

Murals in
Miami's
Wynwood Art
District.



MIAMI

After a few difficult years, Florida's most vibrant city has come roaring back, thanks to an influx of international residents, standout new architecture, and a vital art and culture scene—without losing any of its party spirit

BY ELENI N. GAGE

In 2005, Jennifer Lopez launched Miami Glow by JLo, a fragrance inspired by the city's "palm trees, beaches, parties, freedom, and passion." In 2012, Tom Wolfe published *Back to Blood*, an epic novel also inspired by Miami—specifically, one reviewer said, the city's relationship to "race, sex, art, and immigration."

If that relationship had a Facebook status, it would be "it's complicated." Wolfe once described Miami as "a melting pot full of hard cases who just won't melt." But the clash and coexistence of all these cultures is what gives contemporary Miami—once thought of as merely a bachelor party destination—enough gravitas to sustain a 700-page novel. It's also the magic ingredient that keeps the city constantly reinventing itself.

"When I grew up here in the 1950s, Miami was a very sleepy, segregated Southern town," recalls artist Philip Smith, whose memoir,

Walking Through Walls, evokes the era. "Today it's a burgeoning metropolis where you completely lose sight of the fact that you are still within the territorial borders of the United States."

In 2012, more than 60 percent of Miami residents were born outside the U.S., a huge jump from the just under 50 percent reported as recently as 2008. And while the city's large Cuban population continues to dominate local politics, recent immigrants are pouring in from all over Latin America, as well as from Haiti, Spain, Russia, and Germany. "Demographically, Miami is no longer a city of ghettos," says Juan Carlos Arcila-Duque, the Colombia-born designer behind Mynt, a Miami Beach nightclub. "Everyone is everywhere."

Today, more and more neighborhoods are becoming epicenters of design, art, and farm-to-table cuisine, whereas in 2005 J.Lo probably found her palm trees, parties, and passion in South Beach and >



FROM TOP: A room at the SLS Hotel South Beach. The Webster department store. 1111 Lincoln Road. A mural by Shepard Fairey and a Christian Awe painting at Wynwood Kitchen & Bar.



the floating enclave of mansions that is Star Island. South Beach is still happening—in 2012 both the SLS and James hotel brands opened outposts on the traditional strip—but the action is also climbing north, with Soho Beach House arriving on 43rd Street, and a St. Regis installing itself opposite what’s arguably the nation’s most luxurious mall in Bal Harbour.

“When I moved here in 1994, South Beach was a big party, and Miami was club-centric,” says chef Michael Schwartz. “Now Miami is more comfortable in its own skin. There’s still a big element of flash and style, but there’s a new scene of smaller, low-key restaurants. There’s been a lot of education as to what good food is.”

Schwartz has been a major part of that education, with his Design District staples Michael’s Genuine Food & Drink and Harry’s Pizzeria, which emphasize fresh, local ingredients. He’s now poised to open the more intimate, urbane Cypress Room, whose menus “will follow the Florida seasons,” he says. “There will be lots of frogs’ legs.”

The Design District was a centrally located but overlooked neighborhood of art galleries and designer showrooms when Schwartz opened Michael’s Genuine in 2007. “It was a ghost town at night,” he recalls. “I always brought potential investors during the day when there were people walking around.” Now nighttime sidewalks are full of locals headed toward dinner (once valets have parked their cars), and the galleries have been replaced by luxury stores. “There’s Cartier and Prada,” Schwartz says. “It’s nuts to me.”

The galleries and artists have relocated to gritty, vibrant Wynwood, where every cinderblock wall is a canvas for brightly colored murals, and vacant lots are home to flea markets and food trucks. The area took off when muralists such as Shepard Fairey turned warehouse walls into open-air galleries during 2009’s Art Basel Miami. The emergence of hipster-packed cafés and small-plate restaurants such as Wynwood Kitchen & Bar signals that Wynwood, too, is gentrifying.

“The city has survived the economic downturn, and now it’s thriving,” says Schwartz. That upturn is visible in the high-rise steel palaces of Brickell in downtown Miami, where once-empty condos are being filled by Brazilians and Russians with dollars to burn. And it’s also signaled by an influx of standout buildings that keep popping up between preserved Deco low-rises and *Miami Vice*-era glass towers, making Miami, says Arcila-Duque, “a pioneer of architecture as art.” Frank Gehry’s New World Center opened in 2011, and by the end of 2013 the city will debut the Pérez Art Museum Miami, a reincarnation ➤





Juvia's rooftop dining area.



A Wallcast at the New World Symphony's concert hall, designed by Frank Gehry.

of the existing Miami Art Museum, in a Herzog & de Meuron building on waterfront Museum Park. These ever-expanding culture and arts centers are frequented by tourists, but also by new residents who came to do more than party. "Miami used to be just for entertainment," says Arcila-Duque. "Now it's no longer a shallow city."

Or no longer *just* a shallow city. Take Art Basel, which is both a stimulus for the Miami art community and a magnet for Kardashians and other good-time-Karlies whose favorite artworks are their own photos in gossip mags. "There needs to be a solid collector base or national following for the galleries, beyond Art Basel," says Philip Smith. "But every year interest in the arts gets stronger and young artists come from all over, because the city is still affordable and there's an opportunity to join and make a scene."

It's a scene that continues to celebrate style even as it grows in substance. At its best, it unites the two. "Even our parking garages have become destinations," boasts Bonnie Clearwater, director and chief curator of the Museum of Contemporary Art in North Miami. She's referring to 1111 Lincoln Road, Herzog & de Meuron's seven-story carpark, so elegant it's used as a venue for weddings. A parking lot that's a thing of beauty, and a place to party above the palm trees? J.Lo would be amazed. ■