

TOWN & COUNTRY

DECEMBER 2018/JANUARY 2019

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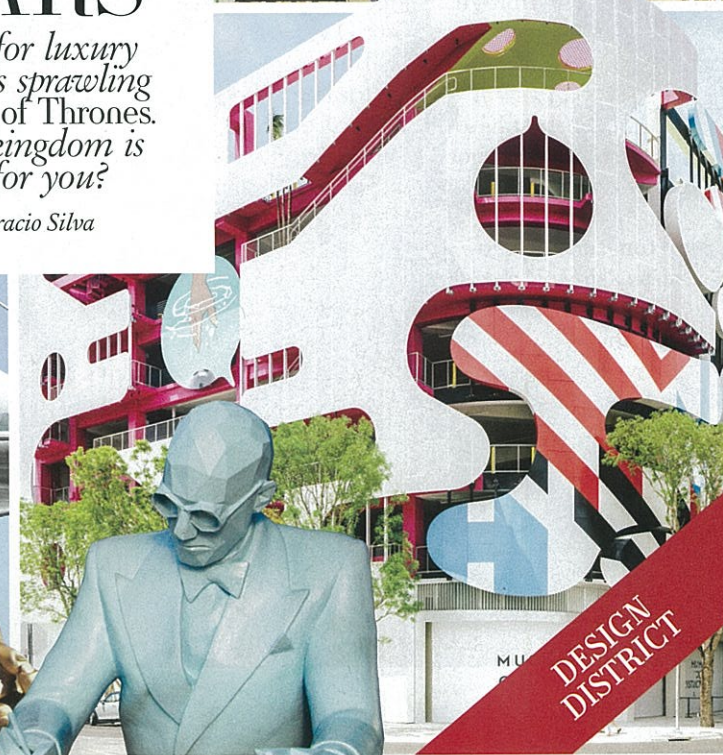
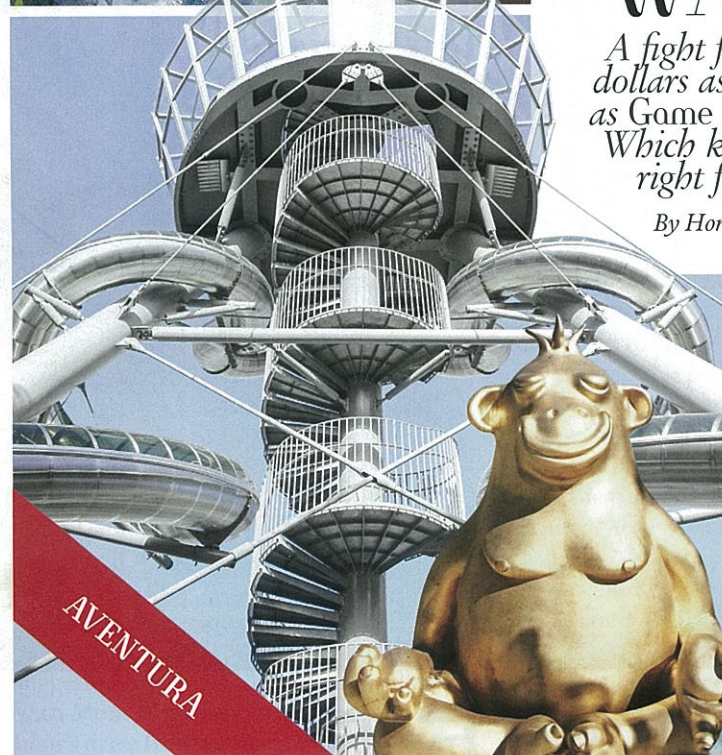
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MIAMI RETAIL WARS

A fight for luxury dollars as sprawling as Game of Thrones. Which kingdom is right for you?

By Horacio Silva



When it comes to fashion, Miami has been derided for decades as the land that style forgot, but the city has been an epicenter of chic since long before Gianni Versace ruled South Beach.

