "but we're trying to think outside the box, to get some revenue from outside the city." Ad companies must also contribute at least

\$250 made from each sign to a non-profit corporation that is "serving the residents of the City of Miami."

Property owners could make plenty of money from such ads. Already outdoor-advertising companies pay up to \$125,000 a month for mural signs and billboards along I-95, Ehrlich notes. How much could be made from a street-level sign covering the window of a vacant storefront? "Depends on the location," Ehrlich answers. "It could be \$400 a month or \$6000 a month."

But Ehrlich says most property owners he's spoken to are uneasy about storefront ads. "The billboard people could put a disgusting malt liquor ad or something," he warns. "That would detract from the other tenants."

Regalado counters that a storefront ad can also be attractive. "If you advertise a national brand, or a Rolex, or a Chevrolet, and it's in color, the ad looks pretty," the mayor offers.

Still, Regalado admits the city won't be able to control the content of the storefront advertisement. "It's a First Amendment issue," he says.

According to Regalado, it was an outdoor-advertising firm that first suggested the concept of temporary ad signs in Miami, though he can't remember the company's name. "These people from New York brought up the idea," he says.

The ad company was represented by

An outdoor-advertising firm suggested the concept, though Regalado can't remember the company's name: "These people from New York brought up the idea."

Balsera Communications, Regalado says, a Coral Gables-based political consulting and government relations firm. Alfredo "Freddy" Balsera, founder and managing partner of Balsera Communications, did not return phone calls from the *BT* by deadline.

Regalado's push for window-dressing ads comes at a time when the city has been criticized for allowing the proliferation of ad murals and LED digital billboards along major thoroughfares. The Federal Highway Administration opined in a June 2011 letter to the Florida Department of

Transportation that the city's 2008 wall-mural ordinance, governing advertisements on buildings within the city, appears to contradict the federal Highway Beautification Act. Following the FHA's advice, county and state officials have declined to give the city the sole authority to issue permits for outdoor ads.

FDOT has also taken notice of the proposed window-dressing ordinance. John Garner, director of FDOT's right-of-way office, reminded city officials in a May 2011 letter that if the storefront ad can be seen from a state or federal road or highway, then it needs a permit from his agency, and it must comply with state regulations — unless the sign promotes products or services provided on the premises.

Barnaby Min, Miami's zoning administrator, says he's consulted with the city's legal department in an effort not to violate state or federal regulations. Min, who has worked on the ordinance for many months, says he's also consulted with business owners and members of the outdoor-advertising industry. "We have tried," he says, "to appease various interested parties in this legislation."

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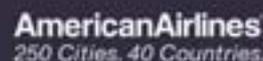
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Site on the south bank where the property owners say they didn't agree to a riverwalk but city officials say they did.



Terrazas River Park Village property manager Denise Castro at the city-owned fence that blocks her riverwalk from Sewell Park.

Riverwalk

Continued from page 42

director for Miami River Oaks. "We're working with the city and doing it."

Less than a block to the southeast is Terrazas River Park Village at 1861 NW South River Dr., which has its full certificate of occupancy. "We are in

compliance as far as having a riverwalk," says Denise Castro, property manager for Terrazas.

Aside from signage alerting passersby to a publicly accessible riverwalk, an iron fence along Terrazas's property line blocks pedestrian access to Sewell Park next door. The fence, Castro points out, is owned by the city. City spokeswoman

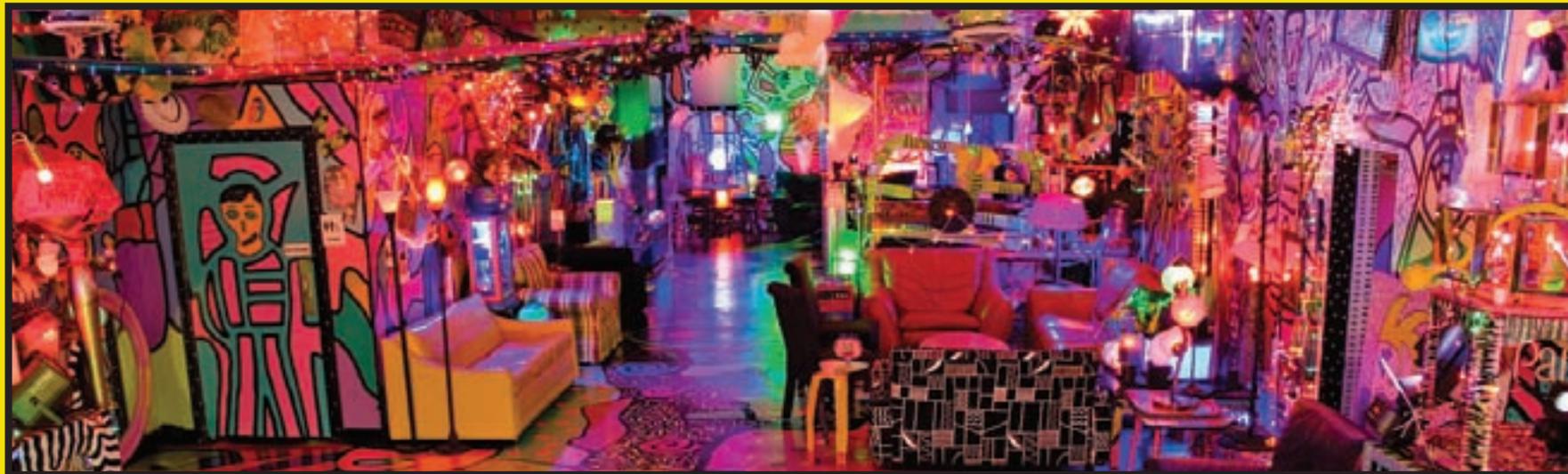
Cristina Fernandez says the parks department is exploring "the possibility of providing access to and from the park and in that way, connecting to the riverwalk."

An older gated community sits between the newly built Miami River Oaks and Terrazas. Because such pre-existing developments are exempt from riverwalk requirements, the new walkway will

swerve from the river to the roadway and then back to the river, Martin says.

But when such grandfathered properties are redeveloped, they too will be required to build riverwalks. Until then, Martin adds, "We can't hold a gun to anyone's head."

Continued on page 50



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Sept
1-4



Life in A Day

Directed by Kevin McDonald

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Topp Twins: Untouchable Girls

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The utterly charming, endearing and funny story of the world's only comedic, singing, modeling lesbian twin sisters, Lynda and Jools Topp, whose political activism and unique brand of entertainment has helped change New Zealand's social landscape. In the process they have become well-loved cultural icons. Winner of over 21 awards at Film Festivals all over the world.

Sept
8-11



Voices from Mariel

Directed by Jim Carleton

Told through the previously unheard stories of ten Cuban-American families, "Voices From Mariel" brings new insight into the lives of over 100,000 Cuban-born immigrants who came to the United States thirty years ago as the survivors of the "Mariel Boatlift." Narrated by Dr. Jose Garcia, who we follow on his first trip back to Cuba since leaving as part of Mariel exodus.



Bill Cunningham New York

Directed by Richard Press

Back to O Cinema, for its third and final engagement is this audience favorite and gem of a film. This fascinating, funny and often poignant portrait of a most unique individual; octogenarian New York Times fashion photographer Bill Cunningham, a man who moves among the high society of Manhattan but whose only wealth is his own humanity and unassuming grace.

Sept
15-18



Gun Hill Road

Directed by Rashad Ernesto Green

Gun Hill Road is the story of a family in transition. After three years in prison, Enrique returns home to the Bronx to find the world he knew has changed. His wife, Angela, struggles to hide an emotional affair, and his teenage son, Michael, explores a sexual transformation well beyond Enrique's grasp and understanding. An official selection of Sundance Film Festival.



Leap Year (Año Bisiesto)

Directed by Michael Rowe

Laura lives an isolated life in a cramped Mexico City apartment. The banality of her daily life stands in stark contrast to her nightly pursuit of sex and love. Her one night stands do little for her isolation, until she meets Artur. The two embark on an increasingly dangerous sadomasochistic relationship in which pleasure, pain and love merge. An intense, powerful and at times deeply unsettling movie.

Sept
22-25



The Last Circus

Directed by Alex de la Iglesias

Set between the Spanish Civil War and the End of the Franco regime, The Last Circus follows Javier, a circus clown whose witnessed too much tragedy to be anything but the sad harlequin. When he meets and falls for seductive acrobat Natalia he must fight for her against her sadistic husband, the seemingly happy clown star of the circus. What ensues is a ferocious battle, escalating to unbelievable heights in this shocking and unforgettable film.



!Women Art Revolution

Directed by Lynn Hersham Leeson

Through intimate interviews, art, and rarely seen archival film and video footage, !Women Art Revolution reveals how the Feminist Art Movement fused free speech and politics into an art that radically transformed the art and culture of our times. An fascinating portrayal of the fight to break down barriers facing women both in the art world and society at large.

Sept
29-
Oct 2



The Weird World of Blowfly

Directed by Jonathan Furmanski

The Weird World of Blowfly tells the story of Miami musician Clarence Reid and his alter ego Blowfly, the original dirty rapper. At 69 years-old, with a gold-spangled superhero costume and a catalog of the world's raunchiest tunes, Blowfly continues to record new material and tour the world, struggling for success and recognition. Before his X-rated career began, Clarence was instrumental in the Florida soul scene of the 1960s and '70s; he wrote Top-10 songs for Miami's greatest R&B acts, including Betty Wright, Gwen McCrae and KC and the Sunshine Band. For 40 years Clarence has shocked and grooved audiences with Blowfly's hilarious and provocative hard-core song. Join us for this terrific film, and for a weekend of live performances, discussions, and the chance to meet Blowfly himself!

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The following projects have not yet complied with the terms for a publicly accessible riverwalk and other amenities, according to officials from the City of Miami and the Miami River Commission.

Project Name: Epic Residences and Hotel
Address: 300 Biscayne Boulevard Way
Description: A 54-story condo-hotel and a 900-foot-long marina developed by Ugo Colombo, Lionstone, and Ponte Gadea Group. Completed in 2008.

Riverwalk Issues: A locked fence and Epic's former sales center block the eastern riverwalk connection with the One Miami riverwalk. Epic's western connection is also not accessible by the public.

Project Name: One Riverview Square
Address: 333 S. Miami Ave.
Description: An eight-story office building developed by Rubicon America Trust that was completed in 2004. In 2008 One Riverview Square was sold to the Boston-based Eaton Vance Corporation for \$50 million.

Riverwalk Issues: There are no benches on the riverwalk. A ground-floor space promised as a restaurant is instead being used as a lobby.

Project Name: Riverfront East
Address: 350 S. Miami Ave.
Description: Developers Lissette Calderon and Frank Guerra planned to build two condo towers in this gated enclave: the 50-story Cima at Riverfront and the 41-story Wind by Neo. Wind was completed in 2008, but the Cima parcel was seized by Wells Fargo as part of a \$28 million foreclosure judgment. Wind's vacant condos were sold out of receivership as part of a \$47 million foreclosure action.
Riverwalk Issues: There are trees where a public riverwalk should be, according to minutes from a June 22 Miami River Commission meeting.

Project Name: Riverfront West
Address: 55-95 SW 3rd St.
Description: Developed by Key International, Riverfront West consists of the 55-story Mint (completed in 2009) and 47-story Ivy (finished in 2008). Mint currently operates with a temporary certificate of occupancy.
Riverwalk Issues: While construction of the riverwalk has progressed, the paved pathway remains incomplete.

Project Name: Brickell on the River
Address: 31-41 SE 5th St.
Description: The twin-tower complex was built by Groupe Pacific president and CEO Michael Bedzow. The 42-story North Tower was finished in 2006. The 46-story South Tower was completed in 2007.
Riverwalk Issues: The project's permits included pathways on both sides of the complex, connecting the SE 5th Street sidewalk to the riverwalk behind it. The connector on the east side was never built.

Project Name: A daycare center and two unnamed parking lots.
Address: 98 SW 6th St.
Description: The building containing a daycare center has been owned by sibling real-estate investors Bernard and Jerome Herskowitz since May 1987, according to public records. The Herskowitz brothers bought the adjacent waterfront lots, now used for parking and boat dockage, from the Marjorie O. Brickell Revocable Living Trust in December 2009 for more than \$1 million.
Riverwalk Issues: City administrators claim the original permit used to pave a lot for the daycare center requires construction of a 13-foot-wide riverwalk. The Herskowitz brothers deny agreeing to the riverwalk, according to city officials.

Project Name: Neo Vertika
Address: 690 SW 1st Ct.
Description: Developed by Lissette Calderon, this 36-story condo was completed in 2006 and includes a Waxy O'Connor's bar and restaurant by the riverwalk. Neo Vertika's homeowners association is suing Calderon over seawall and riverwalk issues, according to minutes from a recent Miami River Commission meeting. Neo Vertika is operating with a temporary certificate of occupancy.
Riverwalk Issues: Although Neo Vertika's permit promised a 25-foot-wide riverwalk, it is not that wide, according to the Miami River Commission. The riverwalk also needs to be connected to the county's pedestrian "M-Path" to the east and Latitude on the River's riverwalk to the west. Neo Vertika has also been cited for seawall violations.

Project Name: Latitude on the River
Address: 615 SW 2nd Ave.
Description: The 44-story rent-to-own condo was developed by Edward A. Fish Associates and completed in 2007. Also on site is Latitude One, a 23-story office tower.
Riverwalk Issues: The project's riverwalk dead-ends before reaching the county constructed riverwalk to the west, beneath the 2nd Avenue bridge.

Project Name: River Oaks Marina and Condominium
Address: 1951 NW South River Dr.
Description: The 19-story building received its temporary certificate of occupancy on June 30. Originally developed by Fernando Marin Valencia and Luis Cardenas Gerlein, iStar Financial filed a foreclosure action against the building in 2009. AREA bought the defaulted \$52 million mortgage for an undisclosed sum in 2010. AREA now runs the building as rental apartments.
Riverwalk Issues: The riverwalk currently does not exist. Construction on the riverwalk and seawall commenced last month.

— Erik Bojnansky



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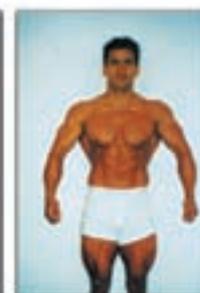
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Letters

Continued from page 12

No one supports declawing these days. It is a pathetic, disgusting practice that needs to be relegated to the annals of animal cruelty. Tell your mother-in-law to go and buy a new sofa instead of adopting a cat. Her love for her furniture is clearly greater than her love for any animal could ever be.

Please, seek help.

I share a home with eight rescued animals, and printing my name for an admitted animal abuser to see seems unwise. Therefore I ask that you not publish my name.

Name Withheld by Request
El Portal

Claws: Removing Them Is Not a Manicure

It's unfortunate that Ms. Rothstein-Kramer has chosen to print her frustrated opinion about a responsible cat-rescue organization protecting its feline charges.

Animal rescue is a grueling, often thankless job. With very few exceptions, everyone involved is a volunteer. Many of these saints spend countless hours and dollars keeping homeless pets alive and safe. Anyone inspired enough, brave enough, or willing to take on the daunting task of running a rescue should not suffer the slings and arrows of those such as Ms. Rothstein-Kramer.

There is never enough time, money, or people to help the unending tide of homeless animals. Those few (and it's always just a dedicated few trying to do the work of what should be many) slave away to protect these pets from what is very often a cruel and indifferent world.

It is a rescue's right and responsibility to deny any application it feels is not in the best interest of its animals.

A Siamese kitten mix will often have multiple applications (and many more options than a black or tabby kitten), but that does not mean its choices for a good home should include mutilation.

It is worth noting that Ms. Rothstein-Kramer was condescending in detailing the rescuer's explanation, and even cut off the description of what is involved when declawing a cat. In the case of a kitten, it is especially heinous. I cannot believe she dared compare the surgery to sterilization, which saves lives. Yet she still claims to be an animal lover!

Declawing is not a manicure. It is a painful procedure of amputation. Imagine getting your fingertips cut off and then being forced to walk around on your hands for the next six weeks. Don't even get me started about what happens to those wounds in a litter box. Is it any wonder that it can change a cat's personality? That many cats become biters because they have no other defense?

The insistence that cats do not need their claws since they will never live outdoors again is patently false. Too many declawed cats end up at shelters and rescues for this to be true. It's the lucky ones that are found. The unlucky ones face horrible deaths as they have no claws to climb or defend themselves.

Ms. Rothstein-Kramer believes that declawing should be a personal choice "between my pets and me." I can assure her that if they could speak, the pets would "choose" to keep their claws.

In addition to declawing, an adopter's age should also be taken into account. Adopting a pet should be a lifetime commitment — the animal's lifetime. While elderly adopters should not be discounted solely because of age, it is much more appropriate that they adopt one of the many adult pets needing homes. In this particular case, it is not irresponsible to consider

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that a kitten could potentially outlive its companion. Again, rescuers are all too familiar with the scenario of dying owners who do *not* make provisions for their pets. These unfortunate animals end up in shelters and rescues. If they are lucky, it will be a no-kill program. If not, the majority will end up euthanized because, as adults, they are unable to adapt to the new situation and/or compete with young, cute kittens and puppies.

Ms. Rothstein-Kramer should take her mother-in-law to the nearest kill shelter to adopt and save a life. There will be no denial based on declawing because, as she pointed out, amputation is better than death. Luckily for the Siamese kitten in question, Adopt A Stray is a no-kill rescue and will find a great home that doesn't declaw. Adopt A Stray has clearly acted in the kitten's best interest and I applaud their actions. If more people treated their pets with the same care and compassion as Edie, the world would be a better place.

*Tia Williams
Miami*

Claws: These Pet Adoption People Are Crazy

I had a similar experience as Shari Lynn Rothstein-Kramer at PetSmart with the Adopt A Stray fanatics.

Four years ago I took my then ten-year-old daughter. We looked, played, and eventually settled on a kitten that she chose. She was so excited to receive her first pet. I've had cats in the past and I know how cats act and react. Of course they had me fill out the paperwork, asking the trick questions.

When we returned two days later to pick up the kitten, we too were turned down. Why? Because I wrote on the form that I would be using the terrace for litter-box placement. After all, I live in a condo with a terrace and was used

to letting my previous cat out on the balcony to use the litter box — for 16 years until he had to be put to sleep because of a chronic illness.

In shock that there was no warning (of course) and no indication of being "turned down," I felt tricked by the wording on the forms, and the Adopt A Stray women.

I was able to talk them into letting me take the animal, promising never to open the sliding glass door. However, after a time, when the kitten turned into a wise and not-stupid cat, I most certainly allowed her onto the terrace (litter box ended up in the bathroom). She enjoys going out onto the terrace and will sit for hours on a chair enjoying the fresh air.

But when she started scratching humans and then scratched my daughter's face, that was it. I took her to a vet clinic did the "dirty deed." I asked them about the cruelty factor. The response was that the vets would not do the procedure if they thought it was harmful and cruel to the cat. After all, vets are the biggest animal lovers of all.

These Adopt A Stray women are out of bounds. And whenever we do go back to PetSmart, we laugh and joke about our terrible secret and whether we should spill the beans on the clawing issue, as well as the terrace issue!

I'm glad Ms. Rothstein-Kramer brought this issue to light. I'm sorry about her mother-in-law's experience, but perhaps her article will serve as a warning to everyone looking to adopt from them. Just lie on the adoption form and get that poor kitten away from these crazy women.

Please do *not* print my name if you run this letter. I'm not looking for any trouble.

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Academic Debate

A proposal for a new charter school isn't popular with everyone, but that may not matter

By **Gaspar González**
BT Contributor

When my wife and I were shopping for a house a few years back, friends in other states would ask if we were taking the quality of the local schools into account. It always struck us as a funny question. We had both lived in places where people did that, but this was Miami-Dade. The way we looked at it, the schools weren't great anywhere, so we should just buy the house we really wanted. It was strangely liberating.

It was also frustrating, because we hoped to start a family soon and knew we would someday, in the very near

future, have to figure out where to send our child. ("The future," incidentally, is now 20 months old and growing.)

Today there may be a new option on the horizon, one that has caused quite a stir in our little village over the summer. You may have heard about it: The Episcopal Church of the Resurrection — at the intersection of Griffing Boulevard, NE 6th Avenue, and NE 113th Street — has proposed opening a charter school on its property.

The announcement was made at the June 20 commission meeting. Few details were provided, but the gist is this: The church is looking to open a public charter school that would initially enroll students in pre-K through third grade, but that would expand, over time,



BT photo by Wendy Doscher-Smith

to include grades four and five. Initial enrollment is projected to be somewhere between 60 and 80 kids, housed in the current classroom building on NE 113th Street. As enrollment increases — the classroom building can accommodate only 180 children — the school could potentially migrate to the property across the street, now a parking lot.

That kind of growth is purely speculative, but just the mere mention of a charter school opening in Biscayne Park was enough to make some residents respond as if someone had scraped an ice pick across a chalkboard: *Can you imagine the traffic, the noise, the inconvenience?*

The church didn't do itself any favors by saying it was planning to open



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the school this August — as in, last month. It was unrealistic, and it made residents feel they were being ambushed. The church is now hoping to open the school for the 2012-2013 school year.

Given the anxiety the proposal has caused in some quarters, and the fact that a community workshop on the school scheduled for July 30 was canceled (and, as of press time, has yet to be rescheduled), I thought it would be a good idea to catch up with Fr. Albert Cutié at the Church of the Resurrection.

I found him in his office, in his clerical collar and short sleeves, and eager to talk about the project. In fact, he was excited. “This is not going to be a mediocre school,” he told me. “The company we’re working with has a record of running A+ schools, and I’m convinced these guys are very competent.”

He also wanted to address some of the questions and concerns he’d heard: The school would be a public charter, with no religious curriculum component. For now, it would utilize the pre-existing building, so construction would not be a concern. And as for traffic? “When you’ve got 50 to 60 kids the first year

— up to 180 maximum — you’re not going to have the same situation you have at Miami Country Day.” Meaning, bumper-to-bumper traffic stretching for three blocks every morning and afternoon. (For the sake of comparison, the enrollment at Miami Country Day, according to the school’s Website, is 935 students.)

For Father Cutié, opening a school is a logical step. “There are *hundreds* of schools being operated in churches,” he notes. “We’ve got this building that is not being used Monday through Friday. The best use of that space is a quality educational facility.”

He’s also not shy about saying that, whatever public good may come from the project, this is also a business decision: “We’ve got expenses, monthly liability insurance. I would hate to see the Church of the Resurrection become another one of those church casualties you see.”

What he doesn’t say, because he doesn’t have to, is that he’s not asking for anyone’s permission. It’s very difficult for communities to keep charter schools from opening. That’s why they call them charter schools — because they are granted a charter from the state, exempting them

from certain state and local regulations. And the recent trend in Florida has been to make it even harder for local governments to oppose the schools.

(One such bill introduced in the Florida House of Representatives this past spring became the subject of controversy when it was disclosed that Rep. Erik Fresen, who helped craft the bill, is the brother-in-law of Fernando Zulueta, president of Academica, a prominent chain of charter schools. Academica is also the company that the Church of the Resurrection has chosen to partner with in their venture. I guess what they say is true; it really *is* a small world.)

What local governments can do — and what the village commission should do — is engage the process and try to produce the best possible outcome for Biscayne Park and its residents. Charter schools are by no means a panacea for what ails education in America. For every success story, there seems to be at least one scandal. And, yes, traffic will no doubt be an issue; that’s a very tricky intersection. Father Cutié suggests that, to avoid clogging NE 113th Street, drop-offs and pick-ups could be limited

to Griffing. There are other, more creative remedies — a shuttle service for students or staggered dismissal times for the different grades, to name two.

What’s the alternative to working with the church? Calling the village Wiccans together to see if they can levitate the building, the way Abbie Hoffman once wanted to do with the Pentagon?

My own feelings about the prospect of a charter school are mixed. On the one hand, I live close enough to Griffing and 113th Street that I too worry about increased traffic. But like a lot of recent arrivals in Biscayne Park, I have a young child who will soon be of school age, and I like the idea of having an additional public school from which to choose. (My wife and I have discussed the possibility of sending our son to Country Day, but are leaning toward keeping a roof over his head instead.)

Which is why I’m willing to give the charter school a chance — because it could be a very good thing for us, and for many of our neighbors. But only if the church and village deal with each other in good faith. No pun intended.

