

## April 2007: The Rejuvenation of American Cities on the Water

April 12–15, 2007  
The Standard Hotel  
Miami



The 2007 AIA COD conference in Miami was enthusiastic, diverse, provocative, and a whole lot of fun. The marathon of organized events carried the zeitgeist of Miami, full of optimism, excitement, and progress while also discussing Miami's current challenges. This energy was apparent in the dedication of the several tour guides who donated their services, the creative range of restaurant choices and diverse dishes, and most, by the incredible development in downtown Miami.

The conference, *The Rejuvenation of American Cities on the Water*, was carefully planned to explore the exciting [developments](#) along Miami's several waterfronts. The physical indication of this transformation is the number of condominium towers and construction cranes that overpopulate the skyline. But the catalyst of this development is found closer to the ground and is intended for the benefit of all. The private and public sector have teamed up to transform the city from "Tropi-cool" to "Tropi-cultural" through the marketing and construction of various art and culture facilities nestled among the various city parks and urban corridors. Most of the talks and tours focused on this exciting, already commenced transformation, which promises to secure Miami's role as the gateway to the Americas. The profound four-day discourse among panelists and participants illustrated that this "Capital City of the Americas" also has its serious pressure points. In addition to Miami's population diversity, the group experienced firsthand the metropolis' range of geographical conditions, including the Florida Keys to the south, the Everglades to the west, Biscayne Bay, the Miami River, and the Atlantic Ocean. Population and geography could both significantly drive Miami's architectural resolution. Newly termed during our conference as "Geo-Fabulous," this tropically hot topic of a city was explored by the attendees and rediscovered as possibly one of the most important emerging cities in the world in terms of social infrastructure and architectural growth.

The four-day conference began on Thursday with a warm welcome from Miami's Mayor Manny Diaz. First elected in 2001, and then reelected to a second term in 2005, Mayor Diaz has led Miami towards a visionary rebirth of prosperity and opportunity. A torrential morning rain had become a beautiful afternoon when the mayor greeted the AIA conference on his private terrace

at the Miami City Hall. This building is a former Pan-American Airways terminal from which “snow birds” shuttled to the Keys and Cuba in the 1920s and ‘30s.

Overlooking the bay and the Coconut Grove Coral Reef Yacht Club, the mayor pointed out the dynamic changes to the city in his talk, *The Past, Present, and Future of Miami*. In just a few minutes, the mayor accomplished the difficult task of laying out his gigantic plans for the city, which include the complete overhaul of the City’s zoning code, named “Miami 21”; the creation of an art and culture campus on Biscayne Bay; and an ambitious sustainability program to make Miami responsibly “green.” The mayor was accompanied by Elizabeth Plater-Zyberk, dean of architecture at the University of Miami. Plater-Zyberk, as a partner of the office of Duany Plater-Zyberk (DPZ), is responsible for the Miami 21 program. This program’s goal is to revise the city’s zoning codes and regulations so as to support higher density and greater sustainability. At the end of the ceremony, Michael Ross, FAIA, presented a proclamation from the AIA COD to Mayor Diaz, recognizing his continuous political commitment to Miami’s architecture and design.

To take advantage of the spectacular sunset from a water’s view perspective, the conference mobilized to Bayside Marketplace to board the *Nautical Queen* for a boat tour of Miami’s coast, led by history professor Paul George. Aboard this spacious boat, the [conference attendees](#) were privileged with panoramic views of the Miami area from Biscayne Bay and an inside look on downtown and Brickell Avenue from the Miami River. Aided by continuous refreshments, George offered an insightful overview of the downtown’s history and today’s urban riverfront renewal. During a short pause between Biscayne Bay and Government Cut, the attendees were presented with a distant view of some of the upcoming tour venues, including Ten Museum Park (TMP), a condominium tour by Oppenheim Studio, and the Carnival Center for the Performing Arts by Pelli Clarke Pelli Architects (PCPA). The boat then took everyone back to the dock at the conference hotel, [The Standard](#), passing by various man-made islands, where many of today’s celebrities have homes, a tradition that dates back to the days of Al Capone.



Friday, the second day of the conference, was dedicated to touring some of the most distinguished contemporary construction in Miami. The selected buildings encompassed the variety of typologies going up in the city today. The first stop was the recently completed [Federal Courthouse](#), by Arquitectonica, in downtown Miami. Laurinda Spear, a partner in Arquitectonica, led the tour with help from other staff members, offering an enthusiastic insight into the challenges and satisfactions of designing General Services Administration buildings in Miami. The courthouse is located at the termination point of the Miami Dade College main pedestrian walk and its iconic figure has redefined the downtown area. The building is the home of 16 court rooms, individually designed for each judge, and a large number of carefully detailed gathering spaces. The building is fully covered with Italian limestone of different tones, laid out in a rhythmic pattern that extends onto the floors and ceilings as well. Incorporated into the design of the courthouse is the work of more than 100 artists. Among them is Maya Lin, recent recipient of the AIA Twenty-five Year Award for the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, who designed the contoured east lawn of this building.