In its between-the-wars heyday,

Lincoln Road, one of the country's first pedestrian malls, was referred to as the Fifth Avenue of the South. Granted, the days when Lincoln Road's garments sneezed and fashionable women everywhere caught a cold, when department stores such as Bonwit Teller dominated

the strip, are long gone—as faded as last year's tan. But thanks to a group of ambitious developers reimagining the future of brick-and-mortar retail as a series of experiences and artful adventures, the city is enjoying another moment in the fashion sun. ➡➡

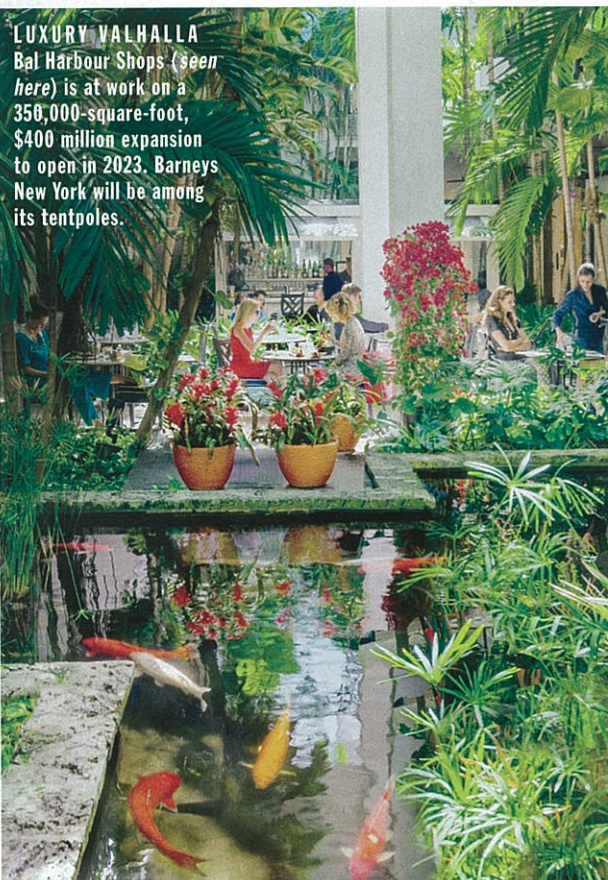
AVENTURA: FOR THE BIG SPENDERS CRAVING EVERYTHING FROM SUSHI TO GUCCI

"We're in a mall, but it doesn't have the stigma associated with old-school malls," says Jackie Soffer, the co-chair and CEO of Turnberry Associates, the family-held company that is the majority owner of Aventura, the leviathan in northeastern Miami that opened in 1983 and gets 28 million visitors a year. "It's more sophisticated than people expect."

No kidding. Soffer, who is dressed in a high/low mix of Celine and COS, her petite frame augmented by towering cork wedges, is walking me through the ground level of the new three-story, 315,000-square-foot luxury wing that opened in 2017. The entrance to the \$214 million expansion is dominated by two interactive artworks, a 93-foot spiral structure designed by German sculptor Carsten Höller and a splash fountain installation of three large-scale bronze gorillas and four bronze trees by design world darlings Simon and Nikolai Haas. The landscaping, by designer and urban planner Nathan Browning (mostly transplanted mahogany and black ironwood trees), looms over the courtyard, giving it an air of ripened permanence. The only clue that the place is relatively new is a COMING SOON sign for a restaurant by San Francisco's award-winning Michael Mina. On the upper level we find three Ugo Rondinone clay sculptures, a Tesla showroom, a hipster gastropub, and a sprawling indoor-outdoor event space, which, perhaps as a sign of the changing tenor of shopping, may or may not ultimately include a discrete VIP area.

"Retail today is all about critical mass and increasing the reasons for shoppers to come," Soffer says, somehow managing to juggle two other conversations on her phone. "The goal is to create multiple reasons for people to want to experience our property."

Though Soffer, an art collector in her own right, is quick to point out that she has been acquiring significant works for her properties since Norman Braman, the Miami businessman and art collector,



"The goal in retail is to create multiple reasons for people to come."

—Jackie Soffer, CEO, Turnberry Associates

implored her to do so in the early '00s ("He basically told me it was my civic duty"), she might also be accused of finding inspiration a little closer to home.

DESIGN DISTRICT: FOR ART COLLECTORS, CULTURE VULTURES, AND LABEL COGNOSCENTI

Soffer is married to developer Craig Robins, who was responsible for the revitalization of South Beach in the '80s and is the driving force behind the Design District, which spans 18 city blocks north of downtown Miami, bordering the neighborhoods of Wynwood and Edgewater. (They met at a deposition.) The knock on the Design District following its 2002 opening was that it was a fancy Potemkin village of sorts, a cluster of luxuriously appointed retail palaces on often deserted streets in search of a neighborhood. But after years of seemingly endless construction, the art-inflected area—also landscaped by Browning—is finally coming

into its own as a vibrant enclave.