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Ode to Franki Jo

Our correspondent says goodbye to her beloved hound

By Wendy Doscher-Smith
BT Contributor

Twelve days ago my best friend of seven years died peacefully in my lap. Her quick demise was unexpected and I am the sole person responsible for ending her life. Before you go calling me Kevorkian, let me explain.

My best friend Franki Jo was a dog who, during the last two months of her 11 years, suffered from lymphoma. My husband and I opted to treat her with chemotherapy (which, unlike humans, most dogs tolerate very well). Franki was one of those dogs, and she had a good quality of life. Then, seemingly overnight, the cancer invaded her lungs

and she had trouble breathing.

I rushed her to the oncologist the next morning, thinking she was having a bad or allergic reaction to her new chemo drug. I wasn't even particularly concerned (and I'm always concerned, in general) about this new development because my husband said he had seen her in slightly worse shape right before her first chemo treatment kicked in months before.

Well, as they say, or at least as I have heard from several veterinarians and people recently: "Cancer does what cancer wants."

Cancer wanted my dog that Monday. And despite medical advancements, both in the human and veterinary medicine

fields, cancer often gets what it wants.

When the news sunk in that Franki was not coming home from the vet, a weird thing happened. I started crying really hard. Somehow this crying was different from my other Franki-related cancer crying. I guess that's because it wasn't crying at all; it was wailing. And it was almost comical in its melodrama. Like a scene borrowed from a dusty graveyard, where a mother throws

herself upon her son's coffin. I didn't think I had it in me.

My decision to euthanize Franki was born of my love for her and my refusal to let her suffer. Yet the "nobility" of the action in no way compensates for the trauma of the experience of her warm body going limp in my lap. That feeling will never leave me.

Being a highly sensitive, detail-oriented person is a blessing and a curse.



BT photo by Wendy Doscher-Smith

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Sometimes it is both simultaneously. In processing grief, it is helpful to just let yourself feel and do whatever comes naturally. Unfortunately (or fortunately, according to psychologists), I am very good at *not* blocking out traumatic moments.

So while I currently mourn Franki's death, I replay certain highlights that have stuck in my mind: the feel of her long, velvety ears, the little sideways dance she did in anticipation of treats, the way the vet, after injecting her for the last time, touched her head and murmured softly: "Rest now, rest."

My grief is fresh and easily accessible, like the first sips of scalding, hot coffee sitting just beneath a cappuccino's swirled foam. Right now, it takes very little to make me cry. I have cried every day since Franki died.

Anyone who has suffered the loss of a family member knows grief often comes in stages and at inconvenient moments. One of mine occurred when I was getting my hair cut and colored yesterday and, for whatever reason, I thought of Franki. A few seconds later, fresh tears dropped from my cheeks and chin onto the black, plastic smock, providing a little river for

wayward hairs to travel down, before forming a tiny pool in my lap.

I have been through this experience before. In 2008, my dog Nyla, a stunning black Belgian shepherd we rescued from abusive neighbors, died in a veterinarian's office. Although the circumstances were different, I thought since I had experienced the loss of one pet, I'd have the one-up this time around.

I couldn't have been more wrong. In life, building a bond in every relationship is different. And in death, so is every goodbye.

Franki Jo was what my husband and I described as a "bagel," as she was part beagle and part basset hound. Really, what this combination made her was what we coined an "über hound," or hound to the highest degree.

Now you, or anyone who knows dog breeds, might have an idea as to the typical temperament of a hound — or, in this case, a double-decker hound. Franki was high-strung but never yappy, determined but patient, strong-willed, loyal, and protective of her "pack" — the other three or four dogs who lived with her, and with us, at any given time.

But above everything else, Franki was a highly spirited character. That dog was a grunting, snoring, jowls-jangling, howling handful! I suspect her, er, zest for life is what caused less appreciative owners to surrender her to the high-kill shelter she was bound for when I intervened and took her in years ago.

Franki was a double-decker hound, all right, with cheese and extra pickles. She would eat anything, including entire packets of Double Stuf Oreos, large bags of dog food that she climbed up on counters to get, and Starbucks Frappuccino lids. I will never forget taking her to the vet when my lid went missing and watching the doctor furrow her brow and say, "I can't palpate her middles!"

Life had not been good to Franki before we adopted her, but as is the canine way, she continued to be good in life. She tolerated all kinds of animals throughout the years, including an ornery parrot named Eggsbert, a curious ferret named Pickle, and a rambunctious puppy named "Li'l Man," whose favorite sport was to climb on Franki and then slide down her back, before toddling to Franki's front and yanking on her leash.

I've lost count of the number of Halloween costumes Franki willingly wore over the years, just as I've lost count of the number of sweets she managed to sneak. Most recently she got into a cake I frosted with food-colored icing and startled us, rounding the corner of the living room with a half-blue face.

The absence of Franki does not make sense to me. Rationally, I understand what happened. But emotionally, there is a disconnect. I don't know why there is no crazed howling at mealtime or why her bed is vacant. Losing Franki has given me a new perspective. There really are few precious moments in life and they sometimes can get, inexplicably, yanked away.

I promised Franki her own box of Krispy Kreme donuts before she had to go. She wouldn't have to sneak them or maneuver cabinets with her pudgy paws to get at them. I never got a chance to deliver. I hope wherever she is now, there are many Krispy Kreme shops and that their flashing, red-lit neon signs, indicating a fresh batch is ready, are always on.

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Walk This Way

Aventura on foot is a terrific experience — so try it!

By **Shari Lynn Rothstein-Kramer**
BT Contributor

To walk or not to walk, that is the question. Or shall I say, that was the question when I moved from New York to Florida. I lived in Chelsea and was used to walking everywhere, every day. As a matter of fact, I didn't own a car for 12 years. Why would I? I had subways, buses, taxis, bicycles, and most of all, my feet.

Walking is amazing. It is a beautiful way to start the day, a great way to clear your head, an awesome way to end a long day, and it's the best form of exercise there is.

I never really knew how much I loved walking until I moved away from

New York City. Before making my permanent home in South Florida, I left Manhattan for Mandeville, Louisiana. Total suburbia. It was completely different from city dwelling. Everything was spread out. There were no tall apartment buildings. I lived in a rental complex. I bought a car. I walked less. My calf muscles didn't look the same.

I lived in Mandeville for a year before moving to Florida to be closer to my family. That was in 2001.

I've been a resident of Aventura since 2005, most of that time spent living in the same condo in Mystic Pointe. I loved it there.

Mystic Pointe was one of the deluxe housing communities that began



sprouting up in Aventura in the late 1980s. Composed of six buildings, the first five sitting south of the Lehman Causeway, it is a great little community.

Building six was the last to be built and, for whatever reason, Mystic Pointers get kind of snooty when they talk about it. They claim that building six is the stepchild, that it doesn't count as

part of the complex because it sits on the "other side of the causeway." I say, *whatever*.

Go figure. My place faced due south; it was on the 15th floor of building six, and it was great in every respect. The only drawback was you couldn't walk to the other buildings in the same way that you could if you lived in numbers one

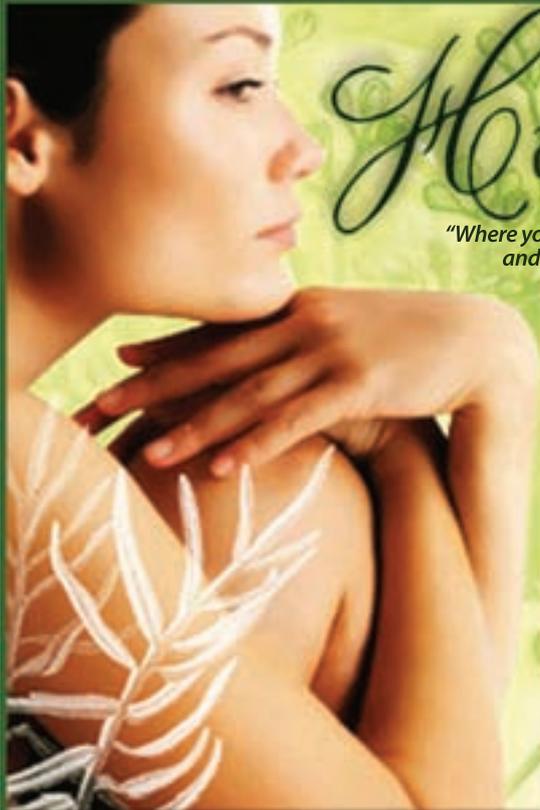
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through five. Over there were the tennis courts, pools, and pathways. The point? That you could walk throughout your private little utopia — no car needed.

A bit more than a year ago, I decided that I needed a change. I didn't want to go too far, but I was beginning to long for a place where I could walk to and from everywhere. My new place is on the tenth floor and faces north *and* south. (It's a flow-through apartment with balconies on both ends!) I can look out over the water as I sit in my living room and watch the city lights blink as I go to sleep each night. It is quite lovely.

The funny part is, I thought I might be done with Aventura. I looked at places in Hollywood, Sunny Isles, Hallandale Beach, North Miami Beach, and elsewhere. I searched for the perfect area. I looked high and low and I wound up moving... four blocks away. Whoa, crazy! But here's the thing — those four blocks really did make a difference.

We are closer to "the heart of town." We are minutes from my Publix, Loehmann's Plaza, Walgreens, Blockbuster, DSW, Starbucks, Tutti Frutti (one of the newest of the self-serve frozen yogurt

places), my pets' vet, and a lot of other places I visit on a frequent basis.

We now walk daily. Instead of hopping in the car, we put the dog on her leash and stroll. We walk her along the dock, on the sidewalk, to the store. It's great! I know it may not seem like such a big deal, but it brings me back to a place that makes me super happy. It makes me feel alive. Talk about simple pleasures. It

Walking helps keep us in shape, without having to be a slave to the gym. And it helps us stay environmentally aware.

enables me to get out and clear my head.

I can walk just five minutes to pick up the day's groceries, or to grab that missing ingredient for dinner, or to find a movie if I want to stay in that evening. I can walk to restaurants, be it a casual, everyday joint or one of the new upscale eateries. So far, I've gone to Mr. Chef's, Fuji Hana, Pei Wei, Mo's Bagels, Bagel

Cove, Bourbon Steak, and Zuckerello's, all on foot.

It's also great to be able to "walk off" dinner or, when choosing to partake in a cocktail (or three), having the option of simply walking home instead of driving under the influence or being forced to take a taxi.

And if it's culture I want, I have the Aventura Arts & Cultural Center right at the end of my block. On

Saturday nights, we dress, we turn left, and we stroll about 1000 feet to the center's door. We go in, we watch, and we're home in minutes. Could it be any easier? Hard to imagine. It is nice.

The same goes for shopping. As long as I can manage my packages, I walk to Loehmann's, Pier 1 Imports, and Sports Authority — and shop! It's like my own private slice of Times Square.

Walking has other benefits. It helps keep us in shape, without having to be a slave to the gym. And it helps us stay environmentally aware. Think about it: More walking (or bike riding, but that's

another column) means using less gas, leaving a smaller carbon footprint, and, most important, reducing the number of cars on our roads. (And we all know that, especially in season, our roads tend to get clogged by snowbirds, locals, and random others.)

So with that said, if each person chose to walk even just once in a while, the positive effects for them — and for others — would be quite significant, fostering healthier and happier people.

The good news is that we have the perfect setting for it. Not only is the weather almost always amazing (okay, some might argue it rains a bit each day and it gets scorching hot in the summer, but who cares — we live in Florida, people!) but our community is quite pretty to look at. And you might even get to know your neighbors while you're walking around.

So, my fellow residents of Aventura, next time you reach for the car keys, think about how nice a stroll might be. You have nothing but your auto addiction to lose. And a lot to gain.

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Street Smarts

Now that the kids are back in school, drivers may want to slow down a little

By **Frank Rollason**
BT Contributor

Here we are in September already and the kids are back in school. Seems to be an appropriate time to broach a subject that most of us say we take seriously, but often don't — looking out for the kiddies as they traverse the daily maze designed for the automobile and not the pedestrian.

Some of you may recall that we lost a little one on the Boulevard a couple of years ago when he wandered away from Morningside Elementary School and tried to make it home on his own. He got as far as the Boulevard and 64th Street, where he made an error in judgment

— after all, he was only five — and stepped into the path of a southbound auto that was not speeding and certainly not expecting such a tiny tot to wander into its path. And that was that. The little boy will have no chance to learn from a near-miss experience. No, he will have no second chances for eternity.

So what brings me to write on this subject? Well, the other day a neighbor of mine in Belle Meade stopped me to lament how some of our fellow residents within the neighborhood seem to be suffering from lead-foot syndrome. He was concerned, and rightfully so, about the number of drivers who have forgotten that streets are connected to sidewalks and that sidewalks are pedestrian paths.



My wife, Fran, and I have lived in Belle Meade for six years now and we comment on how, when we first moved in, most of the pedestrian activity was neighbors walking their dogs. Now,

however, we are cognizant of the tremendous increase in parents pushing strollers occupied by the newest, tiniest residents of the area. Personally, we love seeing the youth and energy it brings, this

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transformation of our neighborhood from older to younger.

The stroller brigade is slowly giving way to the tiny ones stepping up to tricycles or their equivalent, and some have already graduated to two-wheelers, with and without training wheels; the more adventurous to roller skates and skateboards. And where do these little ones hone their skills? On the sidewalks, of course, just as we did when we were kids — at least those of us who grew up in a city.

The problem comes when the sidewalk and the street intersects, especially now that all the sidewalks have these slick ADA (Americans with Disabilities Act) ramps at every corner. I think we all recognize that streets are for cars and sidewalks are for pedestrians, but the joining of the two is a reality, and there is a tried and true axiom that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time. When this basic law of physics is ignored or tested, we have what we call “an accident.” And it doesn’t take a rocket scientist to determine the outcome of an accident between an automobile and a tiny pedestrian who has made a

fatal error in judgment.

Also keep in mind that as the kids get a little older, they venture more and more into the street; just a natural progression of growing up. Children have no fear. In their minds, they are invincible. They have not had the close-call occurrences from which to learn just how vulnerable they are. As we mature, we learn from those close calls — the hot-stove rule, if you will.

I remember when my young son asked me what electricity felt like. Sometimes constant admonition only inspires the one question that children most ask: Why? So when my son asked me that, I had him hold onto the sparkplug of the lawnmower while I slowly pulled the starter rope. Yep, he got a jolt and let out with a yelp.

Probably a reportable offense under today’s rules and regulations on raising children, but he got the message loud and clear and wanted no part of anything that could give him a similar sensation from that point forward. He still thought he was invincible, but he had acquired a healthy respect for electricity.

Now, back to the kids on bikes and those just getting to the point that they

can run: They need our help, all of our help, to survive. Back when I was a paramedic riding fire-rescue, the number of kids struck by cars while riding their bikes and roller skates was exponentially greater on Christmas Day. And if it wasn’t Christmas, there was a good chance it was the kid’s birthday.

I remember one call when a mother had given her 16-year-old son a motorcycle for his birthday. He didn’t make it around the block on his first ride. He ran into a telephone pole and was killed instantly. A family friend struck and killed a child with her auto when the child veered off the sidewalk and onto the street while earning to ride a bike with no training wheels. The horror of that event haunts this lady still. She has never gotten over it.

So how much time does speeding through our neighborhood really save us? Just out of curiosity, I timed a trip by car from our guard gate to both the east end of Belle Meade Island and the southeast corner of the mainland (Belle Meade Boulevard and 72nd Terrace) staying between 25 and 30 mph. Both took just a tad over two minutes.

Then I drove them both again, as fast as I could (just under 50 mph on some stretches) and rolled through all the stop signs. Both trips took just a tad over one minute and 45 seconds. Can you imagine having to live with the guilt of seriously injuring or killing one of your neighbor’s children just to gain an extra 15 or 20 seconds?

As many of you know, Fran and I live on the corner of NE 7th Avenue and 74th Street. Most drivers do not stop at the stop signs on 74th. I mean *really* stop. Most slow down a little bit, then blow through, trying to gain a few of those extra 15 to 20 seconds.

You are tempting fate. One day a child will be coming down that street, unsteadily navigating the bike he just got, or her first pair of roller skates. That child may not yet grasp the basic concept that two objects cannot occupy the same space at the same time, may not yet comprehend her own vulnerability. Do you want to be the one who teaches her that lesson? You’ll regret it the rest of your life.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



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Adrenaline Rush

Need more excitement in your life? Try navigating the intersection of Biscayne Boulevard and 96th Street

By Jen Karetnick
BT Contributor

I've driven, and gotten lost (even with a GPS), all over this strangely stretched-out county called Miami-Dade. In fact, I've driven and gotten lost in countries all over the world. But in all my wanderings, both deliberate and otherwise, I have yet to find an intersection where I have seen so many fender-benders, and narrowly avoided so many more myself, than Biscayne Boulevard and 96th Street.

Most recently, on August 1, a traumatic truck-and-car collision closed the entire roadway in the middle of the afternoon. Heading south, already late

for an appointment, my kids and I were caught in the standstill while the victims were loaded into ambulances, their vehicles towed, and the streets swept free of debris. Eventually we inched our way to a detour just north of Kmart that led to Griffing Boulevard and NE 6th Avenue. It put us more than an hour behind schedule.

If this sounds like I have very little sympathy for the "victims," let me assure you — you're correct. I only feel bad for the innocent driver injured by another's error.

How do I know this accident was caused by carelessness? I'm only guessing, of course. I didn't witness it, and there's no report about blame. But every



single crunch, smash, or near miss I've seen or been involved with at this intersection most certainly has been a result of driver error. Indeed it is more than that. It is driver stupidity or, worse, driver insolence: eastbound cars making speedy, illegal left-hand turns onto Biscayne Boulevard, long after the green

turning arrow has disappeared, playing chicken with oncoming traffic. Their impervious cockiness has often left me screeching to a stop in the middle of the road to avoid being hit.

Let's review, for a second, the rules for making a left-hand turn. Here's the basic, most important one: You don't



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have the right of way. You must yield to oncoming traffic. Simple, right? You would think.

On 96th street, drivers heading east or looking to turn left onto the Boulevard are generously given their green light and green arrow ahead of the cars heading west for about 15 to 20 beats, depending on how fast you count. (I suppose this is owing to the volume of east-bound traffic coming off I-95, seeking to go north on the Boulevard.) Then the green arrow changes to a yellow arrow — which, apparently, serves as a sign to those turning that they should speed up — before the light simply becomes green in both directions, and drivers wishing to make a left onto the Boulevard are back in the position of yielding.

The problem is, they don't. Anywhere from three to six to as many as seven drivers attempt to whip through that left turn long after westbound cars have started moving. This forces westbound traffic to yield — or suffer the consequences. If a wreck does occur, the driver making the left will obviously be at fault. But that's little comfort if an accident puts your kids in the hospital.

It's actually not that big of a deal to wait, really. Very few vehicles navigate the intersection from the east, given that most people in the Shores live west of the Boulevard. The only exception to this is the morning rush hour, which is fueled by traffic coming off the 79th Street Causeway, then heading north on NE 10th Avenue to 96th Street, before turning in the direction of the Boulevard. Even then, you might have a backup of only ten or so westbound cars at the stoplight.

It's not only drivers who are idiotic about the right-of-way rules there. Not too long ago, I saw a man pushing a baby stroller across 96th Street, on the west side of the intersection, where there's not only the left-turn lane but also a right-turn lane that feeds into the Boulevard going south. He was calmly walking against a green light, weaving through speeding cars, with ear buds blasting hip-hop so loudly into his ears that we could hear it through our open window.

I avoid this intersection as often as possible, taking NE 10th Avenue to 79th Street and then jumping on the Boulevard when I'm heading south on my way to work in the morning, or winding my

way through the streets to the light near CVS and Publix when I'm taking the kids to school.

But I shouldn't have to go out of my way like that. An easy fix would be allowing that green arrow to turn red and putting a direct stop to any cars trying to make a left. While I'm sure some would still try, it would end the sense of entitlement that a green or yellow arrow implies (even when there is traffic coming from the opposite direction).

Another possibility? Pictures. I'm not a proponent of the red-light cameras that our sister cities have installed, simply because I know they are only moneymaking schemes — and might not even be legal, infringing on people's rights. But evidence has shown that they have cut down on accidents at problem intersections like this one. Apparently people fear tickets more than they fear dying — or killing someone else.

Actually the good news is that the data from 2001-2009 (more recent data wasn't available) suggests that no one has been killed at Biscayne Boulevard and 96th Street, at least not recently. The driving fatalities in Miami Shores — on

average, about two a year — usually happen on or near I-95. Other trouble spots are along N. Miami Avenue and NE 6th Avenue.

Still, the less-than-comforting interpretation is that in 2009, Miami Shores, per 100,000 people, had about twice as many fatalities as the average Florida community. That's *fatalities*. Add in the fender-benders at Biscayne Boulevard and 96th, and our accident rate is probably exploding off the charts. When data for 2010 and 2011 is available, I bet we see an increase in those accident stats.

I should probably warn you: If you're one of those drivers who blatantly takes that left as if it were your privilege, I might go ahead and let you hit me. My car has never been the same since I fell asleep at the wheel and hit that fire hydrant. One tap and it'll fall apart. I'll be going slow, wearing my seat belt, maybe even a helmet and pads. (My children will be at home.) And you'll be to blame. I hope you have good insurance, because I'm thinking an Audi convertible might be nice.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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Nasty As Ever, and Not Yet Through

Miami's Blowfly is the oldest, dirtiest rapper around — a new film tells how he got that way

By Anne Tschida
BT Contributor

The *Weird World of Blowfly* is a documentary that will have a special screening at Wynwood's O Cinema at the end of this month. A generic, straight tagline for the film would read something like this: "On tour with an original rapper and underappreciated R&B composer who has made Miami his home and who has become a cult hero."

But that would be an understatement, to say the least. A viewer following that loose description might not be prepared for the very first scene, in which Blowfly raps into a microphone about how he is "the master of the class," with a male member so large he "can't f**k a human ass." Then he turns to his manager and says he needs to make sure he includes former President George Bush in his dirty ditty. *That* is a better summary not only of the film, but of the weird double life of the man born Clarence Reid.

The 71-year-old, who has worked and lived around North Miami almost since he left his native Georgia (before he was ten), rhymes about raunchy sex, race, and politics. He's also pretty funny.

In the opening minutes of the film, we see local star DJ Le Spam talking 1960s music in Reid's living room, rapper and *Law & Order* actor Ice T

reminiscing about how his dad listened to Blowfly's foul party lyrics, and the Dead Kennedys' Jello Biafra saying he has never heard a sense of humor with such a "deliciously degenerate attitude toward the world." Indeed, Reid might be the most interesting entertainment story out of Miami that most people have never heard.

The film traces Reid's beginnings and the emergence of his alter ego at a tender age. Dressed in a trademark outfit that includes sequined cape, jumpsuit, and a glittery blue super-hero hood, Reid remembers that, as a seven-year-old, following the death of his grandfather, he set out to make some money for the family. According to Reid, he told the family's white landlords: "I could plow a mule. And they said, 'Get your little nigger ass over there and sit down and shut the f**k up.'"

So he sang a dirty tune instead. The white folks loved it and, rather than paying him a measly buck for plowing, they gave him \$30. When his grandmother wondered why anyone would do that, Reid told her they said, "Oh, he's a nasty little bastard — but he's funny." His grandmother replied, "You're a disgrace to the human race. You're no better than a blowfly."

That's one version of the story.

But it's a revealing and poignant one. The little nasty rapper started changing



Photos courtesy of Variance Films

Clarence Reid as Blowfly: Rhyming about race, politics, and raunchy sex — humorously.



At age 71, North Miami resident Reid treasures the Bible and lives with his mother.

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The documentary shows Blowfly in concert, among other places, in Europe.

lyrics to pop songs to make people laugh and to hold an audience. But the man behind the Blowfly persona never drank, took drugs, or lived anything like a hip-hop lifestyle. To this day, Reid reads the Bible regularly, as is shown in one scene in which he pulls out a small, torn, well-worn edition.

That incredible contradiction is what made Jonathan Furmanski want to make a film about him. He had been listening to Blowfly's music since he was in high school, but the filmmaker didn't know about Clarence Reid. When he finally encountered him, Furmanski fell for the gentle man without the cape, and decided he wanted to follow "both" of them on an upcoming tour.