The second stop was the residential condominium project [TMP](#), the most prominent example of the new residential towers on Biscayne Bay north of downtown. Chad Oppenheim, codeveloper and architect of the building, led the tour. The building serves as an example of the impact architecture can have on the value of condominiums, even in a highly commoditized real estate market. TMP broke all records when it entered the market. In eight days, all units were sold at unprecedented levels, with prices more than 50 percent higher than those of neighboring buildings. This success is partially attributed to Oppenheim's sensibility and ability to capture the desired lifestyle in Miami through residential units uniquely open and connected to the local context. In addition, the building is the setting of 18 meticulously designed private pools, its own in-house spa, Clinique La Prairie, street-level restaurants, offices, and retail spaces.



The group next visited the [Espirito Santo Building](#), designed by Kohn Pedersen Fox. The project manager, Senior Associate Principal Peter Gross and Design Partner in Charge William Louie, FAIA, led the conference attendees through various spaces of this spectacular mixed-use tower. Located on Brickell Avenue, the building has become an icon in the city due to its unique and inviting carved-out parabolic west façade. The building houses the American headquarters of the Portuguese Espirito Santo Bank and the Conrad Hotel and Residences. Louie explained some of the extensive provisions creatively incorporated in order to withstand the potential floods and hurricanes of Miami. The building features a naturally ventilated atrium with a glass-bottomed pool that serves as a massive skylight for the building vehicular drop-off below, and a multilevel hotel atrium on the 25th floor with an intricately detailed curtain wall and louver system that overlooks Biscayne Bay.

The conference then convened for the annual AIA COD business meeting in the historic Freedom Tower on Biscayne Boulevard. Built in 1920 and formerly known as the Miami News Tower, the Freedom Tower became a refuge for Cuban immigrants in 1959. It served as a sort of Ellis Island and Statue of Liberty as the Immigration and Naturalization Services and Red Cross rented the building for many years and processed hundreds of thousands of these immigrants. Building developer David Martin of Terra Group welcomed the group with a brief history of the building and his personal association with it. Roberto Espejo pointed out the creativity of BFA seniors from the New World School of the Arts, who were enjoying their first exhibit in the newly renovated gallery space. Attendees then discussed the merits of many candidates for the AIA Gold Medal, the AIA Firm Award, the AIA Twenty-five Year Award, and Honorary Fellowship.

The fourth and final stop was the [Carnival Center of the Performing Arts](#), designed by PCPA. PCPA Senior Associate and local conference chair Roberto Espejo, leading the tour, passionately described the urban and acoustical significance of the building. The walk-through started at the Thompson Plaza for the Arts, located between the Ziff Ballet Opera House and the Knight Concert Hall. With a brick-and-mortar cost of around \$360 million, the Carnival Center is the largest private/public partnership in the United States. As an



urban design element, it is the pioneer and catalyst of the current wave of development in the immediate area. Together with theater planners Fisher Dachs and ARTEC Consultants guiding the acoustics, PCPA designed a 2,500 seat ballet/opera house with unprecedented theatrical capabilities, including one of the largest stages and highest fly lofts in the United States. On the opposite side of Biscayne Boulevard is a 2,200-seat concert hall with infinite acoustic flexibility and a warm, rich maple interior. This hall features a 128,000-pound movable acoustic canopy which can lower to adapt to the sound of a soloist, for example, or raise to best fit the sound of a large orchestra. In addition, 84 electronically operated doors weighing between five and 12 tons each surround the hall and can be opened up onto a huge reverberation chamber that can prolong the life of sound for up to nine seconds. By the end of the tour, it became clear why the building has become an international destination and a strong testament of the city's commitment to its cultural and artistic mission.