Existing public installations by the likes of John Baldessari and Buckminster Fuller have been joined by site-specific works by Urs Fischer and the Bouroullec brothers. Homes for the Institute of Contemporary Art Miami (supported by Norman Braman) and the De la Cruz collection have opened, as has the Museum Garage, a parking station the façade of which has been tricked out by five different artists. Top-tier brands such as Hermès, Dior, and Louis Vuitton continue to build monumental flagships, lending weight to the argument that while the foot traffic here might not yet match the District's rivals, the shoppers are not short of a dime. Meanwhile, stalwarts such as Michael's Genuine Food will now have competition from new spots by Brad Kilgore and Joël Robuchon (his partners are still committed to the three locations the master chef was slated to open before he died earlier this year), as well as Swan, an eagerly anticipated restaurant and lounge by Pharrell Williams and hospitality maven David Grutman, with very Instagrammable interiors by Ken Fulk.

"Whenever you truly invent something, it takes time," Robins says, sitting in his office at Dacra, the development company that operates the District. "And with a new vision for an outdoor museum that makes a statement about retail that's different from anything else, it was always going to take a little while to build up. But I think we're almost there."

BAL HARBOUR: FOR ROYALS, POTENTATES, AND JETSETTING VOLUPTUARIES

Of course, the emergence of the Design District as a bona fide force in the luxury wars is in no small part the result of protracted arm-wrestling between Robins and the Whitman family, which owns Bal Harbour, the ne plus ultra of shopping in South Florida since it opened in 1965. The city relies on tourists (recent studies point to more than 15 million overnight visitors a year, generating sales of \$26 billion), and from the get-go Bal Harbour's location, near many hotels and condos in a one-mile area between the [CONTINUED ON PAGE 198]



THE ART OF SHAME

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 53] for sexual assault), film producer Harvey Weinstein (charged with rape; out on bail at time of writing), and broadcaster Matt Lauer (fired by NBC after accusations of sexual misconduct), the removals made national news.

The Occidental Grill in Washington, DC, has quietly taken down the picture of Senator Al Franken from its gallery of U.S. presidents, senators, representatives, and Beltway journalists. Sardi's hasn't pulled anyone down yet, even though its gallery features caricatures of such contentious figures as Dustin Hoffman and James Franco (both of whom deny wrongdoing amid sexual misconduct allegations).

"We have a few on our walls who have been accused but not convicted," says Sean Ricketts, Sardi's co-owner and general manager. That said, he notes that if Sardi's had had a likeness of Weinstein on the wall, "we would have taken him down." (In the past, a different disgraced producer nearly had his Sardi's portrait turned upside down, but instead it was relocated to a wall upstairs and ultimately removed.)

When I heard that Claridge's Hotel, the Art Deco landmark in London's Mayfair neighborhood, had unveiled a portrait gallery in this fraught climate, I went to behold it in person. The hotel has long displayed photographs of its illustrious clientele, but its gleaming new "Black and White Corridor" features dozens of watercolor portraits of the hotel's most glamorous contemporary guests, including Diane von Furstenberg, Sarah Jessica Parker, Alber Elbaz, and Christian Louboutin. Their creator, artist David Downton, calls them "the talking heads" and imagines that "if you walked down the corridor at 2 a.m., they'd be having a good time, I think."

The gallery has been in the works since 2013, and it seems as if it should have been there forever. After all, for decades Claridge's has held supreme client boasting rights; its devotees have included royals (current, retired, and exiled), movie stars, and other such creatures. Its current portrait subjects have been chosen via a

mysterious process, but Downton says that each must have a meaningful relationship with the hotel, and each must sit for him in person. Assorted visitors and luminaries have quietly lobbied for inclusion, to no avail. "There have been strong hints," says a Claridge's representative, "but we pick our subjects."

I ask if it has been nerve-racking to launch a portrait gallery during a period of drastic upheaval, with prominent figures toppling in the realms of politics, broadcasting, and the arts. Downton says he's grateful that such considerations are "beyond my pay grade." A hotel representative says, "We'd think long and hard about removing a portrait. We wouldn't knee-jerk it." (Downton adds, "It will be interesting to see who's here in 10 years.")