The results are humorous, and revealing. In a Seattle hotel room, Furmanski captures Reid alone in bed smothering a McDonalds breakfast in grape jelly and syrup, before making the sign of the cross. The very next scene: A masked Blowfly is singing what he says is one of the first raps ever, his own from 1965, "Rap Dirty." His hand is making very

different gestures this time. And, make no mistake, these are X-rated lyrics.

"That's what is so completely unexpected," says Furmanski, speaking by phone from New York. "He is not a one-note character."

No, indeed. In the 1960s and 1970s, Reid wrote some seriously good soul songs, including "Rockin' Chair," and hits for Sam and Dave and KC and the Sunshine Band. But like so many musicians of his day, especially black ones, Reid ended up selling the rights to the moneymaking hits for, well, a song.

As Blowfly, Reid's music found a cult following, but never mainstream acceptance, and certainly it never made millions for anyone. Yet that's the persona Reid most seems to love, as does a dedicated following.

After writing an article for Miami *New Times* on Blowfly back in 2003, writer Tom Bowker quit being a scribe and decided to manage the singer, play the drums in his band, and take him back out on tour, years after he had quit the road.



Blowfly's act is campy, more reminiscent of a cabaret than a rap concert.

Director Furmanski filmed several of these tours, including one through eastern Germany, with German alt-rock band Die Artze. Talk about contradictions. Non-English-speaking revelers, some of whom could be Reid's grandchildren, dressed in black with pierced faces, are jamming and laughing at the graphic yet silly lyrics being sung by a man in a mask and cape, while the female backup singer, wearing tassels on her naked breasts, shakes a fleshy, decidedly un-South Beach body. It's campy, and more reminiscent of a cabaret than a rap concert.

Onscreen, Reid, who never got a high-school education, appears philosophical. He says that maybe he wasn't really trying to make the white farmers laugh when he added profanity to their favorite songs — he wanted "to piss them off." The man who follows the Bible claims he shouldn't go to heaven, as it "would be boring to me."

Back in Miami, with the tour over, the costumes stored away, and the hip members of the headline bands nowhere

in sight, another poignant and funny moment unfolds. Reid sits at an admissions desk at Jackson Memorial Hospital, telling the administrator that he makes about "\$600 and something" in Social Security per month, that he lives with his mother, and that he needs to get treatment for the arthritis in his knee.

Then Reid says he wants to sing her a little song, but he guesses "it should be clean." As other women in the room turn around and start to giggle, he decides against a clean number, and changes the lyrics of "By the Time I Get to Phoenix" to the time he gets something else. They all love it.

During the four-day film run, special events will be held at O Cinema, including live sets by DJ Le Spam and Blowfly himself. From Thursday, September 29 to Sunday, October 2, with four screenings on the weekend days; 90 NW 29th St., Miami, 305-571-9970, www.o-cinema.org.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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Cleon Peterson, Daybreak 1, acrylic on wood panels, 2010, at Primary Projects.

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www.haroldgolengallery.com
Through September 10:
"The Hukilau 10 Year Anniversary Fine Art Tiki Show" with Kevin Kidney, Jody Daily, Shag, Skot Olsen, Kirsten Easthope, Tiki Hana, N! Satterfield, Roberto Jimenez, Aaron Marshall, John Kisse, Derek Yaniger, Ken Bernstein, Michelle Bickford, El Gato Gomez, Atomick Kitty, Jason Snyder, Ken Ruzic, Sam Gambino, Tom Fowner, Al Evans, Nat Reed, Jessica Caster, Richey Fahey, and Joe and Donella Vitale

ICON ART

147 NW 36th St., Miami
305-576-4266
www.iconartimages.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

JG PLATFORM GALLERY

2320 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-573-0208
www.jgplatform.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

KABE CONTEMPORARY

123 NW 23rd St., Miami
305-573-8142
www.kabecontemporary.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

KAVACHNINA CONTEMPORARY

46 NW 36th St., Miami
305-448-2060
www.kavachnina.com
September 8 through October 6:
"Tu, You y Tu Otro Yo" by Yuri Zatarain
Reception September 8, 7 to 10 p.m.

KELLEY ROY GALLERY

50 NE 29th St., Miami
305-447-3888
www.kelleyroygallery.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

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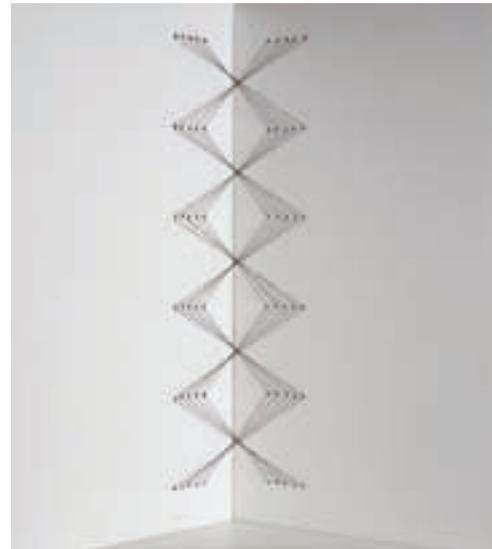
2300 N. Miami Ave., Miami
786-431-1506
www.galerieleliamordoch.com
September 10 through October 1:
"123 Days Remaining" with various artists
Reception September 10, 4 to 10 p.m.

LOCUST PROJECTS

155 NE 38th St., Miami
305-576-8570
www.locustprojects.org
September 10 through October 15:
"Plus Sign" by Andy Coolquitt
Reception September 10, 6 to 10 p.m.
September 9, 6:30 p.m.:
Conversation with Andy Coolquitt

MAOR GALLERY

3030 NE 2nd Ave., Miami
305-573-9995
http://maormiami.org/
Call gallery for exhibition information



Karen Rifas, *Cornered*, colored cord, 2011, at Bernice Steinbaum Gallery.

MIAMI ART SALON

36 NW 36th St., Miami
305-775-9683
www.miamiartsalon.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

MIAMI ART SPACE

244 NW 35th St., Miami
305-757-6000
www.miamiartspace.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE, CENTER GALLERY

300 NE 2nd Ave., Miami
Bldg. 1, Room 1365
305-237-3696
www.mdc.edu
September 8 through October 16:
"Faculty Exhibition" with Joseph Tamargo, Claudia Scalise, Natasha Duwin, Shirley Henderson, Tom Scicluna, Melissa Diaz, Helen Burgos, and Yovani Bauta

MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE, FREEDOM TOWER

600 Biscayne Blvd., Miami
305-237-7700
Through October 7:
"Mona Lisa Unveiled" with various artists
Through October 22:
"100/10" by Oscar Niemeyer

MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE, GALLERY NORTH

11380 NW 27th Ave., Miami
305-237-1532
www.mdc.edu
September 22 through December 15:
"Ralph Provisero: Maquettes and Drawings" by Ralph Provisero

MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE, HOMESTEAD ART SPACE

500 College Terr., Homestead
305-237-5000
www.mdc.edu/homestead

September 12 through October 28:
"Old and New" with Peggy Nania and Lucas Blanco

MIAMI-DADE COLLEGE, KENDALL GALLERY

1110 SW 104th St., Miami
305-237-2322
www.mdc.edu/kendall
Through October 29:
"Pannaroma" with various artists

MIAMI INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF ART AND DESIGN

1501 Biscayne Blvd., Miami
305-428-5700
www.mymiu.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

MICHAEL PEREZ POP ART GALLERY

Shops at Midtown Miami
Store # 120 Buena Vista Blvd., Miami
516-532-3040
www.michaelperez-artist.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

MORE FUNNER PROJECTS

180 NE 39th St., Miami
786-512-4130
www.morefunnerprojects.blogspot.com
Through September 5:
"Chinese Bootleg Mexican Hyphy" by Greg Shimada

MYRA GALLERIES

177 NW 23rd St., Miami
631-704-3476
www.myragalleries.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

NEW WORLD GALLERY

New World School of the Arts
25 NE 2nd St., Miami
305-237-3597
Through September 9:
"Six + Six" with various artists

NINA TORRES FINE ART

2033 NW 1st Pl., Miami
305-395-3599
ninatorresfineart.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

NORMAN LIEBMAN STUDIO

2561 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-573-3572
www.norman-liebman-studio.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

O. ASCANIO GALLERY

2600 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-571-9036
www.oascaniogallery.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

OHWO

3100 NW 7th Ave., Miami
305-633-9345
www.oh-wow.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

PANAMERICAN ART PROJECTS

2450 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-573-2400
www.panamericanart.com
September 1 through October 15:
"Leon Ferrari and Collective of Argentinean Artists" with Leon Ferrari, Oscar Bony, Tomas Espina, Ana Fabry, Santiago Porter, Gian Paolo Minnelli, and Yaya Firpo
Reception September 10, 6 to 9 p.m.



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PAREDES FINE ARTS STUDIO

2311 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-534-2184
www.miguelparedes.com
Ongoing:
"Elements of an Artist" by Miguel Paredes
Reception September 10, 5 to 10 p.m.

PRAXIS INTERNATIONAL ART

2219 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-573-2900
www.praxis-art.com
September 10 through October 22:
"Understory" by Nina Surel
Reception September 10, 7 to 9 p.m.

PRIMARY PROJECTS

4141 NE 2nd St., Suite 104
www.primaryprojectspace.com
info@primaryflight.com
September 10 through October 1:
"His Wife & Her Lover" with Valerie Hegarty, Mark Jenkins, George Sanchez-Calderon, Dead Dads Club Corporation, Manny Prieres, Emmett Moore, Franky Cruz, Andrew Nigon, Cleon Peterson, Nick Klein, Johnny Robles, Jessy Nite, and Edouard Nardon
Reception September 10, 7 to 11 p.m.

SAMMER GALLERY

82 NE 29th St., Miami
305-441-2005
www.artnet.com/sammertgallery.html
Call gallery for exhibition information

SOHO STUDIOS

2136 NW 1st Ave., Miami
305-600-4785
www.sohostudiosmiami.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

STASH GALLERY

162 NE 50th Terr., Miami
305-992-7652
www.myspace.com/stashgallery
Call gallery for exhibition information

SWAMPSPACE GALLERY

3821 NE 1st Ct., Miami
http://swampstyle.blogspot.com/
swampstyle@gmail.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

TONY WYNN MODERN ART GALLERY

3223 NE 2nd Ave., Miami
786-536-9799,
www.tonywynn.com
Ongoing: "First Lady Fantasy & Neon Art" by David Mayberry

THE LUNCH BOX GALLERY

310 NW 24th St., Miami

305-407-8131

www.thelunchboxgallery.com
September 10 through October 4:
"Summer Photo Show" with various artists

UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI PROJECTS SPACE

2200 NW 2nd Ave., Miami
305-284-2542
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

YEELAN ART GALLERY

250 NW 23rd St., Unit 306, Miami
954-235-4758
www.yeelanart.com
Call gallery for exhibition information

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800 Lincoln Rd., Miami Beach
305-674-8278
www.artcentersf.org
Through October 2:
"Roman Bonfill + Westen Charles + Brian Reedy" with Roman Bonfill, Westen Charles, and Brian Reedy

BASS MUSEUM OF ART

2100 Collins Ave., Miami Beach
305-673-7530
www.bassmuseum.org
Through October 16:
"At the Same Time (Al Mismo Tempo)" by Sandra Gamarra
Through October 30:
"Vanishing Points: Paint and Paintings from the Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection" with various artists

CIFO (Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation)

1018 N. Miami Ave., Miami
305-455-3380
www.cifo.org
September 8 through November 6:
"Viewpoint: 2011 CIFO Grants & Commissions Program Exhibition" with Laura Belem, Tania Bruguera, Fizia Irizar-Rojo, David Lamelas, Begona Morales, Amalia Pica, Antonio Vega, Alicia Villarreal
Reception September 8, 6 to 7 p.m. Gallery tour with artists 7 to 9 p.m.



Timothy Buwalda, *The Birthplace*, oil on canvas, 2011, at Fredric Snitzer Gallery.

DE LA CRUZ COLLECTION CONTEMPORARY ART SPACE

23 NE 41st St., Miami
305-576-6112
www.delacruzcollection.org
Through October 8:
"The Family of Man" by George Sanchez-Calderon
September 10 through October 8:
"Optic Nerve XIII Finalists: Screening at the Collection" with various artists

FLORIDA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY FROST ART MUSEUM

10975 SW 17th St., Miami
305-348-2890
thefrost.fiu.edu
September 7 through October 2: "Tipping Points" with Mette Tommerup and William Burke
Through September 11:
"East/West: Visually Speaking" with Cai Lei, the Luo Brothers, Ma Baozhong, Cang Xin, Shen JingDong, Shi Liang, Sun Ping, Tang Zhigang, Zhang Hongtu, and Zhong Biao
Through September 18: "Who's Counting" and "Temporal State of Being" with David Hodge and Hi-Jin Hodge
Through September 18:
"From Old to New" with various artists

LEGAL ART

1035 N. Miami Ave., Suite 200, Miami
www.legalartmiami.org
September 8 through October 8:
"KIDSART" with Bhakti Baxter, Leda Almar, Doug Hoekzema, Pachi Giustinian, Sinisa Kukec, Lacoreya Glass, Chloe Gonzalez, Leandra Michelle Hall, Daisy Hoover, Rose Hoover, Juliet Loyd, Taylor Lynott, Galt Mikesell, Trenard Newkirk, Torance Rodriguez, and Azziji Usery
Reception September 8, 6:30 to 9:30 p.m.

LOWE ART MUSEUM, UNIVERSITY OF MIAMI

1301 Stanford Dr., Coral Gables
305-284-3535
www.lowemuseum.org
Through September 25:
"Frank Paulin: An American Documentarian" by Frank Paulin
Through October 23:
"Sacred Stories, Timeless Tales: Mythic Perspectives in World Art from the Permanent Collection" with various artists
Through April 22, 2012:
"Women, Windows, and the Word: Diverging Perspectives on Islamic Art" with various artists

MIAMI ART MUSEUM

101 W. Flagler St., Miami
305-375-3000
www.miamiartmuseum.org
Ongoing: "Between Here and There: Modern and Contemporary Art from the Permanent Collection"
Through October 16:
"A Day Like Any Other" and "First Love Sketching Appointment" by Rivane Neuenschwander
September 8: "What Remains" by Vicki Goldberg
Lecture, 6:30 p.m. Free for MAM Members, police, firefighters, and emergency personnel. \$8 for nonmembers.

MUSEUM OF CONTEMPORARY ART

770 NE 125th St., North Miami
305-893-6211
www.mocanomi.org
Through September 4:
"Any Ever" by Ryan Trecartin
September 23 through November 13: "Modify, as Needed" with Kathryn Andrews, Darren Bader, Nina Beier, Karl Holmqvist, Adriana Lara, Natalia Ibanez Lario, José Carlos Martinat, Amilcar Packer, Nick Relph, Anders Smebye, Nicolas Paris Velez

THE MARGULIES COLLECTION

591 NW 27th St., Miami
305-576-1051, www.margulieswarehouse.com
Collection will be closed until November 10

THE RUBELL FAMILY COLLECTION

95 NW 29th St., Miami
305-573-6090
www.rubellfamilycollection.com
Call collection for exhibition information

WORLD CLASS BOXING

Debra and Dennis Scholl Collection
170 NW 23rd St., Miami
305-438-9908
www.worldclassboxing.org
Call for exhibition information

Compiled by Melissa Wallen

Send listings, jpeg images, and events information to art@biscaynetimes.com



With Rowing, You Get Egg Rolls

Geographically and culturally, China may seem distant, but the Middle Kingdom's ancient watersport of dragon-boat racing fits Miami perfectly. This year's **South Florida Dragon Boat Festival** starts at 9:00 a.m. on **Saturday, September 24** and paddles on until 5:00 p.m. at Haulover Beach Park Marina (10800 Collins Ave., Miami Beach). To participate you need to form or join a team and practice in advance. If you simply want to watch, you can take part in another sport — eating egg rolls! Whoever eats ten in the fastest time becomes the 2011 Egg Roll Eating Champion. For more details go to www.miamidragonboat.com or call 305-345-8489.

Waiting For BP

If You're Going to Pull a Knife, USAló is a remarkable hybrid of language, imagery, movement, dramatic flourish, and eco-activism. A collaborative effort from two local performers, Elizabeth Doud and Carlos Caballero — also the only two actors in the play — it's a tale of a mermaid and a petroleum worker, based on text from Samuel Beckett, told in a mixture of both English and Spanish, set

on a polluted ocean. It's another example of Miami pushing creative boundaries and becoming a true breeding ground for artistic expression. *Knife* will play out from **Thursday, September 8 through Saturday, September 10** at 8:00 p.m., and on **Sunday, September 11** at 5:00 p.m., at the On Stage Black Box Theater at the Miami-Dade County Auditorium, 2901 W. Flagler St. Tickets cost \$20. Call 305-358-5885.

Hurricane Watch

Back in 2002, the University of Miami football team, on one of the great runs in college football history, was favored to win a second consecutive national championship — until it ran into Ohio State in the Fiesta Bowl. Last year the rematch ended no better for the Canes. Now they get one more chance at revenge. (Which is one more chance than the current NCAA investigation is likely to give them.) See if the Canes can finally get past the Buckeyes in the team's home opener on **Saturday, September 17** at Sun Life Stadium. Tickets start at \$60; pregame time is 7:30 p.m. If you can't make it out to Miami Gardens, the game will be broadcast on ESPN and WQAM 560 radio.

A Picker-Upper for What Ails Our Waters

In a recent survey, Miami came out dead last among major metropolitan areas in civic participation — few people vote, even fewer volunteer. Let's shake that status! The annual **Miami-Dade Coastal Cleanup** will take place this year on **Saturday, September 17**. Volunteers

not only clean up the litter in the water, but also catalogue it by taking notes to better understand the type and source of the junk so that one day the need for a Cleanup Saturday will be obsolete! You need to sign up for a specific site, six of which are along the Biscayne Corridor, by going to www.miamidadecoastalcleanup.org or calling 305-372-3300. Plan to arrive by 8:30 a.m. and work until noon, at which point the after-party starts at the Miami Seaquarium, a reward for all that trash-taking.

Design a Fun Day

The sixth **Family Day** in the Design District will be held on **Saturday, September 24**, with additional participation this year by the Adrienne Arsht Center. Around the district, from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m., take the kids to decorate cupcakes, make mini pizzas, and get temporary tattoos. Don't worry, there's stuff for big people, too, as boutiques, showrooms, and galleries will be open. For more info on the event and a list of neighborhood establishments, go to www.miamidesigndistrict.net

An Arts Anniversary

The Aventura Arts & Cultural Center (3385 NE 188th St.) will kick off its second season with a free family event called **Curtain Up!** This will be an opportunity to catch highlight performances from the inaugural year, such as the classical moves of the Arts Ballet Theater and the ebony-and-ivory sounds of the Miami

International Piano Festival, featuring pianists from across the globe. There will be other activities taking place as well, including puppet shows and prize drawings. From noon to 4:00 p.m. on **Sunday, September 25**. For more information call 954-462-0222 or go to www.aventuracenter.org.

Dogtown Miami

South Florida is a dog-lovin' place. So it's fitting that Miami will play host to **The Incredible Dog Show**, the first U.S. city to do so. Under a big-top tent in Bicentennial Park (1075 Biscayne Blvd.), starting on **Wednesday, September 28** and running for ten days, world-champion dogs will catch Frisbees, run obstacle courses, do some doggy-diving, and perform many other stunts (one pooch specializes in extreme skateboarding). One of the coolest things: More than 50 percent of the dogs featured have been rescued and successfully rehabilitated. Daily shows start at 7:30 p.m., with extra performances Saturdays at 3:30 p.m. and Sundays at 12:00 p.m. and 3:30 p.m. Tickets range from \$30 to \$65 and can be purchased at the park or at www.theincredibledogs.com. Call 305-358-7550.

Be the Next Bryan Norcross

It's the middle of the hurricane season here in Florida, a season that comes, whether we like it or not, every year. So why not embrace it by learning and understanding our subtropical environment? On **Friday, September 29**, HistoryMiami (101 W. Flagler St.) will get **Wild About the Weather** for an all-day event, 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m., meant to promote interaction, even empowerment, with the atmospheric world. Make a weather station equipped with barometers and thermometers and get a grasp of the fundamentals of weather forecasting. Tickets cost \$35 for members, \$45 for non-members. Go to www.historymiami.org.

Compiled by BT arts editor Anne Tschi-da. Please send information and images to calendar@biscaynetimes.com.



Muir Vidler

Manu a Manu

The music of **Manu Chao** has become an international soundtrack of the hip, from cafés and boutiques in Madrid and Mumbai to Miami. With all sorts of musical influences and beeps and chirps in the background, he sings about peace and war and marijuana, in French, Galician, Basque, Portuguese, Arabic, and English. While the left-leaning musician has played in Cuba, he has never performed in Miami — until now. On **Friday, September 9** starting at 7:00 p.m., we'll get to hear him jam at the Klipsch Amphitheater at Bayfront Park (301 N. Biscayne Blvd.). Tickets start at \$33.50. Go to www.rhythmfoundation.com for more information. For a free introduction to Manu Chao's music, O Cinema (90 NW 29th St.) will screen *Manu Chao Babylon Fever* on **Friday, September 2** at 10:00 p.m.



Tigertail Roars in Wynwood

With the backdrop of the awesome Wynwood Walls, the nonprofit cultural presenter Tigertail Productions will kick-start its season with a kick-ass party, **Expected/Unexpected**, featuring performance artist Pat Oleszko and her giant blow-up dolls. On **Tuesday, October 5**, from 7:00 to 9:00 p.m., Tigertail invites you to witness the antics and partake of the festivities for *free*, in an event that will move in and out of Joey's restaurant, the courtyard of murals, and Wynwood Kitchen and Bar (all in the 2500 block of NW 2nd Avenue). For more info call 305-324-4337 or go to www.tigertail.org.

Biscayne Crime Beat

Compiled by Derek McCann

Gullible Employee Contributes to Loss

200 Block of NE 79th Street

One would think that common sense would be in demand in this weak job market, and only those possessing it would be hired. Well, think again. While on vacation, the victim received a phone call indicating that there was a strange man on his property, possibly removing items. When the victim returned home, there was a new lock on his front gate. He broke the lock, entered his property, and then noticed that one of his trailers had gone missing. It seems the perpetrator offered money to one of the victim's employees to remove the trailer, claiming that's what the boss wanted. The

worker happily complied. The lesson here? As Ronald Reagan famously said, "Trust, but verify."

An Apple a Day Keeps the Crooks Happy

900 Block of Biscayne Boulevard

No matter how much some folks want the latest gadget from Apple, they simply are unwilling to put up with the long lines at Aventura Mall and on Lincoln Road. Who wants to make an appointment when you could just take someone else's loot? An apartment was burgled (though there were no signs of forced entry). While there were many high-ticket items to steal, the only item taken was an iPhone, along with its charger. The apartment was not

ransacked or otherwise disturbed. Should we all just switch to MetroPCS? It can't be that bad!

You Didn't Tell Me It Was a Long-Distance Call

6700 Block of Biscayne Boulevard

Even if you do have MetroPCS, it's probably wise while navigating Miami to not let anyone else know you have a cell phone — or any other form of technology, for that matter. A man asked to use victim's cell phone. His call lasted longer than expected and the victim asked him to return the phone. The moocher refused, put the phone in his pocket, and screamed, "Come get it!" He then ran south on Biscayne Boulevard. Sigh.

Make-Believe Friends Are Better

5800 Block of N. Miami Avenue

Victim had four "friends" over to play video games on his Xbox 360. While they were playing, the victim stepped out for an hour. He must have figured that



playing the perfect host was not necessary when everyone was so engrossed with the Xbox. Turns out he should have hosted. When he returned, the friends and the video-game system were gone. Since video-game geeks generally seem to have difficulty with nonvirtual relationships, we suggest they come to terms and accept a life of isolation and online gaming. After all, what is more important — to have real friends or the ability to zap enemy soldiers on your television?

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NE 13th Street and NE Miami Court

A woman pulled over at a Pay to Park machine and a man entered her car from the passenger side. He told her he was the parking attendant and she had to pay \$30 to park. When the woman refused, the intruder grabbed her purse and told her to leave the vehicle. She did, but then decided to chase the vehicle on foot. The man eventually jumped from the vehicle and ran away. When the victim flagged down a police officer and explained the situation, she kept contradicting herself and giving different accounts. The police report noted that she was likely on drugs. No suspect had been located at press time. The druggie obviously scared the suspect. Lesson learned: Drugs may destroy your brain, but they can also scare the bejeezus out of criminals. Turn on, tune in, and drop those thugs.

