

VIP

GUIDE MIAMI

Sleek & Chic

Your exclusive guide to having a haute holiday



ARTS & CULTURE ISSUE

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LOCATION, LOCATION, ARCHITECT

Will names like Gwathmey and Gehry sell condos in South Florida like Gucci and Prada sell clothes?

BY JUDITH MASTERS

Although a few name-brand architects (Michael Graves, most notably) got involved in the building boom of the nineties, it was the competition to rebuild Ground Zero that moved the trend into high gear, catapulting modern architecture into dinner-party debate. A famous architect is a major selling point, a way to manifest taste in status-conscious cities. Hiring these name-branders has become the latest selling tool and a distinguishing factor, especially in markets saturated with development.

The name-brand fever is not limited to just New York, Los Angeles and Chicago; it has spread south and headed for the Sunshine State. The Delano Hotel, for example, is known as the place to be in Miami's South Beach, as designer Philippe Starck made a statement of exclusivity with his well-known sense of whimsy. The Delano is where

producers, movie directors and music moguls who scout locations, develop plotlines and compose lyrics along, or about, its palm-lined streets. No longer just a source of temporary inspiration, those in the know are choosing to live here full time.

In 2003 alone, Florida had 248 sunny days—that's 70 percent of the year—and the temperature never dropped below 30 degrees. Many are relocating because of the favorable weather. Now that the world is recognizing this state for its appeal and proven ability to set new trends, the market is now quasi-saturated with homebuyers looking for the best living experiences. Developers are scurrying to meet those demands.

In a world where people are increasingly identifying with name brands and labels like Gucci, Prada or Louis Vuitton, architects and designers are becoming just as essential. In other words, everybody

the 24-tower building right on Fort Lauderdale beach. Construction has not been completed, but this luxurious condo hotel has already become a landmark—and not just because of the Trump name.

"For us, what our buildings look like is not a matter of style so much as using architectural language to develop the idea of 'character,'" Graves said. "Character, for us, creates a building's identity, its personality, both inside and outside. In the case of Trump Fort Lauderdale, the character is derived from the regional context and a somewhat romantic idea of life associated with the sea."

"For a development of this caliber, we could only work with the best," Stillman explained. "Michael Graves and Associates continuously delivers projects of spectacular design, and we wanted a true master on board to help us achieve a cutting-edge, yet classic condo hotel that people would also see as a masterpiece."

Also on the city's ocean shores, the W Fort Lauderdale Resort Hotel and Residences is embodying high living in true South Florida fashion, with none other than Clodagh Design at its helm. Known for her worldwide experience in architecture and interior design, and celebration of "the experience of living," the singularly named Clodagh has received a number of awards for her constant innovation.

There, "space defines the experience," and for this project, the ambiance will be softer than that found in a trendy hotel like New York's W. She will create an urban retreat with textured stones, concrete and

homeowners. The principals at Property Markets Group (PMG) wanted a designer who would step up to the challenge. "We want to create a space that's beautiful but not overstated," PMG developer Mitchell Schneiderman said.

Also in Miami Beach, the Caribbean Hotel, a 1940s vestige, is undergoing a revival. It is being converted to a luxurious condominium with interiors being redesigned by the renowned Christopher Ciccone, brother to pop artist Madonna. Already used to the spotlight, Ciccone has been appointed to create lavish spaces that evoke the same plush ambiance of the good old days, when Frank Sinatra and Sammy Davis Jr. frolicked along the beaches. His brand name furniture was even selected to adorn former President Bill Clinton's New York office.

Then there are architects like Richard Meier, who needs no introduction in the world of design. This award-winning professional has already inspired New York City with his unsurpassed talent. On the former site of the Beach House Hotel, a favorite destination for celebrities, he will introduce his design to the Miami set with Beach House, a new high-end, all-glass, oceanfront condominium.

A TOUCH OF WHIMSY

But perhaps one of the most talked-about, upcoming projects will be in Brickell, where über-developer Jorge Perez is conceiving his latest



Pictured from left to right are renderings of: W Fort Lauderdale's lobby, Mei condominiums, The Trump International's tower and pool deck.

locals and tourists spend their time away from the daily rigors of life. Equally illustrious is the Mandarin Oriental in Miami, where the world-renowned firm of Hirsch Bedner Associates concocted the perfect mix of tranquility and extravagance.

As a result of the excitement surrounding these projects, South Florida condo developers noticed the impact of using famous architects and designers' talents. It became clear that such artistry could lure homebuyers while setting their projects apart from others. Since this epiphany, hiring esteemed designers and architects has become a major preoccupation.

A BOOMING MARKET

South Florida is now a destination of choice for artists, entrepreneurs and moguls in every field. In fact, it has become a favorite of film

wants one. For many New Yorkers, for instance, living in spaces canvassed by legendary masters is primordial. "New Yorkers tend to look for location, but design is also key," said Craig Studnick, vice president and partner of International Sales Group, one of South Florida's premier real estate sales and marketing organizations. "To them, the name brand is very important."

FANCY FORT LAUDERDALE

The challenge for condo developers in this highly populated state, where property values are constantly on the rise, is to offer living spaces that distinguish their product and attract homebuyers with a flair for the bold and the beautiful. The Trump International Hotel and Tower Fort Lauderdale is doing just that. It has taken the lead by commissioning the world-renowned firm of Michael Graves and Associates to design

natural materials, all conducive to a more serene atmosphere where residents and guests will gather for conversation.

MIAMI BEACH SOPHISTICATION

Meanwhile, arguably the world's leading hospitality design firm, Hirsch Bedner Associates, is mirroring the Mandarin Oriental's sophistication in Mei, the Asian-themed condominium located on the last parcel of oceanfront land in Miami Beach. The firm, which has also designed the Beverly Hills Hotel in California and the Ritz-Carlton in New Orleans, is aiming to incorporate exotic elements like bamboo, rice paper, linen and glass features to create a sensuous haven for residents in the lobby, tea lounge, and the Asian spa and fitness center.

"Mei" is Mandarin for beauty and femininity, and the designer is striving to create the most graceful of living experiences for

gem, ICON Brickell, along with Starck's incomparable mind for design. Known for his vivid imagination, his spontaneity and his extraordinary vision, Starck is generating a buzz with his ideas for the new high-rise, which will be located in the heart of Miami's financial district. The designer of The Delano and ICON South Beach is seeking to inject passion, brilliance and seduction into the living areas at ICON Brickell. Plus, his custom-designed Yoo by Starck furniture package will grace the public areas of the building.

HOME-CHIC-HOME

Developers are taking advantage of affluent buyers' interests in brand-name architecture. The trend, apparently, is to experience the highest quality in living, whether in reality or in perception. Fortunately for those seeking a name brand home, South Florida is providing a growing cache of fashionable options. **VIP**