Rearranging them wouldn't require the invention of any new skills, however. Establishments on both sides of the Atlantic have for decades dealt with difficult politics surrounding some of their customers. "Restaurants have always been about seeing and being seen, and making it onto the wall of a well-known restaurant is a way of doing that," says food anthropologist and historian Willa Zhen. And while displaying one's loftiest affiliations in pictures does bring prestige, the sword has always cut both ways. (After her husband's abdication of the throne, former Claridge's regular Wallis Simpson—whose visage is prominently exhibited in the hotel lobby—was once considered the most reviled woman in England.) For years portraits in prestigious restaurants and hotels have come under attack for all sorts of reasons.

"We've seen divorce settlements where people have demanded that their exes get taken off the wall," says Bruce Bozzi Jr., executive vice president of the Palm, whose family has run the restaurant line for four generations. In the past, he says, "it has taken a lot" for a patron portrait to be taken down. O.J. Simpson was removed from the Palm's now-defunct Hollywood location in the 1990s, but other than that Bozzi could not recall another eviction before this tumultuous year. The banishment of a Palm portrait subject is no small thing, as the portraits are usually painted straight onto the walls and have to be literally chiseled away.

Ultimately, Bozzi adds, the restaurants just "patch up the wall and celebrate someone else." One thing is certain in uncertain times: There will always be prominent figures in disgrace, and there will always be more rising stars. «



MIAMI RETAIL WARS

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 58] beach and the bay, gave it a direct pipeline to the most affluent among them, making it the most consistently profitable mall in the country.

A none-too-secret element of its success was its savvy radius restriction, which prevented tenants from setting up shop elsewhere by relegating them to less-trafficked areas or requiring them to cough up a percentage of sales. In 2011, when Louis Vuitton left Bal Harbour, other LVMH labels followed, and with them went the suggestion that there was only one luxury name in town—especially when LVMH bought into the Design District through one of its investment arms.

At the time, Randall Whitman, the son of founder Stanley Whitman, sent Robins a stinging message to relay to the bigwigs at LVMH. But if there is any residual animosity, the key players aren't telling. "Frankly, I think it was past time to move on," says Matthew Whitman Lazenby, Stanley's grandson, who has been president and CEO since 2013. "Life's too short. And whether it's for us or for them, business is too important to sacrifice on things like that." Lazenby points out that some of LVMH's brands—including Loro Piana and Bulgari—never left, and he is working with the company to bring back some defectors.

Robins is playing nice too. "I think the Whitmans have contributed so much to our community, and I wish them nothing but the best," he says. Soffer adds, "I see them out, but I really don't know them"—though she sounds more like the Mariah Carey meme in which the diva claims to be unfamiliar with a rival.

Besides, Lazenby and his team are busy developing an additional 350,000 square feet, including an adjacent parcel of land on the southwest side of the mall. Construction on the \$400 million expansion won't be completed until 2023, but Lazenby is worried not so much about growing as about diluting the exclusivity of his offerings. "We could probably

fill the entire new space just by making existing tenants larger,” he says, adding that he could fill any leftover space from the wait list of prospective tenants. “My philosophy of almost everything in life is that it’s all a cycle. Right now luxury is in expansion mode, and at some point, as in all things, it will go too far and contract again. But it’s a different world, and for now the Miami market can definitely accommodate three or four locations for luxury brands.”

BRICKELL: FOR TECHIES AND TITANS OF INDUSTRY

As of late 2016, the latest entrant in Miami’s Game of Thrones is Brickell City Centre, a retail-and-hospitality behemoth owned by Hong Kong’s Swire Properties that, in a neat twist to rival the Robins-Soffer marriage, has gotten an assist from an unlikely ally: the Whitmans. With a price tag of more than \$1 billion, the 4.9-million-square-foot shopping, office, condominium, and hotel project is arguably the most talked-about development in Miami. In addition to the 40-story East Miami Hotel, it’s home to Saks Fifth Avenue, the three-story Italian food hall La Centrale, a newfangled CMX movie theater, and the holy grail of millennial retail: an Apple store.

Whereas close to 65 percent of sales at Bal Harbour come from tourists, this complex in the financial district is relying on the area’s large daytime office population and the residents of the 5,000 apartments that have sprung up nearby in the past few years. “People don’t want to live a million miles away from where they work,” says Kieran Bowers, the Oxford-educated president of Swire Properties USA. “And with the way the Miami map is divided, we saw a real opportunity in a downtown location with next to no retail of any substance.”