The Sign Said "Free TV in Every Room"

3500 Block of Biscayne Boulevard

A man rented a room at one of our finer Boulevard motel establishments. At

checkout time, he failed to turn in his key. Instead he was busy trying to steal the 42-inch television from his room by wrapping it in a blanket and carting it away. When motel personnel chased him, the perp chucked the TV over a fence, before climbing the fence himself. Leaving the now broken TV behind, he ran north on the Boulevard. His fingerprints are all over the television.

The Adventures of Captain Caffeine

2900 Block of Biscayne Boulevard

The male suspect entered Starbucks and purchased a beverage. Nothing unusual there. However, after that, he grabbed the purse of the woman next to him and ran off. A brave employee (victims and bystanders are getting more courageous these days) chased the slimeball to a waiting vehicle. Before the crook could get away, the employee reached into the car and snatched the purse back. The car drove off. The employee returned the purse to the victim. Don't mess with people high on caffeine, folks — they seem to welcome the additional rush.

Taxi Driver Revenge

4900 Block of NE 2nd Avenue

We see report after report of passengers ripping off hard-working cab drivers. This time, the tables turned. A cab pulled up to its destination and, as the passenger was getting out, the driver asked to use his cell phone. At the same time he handed him his cell phone, the passenger also gave the driver a \$20 bill to cover the fare, expecting change in return. Instead the driver took off with the cell phone and the money. We, of course, don't condone this behavior, but we suppose cab drivers have as much right as anyone to get in on Miami's rampant lawlessness. Or maybe this was just a pre-emptive robbery.

Next Stop: The Hospital

1400 Block of Biscayne Boulevard

Victim was waiting at a bus stop when he was approached by two males, who engaged him in lively conversation. (Insert red flag here.) When the bus pulled up, they all boarded together. The two men then aggressively began to ask the victim for money. Victim told them he had only two dollars in his pocket,

which he needed for return bus fare. A struggle ensued and the men repeatedly punched the victim in the face before leaving the bus empty-handed. Another sad reminder that one person's poverty is another person's bounty. Also that there's a major drawback to mass transit: They'll let anybody on.

An Audit of Their Brains Revealed Nothing

6200 Block of NE 2nd Avenue

A mother and son entered a tax office. The son went to the front desk and demanded his mother's refund check. The receptionist told him they would be receiving the check shortly. That did not please the son. He proceeded to vandalize the office, throwing equipment around. Mommy, meanwhile, stood watch to make sure her little baby's tirade would not be interrupted by police. They eventually left the office with no check, but they do have a nice little date with the criminal court system. Do Miami thugs even think anymore?

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A Playground No More

North Miami Beach's Taylor Park has fallen on hard times, and it's the kids who suffer

By **Jim W. Harper**
BT Contributor

Little Betty skipped down the street to visit her favorite playground and when she got there, she stopped cold. Where did it go? Who took away her merry-go-round? As Betty stood there in shock, staring at the demolished playground, her shoulders slumped, and a single tear fell down her cheek.

Little Betty doesn't understand the economic downturn. All she knows is that her playground, her place, is gone.

Parks near and far are going into foreclosure. More than 100 state parks across the nation plan to lock their gates, and while Florida's state parks have been spared for the moment, the talk in Tallahassee revolves around privatization as salvation. Without more revenue, large parks cannot save themselves.

At the city level, parks and recreation is no sitcom, and municipalities are deciding which parks and services to keep and which to chop. Community center? Keep. Costly pool? Chop. While lamentable, parks that cannot be adequately and safely maintained need to be closed securely to protect the public. And then the question becomes, how do

you keep a closed park safe?

Here's how *not* to close a park: Open the gate every morning, allowing people to drive in as they please, knowing that next to no one will visit. Let the fencing fall apart so that the park remains open 24 hours a day, regardless of whether the main entrance is officially open. Abandon the baseball diamond, but forget to lock one of the gates, so that any stray animal can loiter on the field of weeds. For atmosphere, scatter a few old signs on the ground. And while you are at it, decorate the ground below the park's entrance sign with a few beer bottles.

That is the situation I found at Taylor Park in North Miami Beach. It used to have a baseball complex, but now the dugouts have trees growing in them. Not weeds, trees. It used to have a playground, but that got canned. It used to house a preschool, but now the property is unsafe for children.

The Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) of North Miami Beach has budgeted \$500,000 for phase one of improvements to the park, but they are on hold "due to environmental remediation testing required by DERM" — the county's Department of Environmental Resources Management — as stated in the CRA's current Capital Projects



BT photos by Jim W. Harper

Taylor Park is a good example of a bad approach to closing a park.

Status Report.

So if there are pending environmental issues, why is this park still open? And if testing needs to be done, why has it not happened?

The park's daycare center and tot lot were removed at a cost of \$20,000. Today the park looks abandoned.

But wait, there's more.

The description above refers only to the "east side" of Taylor Park, along W. Dixie Highway. Another section of Taylor Park sits on the western side of a large, rectangular lake. Some online maps call it "Aqua Park," but the park's signs say otherwise. One side of Taylor Park cannot see the other, owing to thick vegetation, and private residences along most of the lake mean that you cannot easily walk from one to the other.

"Westside" Taylor Park is tidy, if also tiny, and clearly it was the favored child, unlike the ugly orphan across the pond. The park's centerpiece stands in the middle of the lake: A continuous fountain spews water about 20 feet high in a vertical trumpet shape.

The park's other noteworthy feature is its hurricane warning system. A flock of ibis stands guard in the grass and, as fans of the University of Miami's mascot may know, these birds are believed to be the last to leave before a hurricane, and the first to return. The university calls them "brave," although a few other choice words come to mind. In any case, if you visit the park and don't see a single ibis, run!

Hérons and ducks also live on or frequent the pond, and the fish must be



The abandoned baseball complex has trees — not just weeds — growing in the dugouts.

abundant, too, as fishermen often cast their lines in the park's southern corner. The shoreline consists of one part grass, one part Australian pine needles. These invasive trees also provide most of the shade.

Would Little Betty like to visit here? No, because despite the sign that mistakenly calls it a "playground," there is nothing here to climb except for a couple of black metal benches. And she might get scared and confused when she glances across the street. *What's that?*

That wall belongs to the Shalom Memorial Cemetery. While attractive

TAYLOR PARK

Park Rating

15400 W. Dixie Hwy.
North Miami Beach
305-948-2957

Hours: Dawn to dusk

Picnic tables: No

Barbecues: No

Picnic pavilions: No

Tennis courts: No

Athletic fields: Yes

Night lighting: No

Swimming pool: No

Playground: No



People will find a way to get in, especially if they're up to no good.



Signs say the west side of Taylor Park has a playground, but it doesn't.



Most of the lake is rimmed by private residences, making it inaccessible.

externally, the wall remains part of cemetery row, a series of resting places along NE 16th Avenue. People go in, but they do not come out. Not a playful scene.

But if you happen to be visiting a loved one's final resting place, you may want to drive over to the lake for a moment of reflection. While that portion of the park is nothing more than a thin strip of grass and trees along one edge of the lake, it offers nice views of a

waterway that is otherwise inaccessible to the public.

So how do you reconcile the west side of Taylor Park with the east side? Answer: Change the name of one of them. I think the east side should be called Closed. Or better yet, Foreclosed.

North Miami Beach has to make some choices. The city's proposed budget for fiscal year 2012, which was under discussion during August, cuts a

cool million from Leisure Services, the department that includes the city's parks. This cut takes away more than 21 percent, leaving them with \$4,331,704 to staff and operate all the pools, cultural centers, parks, and the city library. Something has got to give.

The good news for the abandoned baseball field is that it falls within the boundaries of the city's CRA, whereas the west side of Taylor Park does not.

That means that grants may be available to fix up the flop. Methinks that someone so far has dropped that ball.

In the meantime, close the thing. It's not safe for Little Betty and her friends. Close the gate, shut the door, and leave Little Betty outside singing to herself, through her sniffles, "This used to be my playground."

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com

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Lightning Crashes, Thunder Rumbles, Fido Freaks

If you absolutely love scary storms, your pets will too

By Lisa Hartman
BT Contributor

Editor's note: As she normally does during the summer season, veteran BT columnist Lisa Hartman was spending time in Long Island, New York, when something quite abnormal occurred: A hurricane named Irene began marching up the East Coast and threatening everything in its path.

In a hasty e-mail message sent August 27, Lisa warned that she was being forced to evacuate and did not know what to expect. Since then she understandably has had more serious concerns to deal with than a column for the BT.

On our deadline day, August 31, we received word from her via an Internet

café in Montauk: no electricity, no water, no cell phone service. Sounds depressingly familiar, doesn't it?

We wish Lisa well, along with everyone affected by the storm. Rather than no "Pawsitively Pets" this issue, we decided to reprise one of her columns. This one was published in July 2007, and its subject matter is appropriate to the occasion.

The rainy season has arrived, and thunderstorms and lightning seem to be a normal part of our days now. While these forces of nature may be a mere inconvenience for us, our pets may view them as horribly scary and a reason to panic.

And though we may never know exactly how sensitive our pets are to



changes in barometric pressure or explosions of thunder and lightning, how we humans handle bad weather can help alleviate some of their anxiety — or not

build any in the first place.

Our pets are our babies, of course, and our first inclination during a scary storm is to reassure them that everything



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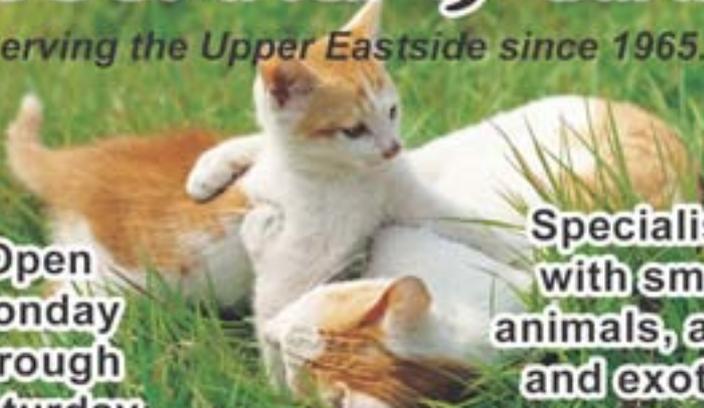
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is okay. Don't do it! Telling your dog "it's okay, it's okay" over and over will only assure them that things obviously

Our pets are our babies, of course, and our first inclination during a scary storm is to reassure them that everything is okay. Don't do it!

are not okay or you wouldn't need to console them. What's more, your constant attention, petting, and holding them can actually feed their worried behavior, since their acting afraid succeeds in getting your attention.

If your pet is only mildly uncomfortable in storms, try to act calm and uninterested yourself. Animals are masters at reading body language, and will take behavior cues from you. If you're reading a book as thunder claps begin shaking the house, continue reading — or watching TV or cleaning or whatever you've been doing. You may even want to yawn or giggle a few times during a storm while

continuing your other activity, demonstrating to your pet that you're not at all concerned with the tempestuous events going on outside.

You can also try making thunderstorms a cause for celebration. In other words, storms make great things happen for pets! At the first sound of thunder, smile, act happy, and bust out your dog's favorite toy or game. From now on, that special game of fetch or tug, or that favorite toy will only magically appear during thunderstorms. Interactive toys such as Kongs, in which your pet must work to get food out, can be very useful in diverting attention from something frightening to something wonderful.

You'd be well advised to fill the Kong with the best food ever: steak, cheese, whatever turns your dog on. It must be special in order to grab his attention. Your cat can also benefit from distracting herself by licking fish spread out of a Kong, or playing with a catnip ball when

that storm approaches. Exercising your pet before bad weather breaks is also helpful in taking the edge off.

If you're lucky enough to raise a young puppy in the rainy season (smile), the dog will have the advantage of getting used to the sounds and smells of a thunderstorm early and will realize it is a natural part of life and nothing to fear. Remember to keep things light and make a game out of it. Occasionally take them out during a storm so they don't grow up to be afraid of rain.

To pee or not to pee, that is a serious question when hurricanes approach. As that Category 3 gets near, nobody will

Storms make great things happen for pets! At the first sound of thunder, smile, act happy, and bust out your dog's favorite toy or game.

be taking Lassie for a walk. Alternative options must be explored.

First get your dog used to doing his business in the rain. Training your dog to

pee "on command" will also help to get the job done quickly and efficiently. Pick an emergency spot or tree near an open doorway of your house and praise and reward your dog profusely when he uses it.

When a storm hits, he will already be accustomed to relieving himself there and can quickly rush back in the house. You may want to have an emergency spot of sod or a newspaper in your garage or bathroom in case leaving the house is out of the question.

There is no better role model for our pets behavior than our own. It's not a quick-fix program, however. It takes time and forethought. Remaining calm, or even being happy, will help your dog learn that storms too shall pass, and are nothing to fear. In fact they may even be fun.

From now on, give new meaning to potentially terrifying storms — they make terrific things happen for pets.

Lisa Hartman is a dog-friendly trainer, behavior specialist, and author of Dial a Dynamite Dog. You can reach her at lisa@lisathedogtrainer.com, or visit www.pawsitivelypetsonline.com.

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Our Fowl Friends

Chickens are fun to have around — and useful, too

By Jim W. Harper
BT Contributor

During the day, the killer hides away from the house, but he cannot be far. His intended victims mill around the yard, doing the daytime things that chickens do best: kicking up dirt and snagging bugs, following each other, laying eggs, resting in a shady corner.

Then at twilight, they follow another instinct and hop up the branches of the lychee tree, one by one, and perch near the end of a stable branch.

What could be more bucolic than a clutch of fat hens, sleeping in a fruit tree? Their silence at night makes them so charming — and so vulnerable. That's when the killer strikes.

But tonight's story will have a happy ending. After midnight, I hear it: a low clucking sound, as if Glinda (the best egg-layer) is asking a question. I ask her: "Can't you see I'm trying to sleep here?" *Cluck, cluck.* All night I've been listening for this sign. I know the killer has returned.

Running into the backyard, I point the flashlight into the tree, and a set of unfamiliar eyes glows green. This time, it's not a possum; high in the tree climbs a fat raccoon. Damn chicken thief. Reaching for the closest object, I hurl a brick at the would-be bandit. On this night, at least, I have defended my brood.

Chickens make wonderful pets and unrivaled arbiters of environmental justice, and our world would be a better place if every household had one. Before adopting your fowl, however, find a safe place for it to sleep, as hurled bricks are not always the best insurance against attack by predators.

How does a household chicken help the environment? Let me count the ways. Backyard poultry teaches us where food comes from. Even vegetarians eat eggs, and guess where eggs come from? (Stop me if you've heard this one.) Seeing and hearing a hen laying an egg makes you much more appreciative of this gift. Once your awareness grows, your choices of food will shift toward more sustainable and humane options.

Watch a chicken's habits and you will want to support low-chemical, free-range poultry. At night they huddle together in a coop (or a tree), but during the day they are constantly on the move. Their habits do not mesh with the routine imposed on them by factory-style farms that treat them like vegetables. Vegetables do not do the funky chicken dance.

Chickens eat bugs. Lots and lots of bugs. Glinda and friends cleared their lychee tree of a weevil infestation. Employing these natural predators means that you will deploy fewer pesticides and other chemical agents to control mosquitoes and cockroaches. They also love mangoes and other fruit, even when overly ripe (or



better yet, bug infested), and that means less waste from the kitchen.

Chickens devour grass in a flash, and while this habit may be offensive to lawn addicts, it promotes an environmentally friendly yard. Less grass means less fertilizer and fewer resources to maintain it. Besides, low-cut grass is not native to Florida, no matter what the golf promoters may say.

Chickens provide many other services. This summer, very special chickens, called "sentinel chickens," warned our community about a dangerous disease. These chickens live in an upscale neighborhood in the City of North Miami and are regularly tested for disease. In late July, the public was notified that a mosquito with West Nile virus had infected a sentinel chicken. With that warning, mosquito control was activated and the authorities became more vigilant.

Who knew? Chickens have got our backs.

Feral chickens have long been a fixture in Key West and, despite the best attempts of the city's "Chicken Man" to reduce their numbers, they remain in force. In Miami-Dade, chickens may be considered a nuisance, but they are also emblematic of Caribbean culture. What fast-food chain started in our area? Pollo Tropical. What brightly ornamented

statues dot the famed Calle Ocho? Giant chickens. Who greets you when you arrive to shop at Costco? A rooster.

Wait, what? Yes, drive along Biscayne Boulevard to 145th Street to find Miami's answer to the eternal question: "Why did the chicken cross the road?" Obviously, to get to Costco. Look for the rooster patrolling the parking lot.

Keeping a pet chicken is another story, and its legality depends on your municipality's code. South Miami allows it, and their green-oriented mayor approves. North Miami doesn't, officially, but tell that to the folks living there. The City of Miami allows poultry with a permit. But only hens, mind you, as cock-a-doodle-does are verboten.

Miami needs to embrace chickens. *The New Yorker* calls them the "it" bird of the moment, and *Treehugger.com* says they're "a movement." Hollywood celebrities from Barbra Streisand to Hilary Swank are raising them. You can, too.

Just be vigilant. That raccoon eventually got Glinda, and I was heartbroken. She gave me so much, and I couldn't protect her.

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Rainy Day Specials

Parents and kids alike will enjoy these indoor play options

By Crystal Brewe
BT Contributor

In Hawaii, where we lived for five years, it rained for 47 days straight — 47 days of fat raindrops the size of your elbow and every yard, playground, and park flooded with muddy sludge. It goes without saying that our then two-year-old, Matilda, soon had just about enough of the rain. Things were going downhill fast. We needed some way to let her burn off energy.

I got so desperate that I packed her in the car and headed off to the McDonald's on the other side of the island. It didn't matter that she was an organically fed baby. We were on a pilgrimage for an indoor jungle gym, and if it meant she had to consume a Happy Meal, that's how it was going to go down.

Turned out that I wasn't the only creative mother. The place was packed with raucous kids who had enough pent-up energy to power Waikiki. They were jumping from the top of the slide and body-checking each other in the ball house with such unbridled enthusiasm that Matilda refused to leave my side. We were foiled.

Since then, I have noticed a proliferation of indoor play spaces. On a recent family visit to South Carolina, we passed a building with big windows that appeared to have the walls covered in

bounce-house material and kids falling from the ceiling with giant grins on their faces. "Oh, that's Monkey Joe's!" exclaimed my cousin in her thick drawl. "It's great for wearin' out the kids when the weather's no good!"

There *is* something appealing about this trend — especially in a place where temperatures can fry an egg and rain is inevitable in the summer months. Thankfully, parents have plenty of choices for indoor play in South Florida.

Opened by two stay-at-home moms, Café Bambini (www.cafebambinimiami.com), in North Miami Beach, is a sanctuary for both parents and kids. Owners Jennifer Rojikes and Julie Saal are moms who know their coffee. They serve up fresh panini, salads, and even *mate*, the popular South American brew. Moms can nosh and chat while kids enjoy five play areas — science and discovery, blocks and building, imaginative and dramatic play, the library, and gross motor. The entrance fee for the wee ones is just \$5 each. Café Bambini doesn't have much to interest kids over the age of five, but toddlers will be engrossed.

At Cool-de-Sac (www.cool-de-sac.com), with locations in the Dolphin Mall and the Shops at Sunset Place, activities include arts, blocks, a jungle gym, computer station, games, and a salon with every kind of dress-up costume imaginable. What makes Cool-de-Sac different



BT photo by Crystal Brewe

is that it's also a full-service restaurant. The menu is adult-friendly — there's a wine list — and the wait staff is excellent. Each activity station has attentive staff members who engage the kids and ensure their safety. In fact, as you pay the entrance fee (children under three are \$4.50; three and older are \$9.50), Cool-de-Sac staff outfits each child and accompanying adult with matching wristbands, which are checked as everyone exits the secured premises.

The Miami Children's Museum (www.miamichildrensmuseum.org), just off the MacArthur Causeway, is one of the best family outings in South Florida. The museum features 14 permanent exhibits, including "Castle of Dreams" (a two-story sandcastle), a six-foot piggy bank, a health and wellness center, a make-believe supermarket (with miniature shopping carts and cash registers), and water play and bubbles for kids under five at "The Sea and Me."

Wynwood isn't just for hipsters anymore! Play-In (www.play-inmiami.com) provides an oasis for families in the flourishing landscape of art and culture previously devoid of family-friendly anything. This all-purpose, indoor fun zone is the brainchild of Nina Ginatta, a behavioral analyst who found a niche market for her services and expanded her

practice to include an indoor play space for kids of all ages. Play-In offers open play, after-school programming, homework helpers (ages 5 to 11), gallery night activities (with drop-off care), birthday parties, and various therapy offerings.

One of Miami's favorite art collectives, Friends With You, was commissioned to create Aventura Mall's indoor playground (www.aventuramall.com). Anyone who has experienced a Friends With You exhibit knows the group's unique take on childlike fantasy is not to be missed. Don't forget your socks for this one (socks are required for parents and children; no shoes are allowed), or you'll find yourself paying \$6 for a pair, just to get in. Kids can jump, climb, run, and crawl around while parents watch from the surrounding benches. Aventura Mall also treats kids to "Character Wednesdays" with story and activity time. Kids under 42 inches are admitted entrance to this free playground, but be warned — the playground is located directly across from a candy store.

Nothing replaces an outdoor day with the family, but it's great to know that these places are there when you need them. Because there's nothing scarier than a rainy teacher-planning holiday.

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Pretty in a Pot

Succulents make excellent decorative plants, if you know how to care for them

By **Jeff Shimonski**
BT Contributor

I have not written about one of my favorite plant groups in a while: Succulents, those fascinating plants that always have an artificial, plastic look about them. With their hard outer skin and often wicked spines, they have always appeared indestructible to me.

The word succulent is a general term that denotes plants that are adapted to arid environments and have the ability to store water in their trunks, roots, or leaves. Sometimes people use the words cactus and succulent interchangeably, but cactus is an actual family of plants, most of which are succulents, and succulent is just a characteristic found in many different plant families.

One other interesting characteristic of these seemingly tough plants is their flowers. Many, being plants from inhospitable environments like deserts, have white flowers that bloom at night. This, of course, is an adaptation to attract pollinators to visit the flowers during the coolest part of the day. Since these pollinators don't rely on vision to get around at night, some of these flowers have delicious fragrances.

Pachypodium is a good example of a night-blooming flower. I often see them in residential landscapes. They can grow quite tall, sometimes up to eight feet, with spiny, erect, green trunks and perhaps a branch or two coming

out laterally looking like a dried-out scarecrow.

When they are in a well-drained location but do get irrigated regularly, they can develop large bulges in their trunks that give them the look of an overfed person. In periods of drought, these bulges will shrink. I grew a number of very large Pachypodium from seed at Parrot Jungle years ago. They liked the full blasting sun, well-drained soil with a bit of well-composted organic material mixed in, and lots of water.

Many of the succulents do not grow well here in South Florida because of our high humidity. One day you'll notice a small, wet, black spot on the trunk and a couple of days later the whole plant turns to mush and falls over. Not all succulents will grow here, especially if they get rain on them. I used to have a large collection of succulents that I grew under a translucent fiberglass roof. They did well for the most part, but if I ever left them out in the rain or cold, they quickly turned to mush.

The photo that accompanies this article is a fairly new form of the crown-of-thorns plant that has come and gone from our local landscapes for years now. The flowers are striking against the large foliage and last a long time. I have grown many forms of *Euphorbia milii*, and this is one of my favorites.

It grows well in my yard, but I think it best to grow it in a container. This form of crown-of-thorns makes a nice,



BT photo by Jeff Shimonski

One of the very attractive crown-of-thorns that grows well in containers.

fat, round specimen in a container, and thus is an excellent balcony plant. Plus, growing it in a container gives you a chance to move the plants under cover if we are expecting cold weather. (Most succulents like crown-of-thorns will not tolerate frost. We used to cover our hedges of these spiny plants with burlap before frost and sometimes still had them die in 30-degree temperatures.)

For those of you concerned about toxic plants, the crown-of-thorns is in the *euphorbia* family (as is the holiday poinsettia) and the milky sap, which is characteristic of this family, can be a bit caustic. Most pets and children won't go past the thorns to get to the sap, but the leaves have a bit of sap in them, too.