On Saturday, the third day of the conference, the attendees met at the Miami Art Museum (MAM) to participate in a discussion of the transformation of downtown Miami's Bicentennial Park. The distinguished panel of speakers included Terence Riley, chief curator of MAM; Gillian Thomas, president of the Miami Museum of Science (MMS); Alex Cooper, principal of Cooper Robertson; Timothy Schmand, of the Bay Front Trust; and Michael Spring, of the Miami Dade Cultural Affairs Council. Riley



started by introducing Cooper, who presented the park master plan for the newly-named Museum Park. Because the master plan includes the new sites for the MAM and MMS, Riley then continued with a talk that described the selection process used to choose the architect of the new MAM. The finalists included Mansilla y Tullon, Renzo Piano, Tadao Ando, and Zaha Hadid, among many other internationally renowned architects. The selection committee was looking for an architectural office with vast experience and a track record of innovation, which led them to award the Swiss architectural office of Herzog & de Meuron with the commission. Following Riley, Thomas introduced the conference attendees to the programmatic features of the future MMS, which include a planetarium, aquarium, and a science theater.

The two museums will sit next to each other in Museum Park and will complete the campus of cultural institutions of downtown Miami. Together with the American Airlines Arena and the Carnival Center of the Performing Arts, Museum Park promises to realize the city's waterfront renewal and create an acropolis of modern cultural institutions.



After a rich and insightful walking tour of Miami Beach's [Art Deco architecture](#), led by Allan Shuman of the University of Miami and other guides, the conference met for cocktails at the Wolfsonian. In the lobby of this magnificent museum that holds some most interesting artifacts of American and European origin, the attendees enjoyed wine and hors d'œuvres before starting the evening presentation. During a relaxed and sometimes comical presentation, the winners of the 2007 Ideas Competition were introduced and the legendary Members Slide Show was presented. Attendees showed their works to each other during a fast-

paced hour-long presentation. As a final bonus, Minneapolis Conference Chair Tim Carl of HGA made a brief slide presentation, giving a glimpse of the Part 2 of this exciting conference series. Registration for this conference is now open.

On Sunday morning, at the end of the conference, the attendees participated in a panel that included some of the most distinguished architects in the community. Plater-Zyberk moderated a panel that included Trenton Baughn of Zyscovich Architects, Chad Oppenheim of Oppenheim Architects, Jean-Francois LeJeune of the University of Miami, Roberto Espejo of PCPA, Bernardo Fort-Brescia of Arquitectonica, Terence Riley of the MAM, and Daniella Levine of Imagine Miami. During a breezy morning at Sardinia Ristorante the group covered a range of topics which emphasized the exciting prospects and the difficult challenges that Miami is facing today.

Oppenheim opened with a positive outlook of Miami as the city of opportunity and optimism, where there is a spirit of continuous possibility. He described the city as a place that is constantly looking forward and searching for ways of improvement; a dynamic place that makes everyone feel at home. Fort-Brescia introduced some of the challenges the city is encountering, such as the privatization of the waterfront and the resulting mobilization of the middle class farther away from downtown. He also noted that the city is reaching its natural boundaries and will be forced to become denser as the population grows.

The candid discussion continued with Baughn, involved in the new Master Plan for downtown Miami, who offered a more general perspective by noting that many cities in the United States are still struggling to promote their decaying downtowns with any type of development. He pointed out that Miami, on the other hand, is successfully on its way to renew its downtown, and although the concentration of residential development might be unbalanced, the area is evolving in the right direction. Riley used his opportunity to remind the conference that historically, density has been perceived as unhealthy and unsustainable, a notion which is still embedded in the minds of most Americans.

The conference took a more social approach with the anecdotes provided by Espejo, who explained that Miami is constantly receiving recurrent waves of immigration from Latin America. He points out that although most of these immigrants initially perceive Miami as a transient location, most immerse into the city and come to see it as their new hometown. Levine elaborated on Roberto's comments with many solutions her group is advocating in order to provide a platform in which to sponsor the integration of people from all economic status.

LeJeune closed the panel with a global perspective. He noted that the problems Miami is facing are similar to those from other towns such as Vancouver or Philadelphia, where developers, for example, are also dictating the growth of the city. He concluded by urging architects to become participants in the improvements of their hometowns. After various rounds of applause in appreciation of the panelists' time and energy, the AIA COD presented a prize to Plater-Zyberk and Espejo who distinguished themselves with their generous dedication to the AIA COD Conference in Miami.

See you in Minneapolis!

*Eduardo Quintero obtained a BArch from the University of Arkansas and an MArch from Cornell University. Since the beginning of 2007 he has been a project architect at Oppenheim Architecture & Design. Previous to that he worked with PCPA since 2001. He arrived in Miami in 2004 as project architect for PCPA's construction administration of the Knight Concert Hall of the Carnival Center of the Performing Arts. Quintero was invited to volunteer as scribe for this conference by his good friend and colleague Espejo, with whom he worked on the Carnival Center.*