Bowers and his cohort have been paying close attention to the competition. Brickell doesn’t yet have a permanent art collection, but last year, just in time for Art Basel Miami Beach, the mall invited local curators to incorporate feminist-themed exhibitions by Yoko Ono and the Guerrilla Girls into its offerings. “Art may not have a direct transactional purpose, but it creates a flash point and a sense of urgency,” he says. “At the end of the day we are all in the business of creating stimulating moments and curiosity.” Or, to borrow from the universal language of commerce, *ka-ching!* «



IS CABERNET THE NEW MERLOT?

[CONTINUED FROM PAGE 66] wines like Harlan, Colgin, Dalla Valle, and Screaming Eagle, and pretty soon all their neighbors were emulating the high-price, high-octane cult wines, picking late, pushing ripeness to extremes. As Matthiasson said, “It became macho about how late you pick.” Until some started to say, enough.

Among those who derided this trend was critic and Blue Hill panelist Jon Bonné, in his influential 2013 book *The New California Wine*. Bonné dubbed the prevailing sun-drenched, sugary style “Big Flavor,” complaining that many California wines, especially the cabs, were unbalanced and overblown—that they quickly exhausted the palate and overwhelmed almost any food. Bonné’s book sought to identify and champion the winemakers, some of whom have been around since the late ’60s, who were part of a counter-revolution, seeking balance and finesse and acidic lift—winemakers like Matthiasson, Cathy Corison, and Paul Draper of Ridge Vineyards. “In a way,” Bonné told the audience, “the fight over cabernet is a culture war, or maybe even a generational war.” He asserted that younger drinkers were increasingly turned off by cabernet. “It’s the cultural baggage of a lot of douchebaggery in times past, of big wines that were all about peacocking.” Think finance bros in suspenders crying out for \$1,000 bottles of Harlan.

Jason Wagner, the 39-year-old wine director at Union Square Café, said, “For the generation of sommeliers just under me, cabernet is not cool. Too pricey, not food-friendly. People eat differently now. It’s less and less that a meal is centered on a single meat-based dish. Instead guests are sharing plates, smaller portions, multiple courses, tasting menus. They’re looking for something to go with a wide array of foods, and cabernet is generally not built for that.”

Dan Petroski, who organized the panel, did not disagree. “Cabernet definitely has an image problem. It seems to be stuck in the past in terms of how it’s

perceived: noble but stodgy, exceptionally delicious but expensive.”

Raj Vaidya, the head sommelier at the restaurant Daniel in New York, took issue with the prevailing, wine-geeky sentiment in the room, pointing out that the Big Flavor style has many fans. “It may not be my personal cup of tea, but we have a robust customer base that likes a style of Napa cab that’s big and ripe and inky and sweet. There are a lot of fans for these wines, and I’d be doing my customers and my boss a disservice not to provide them. Not everyone wants lean, herbaceous wines.”

Petroski’s own working life is an interesting reflection of the great divide in the current wine scene. By day he makes rich, high-scoring cabernets at Larkmead, a historic Napa estate. But his very successful side project is Massican, a label devoted to white wines made with ribolla gialla, tocai friulano, and sauvignon blanc that are poured by the glass at the French Laundry and are featured on the lists at Le Bernardin in New York and Alinea in Chicago. They are all light, bright, and crisp—perfect summertime food wines. Sommeliers love them; Robert Parker, on the other hand, doesn’t even review them—although he does review Petroski’s Larkmead cabernets, which are very ripe, giving them scores in the high 90s. The audiences for his two labels probably have no overlap.

Matthiasson also has a foot in both worlds. He has a thriving business as a vineyard consultant, having worked for both Araujo and Dalla Valle, two benchmark makers of cult cabernets. The wines he makes under his own eponymous label, including a Napa cabernet and a Bordeaux blend, are much more savory and restrained than is the norm in Napa. Matthiasson’s career may answer the question of what cabernet should be: There’s room on the table for both styles—or multiple styles. Cabernet will never be a dainty wine, or a good partner to oysters. And in Napa, where land and farming are expensive, it will never be cheap, but its various expressions can please different audiences.

Of course, vegan Snapchat users and pescatarians are unlikely to drink any style of cab. The days when cabernet (and chardonnay) ruled the wine world are over. But there is a new generation of California winemakers who are seeking more finesse from the grape. And as long as there’s steak on the menu, there will be cabernet on the wine list. «