The desert rose, *Adenium obesum*, is another succulent that makes an excellent potted plant. The plant has colorful flowers, no spines, and can end up with a wonderfully fat trunk. (A large swollen base two or three feet across is not unheard of.)

When I repot them, I always raise the plant up out of the soil a few inches

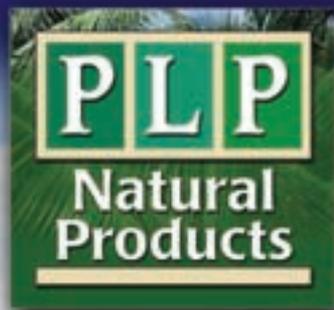
to expose more of the swollen base. This will not harm the plant and I think it makes a much more attractive specimen.

When you first buy these plants as seedlings, they are usually pretty skinny. Don't raise them until they have been growing for a year or two and you see the base getting fat. If you don't see flowers, they are probably in too much shade.

I often see some very attractive species of succulents for sale in the local garden centers. They'll be purchased for planting in residential landscapes, where they'll look great for a couple of weeks and then start to die out. Check out the species before you purchase a plant. Many succulents only grow well in a cool, dry, Mediterranean-type environment.

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.

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By Bill Citara
BT Contributor

New Zealand is said to be one of the last landmasses settled by humans, supposedly Polynesians making their way through various South Pacific islands between 1250 and 1300 A.D. The country is actually a pair of islands about 1400 miles southeast of Australia, which is more than 20 times larger, with more than five times the population.

Given its proximity and relative puniness to its much bigger and more populated neighbor, it was probably inevitable that New Zealand would come to be regarded as Australia Lite. This is manifestly unfair to New Zealand, as it bears no responsibility for the export of such abominations as “critter wines,” Paul Hogan, shrimp on the barbie, Out-back Steakhouse, and 10,000 euphemisms for “barf.”

In fact, New Zealand exports in general tend to fly under everyone’s radar. There is the kiwi, a fuzzy green fruit whose sudden appearance as a garnish in fancy restaurants in the 1970s helped make “California cuisine” a global laughingstock. There is the world’s longest place name: *Taumatawhakatangihangakoauauotamateaturipukakapimaungahoronukupokaiwhenuakitanatahu*, which means: “Hilltop where Tamatea, the man with the big knees, the conqueror of mountains, the eater of land, traveler of land and sea, played his nose flute to his beloved.” This is typically shortened to “WTF?”

And there is Sauvignon Blanc, the grape that produces New Zealand’s

best-known and largest-selling wine. In the States, it accounts for as much as 70-percent of all imported Sauvignon Blanc.

Given our abundance of fresh local seafood, South Florida in particular should embrace New Zealand Sauvignon Blanc. Its crisp, citrusy character, stern acidity, and typically low alcohol (12.5 to 13.5 percent) make it the perfect complement to everything from grouper and hog snapper to stone crab and spiny lobster. And though the New Zealand style is typically characterized by bright acidity and tangy lemon-lime-grapefruit-gooseberry flavors, within that style wines can range from softer and rounder to tart enough to strip the paint off your car.

They can also be terrific values, especially compared to the 800-pound gorilla of white wines, Chardonnay. Take the **2009 Monkey Bay Sauvignon Blanc**. It’s as common as dirt, costs a whopping \$8.99, and is an excellent food wine. Stylistically it leans toward the softer, rounder side, tasting of grapefruit and lemon and a mellowing hint of orange. You won’t get the complexity of more expensive New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs like Cloudy Bay and Kim Crawford, but for nine bucks and the ability to play nice with everything from roast chicken to steamed lobster, whadya want?

Easily my favorite wine of this tasting is another inexpensive, easy-to-find wine, the **2010 Nobile**. Like most of the New Zealand Sauvignon Blancs, it comes from the Marlborough region, the country’s largest and most prominent

wine-producing area. It reprises the softer citrus fruit of the Monkey Bay, but, although younger, adds greater complexity with faint flavors of orange, melon, and herbs. With a little more time in the bottle, it will be even better.

A similar find is the **Smythe & Renfield 2010 Marlborough Sauvignon Blanc**. I love its 12.5 percent alcohol (which used to be the norm and now is way low), its orange-grapefruit-fresh herbs nose, its clean lemon-lime acidity. It’s \$11 price tag isn’t too bad, either.

On the other side of the soft-crisp divide is the **2010 Cottesbrook**. It delivers bracing aromas of grapefruit, gooseberry, lemon, and herbs, with a very clean lemony-grapefruity character and long finish. It reminds me a bit of a French Muscadet — simple, direct, refreshing, and a wine that can take the edge off rich seafood like scallops and lobster, and cut through even the plushest cream sauce.

Sauvignon Blancs from **Allan Scott** and **Kemblefield** were both vintage 2010, both paler than a Midwesterner in mid-January, both marked by classic lemon-lime-grapefruit flavors with a touch of herbs, and both revealing just the slightest musty scent when first opened. In both cases that blows off and the wines



Total Wine & More (14750 Biscayne Blvd., 305-354-3270) in North Miami Beach is the source of the Kemblefield and Cottesbrook Sauvignon Blancs, at \$9.99 and \$11.99 respectively. The Monkey Bay and Nobile wines can be found at the Biscayne Commons Publix (14641 Biscayne Blvd., 305-354-2171), the former for \$8.99, the latter for \$10.99. The North Miami Beach ABC Fine Wine & Spirits (16355 Biscayne Blvd., 305-944-6525) carries Smythe & Renfield for \$10.99 and Infamous Goose for \$11.99. Get the Allan Scott Sauvignon Blanc at the Aventura Whole Foods Market (21105 Biscayne Blvd., 305-933-1543) for \$11.99.

finish nicely, though if I had to choose between the two, I’d go with the Scott.

I would not, however, go anywhere with the 2009 Sauvignon Blanc from **Infamous Goose**, which stunk like something that came out the back end of said bird. Maybe I should send a case to Paul Hogan, and tell him to throw it on the barbie.

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com



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Dining Guide

Restaurant Listings

The Biscayne Corridor's most comprehensive restaurant guide. Total this month: 281.

Restaurant listings for the BT Dining Guide are written by or written by Pamela Robin Brandt (restaurants@biscaynetimes.com). Every effort has been made to ensure accuracy, but restaurants frequently change menus, chefs, and operating hours, so please call ahead to confirm information. Icons (\$\$\$) represent estimates for a typical meal without wine, tax, or tip. Hyphenated icons (\$-\$\$\$) indicate a significant range in prices between lunch and dinner menus, or among individual items on those menus. \$= \$10 and under
\$\$= \$20
\$\$\$= \$30
\$\$\$\$= \$40
\$\$\$\$\$= \$50 and over

MIAMI

Brickell / Downtown

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

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, 305-424-5234

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 windows showcase Biscayne Bay. But diners prefer ogling the raw-bar-fronted open kitchen, where globe-trotting chef Joel Huff crafts imaginative, often multi-part dishes – some Asian-inspired (like oysters with fresh wasabi, hibiscus granita, and Asian pear), as one would expect from the Mandarin Oriental's top eatery. But most of Huff's dishes are strongly European-influenced, primarily by New Spanish cuisine. Elegant, playfully molecular gastronomy-accented almond gazpacho with foie gras "snow," or "eggs, bacon & toast" (suckling pig, tempura duck egg, truffled potato, and speck "air") tell the story. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Balans
901 S. Miami Ave., (Mary Brickell Village),
305-534-9191

Open until 4:00 a.m. on weekends, this London import (Miami's second Balans) offers a sleeker setting than its perennially popular Lincoln Road progenitor, but the same simple yet sophisticated global menu. The indoor space can get mighty loud, but lounging on the dog-friendly outdoor terrace, over a rich croque monsieur (which comes with an alluringly sweet/sour citrus-dressed side salad), a lobster club on onion toast, some surprisingly solid Asian fusion items, and a cocktail is one of Miami's more relaxing experiences. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

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. \$\$\$

bistro e
485 Brickell Ave., 305-503-0373

A full power lunch from a Michelin-starred chef for \$15? Sounds unbelievable, but you'll find just such a daily special (like corn/jalapeño soup, a grilled-cheese BLT, airy cheesecake, and a pint of beer) at bistro e, daytime name for Michael Psilakis' dinner-only new Aegean eatery Eos. The name change emphasizes lunchtime's wholly different, globally influenced menu. Among à la carte temptations: pork belly tacos, a Korean BBQ prawn salad, or a brisket/gruyere sandwich with dipping juice. Breakfast, too, from 6:30 a.m. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Brickell Bridge Bistro & Bar
500 Brickell Ave., 786-871-7039

The casual-polished hangout's name refers to the nearby real bridge between Brickell and downtown, but its ambiance – part South Beach music lounge and part bankers' sports bar – also tries to bridge the neighborhoods, luring both execs and edgier sorts. The same's true of Allen Susser's role as consulting chef, though those expecting a hint of Chef Allen's won't find it; the sole similarity on the Latin-accented Italianesque menu is Susser's Valrhona chocolate soufflé. Snacking on small plates like meatballs with dried apricots and pine nuts is most fun. \$\$\$

Café Bastille
248 SE 1st St., 786-425-3575

Breakfasting on a ham-egg-cheese crepe at this very French-feeling – and tasting – café is a most civilized way to start the day. Formerly breakfast and lunch only, the café is now open for dinner, too. And while the crepes (both savory and sweet) are tempting and varied enough to eat all day, dinner choices like homemade foie gras (with onion jam and Guerande salt), salmon with lentils and fennel salsa, or a very affordable skirt steak au poivre make it possible to resist. \$\$\$

Café Sambal
500 Brickell Key Dr., 305-913-8358

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

Chophouse Miami
300 S. Biscayne Blvd., 305-938-9000

Formerly Manny's Steakhouse, Miami's Chophouse retains basically everything but the famed name (from the original Manny's in Minneapolis), and remains 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 flavored 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Crazy About You
1155 Brickell Bay Dr. #101, 305-377-4442

The owners, and budget-friendly formula, are the same here as at older Dolores, But You Can Call Me Lolita: Buy an entrée (all under \$20) from a sizable list of Mediterranean, Latin, American, or Asian-influenced choices (like

MIAMI

BRICKELL / DOWNTOWN

Miami Art Café
364 SE 1st St., 305-374-5117

For businessfolk on the go, this breakfast/lunch-only French café serves up evocative baguette sandwiches (like camembert) loaded, if you like, with greens, olives, and more. For those with time to sit, we'd recommend the savory crêpes, garnished with perfectly dressed salad, or sweet crêpe like the Bonne Maman (whose sugar/salted butter stuffing brings Brittany to downtown). And quiches are nicely custardy. But there are surprises here, too, including just a few full entrées, with correctly made traditional sauces one wouldn't expect at a luncheonette – except, perhaps, in Paris. \$\$\$

MIDTOWN / WYNWOOD / DESIGN DISTRICT

Egg & Dart
4029 N. Miami Ave., 786-431-1022

While co-owners Costa Grillas (from Maria's, a Coral Gables staple) and Niko Theodorou (whose family members have several Greek islands restaurants) describe their cuisine as "rustic Greek," there is surprising sophistication in some dishes: an especially delicate taramasalata (cod roe dip); precisely crisp-fried smelts (like a freshwater sardine); galactobourico, an often heavy and cloyingly vanilla-saturated dessert, here custardy and enlivened by orange flavor. Extensive lists of mezze (snacks) and creative cocktails make the expansive, invitingly decorated space ideal for large gatherings of friends who enjoy sharing. \$\$\$

UPPER EASTSIDE

La Cigale
7281 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-0014

"Bistro" can mean almost anything these days, but with owners who are a husband/wife team recently arrived from Marseille, it's not surprising that this neighborhood wine bistro is the classic kind found in France – a home away from home where the contemporary but cozy space is matched by the southern French comfort food coming from the open kitchen. Drop in for drinks and snacks such as artisan cheeses and charcuterie, or enjoy full meals ranging from classic (wine-poached mussels; a boldly sauced steak/frites) to creative (Parma ham-wrapped tuna loin). \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Thai-marinated churrasco with crispy shoestring fries) and get an appetizer for free, including substantial stuff like a Chihuahua cheese casserole with chorizo and pesto. The difference: This place, housed in the former location of short-lived La Broche, has an even more upscale ambiance than Dolores – including a million-dollar water view. \$\$\$

Cvi.che 105
105 NE 3rd Ave., 305-577-3454

Fusion food – a modern invention? Not in Peru, where native and Euro-Asian influences have mixed for more than a century. But chef Juan Chipoco gives the ceviches and tiraditos served at this hot spot his own unique spin. Specialties include flash-marinated raw seafood creations, such as *tiradito* to *la crema de rocoto* (sliced fish in citrus-spiked chili/cream sauce). But traditional fusion dishes like Chinese-Peruvian Chaurifried rice (packed with jumbo shrimp, mussels, and calamari) are also fun, as well as surprisingly affordable. \$\$

Damn Good Burger
20 Biscayne Blvd., 305-718-6565

At restolounge MIA, the hip, high-tech nightclub component remains the same, as does much of the restaurant space's mod décor. The liquid nitrogen tanks are gone from the kitchen, however, and the atmosphere aims for a retro all-American feel to match the fare: burgers (from

NORTH MIAMI

Bulldog Burger
15400 Biscayne Blvd.,
305-940-9655

Despite Miami's burger bar overload, this one from Howie Kleinberg, adjacent to his BBQ joint, stands out thanks to toppings like candied bacon, caramelized banana jam, and mayo that's flavored, like Southern red-eye gravy, with strong coffee. Bravehearts race for the infamous Luther burger's components – cheddar, bacon, fried onion, secret sauce, and a sweet-glazed mock (holeless) Krispy Kreme donut bun; calories are more than double a Big Mac's. And the thin-sliced, thickly crunch-crust, deep-fried jalapeños will keep you coming back for more, should you live past the first order. \$\$

Giraffas
1821 NE 123rd St., 786-866-9007

Festooned with eye-poppingly colored panels and giraffes – subtler but everywhere – this first North American branch of a wildly popular, 30-year-old Brazilian fast/casual chain is the flagship of a planned 4000 U.S. Giraffas. Given that the steaks, especially the tender, flavorful picanha, rival those at the most upscale rodizio joints – and beat the sword-wielding grandstanders for custom cooking (because staff asks your preference) – we'd bet on giraffe domination. Overstuffed grilled sandwiches, salads, even tasty veggie options are all here, too. The cheese bread is a must. \$\$

NORTH MIAMI BEACH

Cholo's Ceviche & Grill
1127 NE 163rd St.,
305-947-3338

Don't be misled by the mini-mall location, or the relatively minimal prices (especially during lunch, when specials are under \$6). Inside, the décor is charming, and the Peruvian plates elegant in both preparation and presentation. Tops among ceviches/tiraditos is the signature Cholo's, marinated octopus and fish in a refined rocoto chili sauce with overtones both fiery and fruity. And don't miss the molded causas, whipped potato rings stuffed with avocado-garnished crab salad – altogether lighter and lovelier than the tasty but oily mashed spud constructions more oft encountered in town. \$\$\$

a hormone/antibiotic-free ground Angus chuck/brisket/short rib blend), with choice of housemade sauce plus customizable toppings ranging from pickles to pork belly. Also available: veggie burgers, dogs, salads, Buffalo chicken sandwiches, and standard sides. Rich malts and shakes come regular or adult (spiked). \$\$

db Bistro Moderne
345 Avenue of the Americas, 305-421-8800

Just two words – "Daniel Boulud" – should be enough for foodies craving creative French/American comfort cuisine to run, not walk, to this restaurant. If they can find it. (Hint: The mysterious "Avenue of the Americas" is really Biscayne Boulevard Way. Don't ask.) Downtown's db is an absentee celeb chef outpost, but on-site kitchen wizard Jarrod Verbiak flawlessly executes dishes ranging from the original NYC db Bistro's signature foie gras/short rib/black truffle-stuffed burger to local market-driven dishes like crusted pompano with garlic/parsley veloute. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

The Democratic Republic of Beer
255 NE 14th St., 305-372-4161

The food here? Beer is food! The DRB serves 400 beers from 55 countries, ranging from \$2 Pabst Blue Ribbon to \$40 DeuS (an 11.5% alcohol Belgian *methode Champenoise* brew). But for those favoring solid snacks, tasty global



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Dining Guide: RESTAURANTS

smallish plates include fried fresh zucchini with dip (cheese recommended); chorizo with homemade cilantro Mayo; or steak tacos, served Mexican-style with onions, cilantro, and spicy salsa. Sadly for breakfast-brew enthusiasts, the DRB isn't open that early. But it is open late – till 5:00 a.m. \$\$

Dolores, But You Can Call Me Lolita 1000 S. Miami Ave., 305-403-3103

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 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. \$\$\$

Eternity Coffee Roasters 117 SE 2nd Ave., 305-609-4981

Normally we list only full restaurants, but even a (not so) simple cuppa joe from Chris Johnson and Cristina Garces's sleek micro-roastery will convince anyone possessing taste buds that fine coffee can be as complex as fine wine, and as satisfying as solid food. A changing selection of superior single-origin beans (many varieties from the Garces family's Colombian farm; most others from Ethiopia and Kenya), roasted in-house, produces "slow-pour" regular brews with amazing nuances of fruits, chocolate, and more. The espresso is so smooth sugar isn't necessary. Other treats: flaky chocolate-stuffed "cigars" and other locally baked pastries. Free parking. \$

Eos

485 Brickell Ave. (Viceroy Hotel), 305-503-0373
Unlike their Michelin-starred New Adriatic restaurant Anthos, in Manhattan, this venture of chef Michael Psilakis and restaurateur Donatella Arpaia has influences ranging way beyond Greece to the whole Mediterranean region, and even Latin America. Unchanged is Psilakis' solid creativity, and a beautiful sense of balance that makes even very unfamiliar combinations taste accessible. So skip the safe stuff and go for the luxuriantly custardy, egg yolk-enriched lobster and sea urchin risotto, or any raw seafood item, especially the unique marlin with pistachio, apricot, and house-cured speck. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Finnegan's River 401 SW 3rd Ave., 305-285-3030

Pool tables are expected in a sports bar and grill. But an actual pool? And a Jacuzzi? This Miami River hideaway has other surprises, too, on its extensive outdoor deck, including a boat dock and a large array of umbrella tables and lounge chairs where it's easy to while away many happy hours. The menu is the same array of bar bites served by South Beach's older Finnegan's, but angus burgers are big and tasty, and zingy jalapeño-studded smoked-fish dip is a satisfying table-snack choice. \$\$

First & First Southern Baking Company 109 NE 1st Ave., 305-577-6446

How Southern is this restaurant/bakery? During the course of one breakfast of fluffy biscuits with rich sausage gravy, a friend from Italy, we swear, developed a drawl. While y'all will also find familiar fare (burgers, salads, etc.), highlights here are traditional and/or reinvented country cooking favorites – especially homemade sweets. More than two dozen desserts daily are featured, from a roster topping 150: chocolate pecan pie, lemon bars, potato candies, seven-layer cookies, and Jack Daniels pound cakes, which are perfect for parties, though you won't want to share. \$\$\$

Fratelli Milano

213 SE 1st St., 305-373-2300

Downtown isn't yet a 24/7 urban center, but it's experiencing a mini explosion of eateries open at night. That includes this family-owned ristorante, where even newcomers feel at home. At lunch it's almost impossible to resist panini, served on foccacia or crunchy ciabatta; even the vegetarian version bursts with complex and complementary flavors. During weekday dinners, try generous plates of risotto with shrimp and grilled asparagus; homemade pasta like seafood-packed fettuccine al scoglio; or delicate Vitello alla Milanese on arugula. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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 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. \$\$\$

Giovana Caffè 154 SE 1st Ave., 305-374-1024

If the menu at this charming downtown hideaway contained only one item – pear and gorgonzola ravioli dressed, not drowned, in sage-spiced cream sauce – we'd be happy. But the café, formerly lunch-only but now serving weekday dinners, is also justly famed for meal-size salads like grilled skirt steak atop sweetly balsamic-dressed spinach (with

spinach, tomatoes, bacon, hard-boiled eggs, blue cheese, and almonds), or an especially lavish chicken salad with pine nuts, golden raisins, apples, and basil, an Italian twist. \$\$

Grimpa Steakhouse 901 Brickell Plaza, 305-455-4757

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

Half Moon Empanadas 192 SE 1st Ave., 305-379-2525

As with South Beach's original Half Moon, you can get wraps or salads. But it's this snackery's unique take on Argentine-style empanadas that makes it seem a natural for national franchising. The soft-crust, doughy crescents – baked, not fried, so relatively guilt-free – are amply stuffed with fillings both classic (beef and chicken, either mild or spicy) and creative: the bacon cheeseburger, the pancetta/mozzarella/plum-filled Americana, and several vegetarian options. At just over two bucks apiece, they're a money-saving moveable feast. \$

Il Gabbiano

335 S. Biscayne Blvd., 305-373-0063

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. \$\$\$\$

Indigo / Table 40

100 Chopin Plaza, 305-577-1000

Long known for its power-lunch buffet – including hot entrées, carving station, custom pastas, packed-to-the-gills salad, sushi, and dessert stations – the InterContinental Hotel's Indigo restaurant now has a hip offspring intended for private dining: Table 40. The charming, glassed-in wine "cellar" (actually in the kitchen) enables 12-14 diners to watch the action in heat-shielded, soundproofed comfort while eating creations by veteran chef Alexander Feher, combining Continental technique with local seasonal ingredients. Highlights: tender house-smoked, stout-braised short ribs; lavish lobster salad with grilled mango; and a seductive fresh corn gazpacho. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Iron Sushi

120 SE 3rd Ave., 305-373-2000

(See Miami Shores listing)

Jackson Soul Food

950 NW 3rd Ave., 305-377-6710

With a recently refurbished exterior to match its classy/comfy retro interior, this 65-year-old Overtown soul food breakfast institution now has only one drawback: It closes at 1:00 p.m. Never mind, night owls. If you're a first-timer here, order the astonishingly fluffy pancakes with juicy beef sausage, and you'll set multiple alarm clocks to return. Classic drop biscuits (preferably with gravy) are also must-haves. And hearty Southern breakfast staples like smothered chicken wings or fried fish do make breakfast seem like lunch, too. \$

Jamón, Jamón, Jamón,

10 SW South River Dr., 305-324-1111

From the outside, you know you're walking into the ground floor of a new condo building. But once inside the charmingly rustic room, you'd swear you're in Spain. Obviously Spain's famous cured hams are a specialty, as are other pork products on the weekly changing menu, from a roast suckling pig entrée to a fried chorizo and chickpea pasta. But seafood is also terrific. Don't miss bacalao-filled piquillo peppers, or two of Miami's best rice dishes: seafood paella and arroz negro (with squid and its ink). \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Largo Bar & Grill

401 Biscayne Blvd., 305-374-9706

Sure, Bayside Marketplace is touristy. But it can be fun to spend a day playing visitor in your own city. If you do, this waterfront place overlooking Miamarina is a superior food choice. Expect nothing cutting edge, just tasty, familiar favorites solidly prepared. You won't go wrong with stone crab claws and Cajun mustard dip; inauthentic but delicious fish tacos in hard blue corn tortillas with two sauces (cilantro and chipotle), generously portioned fish sandwiches (grouper, mahi, snapper, or daily catch), and festive cocktails. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

La Loggia Ristorante and Lounge

68 W. Flagler St., 305-373-4800

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

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Dining Guide: RESTAURANTS

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 Niçoise with grilled fresh tuna, seared salmon with mango salsa, and other yuppie favorites. \$\$\$

La Provence 1064 Brickell Ave., 786-425-9003

Great baguettes in the bread basket, many believe, indicate a great meal to come. But when Miamians encounter such bread – crackling crust outside; moist, aromatic, aerated interior – it's likely not from a restaurant's own kitchen, but from La Provence. Buttery croissants and party-perfect pastries are legend too. Not so familiar is the bakery's café component, whose sandwich/salad menu reflects local eclectic tastes. But French items like pan bagnats (essentially salade Niçoise on artisan bread) will truly transport diners to co-owner David Thau's Provençal homeland. \$\$

La Sandwicherie 34 SW 8th St., 305-374-9852

This second location of the open-air diner that is South Beach's favorite après-club eatery (since 1988) closes earlier (midnight Sunday-Thursday, 5:00 a.m. Friday and Saturday), but the smoothies, salads, and superb Parisian sandwiches are the same: ultra-crusty baguette stuffed with evocative charcuterie and cheeses (saucisson sec, country pâté, camembert, etc.) and choice of salad veggies plus salty/tart comichons and Sandwicherie's incomparable Dijon mustard vinaigrette. Additionally the larger branch has an interior, with a kitchen enabling hot foods (quiches and croques), plus A/C. \$\$\$

Le Boudoir Brickell 188 SE 12th Terr., 305-372-233

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. \$\$\$

Lime Fresh Mexican Grill

1 W. Flagler St., Suite 7, 305-789-9929
(See Midtown / Wynwood / Design District listing.)

Little Lotus 25 N. Miami Ave. #107, 305-533-2700

Secreted inside the International Jewelry Exchange, this eatery (owned by stealth super-foodie Sari Maharani – paralegal by day, restaurateur by night) is tough to find but seems destined to become one of our town's toughest tables to book. Two talented chefs, whose credits include Morimoto (NYC) and hometown fave Yakko-san, create Japanese, Indonesian, and fusion small plates that look remarkably artful and taste like they're about ready to take on Iron Chef Morimoto himself. Saucing, often with multiple but balanced potions, is especially noteworthy. The prices? A steal. \$\$\$

LouLou Le Petit Bistro 638 S. Miami Ave., 305-379-1404

When Indochine's owner, Jacques Ardisson, closed his Asian spot to open this charming French eatery in the same space, it was a return to his roots. He and his daughter, for whom the place is named, come from Nice. You'll be transported, too, by dishes like lamb shank with flageolets (known as the caviar of beans), duck leg confit on a bed of mouthwatering green lentils from Le Puy, a classic moules/frites, a shared charcuterie platter with a bottle from the savvy wine list, and, of course, salade niçoise. \$\$\$

Martini 28 146 SE 1st Ave., 305-577-4414

This stylish little lunch-only spot, a labor of love from a husband-wife chef team, serves what might well be the most impressive meal deal in town. From an ambitious, daily-changing menu of fare that's geographically eclectic but prepared with solid classic technique, diners get a choice of about ten entrées (substantial stuff like steak au poivre with Madeira cream sauce and roasted potatoes, or pignolia-crusted salmon with Dijon mustard sauce, potatoes, and veggies), plus soup or salad and homemade dessert. For just \$9.99. Told ya. \$

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 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. \$

Mint Leaf 1063 SE 1st Ave., 305-358-5050

Part of London's famous Woodlands Group, this stylish spot, like its Coral Gables parent, serves the sort of upscale Indian food rarely found outside Great Britain or India. More interestingly, the menu includes not just the familiar northern Indian "Mughlai" fare served in most of America's Indian restaurants, but refined versions of south India's scrumptious street food. We've happily assembled whole meals of the vegetarian chaat (snacks) alone. And dosai (lacy rice/lentil crepes rolled around fillings ranging from traditional onion/potato to lamb masala or spicy chicken) are so addictive they oughta be illegal. \$\$\$

Miss Yip Chinese Café 900 Biscayne Blvd., 305-358-0088

Fans of the South Beach original will find the décor different. Most notably, there's an outdoor lounge, and more generally a nightclub atmosphere. But the menu of Hong Kong-style Chinese food, prepared by imported Chinese cooks, is familiar. Simple yet sophisticated Cantonese seafood dishes rock (try the lightly battered salt-and-pepper shrimp), as does orange peel chicken, spicy/tangy rather than overly sweet. And a single two-course Peking duck (skin in crepes, stir-fried meat and veggies with lettuce cups) makes mouth-watering finger food, shared among friends. \$\$\$

neMesis Urban Bistro 1035 N. Miami Ave., 305-415-9911

Truly original restaurants are hard to find here, and harder to describe in standard sound bites. But they often are the attention-grabbing people-magnets that spark revivals of iffy neighborhoods. That's our prediction for this quirkily decorated bistro, where the kitchen is helmed by Top Chef contestant Micah Edelstein. The intensely personal menu of creative dishes inspired by her global travels (plus her fascination with unfamiliar ingredients) changes constantly, but scrumptious signatures include South African smoked veal bobotie, and Peruvian pinoli pancakes with housemade chicken/apple sausage, hibiscus syrup, and maple granules. \$\$\$

Novecento 1414 Brickell Ave., 305-403-0900

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

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 flown-in fish (and the raw bar's cold-water oysters) are ultra-fresh. \$\$\$

Ozzi Sushi 200 SE 1st St., 786-704-8003

Since its 1958 invention, conveyor-belt sushi has been the most fun form of Japanese fast food, but problematic. Who knew how long plates had been circulating on the sushi-go-round? Happily, this sushi-boat spot avoids sanitation issues with clear plastic covers, and as for freshness, low prices ensure a steady stream of diners grabbing makis, nigiri, and

more as they float by. Highlights include glistening ikura (salmon roe) in a thin-sliced cucumber cup, a sweet-sauced mango/guava/crab roll, and a festively frosted strawberry Nutella dessert maki. \$\$\$

Pega Grill 15 E. Flagler St., 305-808-6666

From Thanasios Barlos, a Greek native who formerly owned North Beach's Ariston, this small spot is more casually contemporary and less ethnic-kitschy in ambiance, but serves equally authentic, full-flavored Greek food. Mixed lamb/beef gyros (chicken is also an option), topped with tangy yogurt sauce and wrapped, with greens and tomatoes, in fat warm pita bread, are specialties. But even more irresistible is the taramasalata (particularly velvety and light carp roe dip), available alone or on an olive/pita-garnished mixed meze platter. \$\$

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. \$\$\$

Peoples Bar-B-Que 360 NW 8th St., 305-373-8080

Oak-smoked, falling-off-the-bone tender barbecued ribs (enhanced with a secret sauce whose recipe goes back several generations) are the main draw at this Overtown institution. But the chicken is also a winner, plus there's a full menu of soul food entrées, including what many aficionados consider our town's tastiest soup. 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

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 fiocchi 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. \$

Prelude Adrienne Arshnt Center 1300 Biscayne Blvd., 305-949-6722

Though the opening of Barton G.'s elegant performing arts center eatery did feature a live giraffe, the food's actually more grown-up than at his original SoBe spot. The concept is prix fixe: Any three courses on the menu (meaning three entrées if you want) for \$39. Highlights include silky, tarra-gon-inflected corn/bacon chowder, beautifully plated beef carpaccio with horseradish/mustard and shallot olive oil dipping sauces; and over-the-top playhouse desserts, one with a luscious crème fraiche ice cream pop. \$\$\$

Puntino Downtown 353 SE 2nd Ave., 305-371-9661

The first U.S. venture of a hotelier from Naples, this stylish little place is open Monday through Saturday for dinner as well as lunch. Ambiance is fashionably cool Milanese rather than effusively warm Neapolitan. The food too is mostly contemporary rather than traditional. But in true Italian style, the best stuff stays simple: an antipasto platter of imported cold cuts with crostini and housemade marinated veggies; crisp-fried calamari and shrimp; airy gnocchi with sprightly tomato sauce, pools of melted bufala mozzarella, and fresh basil. \$\$\$

Raja's Indian Cuisine 33 NE 2nd Ave., 305-539-9551

Despite its small size and décor best described as "none," this place is an institution thanks to south Indian specialties rarely found in Miami's basically north Indian

restaurants. The steam-tabled curries are fine (and nicely priced), but be sure to try the custom-made dosai (lacy rice crepes with a variety of savory fillings) and uttapam, thicker pancakes, layered with onions and chilis, both served with sambar and chutney. \$\$

The River Oyster Bar 650 S. Miami Ave., 305-530-1915

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

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

Sandwich Bar 40 NE 1st Ave., 305-577-0622

This cool hideaway has a limited menu. Which is a good thing when it means everything served is solidly crafted by hands-on chef/owners, two of whom amassed sous-chef chops at Cioppino and Sardinia. The main fare is imaginative sandwiches on fresh breads; an especially delicious creation features slow-braised short ribs, caramelized onions, and melting muenster and provolone cheeses. Finish with fine-shaved Aloha ice topped with fresh fruit and other full-flavored syrups, all homemade, plus rich condensed milk. A sno-cone for sophisticates. \$

Scalina 315 S. Biscayne Blvd. 305-789-9933

Comparisons between this new Tom Billante venture and the other (slightly pricier) Italian eatery in the same building are inevitable, especially considering similarities like key personnel from NYC's Il Mulino. Mulino-style abundant free appetizers, and a power-dining crowd. But why focus on competitive nonsense when you can relax on the river-view terrace enjoying chef Enrico Giraldo's specialties, including an elaborate take on Venice's famed fegato (calf's liver and onions), upscaled with Lucanica sausage and a balsamic reduction. Or maybe an even more evocative Roman ice cream tartufo? Mangia! \$\$\$

Soi Asian Bistro 134 NE 2nd Ave., 305-523-3643

From the owners of Calle Ocho's hip Mr. Yum and 2B Asian Bistro, Soi sports similar casual-chic ambiance and eclectic Thai/Japanese cuisine. Traditional Thai curries and familiar sushi rolls are prepared with solid skill and style. But most intriguing are new inventions adding Peruvian fusion flair to the Asian mix, such as a spicy, tangy tangle of crisp-fried yellow noodles with sautéed shrimp plus slivered peppers and onions – mod mee krob, with jalea-like tart heat replacing the cloying sweetness. \$\$

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. \$\$\$

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Sparky's Roadside Restaurant & Bar 204 NE 1st St., 305-377-2877

This cowboy-cute eatery's chefs/owners (one CIA-trained, both BBQ fanatics nicknamed Sparky) eschew regional purism, instead utilizing a hickory/apple-wood-stoked rotisserie smoker to turn out their personalized style of slow-cooked, complexly dry-rub fusion: ribs, chopped pork, brisket, and chicken. Diners can customize their orders with mix-and-match housemade sauces: sweet/tangy tomato-based, Carolinas-inspired vinegar/mustard, pan-Asian hoisin with lemongrass and ginger, tropical guava/habanero. Authenticity aside, the quality of the food is as good as much higher-priced barbecue outfits. \$\$-\$\$\$

Sushi Maki 1000 S. Miami Ave., 305-415-9779

Fans of the popular parent Sushi Maki in the Gables will find many familiar favorites on this Brickell branch's menu. But the must-haves are some inventive new dishes introduced to honor the eatery's tenth anniversary — and Miami multiculturalism: "sushi tacos" (fried gyoza skins with fusion fillings like raw salmon, miso, chili-garlic sauce, and sour cream), three tasty flash-marinated Asian/Latin tiraditos; addictive rock shrimp tempura with creamy/spicy dip. Also irresistible: four festive new sake cocktails. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

SuViche 49 SW 11th St., 305-960-7097

This small Japanese-Peruvian place serves food influenced by each nation distinctly, plus intriguing fusion items with added Caribbean touches. Cooked entrées, all Peruvian, include an elegant aji de gallina (walnut-garnished chicken and potatoes in peppery cream sauce). But the emphasis is on contemporary ceviches/tiraditos (those with velvety aji amarillo chili sauce particularly), plus huge exotic sushi rolls, which get pretty wild. When was the last time you encountered a tempura-battered tuna, avocado, and scallion maki topped with Peru's traditional potato garnish, huancaína cheese sauce? \$\$

Thai Angel 152 SE 1st Ave., 305-371-9748

Inside a colorful courtyard that rather resembles Munchkinland, this downtown "insider's secret" serves serious Thai food till 9:00 p.m. daily. Tasty classics like the four curries (red, green, panang, and massaman) come custom-spiced — mild to authentically brain-searing — and are so affordable there's no guilt in splurging on superb house specials like crisp-coated duck or fresh snapper (whole or filleted) in tamarind sauce. The young chef has a heavenly hand at tofu, too, so vegetarians are very well-served. \$\$

Tobacco Road 626 S. Miami Ave., 305-374-1198

Prohibition-era speakeasy (reputedly a fave of Al Capone),

gay bar, strip club. Previously all these, this gritty spot has been best known since 1982 as a venue for live music, primarily blues. But it also offers food from lunchtime to late night (on weekends till 4:00 a.m.). The kitchen is especially known for its 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. \$\$

Tre Italian Bistro 270 E. Flagler St., 305-373-3303

"Bistro" actually sounds too Old World for this cool hang-out, from the owners of downtown old-timer La Loggia, but "restolounge" sounds too glitzy. Think of it as a neighborhood "bistrolounge." The food is mostly modernized Italian, with Latin and Asian accents: a prosciutto-and-fig pizza with Brazilian catupiry cheese; gnocchi served either as finger food (fried, with calamata olive/truffle aioli), or plated with orange-ginger sauce. But there are tomato-sauced meatballs with rigatoni for Grandpa Vinnie, too. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Truluck's Seafood, Steak, and Crabhouse 777 Brickell Ave., 305-579-0035

Compared to other restaurants with such an upscale power-lunch/dinner setting, most prices are quite affordable here, especially if you stick to the Miami Spice-priced date-dinner menu, or happy hour, when seafood items like crab-cake "sliders" are half price. Most impressive, though, are seasonal stone crabs (from Truluck's own fisheries, and way less expensive than Joe's) and other seafood that, during several visits, never tasted less than impeccably fresh, plus that greatest of Miami restaurant rarities: informed and gracious service. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Waxy O'Connor's 690 SW 1st Ct., 786-871-7660

While the menu of this casually *craic* (Gaelic for "fun") Irish pub will be familiar to fans of the South Beach Waxy's, the location is far superior — on the Miami River, with waterfront deck. And none of Miami's Irish eateries offers as much authentic traditional fare. Especially evocative: imported oak-smoked Irish salmon with housemade brown bread; puff-pastry-wrapped Irish sausage rolls; lunchtime's imported Irish bacon or banger "butty" sandwiches on crusty baguettes, served with hand-cut fries, the latter particularly terrific dipped in Waxy's curry sauce. \$\$

Wok Town 119 SE 1st Ave., 305-371-9993

Judging from the takeout window, the minimalist décor (with communal seating), and predominance of American veggies on the menu, this Asian fast-food eatery, owned by Shai Ben-Ami (a Miss Yip and Domo Japones veteran) may initially seem akin to those airport Oriental steam tables. Wrong. Custom-cooked by Chinese chefs, starters (like

soy/garlic-coated edamame), salads, and have-it-your-way stir-fries, fried rice, or noodle bowls burst with bold, fresh flavor. The proof: a startlingly savory miso beef salad, with sesame/ginger/scallion dressing. Bubble tea, too! \$\$

Zuma 270 Biscayne Blvd. Way, 305-577-0277

This Miami River restolounge has a London parent on San Pellegrino's list of the world's best restaurants, and a similar menu of world-class, Izakaya-style smallish plates (robata-grilled items, sushi, much more) meant for sharing over drinks. Suffice to say that it would take maybe a dozen visits to work your way through the voluminous menu, which offers ample temptations for vegetarians as well as carnivores. Our favorite is the melt-in-your-mouth pork belly with yuzu/mustard miso dip, but even the exquisitely-garnished tofu rocks. \$\$\$

Midtown / Wynwood / Design District

3 Chefs Chinese Restaurant 1800 Biscayne Blvd. #105, 305-373-2688

Until this eatery opened in late 2010, the solid Chinese restaurants in this neighborhood could be counted on the fingers of no hands. So it's not surprising that most people concentrate on Chinese and Chinese/American fare. The real surprise is the remarkably tasty, budget-priced, Vietnamese fare. Try pho, 12 varieties of full-flavored beef/rice noodle soup (including our favorite, with well-done flank steak and flash-cooked eye round). All can be customized with sprouts and fresh herbs. Also impressive: Noodle combination plates with sautéed meats, salad, and spring rolls. \$\$

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. \$

Andalus 35 NE 40th St., 305-400-4422

Early publicity pegging this place (in Pacific Time's former space) as a tapas bar seemed to set it up as direct competition for nearby Sra. Martinez. It's actually quite different, with emphasis divided between small-plate lounging and full fine-dining meals. And regardless of size, dishes aren't contemporary riffs on tradition but authentic regional specialties. Subtly nutty jamon pata negra (the Rolls-Royce of cured hams) or salmorejo (Cordoba's Serrano ham/

egg-enriched gazpacho) truly take your taste buds on a trip to Andalucía. On weekends, food is served till 4:00 a.m. \$\$\$

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. \$\$\$

Best Friends
4770 Biscayne Blvd., 786-439-3999 On a restaurant-starved stretch of Biscayne Boulevard, this spot serves the same sort of simple but satisfying Italian fare (antipasti, soups, salads, pizzas) as its older sibling, South Miami's Blu Pizzeria, plus burgers. The thin-crust, pliable pizzas, though lacking burn blisters, are brick-oven cooked, as are "blues," unusual calzones (like the blu oceano, fatty filled with mozzarella, prosciutto crudo, arugula, and fresh tomatoes). Hefty half-pound burgers come similarly stuffed rather than topped. A sheltered patio and full bar make the place a pleasant neighborhood lounge, too. \$\$

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 figciutto: arugula, gorgonzola dolce, caramelized onions, pine nuts, fresh figs, and prosciutto. Free parking behind the building. \$\$

Blue Piano 4600 NE 2nd Ave., 305-576-7919

The address suggests a street-corner location, but this casually cool wine bar/bistro is actually hidden midblock. It's well worth the hunt, thanks to the passionate, very personally hands-on involvement of its four owners, whose individual areas of expertise encompass food, wine, and live entertainment, melding all seamlessly. The music is muted, encouraging conversation; wines are largely small-production gems, sold at comparatively low mark-ups. And the small-plates menu features delectably different dishes like the McLuvin', a meld of savory Spanish sausage and chicharrones, topped with a quail egg and chipotle cream — supremely satisfying. \$\$\$



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Dining Guide: RESTAURANTS

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 fries, salmon atop ratatouille, or many changing blackboard specials. Portions are plentiful. So is free parking. \$\$\$

Buena Vista Deli 4590 NE 2nd Ave., 305-576-3945

At this casual café/bakery, co-owned by Buena Vista Bistro's Claude Postel, the day starts in authentic French fashion, with fresh breakfast breads, chocolate almond croissants, and other delights. At lunch cornichon-garnished baguette sandwiches (containing housemade pâtés, sinfully rich pork rillettes, superb salami, and other charcuterie classics) are irresistible, and a buttery-crust, custardy quiche plus perfectly dressed salad costs little more than a fast-food combo meal. As for Postel's homemade French sweets, if you grab the last Paris-Brest, a praline butter-cream-filled puff pastry, we may have to kill you. \$\$\$

Cafeina 297 NW 23rd St., 305-438-0792

This elegantly comfortable multi-room indoor/outdoor venue is described as an "art gallery/lounge," and some do come just for cocktails like the hefty café con leche martinis. But don't overlook chef Guily Booth's 12-item menu of very tasty tapas. The signature item is a truly jumbo-lump crab cake with no discernible binder. At one South Beach Wine & Food Festival, Martha Stewart proclaimed it the best she'd ever had. Our own prime pick: melt-in-your-mouth ginger sea bass anticuchos, so buttery-rich we nearly passed out with pleasure. \$\$

Catch Grill & Bar 1633 N. Bayshore Dr., 305-536-6414

A location within easy walking distance of the Arsht Center for the Performing Arts, in the extensively renovated Marriott Biscayne Bay, makes this casual-chic eatery, whose specialty is local and sustainable seafood, a great option for pre-show bites. Then again, enjoying lures like sweet-glazed crispy shrimp with friends on the outdoor, bayfront terrace is entertainment enough. It's worth calling to ask if the daily catch is wreckfish, a sustainable local that tastes like a cross between grouper and sea bass. Bonus: With validation, valet parking is free. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Cerviceria 100 Montaditos 3252 NE 1st Ave. #104, 305-921-4373

Student budget prices, indeed. A first-grader's allowance would cover a meal at this first U.S. branch of a popular Spanish chain. The 100 mini sandwiches (on crusty, olive oil-drizzled baguettes) vary from \$1 to \$2.50, depending not on ingredient quality but complexity. A buck scores genuine Serrano ham, while top-ticket fillings add imported Iberico cheese, pulled pork, and tomato to the cured-ham slivers. Other options revolve around pâtés, smoked salmon, shrimp, and similar elegant stuff. There's cheap draft beer, too, plus nonsandwich snacks. \$\$

City Hall the Restaurant 2004 Biscayne Blvd., 305-764-1310

After 30+ years spent guiding other owners' restaurants to success, Miami Spice program creator Steve Haas has opened his own expansive, two-floor place, on a stretch of Biscayne Boulevard that's suddenly looking fashionable. The vibe is a mix of power-dining destination and cornife neighborhood hangout, and chef Tom Azar (ex-Emeril's) has designed a varied menu to match. Highlights: an astonishingly thin/crunchy-crust pizza topped with duck confit, wild mushrooms, port wine syrup, and subtly truffled béchamel; crispy calamari (rings and legs) with light, lemony tomato emulsion; and tuna tartar that is refreshingly free of sesame oil. Big portions and a full bar to boot. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

The Cheese Course 3451 NE 1st Ave., 786-220-6681

Not so much a restaurant as an artisanal cheese shop with complimentary prepared foods, this place's self-service café component nevertheless became an instant hit. Impeccable ingredients and inspired combinations make even the simplest salads and sandwiches unique — like bacon and egg, elevated by hand-crafted cream cheese, roasted red peppers, avocado, and chipotle Mayo. Cheese platters are

exceptional, and customized for flavor preference from mild to bold, and accompanied by appropriate fruits, veggies, nuts, olives, prepared spreads, and breads. \$\$

Clive's Café 2818 N. Miami Ave., 305-576-0277

Some still come for the inexpensive, hearty American breakfasts and lunches that this homey hole-in-the-wall has served for more than 30 years. Since about 1990, though, when owner Pearline Murray ("Ms. Pearl" to regulars) and cook Gloria Chin began emphasizing their native Jamaican specialties, the intensely spiced grilled jerk chicken has been the main item here. Other favorites: savory rice and pigeon peas; eye-opening onion/vinegar-flavored escovitch fish; sweet plantains; and cabbage that redefines the vegetable. \$

Crumb on Parchment 3930 NE 2nd Ave., 305-572-9444

Though located in a difficult spot (the Melin Building's central atrium, invisible from the street), Michelle Bernstein's bakery/café packs 'em in, partly due to Bernstein's mom Martha, who makes irresistible old-school cakes: German chocolate with walnuts, lemon curd with buttercream frosting, more. Lunch fare includes inspired sandwiches like seared rare tuna with spicy Asian pickles and kimchi aioli. And for morning people, the savory chicken sausage, melted cheddar, kale, and shallot sandwich on challah will convince you that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. \$\$\$

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. \$

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. \$\$

Egyptian Pizza Kitchen Shops at Midtown Miami

Buena Vista Avenue, 305-571-9050
Pizza, pita — hey, they're both flatbreads. So while many pizzas do indeed, as this halal place's name suggests, have initially weird-seeming Middle Eastern toppings, it's really not surprising that the Giza (topped with marinated lamb, feta, olives, peppers, and pungently spiced cumin sauce) works at least as well as Italian classics. Additionally the menu includes interesting Middle Eastern fare like fook, a hummus-like but lighter Egyptian dish of favas, tahini, garlic, lemon juice, and olive oil. A brick oven makes both pizzas and homemade pitas superior. \$\$

18th Street Café 210 NE 18th St., 305-381-8006

Most seating in this cool, pioneering neighborhood café is in a giant bay window, backed with banquettes, that makes the small space feel expansive — fitting, since the menu keeps expanding, too. Originally breakfast/lunch only, the café, though closed weekends, now serves dinner till 10:00 p.m., with comfort food entrées like secret-recipe meatloaf joining old favorites: daily-changing homemade soups, varied burgers, layered international salads, inspired sandwiches (like roast beef and provolone with creamy horseradish). Beer and wine is available, and now so is delivery. \$\$

Five Guys Famous Burger and Fries Shops at Midtown Miami

Buena Vista Ave., 305-571-8341
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

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. \$\$\$

Gigi 3470 N. Miami Ave., 305-573-1520

As befits its location in artful, working-class Wynwood, Gigi has minimalist modern diner ambiance paired with truly creative contemporary Asian-influenced comfort food from Top Chef contender Jeff McInnis (formerly of the South Beach Ritz-Carlton) at surprisingly low prices. From a menu encompassing noodle and rice bowls, steam-bun ssams, grilled goodies, and raw items, highlights include pillow-light roast pork-stuffed buns, and possibly the world's best BLT, featuring Asian bun "toast," thick pork belly slices rather than bacon, and housemade pickles. There's \$2 beer, too. \$\$\$

The Grrrlz of Sandwich 555 NE 15th St., 2nd floor (Venetia condo) 305-374-4305

Riot Grrrl DIY spirit shines in the homemade soups, sweets, salads, and exceptionally tasty warm baguette sandwiches (like prosciutto and fresh mozzarella, dressed with a unique sumac vinaigrette) at this concealed café, hidden on the Venetia condo's mezzanine. Owners Ana Oliva and Fadia Sarkis scour local markets daily for the freshest of ingredients, and their breads (plus light-crust epanadas and sinful Ghirardelli chocolate cake) are all baked in-house. On Saturdays the grrrls'll even deliver you an elegant (yet inexpensive) breakfast in bed. \$

Hurricane Grill & Wings Shops at Midtown Miami

Buena Vista Avenue, 305-576-7133
This Florida fast/casual chain became an instant hit in Midtown Miami owing to a winning concept: more than 35 heat-coded sauces and dry rubs meant for custom-tossing with wings and other things (including white-meat "bone-less wings," really wing-shaped chicken breast pieces), accompanied by ranch or classic blue-cheese dip and celery. It would be silly to not pair your main with garlic/herb-butter parmesan fries. There are many other items, too, including salads. But hey, celery is salad, right? \$\$

Jimmy's Kitchen 2700 N. Miami Ave. #5 305-573-1505

No need to trek to South Beach for what many consider Miami's best classic Puerto Rican mofongo (fried green plantains mashed with fresh garlic, olive oil, and pork cracklings, surrounded by chicken or shrimp in zesty criollo sauce). This new location is bigger and better than the original, plus the mofongo is served every day, not just on weekends. But don't ignore the meal-size salads or high-quality sandwiches, including a pressed tripleta containing roast pork, bacon, Black Forest ham, provolone, and caramelized onions. \$\$

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-crust pizzas like the creative Dolce e Piccante or organic 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

La Provence 2200 Biscayne Blvd., 305-576-8002 (See Brickell / Downtown listing.)

Latin Café 2000 2501 Biscayne Blvd., 305-576-3838

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 Shops at Midtown Miami

Buena Vista Avenue, 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. \$

Limón y Sabor 3045 Biscayne Blvd., 786-431-5739

In this dramatically renovated space, the room is now light and open, and the food is authentic Peruvian, with seafood a specialty. Portions are huge, prices low, quality high. Especially good are their versions of pescado a lo macho (fish fillet topped with mixed seafood in a creamy, zesty sauce); jalea (breaded and deep-fried fish, mixed seafood, and yuca, topped with onion/pepper/lime salsa), and yuca in hot yet fruity rocoto chili cream sauce. \$\$

Lost & Found Saloon 185 NW 36th St., 305-576-1008

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-crust salmon, chipotle-drizzled endive stuffed with lump crab, or customizable tacos average \$5-\$8. Also available: big breakfasts and salads, hearty soups, housemade pastries like lemon-crust wild berry pie, and a hip beer and wine list. \$

Maitardi 163 NE 39th St., 305-572-1400

Though we admired the ambitious approach of Oak Plaza's original tenant, Brosia, this more informal, inexpensive, and straightforwardly Italian concept of veteran Lincoln Road restaurateur Graziano Sbroggio seems a more universal lure for the Design District's central "town square." The mostly outdoor space remains unaltered save a wood-burning oven producing flavorfully char-bubbled pizza creations, plus a vintage meat slicer dispensing wild boar salaminio, bresaola (cured beef), and other artisan salumi. Other irresistibles: fried artichokes with lemony aioli; seafood lasagna with heavenly dill-lobster sauce. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Mandolin Aegean Bistro 4312 NE 2nd Ave., 305-576-6066

Inside this converted 1940s home's blue-and-white dining room — or even more atmospherically, its tree-sheltered garden — diners feast on authentic rustic fare from both Greece and Turkey. Make a meal of multinational mezes: a Greek sampler of creamy tzatziki yogurt dip, smoky eggplant puree,



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and airy tarama caviar spread; and a Turkish sampler of hummus, fava purée, and rich tomato-walnut dip. The meze of mussels in lemony wine broth is, with Mandolin's fresh-baked flatbread, almost a full meal in itself. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Mario the Baker
250 NE 25th St., 305-438-0228
(See North Miami listing)

Mercadito Midtown
3252 NE 1st Ave., 786-369-0423
Some people frequent this fashionable restolounge, festooned with graffiti-style murals designed to evoke a bustling Mexican street market, just for the dangerously smooth margaritas. But the main must-haves here are tacos, encased in a rarity: genuinely made-from-scratch corn tortillas, small but fatty-stuffed. Of 11 varieties, our favorite is the carnitas (juicy braised pork, spicy chili de arbol slaw, toasted peanuts). A close second: the hongos, intensely flavorful huitlacoche and wild mushrooms, with manchego and salsa verde – a reminder that vegetarian food need not be bland. \$\$-\$\$\$

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
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. \$\$-

Morgans Restaurant
28 NE 29th St., 305-573-9678
Housed in a beautifully refurbished 1930s private home, Morgans serves eclectic, sometimes internationally influenced contemporary American cuisine compelling enough

to attract hordes. Dishes are basically comfort food, but *ultimate* comfort food: the most custardy, fluffy French toast imaginable; shoestring frites that rival Belgium's best; mouthwatering maple-basted bacon; miraculously terrific tofu (crisply panko-crust and apricot/soy-glazed); even a "voluptuous grilled cheese sandwich" – definitely a "don't ask, don't tell your cardiologist" item. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

NoVe Kitchen & Bar
1750 N. Bayshore Dr., 305-503-1000
At NoVe, the restolounge at the Opera Tower condo in NoVe (new nickname for the bayfront neighborhood north of the Venetian Causeway), the food is East-West. Meaning you can get burgers, pasta, and so on, or try the inventive Asian small plates and sushi specialties Hiro Terada originated at his past posts, Doraku and Moshi Moshi: the Atlantis roll (tempura conch with asparagus, avocado, scallions, and curry sauce); spicy, crunchy fried tofu atop kimchi salad; much more. Open 6:00 a.m. for breakfast to 3:00 a.m., it is kid-friendly and dog-friendly, too. \$\$-\$\$\$

Orange Café + Art
2 NE 40th St., 305-571-4070
The paintings hanging in this tiny, glass-enclosed café are for sale. And for those who don't have thousands of dollars to shell out for the local art on the walls, less than ten bucks will get you art on a plate, including a Picasso: chorizo, prosciutto, manchego cheese, baby spinach, and basil on a crusty baguette. Other artfully named and crafted edibles include salads, daily soups, several pastas (like the Matisse, focchi pouches filled with pears and cheese), and house-baked pastries. \$

Pasha's
3801 N. Miami Ave., 305-573-0201
(See Brickell/Downtown listing)

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. \$\$

Primo Pizza Miami
3451 NE 1st Ave., 305-535-2555
Just a few years ago, chain pizza joints were dominant most everywhere. Today many places now offer authentic Italian or delicate designer pizzas. But a satisfying Brooklyn-style street slice? Fuhgedit. Thankfully that's the speciality of this indoor/outdoor pizzeria: big slices

with chewy crusts (made from imported NY tap water) that aren't ultra-thin and crisp, but flexible enough to fold lengthwise, and medium-thick – sturdy enough to support toppings applied with generous all-American abandon. Take-out warning: Picking up a whole pie? Better bring the SUV, not the Morris Mini.

Sakaya Kitchen
Shops at Midtown Miami, Buena Vista Avenue
305-576-8096

This chef-driven, fast-casual Asian eatery is more an izakaya (in Japan, a pub with food) than a sakaya (sake shop). But why quibble about words with so many more intriguing things to wrap your mouth around? The concept takes on street-food favorites from all over Asia, housemade daily from quality fresh ingredients. French Culinary Institute-trained Richard Hales does change his menu, so we'd advise immediately grabbing some crispy Korean chicken wings and Chinese-inspired, open-faced roast pork buns with sweet chili sauce and homemade pickles. \$\$

Sake Room
275 NE 18th St., 305-755-0122
Sake takes a back seat to sushi – and sophisticated décor – at this small but sleek restolounge. Among the 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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Salsa Fiesta
2929 Biscayne Blvd., 305-400-8245
The first stateside offshoot of a popular Venezuelan mini chain, this "urban Mexican grill" serves health-conscious, made-fresh-daily fare similar in concept to some fast-casual competitors. But there are indeed differences here, notably pan-Latin options: black beans as well as red; thin, delightfully crunchy tostones (available as a side or as the base for a uniquely tasty take on normal nachos). Other pluses include weekday happy hours with two-for-one beers – and free parking. \$\$-

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. \$\$\$

Sugarcane Raw Bar Grill
3250 NE 1st Ave., 786-369-0353
This chic indoor/outdoor space is an offspring of Lincoln Road's SushiSamba Dromo and a sibling of Sugarcane lounges in NYC and Las Vegas, but more informal than the former and more food-oriented than the latter, as three kitchens – normal, raw bar, and robata charcoal grill – make clear. Chef Timon Balloo's LatAsian small plates range from subtle orange/fennel-marinated salmon crudo to intensely smoky-rich short ribs. At the daily happy hour, select dishes (like steamed pork buns with apple kimchi) are discounted. \$\$\$-

Sustain
3252 NE 1st Ave. #107, 305-424-9079
Is it possible for a restaurant to be sincerely eco-conscious without being self-righteousness? It is at this casual/chic restolounge, where dedication to local, sustainable food comes with considerable humor. Fare includes playful items like "wet" fries (with mouthwatering gravy), corn dogs, house-made soft pretzels with mustard and orange blossom honey, and a "50 Mile Salad" that seems almost like a game show in its challenge: All ingredients must come from within a 50-mile radius. At brunch don't miss the glazed "sin-a-buns." \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Tapas y Tintos
3535 NE 2nd Ave., 305-392-0506
With about 50 different generously sized traditional tapas plates, from simple (imported Spanish cheeses and cured meats; varied croquetas, including beautifully smooth spinach) to sophisticated (crisp-fried soft-shell crab with aioli dip; the witty Popeye y Olivia, garlicky wine-sauced chickpeas with spinach and olive oil) plus complex salads, paellas, and charbroiled meat and seafood entrées, all add up to entertaining eating even without this tapas/wine bar's live entertainment. This second T&T feels less nightclub and more neighborhood than the South Beach original. Great for dates, business lunches, or very happy hours. \$\$\$

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

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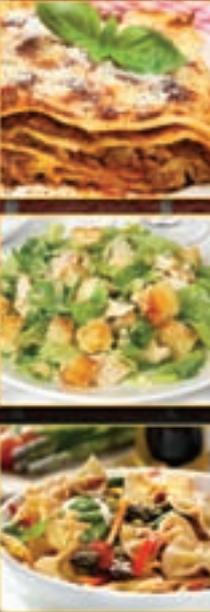
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Chinese food. But the American dumbing-down is minimal. Many dishes are far more authentic and skillfully prepared than those found elsewhere in Miami, like delicate but flavorful yu pan quail. Moist sea bass fillet has a beautifully balanced topping of scallion, ginger, cilantro, and subtly sweet/salty sauce. And Peking duck is served as three traditional courses: crêpe-wrapped crispy skin, meat sautéed with crisp veggies, savory soup to finish. \$\$-\$\$\$

Vintage Liquor & Wine Bar 3301 NE 1st Ave. #105, 305-514-0307

Gentrified ambiance, a remarkably knowledgeable staff, and a hip stock (including global beers as well as liquor and wine, plus gourmet packaged foods to accompany), and self-service wine dispensers for sampling make this an enjoyable retail shop. A wine/cocktail/tapas bar, open from 4:00 p.m. daily, makes it an enjoyable neighborhood hangout, too. Tapas include beef carpaccio, bruschetta cones, varied salads and empanadas, a daily ceviche, and fresh-made sandwiches. And remember to ask about special events: karaoke Thursdays, monthly wine dinners, tastings, more. \$\$\$

Wynwood Kitchen & Bar 2550 NW 2nd Ave., 305-722-8959

Neither man nor woman can live by bread alone. But art alone doesn't do the trick, either. Father-daughter development visionaries Tony and Jessica Goldman satisfy the full range of life needs by combining cuisine from master chef Marco Ferraro with works from master street artists, in one venue – that fits perfectly into its gritty artistic neighborhood. Here Ferraro eschews his upscale Wish fare for simple yet inspired small plates (crisp, chili-dusted artichoke hearts with tart/rich yuzu aioli; mellow veal sausages enlivened by horseradish sauce; etc.) ideal for work or gallery-walk breaks. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Upper Eastside

American Noodle Bar 6730 Biscayne Blvd., 305-396-3269

For us personally, a three-word Homer Simpson review says it: "Bacon sauce! Mmmm..." But responsibly, the chef/owner of this casual, counter-service Vietnamese fusion cheap eats joint is Michael Bloise, formerly executive chef of Wish, one of South Beach's most glamorous. At his own anti-establishment place, customers customize. Seven bucks will get you a bowl of thick, charmingly chewy noodles, plus one of nine sauces (smoked lobster, lemon grass, brown sugar/ginger, bacon) and ten toppings (recommended: slow-roasted duck, sweet Chinese sausage). Also enjoy cheeseburger dumplings, banh mi subs, house-made fruit sodas, beer or wine, and attitude-free fun. \$

Andiamo 5600 Biscayne Blvd., 305-762-5751

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

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

Balans Biscayne 6789 Biscayne Blvd., 305-534-9191

It took longer than expected, but this Brit import's third Miami venue finally opened, and rather quietly – which has an upside. It's easier to get a table here (and to park, thanks to the free lot on 68th Street) than at Lincoln Road or Brickell. This, along with the venue's relatively large, open-to-the-street outdoor area, contributes to a more relaxed, neighborhood-focused vibe. The fun menu of global comfort food is the same (ranging from a creamy-centered cheese soufflé through savory Asian potstickers) and, at breakfast, fluffy pecan/maple-garnished pancakes) and prepared as reliably well. \$\$\$

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 pastéis to hefty Brazilian entrées, is also appealing – and budget-priced. \$\$

Le Café 7295 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-6551

For anyone who can't get over thinking of French food as intimidating or pretentious, this cute café with a warm welcome, and family-friendly French home cooking, is the antidote. No fancy food (or fancy prices) here, just classic comfort food like onion soup, escargot, daily fresh oysters, boeuf bourguignon (think Ultimate Pot Roast), Nicoise

salad, quiche, and homemade crème brûlée. A respectable beer and wine list is a welcome addition, as is the house-made sangria. Top price for entrées is about \$14. \$\$\$

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. \$\$\$

DeVita's 7251 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-8282

This 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). \$

Dogma Grill 7030 Biscayne Blvd. 305-759-3433

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. \$

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 Techron. Snacks match the casual chicness: sandwiches like the Renato (prosciutto, hot capicola, pepper jack cheese, red peppers, and Romano cheese dressing); an elaborate almond-garnished Chinese chicken salad; H&H bagels, the world's best, flown in from NYC. And the car cleanings 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. \$\$

Go To Sushi 5140 Biscayne Blvd., 305-759-0914

This friendly, family-run Japanese fast-food eatery offers original surprises like the Caribbean roll (a festively green parsley-coated maki stuffed with crispy fried shrimp, avocado, sweet plantain, and spicy Mayo), or a wonderfully healthful sesame-seasoned chicken soup with spinach, rice noodles, and sizable slices of poultry. Health ensured, you can enjoy a guiltless pig-out on Fireballs: fried dumplings of chicken, cabbage, and egg, crusted with quills – really a delectable crunchy noodle mix. \$

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. And now that the place is open for dinner, you can indulge your breakfast cravings for several more hours. 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. And don't forget traditional diner entrées like meat loaf, roast turkey, liver and onions, plus burgers, salad platters, and homemade chicken soup. \$\$\$

Dining Guide: RESTAURANTS

Lo De Lea

7001 Biscayne Blvd., 305-456-3218
In Casa Toscana's former space, this cute, contemporary parillada is proof that you can have an Argentinean meal and a cholesterol test in the same month. While traditional parillada dishes are tasty, they're meat/fat-heavy, basically heaps of grilled beef. Here the grill is also used for vegetables (an unusually imaginative assortment, including bok choy, endive, and fennel), two of which are paired with your protein of choice. You can indulge in a mouthwateringly succulent vacio (flank steak), and walk out without feeling like you're the cow. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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 restolounge, 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 resumé, not to mention regular Food Network appearances, opened a homey restaurant in an emerging but far from fully gentrified neighborhood. Just be glad she did, as you dine on white almond gazpacho or impossibly creamy ham and blue cheese croquetas. Though most full entrées also come in half-size portions (at almost halved prices), the tab can add up fast. The star herself is usually in the kitchen. Parking in the rear off 69th Street. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Mi Vida Café

7244 Biscayne Blvd., 305-759-6020
At this indoor/outdoor vegetarian and raw-food vegan café, culinary-school-trained chef/owner Daniela Lagamma produces purist produce-oriented dishes that are easy to understand, like sparkling-fresh salads and smoothies, plus more technique-intensive mock meat or cheese items, based on soy proteins, that satisfy even confirmed carnivores. Particularly impressive on the regular menu: a superior Sloppy Joe made with mushroom confit, braised homemade seitan, spinach, and rich almond romesco sauce; and cannelloni de verdura, homemade crepes stuffed with spinach and cashew "ricotta." Do check the daily specials, too. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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

Revaes Italian Ristorante

8601 Biscayne Blvd., 305-758-1010
Owned by two couples (including former Village Café chef Marion 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 fiume (with pancetta, tomato, garlic, basil, and a touch of cream) or yellowtail française (egg-battered, with lemon-caper-wine sauce) are the must-haves here. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Royal Bavarian Schnitzel Haus

1085 NE 79th St., 305-754-8002
With Christmas lights perpetually twinkling and party noises emanating from a new outdoor biergarten, this German restaurant is owner Alex Richter's one-man gentrification project, transforming a formerly uninviting stretch of 79th Street one pils at a time. The fare includes housemade sausages (mild veal bratwurst, hearty mixed beef/pork bauernwurst, spicy garlicwurst) with homemade mustard and catsup; savory yet near-greaseless potato pancakes; and, naturally, schnitzels, a choice of delicate pounded pork, chicken, or veal patties served with a half-dozen different sauces. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Soyka

5556 NE 4th Court, 305-759-3117
Since opening in 1999, Soyka has often been credited with sparking the Upper Eastside's revival. Now the arrival of new executive and pastry chefs plus a wine-wise general manager, all Joe Allen veterans, signals a culinary revival for this neighborhood focal point. The concept is still comfort food, but a revamped menu emphasizes fresh local ingredients and from-scratch preparation. (The meatloaf gravy, for instance, now takes 24 hours to make.) Unique desserts include signature sticky date pudding, a toffee-lover's dream. And the wine list features new boutique bottles at the old affordable prices. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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. \$\$\$

UVA 69

6900 Biscayne Blvd., 305-754-9022
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 focaccia). Dinner features a range of small plates (poached figs with Gorgonzola cheese and honey balsamic drizzle) and full entrées like sake-marinated salmon with boniato mash and Ponzu butter sauce, and crispy spinach. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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 homemade 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 flans. \$

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. \$\$\$

The Crab House

1551 79th St. Causeway, 305-868-7085
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 specialties like Szechuan shrimp, that change seasonally. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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



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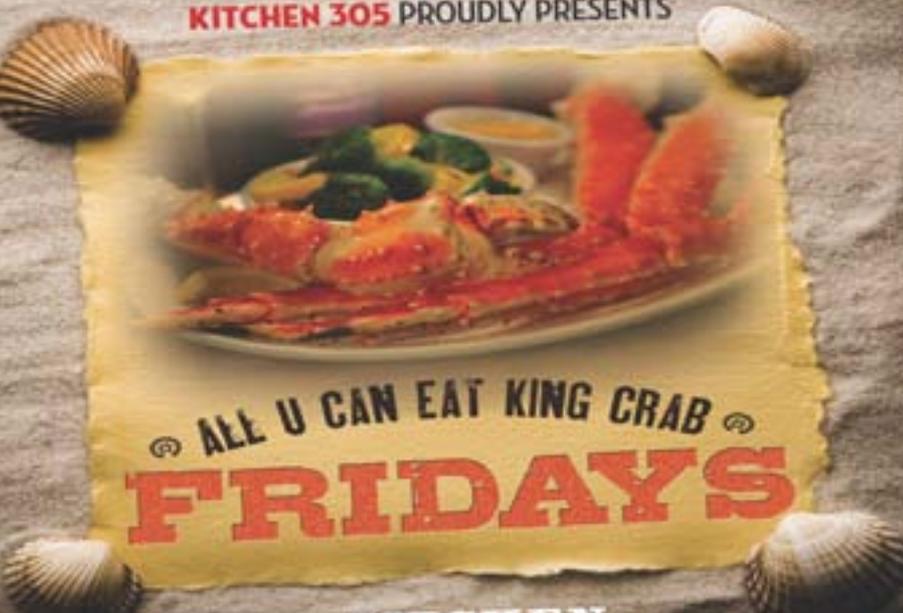
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Dining Guide: RESTAURANTS

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
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 luxurious crab ravioli with creamy lobster sauce, with occasional forays into creative exotica such as seaweed spaghetti, with sea scallops, shiitakes, 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)

Trio on the Bay
1601 79th St. Causeway, 305-866-1234
Several ventures have failed in this expansive indoor/outdoor waterfront space, but that's hard to imagine once you've experienced this stunning incarnation as an exciting yet affordable restaurant/nightclub where food definitely doesn't play second fiddle to entertainment. Former Crystal Café chef Klime Kovaceski demonstrates a rare mix of Old World technique and New World invention in dishes like perfectly caramelized sea scallops with smoky bacon-garnished spinach salad, filet mignon atop surprisingly pistachio-studded béarnaise sauce, and figs with panna cotta so light one fears a bay breeze might carry it off. \$\$\$

NORTH BEACH

Café Prima Pasta
414 71st St., 305-867-0106
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. \$\$\$

K'Chapas
1130 Normandy Dr., 305-864-8872
Formerly the Peruvian restaurant Pachamama, this space is now both Peruvian and Venezuelan — but not fusion. The Venezuelan sisters who run the place keep dishes true to country. Most Big Food comes from Peru: fresh ceviches, classic cooked entrées. But it's the Venezuelan breakfast/snack items that keep us coming, especially signature cachapas, somewhat similar to arepas but harder to find in restaurants. These moist pancakes, made from ground corn kernels instead of just corn meal, are folded over salty white cheese for a uniquely bold balance of sweetness and savor. \$\$\$

Lou's Beer Garden
7337 Harding Ave., 305-704-7879
"Beer garden" conjures up an image of Bavarian bratwurst, lederhosen, and oompah bands — none of which you'll find here. It's actually a hip hideaway in the New Hotel's pool-patio area, a locals' hangout with interesting eclectic fare and a perennial party atmosphere. Especially recommended: delicately pan-fried mini-crab cakes served with several housemade sauces; hefty bleu cheese burgers with Belgian-style double-cooked fries; blackened "angry shrimp" with sweet/sour sauce; fried fresh sardines. And of course much beer, a changing list of craft brews. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Tamarind Thai
946 Normandy Dr., 305-861-6222
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. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

MIAMI SHORES

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. \$\$\$

Iron Sushi
9432 NE 2nd Ave., 305-754-0311
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 Miamians 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? \$\$\$

Miami Shores Country Club
10000 Biscayne Blvd., 305-795-2363
Formerly members-only, the restaurant/lounge facilities of this classy 1939 club are now open to the public — *always*, lunch and dinner. Not surprisingly, ambiance is retro and relaxed, with golf course views from both bar and indoor/outdoor dining room. The surprise is the food — some classic (steaks, club sandwiches) but other dishes quite contemporary: an Asian ahi tuna tower; a lavish candied-walnut, poached-pear, grilled chicken salad; and fresh pasta specials. Prices are phenomenal, with dinner entrées \$9 to \$17; drinks average \$3 to \$4. \$\$

Mooie's
9545 NE 2nd Ave., 305-754-3666
"Kid friendly" generally means restaurants will tolerate youngsters. Mooie's, an ice cream parlor plus, positively pampers them, from the cute play area out back (equipped with old-school toys like giant bean bags) to a children's menu that doesn't condescend. (Who says kids don't appreciate pizzas with fresh mozzarella?) For grown-ups there are sophisticated salads and sandwiches like a turkey, pear, garlic oil, and brie panini on house-baked bread. Just don't neglect Mooie's mainstay: ice cream, dense yet creamy-soft Blue Bell. Pistachio almond is our pick. \$

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. 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

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. \$

Bulldog Barbecue
15400 Biscayne Blvd., 305-940-9655
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 stuffed with "burnt ends" (the most intensely flavored outdoor barbecue chunks); and sweet potato or chipotle-spiced fries. The cost is comparatively high, but such is the price of fame. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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

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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 yellow-tail 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: cochinita pibil? Chéen's authentically succulent version of the pickle-onion-topped marinated pork dish is earthily aromatic from achiote, 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)

Flip Burger Bar
1699 NE 123rd St., 305-741-3547
Casual-chic burger bars, everywhere in South Beach, are still rare farther north. One reason this easy-to-miss venue is a must-not-miss for North Miami locals: The hefty half-pounders on fresh brioche buns include a scrumptious patty with Gruyere, mushrooms, and onion marmalade. The Fireman is a jalapeño/chipotle scorcher. There are even turkey and veggie variations. Other draws are hand-cut fries, beer-battered onion rings, a top-drawer beer list, budget-priced combo specials, conversation-friendly acoustics, and a South Beach rarity: free parking. \$\$\$

Happy Sushi & Thai
2224 NE 123rd St., 305-895-0165
Grab a booth at this cozy eatery, which serves all the expected Thai and sushi bar standards, including weekday lunch specials. But there are also delightful surprises, like grilled kawahagi (triggerfish) with seasoned Japanese mayonnaise. This intensely savory/sweet "Japanese home cooking" treat satisfies the same yen as beef jerky, except without pulling out your teeth. Accompanied by a bowl of rice, it's a superb lunch. For raw-fish fans, spicy, creamy salmon tartare (accompanied by hiyashi wakame seaweed) is a winner. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

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
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. \$\$\$

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
13695 W. Dixie Highway, 305-891-7641
At this North Miami institution (opened in 1969) food is Italian-American, not Italian-Italian: spaghetti and meatballs, lasagna, eggplant parmigiana, and hot or cold subs. No imported buffalo, arugula, or other chichi stuff on the New York-style medium-thin-crust pizzas: the top topping here is the savory housemade sausage. And no one leaves without garlic rolls, awash in warm parsley oil and smashed garlic. New branches are now open in Miami's Midtown neighborhood and in North Bay Village. \$

Pastry Is Art
12591 Biscayne Blvd., 305-640-5045
Given owner Jenny Rissone's background as the Eden Roc's executive pastry chef, it's not surprising that her cakes and other sweet treats (like creamy one-bite truffle "lollipops") look as flawlessly sophisticated as they taste — perfect adult party fare. What the bakery's name doesn't reveal is that it's also a breakfast and lunch café, with unusual baking-oriented fare: a signature sandwich of chicken, brie, and caramelized peaches and pecans on housemade bread; quiches; pot pies; even a baked-to-order Grand Marnier soufflé. The pecan sticky buns are irresistible. \$\$\$

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. \$\$\$

Rice House of Kabob
14480 Biscayne Blvd., 305-944-4899
Since 2006, South Beach's original Rice House has been serving up mountainous platters of basmati rice and Greek salad topped with Persian-style marinated/char-grilled meat, poultry, seafood, or veggie kabobs — for very little money. This branch of what is now a growing chain has the same menu (which also features wraps, for lighter eaters) and the same policy of custom-cooking kabobs, so expect fresh, not fast, food. Sides of must-o-keyar and must-o-mooseer (thick yogurt dips with herbed cukes or shallots) are must-haves. \$\$

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. \$\$\$

Yes Pasta!
14871 Biscayne Blvd., 305-944-1006
At this fast/casual Italian eatery, the specialty is mix-and-match. Choose one of seven fresh or dried pastas (whole wheat and gluten-free options available), then one of 15 sauces. Our personal pick is carbonara, correctly

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creamy-coated (via egg thickening, not cream overload); Bolognese is a wise choice for those who like sauces rich and red. Many options exist for vegetarians and pescatarians as well as carnivores, all clearly coded on the menu. \$\$\$

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
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 Gouveia, originally from British Guyana, the wrapper is a far more substantial and tasty roti, a Caribbean megacrepie 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. \$

Duffy's Sports Grill

3969 NE 163rd St., 305-760-2124
Located in a sprawling indoor/outdoor space at the Intracoastal Mall, Duffy's, part of a popular chain that identifies as the official sports grill of every major Miami team, features roughly a zillion TVs and an equally mega-size menu of accessibly Americanized, globally inspired dishes designed to please crowds: stuffed potato skins, crab Rangoon, coconut-crust fish fingers with orange-ginger sauce, jumbo wings of many flavors. Imagine a sports-oriented Cheesecake Factory. What makes this particular Duffy's different and better? Location, location, location – fronting the Intracoastal Waterway. There's even a swimming pool with its own bar. \$\$\$-\$\$\$

Empire Szechuan Gourmet of NY

3427 NE 163rd St., 305-949-3318
In the 1980s, Empire became the Chinese chain that swallowed Manhattan – and transformed public perceptions of Chinese food in the NY metropolitan area. Before: bland faux-Cantonese dishes. After: lighter, more fiery fare from Szechuan and other provinces. This Miami outpost does serve chop suey and other Americanized items, but don't worry. Stick with Szechuan crispy prawns, Empire's Special Duck, cold sesame noodles, or similar pleasantly spicy specialties, and you'll be a happy camper, especially if you're an ex-New Yorker. \$\$

Flamma Brazilian Steakhouse

3913 NE 163rd St., (Intracoastal Mall) 305-957-9900
The rodizio formula is familiar: Pay one price (\$39.90 for dinner, \$29.90 at Sunday brunch), then eat till you drop from a groaning salad/appetizer bar and a massive selection of beef, pork, lamb, poultry, sausage, and fish (16 varieties at dinner; 5 at brunch) carved tableside by costumed waiters. What spectacularly differentiates Flamma: its setting on the Intracoastal Waterway. But also spectacular is a Monday-Thursday two-for-one dinner deal with a coupon available at Flamma. Unbelievable but true. \$\$\$

El Gran Inka

3155 NE 163rd St., 305-940-4910
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). \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

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. \$

Heelsha

1550 NE 164th St., 305-919-8393
If unusual Bangladeshi dishes like fiery pumpkin patee (cooked with onion, green pepper, and pickled mango) or Heelsha curry (succulently spiced hilsa, Bangladesh's sweet-fleshed national fish) seem familiar, it's because chef/owner Bithi Begum and her husband Tipu Raman once served such fare at the critically acclaimed Renaisa. Their 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 satkara, 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
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
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 fagiolo, 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

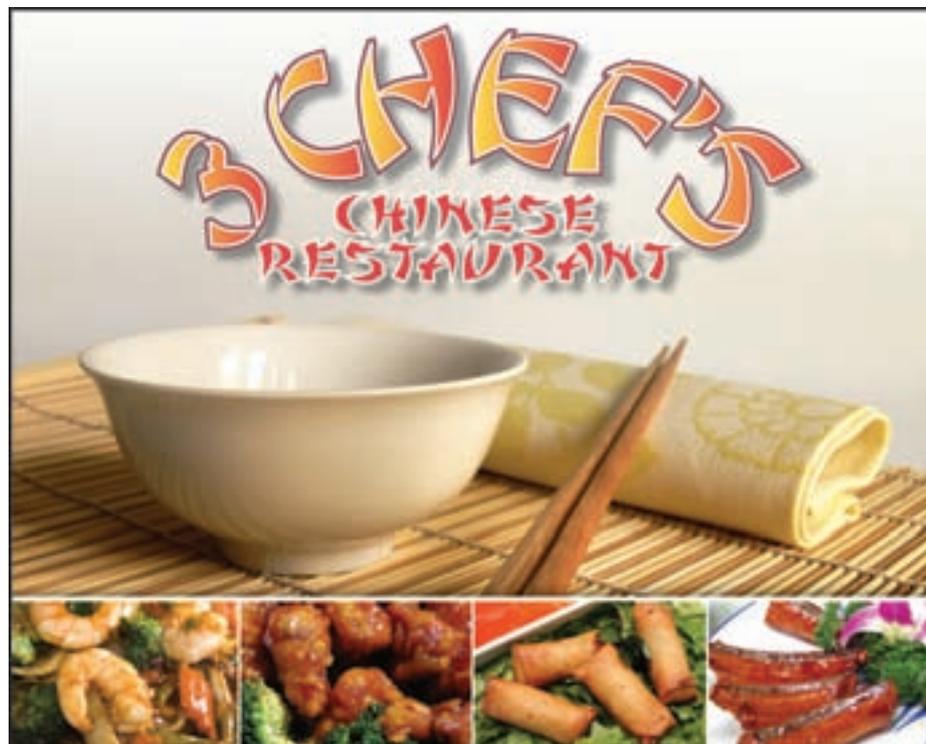
1284 NE 163rd St., 305-945-0333
Don't be unduly alarmed by the American birthday cakes in the window. At this small Chinese bakery the real finds are the Chinatown-style baked buns and other savory pastries, filled with roast pork, bean sauce, and curried ground beef. Prices are under a buck, making 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
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. \$\$\$

Miami Prime Grill

16395 Biscayne Blvd., 305-949-5101
Don't be confused by the name, suggesting a steakhouse. It's really a reinvented sports bar, which has been packing in more varied crowds than the average man-cave by offering more varied food and entertainment options. No



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worries, sports fanatics. For you there's an astonishing array of high-def TVs plus all sports snacks known to mankind. But food fans should check out the special deals on full meals, offered daily. Our favorite day: Thursday, which hosts both Ladies Night (free drinks for us!) and Lobster Night (a Maine lobster plus two sides for \$16). \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

New China Buffet 940 North Miami Beach Blvd., 305-957-7266

The venue (a former Bennigan's) is clean, casual, and not kitschy. The all-you-can-eat fare is voluminous – scores of Chinese dishes (recommended: Mongolian pork, spicy garlic shrimp, and surprisingly authentic steamed fish with ginger and scallion); international oddities (pizza, plantains, pigs-in-blankets); plus sushi, salad, and pastry/ice cream bars. And the price is sure right. Lunch is \$6.75 (\$7.75 Saturday and Sunday). Dinner features more seafood, \$9.55. There's an inexpensive take-out option, too, and reduced kids' prices. \$

Oishi Thai 14841 Biscayne Blvd., 305-947-4338

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 albón-digas – spicy, ultra-savory meatballs. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

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. \$

Racks Italian Kitchen 3933 NE 163rd St. (Intracoastal Mall) 305-917-7225

The complexity of the Racks concept makes a sound-bite description impossible. It's part Italian market, with salumi, cheeses, and other artisan products plus take-out prepared foods; part enoteca (wine bar, featuring snacks like addictive Portobello fritti with truffle aioli, especially enjoyable on the waterfront deck); part ristorante (pastas and other Big Food); part pizzeria. What's important: All components feel and taste authentically Italian. Just don't miss the coal-oven pizza. Superior toppings (including unusually zesty tomato sauce) plus an astonishingly light yet chewy crust

make Racks' pies a revelation. \$\$

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 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. \$\$

The Rumcake Factory 2075 NE 163rd St., 786-525-7071

When ex-Louisianan (and ex-Dolphins player) Larry Robinson and his Cuban-American wife Elena started a catering company in Miami Lakes, their mouthwateringly moist Caribbean-style buttered rum/walnut-glazed rum cake instantly became the star attraction. But after relocating to a real (if tiny) restaurant space in BT territory, the Factory now features a small supporting cast of Cajun fare scrumptious enough to upstage the star. Always available: authentic remoulade-dressed New Orleans po-boy sandwiches (shrimp, catfish, fried turkey), and humongous house-smoked chicken wings. Rotating specials include hearty gumbo, jambalaya, and BBQ ribs. \$\$\$

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

At this unique, mostly Taiwanese eatery, all seafood, poultry, and meats used to be skillfully crafted and delicious vegetarian imitations. These are still here, plus there's now a wider choice of dishes, some featuring real meat. Try the authentic-tasting Vietnamese banh mi sandwiches (available with a variety of meat and mock-meat fillings). Bubble tea is the must-not-miss drink. The cold, refreshing boba comes in numerous flavors, all supplemented with signature black tapioca balls that, sipped through 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

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

Sushi Sake 13551 Biscayne Blvd., 305-947-4242

Chic Asian-accented décor, video screens, 99-cent drink deals, and late-night hours make this hip hangout not just a sushi bar but sort of a neighborhood bar, too. That said, the sushi is impressive, mainly because seafood is delivered daily and all except the shrimp is fresh, not frozen (as is customary at most Miami sushi places). Also notable: All sauces are housemade. Cooked makis like a crunch-topped Miami Heat are most popular, but it's as sashimi that the fish's freshness truly shines. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Tuna's Raw Bar and Grill 17850 W. Dixie Hwy., 305-932-0630

The reincarnated Tuna's has gained new owners, a new name, a dazzling outdoor bar and dining area, and a newly impressive selection of raw-bar specialties: cold-water oysters from the Northeast, plus Blue Points, Malpecs, Island Creeks, and more. Traditional house favorites remain, and the emphasis is still on fresh fish from local waters. Open daily till 2:00 a.m., the place can get rather festive after midnight, but since the kitchen is open till closing, Tuna's draws a serious late-night dining crowd, too. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Vegetarian Restaurant by Hakin 73 NE 167th St. 305-405-6346

Too often purist vegetarian food is unskillfully crafted bland stuff, spiced with little but sanctimonious intent. Not at this modest-looking vegan (dairy-free vegetarian) restaurant and smoothie bar. Dishes from breakfast's blueberry-packed pancakes to Caribbean vegetable stews sparkle with vivid flavors. Especially impressive: mock meat (and fake fish) wheat-gluten items that beat many carnivorous competitors. Skeptical? Rightly. But we taste-tested a "Philly cheese steak" sandwich on the toughest of critics – an inflexibly burger-crazy six year-old. She cleaned her plate. \$

Yakko-San 3881 NE 163rd St. (Intracoastal Mall), 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 nuta – 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. \$\$

Yes, Pasta! Trattoria Italiana 14872 Biscayne Blvd., 305-944-1006

At Roman-native Flaminia Morin's casual, family-friendly eatery, the specialty is pasta your way. Choose one of seven fresh or dried pastas (including gluten-free options), then one of 15 sauces ranging from traditional carbonara to inventions like Mozzarella Filante (creamy tomato sauce with melted cheese); à la carte meat, seafood, or veg add-ons are also available. Build a full Italian feast with antipasti, salads, six secondi (entrées), and desserts. Budget diner alert: Check out Monday-Friday lunch specials, two courses plus drink for \$8.

BAY HARBOR ISLANDS

Asia Bay Bistro 1007 Kane Concourse; 305-861-2222

As in Japan's most refined restaurants, artful presentation is stunning at this Japanese/Thai gem. And though the voluminous menu sports all the familiar favorites from both nations, the Japanese-inspired small plates will please diners seeking something different. Try jalapeño-sauced hamachi sashimi; toro with enoki mushrooms, bracing ooba (shiso), tobiko caviar, and a sauce almost like beurre blanc; rock shrimp/shitake tempura with a delicate salad; elegant salmon tartare with a mix-in quail egg. And spicy, mayo-dressed tuna rock makis are universal crowd-pleasers. \$\$\$

Caffe Da Vinci 1009 Kane Concourse; 305-861-8166

After renovations in 2010, this old favorite (since 1989) reopened with a hip new lounge – but no fixes to what ain't broke, notably handmade artisanal pastas sauced with high quality ingredients. Choose luxe stuffed models (like crab-filled ravioli with rich lobster sauce) or relatively pristine preparations like linguini with garlic, wine, and fresh littlenecks. Eating light? Make a meal of lavish salads or starters like true beef carpaccio – dressed, like the original from Venice's Harry's Bar, with creamy mustard sauce rather than mere olive oil. \$\$\$

The Palm 9650 E. Bay Harbor Dr., 305-868-7256

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Dining Guide: RESTAURANTS

NYC's original Palm from Italian restaurant to bastion of beef. Owners would run out to the butcher for huge steaks to satisfy the hardboiled scribes. So our perennial pick here is nostalgic: steak à la stone – juicy, butter-doused slices on toast, topped with sautéed onions and pimientos. This classic (whose carb components make it satisfying without à la carte sides, and hence a relative bargain) isn't on the menu anymore, but cooks will prepare it on request. \$\$\$\$

AVENTURA / HALLANDALE

Anthony's Coal Fired Pizza

17901 Biscayne Blvd., 305-830-2625
When people rave about New York pizzas' superiority, they don't just mean thin crusts. They mean the kind of airy, abundantly burn-bubbled, uniquely flavorful crusts that can only be consistently produced by a traditional coal (not wood) oven – like those at Anthony's, which began with one Fort Lauderdale pizzeria in 2002 and now has roughly 30 locations. Quality toppings, though limited, hit all the major food groups, from prosciutto to kalamata olives. There are salads, too, but the sausage and garlic-sautéed broccoli rabe pie is a tastier green vegetable. \$\$

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Bagel Cove Restaurant & Deli

19003 Biscayne Blvd., 305-935-4029
One word: flagels. And no, that's not a typo. Rather these crusty, flattened specimens (poppy seed or sesame seed) are the ultimate bagel/soft pretzel hybrid – and a specialty at this bustling Jewish bakery/deli, which, since 1988, opens at 6:30 a.m. – typically selling out of flagels in a couple of hours. Since you're up early anyway, sample elaborately garnished breakfast specials, including unusually flavorful homemade corned beef hash and eggs. For the rest of the day, multitudes of mavens devour every other delectable deli specialty known to humankind. \$\$

Bella Luna

19575 Biscayne Blvd., Aventura Mall, 305-792-9330
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 rests 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, pears, 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., 786-279-0658 (Fairmont Hotel, Turnberry Resort)
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. \$\$\$\$

Café Bistro @ Nordstrom

19507 Biscayne Blvd. #15, 305-937-7267
In the days before quick-bite food courts, upscale department stores had their own real restaurants, civilized oases where "Ladies Who Lunch" took leisurely respite from shopping. In today's "Women Who Work" times, those restaurants (and privileged ladies) are anachronisms, but this room, hidden on Nordstrom's second floor, is a relaxing time-trip back. Enjoy creamy crab bisque, extravagant salads (shrimp with cilantro-lime dressing; pear, blue cheese, and candied walnuts with cherry balsamic vinaigrette), or a retro-modern club sandwich. Organic ingredients from local purveyors are emphasized. \$\$\$

Il Migliore

2576 NE Miami Gardens Dr., 05-792-2902

This 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. \$\$-\$\$\$

Fuji Hana

2775 NE 187th St., Suite #1, 305-932-8080
A people-pleasing menu of typical Thai and Japanese dishes, plus some appealing contemporary creations (like the Spicy Crunchy Tuna Roll, an inside-out tuna/avocado/tempura maki, topped with more tuna and served with a luscious creamy cilantro sauce) has made this eatery a longtime favorite. But vegetarians – for whom seafood-based condiments can make Asian foods a minefield – might want to add the place to their "worth a special drive" list, thanks to chefs' winning ways with tofu and all-around accommodation to veg-only diets. \$\$-\$\$\$

Gourmet Carrot

3599 NE 207th St., 305-749-6393
Since the first Gourmet Carrot – a healthy and kosher but not at all preachy eatery – opened in South Beach, its menu expanded to include many red-meat items. The same is true of this new Waterways mall branch. When confirmed cholesterol-careless carnivores like ourselves opt voluntarily for an eatery's veggie burgers (a brown rice/lentil/veggie blend more satisfying than beef), or remarkably juicy ginger-mayo-dressed chicken burgers, over normal hamburgers, based solely on flavor – well, religion aside, that's a major miracle. \$\$\$

Heavy Burger

19004 NE 29th Ave., 305-932-7555
Sure, South Beach is our town's burger capital, if you're judging by high profile. But if creativity is what counts, no joint bangs a gong like homeboy Mark Panunzio's place, where the concept is: Nothing goes together better than heavyweight burgers and heavy-metal music. What rocks us: a fire-grilled, 1.0 oz. Motley Burger (with cheddar, applewood bacon, tomato, Bibb lettuce, and frizzled plus raw onions on a challah roll; upon request, chipotle aioli was cheerfully substituted for BBQ sauce). Get hand-cut cheese fries, too, and get wasted on craft beer. \$\$

Kampai

3575 NE 207th St., 305-931-6410
At this longtime neighborhood favorite Japanese/Thai restaurant, many come just for the slightly pricy but very generous sushi specialties. Most makis are cooked, but for raw-fish fans the tempura-flake-topped crunchy tuna/avocado roll with spicy mayo, and tuna both inside and out, is a people-pleaser. Don't neglect Thai specialties, though, especially red and green curries customizable as to heat (mild, medium, hot, and authentic "Thai hot"). And for a bargain light lunch, try tonjiru, miso soup jazzed up with veggies and pork. \$\$-\$\$\$

The Grill on the Alley

19501 Biscayne Blvd. (Aventura Mall), 305-466-7195
Ensclosed in a leather booth, with dark hardwood everywhere and a massive bar dispensing two-fisted drinks, you'd never know you were dining in a shopping mall – or in the new millennium. This upscale mini chain salutes America's great grill restaurants of yesteryear, with prodigious portions of char-broiled meats and seafood, plus classics like creamy chicken pot pie. New retro dishes are added quarterly, but our favorite remains Sunday night's prime rib special: a \$32 hunk of juicy beef that'll take care of Monday's meals too. \$\$\$\$

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

Mo's Bagels & Deli

2780 NE 187th St., 305-936-8555
While the term "old school" is used a lot to describe this spacious (160-seat) establishment, it actually opened in 1995. It just so evokes the classic NY delis we left behind that it seems to have been here forever. Example: Lox and nova aren't pallid, prepackaged fish, but custom-sliced from whole slabs. And bagels are hand-rolled, chewy champions, not those machine-made puffy poseurs. As complimentary pastry bites suggest, and the massive size of the succulent, sufficiently fatty pastrami sandwiches confirm, generous Jewish Mo(m) spirit shines here. \$\$

Mr. Chef's Fine Chinese Cuisine & Bar

18800 NE 29th Ave. #10, 786-787-9030
Considering our county's dearth of authentic Chinese food, this stylish eatery is heaven-sent for Aventura residents. Owners Jin Xiang Chen and Shu Ming (a.k.a. Mr. Chef) come from China's southern seacoast province of Guangdong (Canton). But you'll find no gloppily sauced, Americanized-Cantonese chop sueys here. Cooking is properly light-handed, and seafood specialties shine (try the spicy/crispy salt and pepper shrimp). For adventurers, there's a cold jellyfish starter. Even timid taste buds can't resist tender fried shrimp balls described this way: "With crispy adorable fringed outfit." \$\$\$

Ocean Prime

19051 Biscayne Blvd. (Aventura Mall) 305-931-5400
Most mall dining experiences are akin to NASCAR pit stops: quick pauses to refuel. Ocean Prime, as its super-sleek, circa 1930s cruise ship ambiance would suggest, is more like the tranquil trans-Atlantic crossings of slower-paced times – which makes the steak and seafood eatery's mall location perfect. After a frenetic shopping day, there's no better way to decompress than a couple of hours in a time warp, savoring retro supper-club specialties: pecan-crusted mountain trout with brown butter, an oversize cocktail, and a live lounge pianist. \$\$\$-\$\$\$\$

Pilar

20475 Biscayne Blvd. 305-937-2777
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. \$\$

Playwright Irish Pub

801 Silks Run Rd. #2597, 954-457-7563
The vintage Old World look and convivial atmosphere of this new pub, located in the Village at Gulfstream Park, are more traditionally Irish than most of the menu, which ranges from penne with marinara sauce to Thai-inspired spring rolls. But fish and chips are always crisp-coated and satisfying; potato leek soup is the real thing; and the crab cakes (crab meat mixed with just enough celery, onions, and peppers for interesting texture) are so good you'll be thinking Maryland, not Dublin. \$\$

Sushi Siam

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

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