

If it were up to city fathers, North Miami Beach would be development's next wave



At first glance, the two-story office building clad in reflective glass doesn't look like an obvious site for an 11-story Cambria Hotel & Suites.

Located at the corner of 163rd Street and NE 19th Avenue in North Miami Beach, its immediate neighbors include a gas station, a Burger King, La Granja restaurant, and Fulford United Methodist Church. Within a mile are aging strip malls with restaurants, shops, and Asian massage joints. There are other office buildings like this one -- and, like it, dating from the 1960s and 1970s -- with abundant parking, but not so many cars.

There are unexpected monuments, too -- a stone water fountain, a medieval Spanish monastery brought in pieces from Segovia and rebuilt, an anti-aircraft cannon, a replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Wall.

City on the Verge

Written by Erik Bojnansky, Senior Writer
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The neighborhood includes apartments, duplexes, and lots of single-family homes, plus warehouses, dive bars, and a satellite campus of Nova Southeastern University. There's a general sense of suburban quiet.

But Argentine-born developer Alejandro Araujo sees a city with soaring high-rises and apartment complexes, brand-new retail, pedestrian-friendly shopping areas, even a train station.

"The developer needs to imagine and focus and be a part of the future," he says. "If you wait until everything is done – well, of course you can do that -- but we're envisioning that this is the moment to really start doing something."

"Remember Wynwood five years ago?" he asks. "Could you imagine then what Wynwood is today? And what it's going to be two years from now?"

Indeed, Wynwood was a bleak industrial district before being colonized by art galleries. Today New York-based developers, with plans to build millions of square feet of condos and retail, are pouncing on the neighborhood. Wynwood is now included in an area that real estate analysts call Greater Downtown Miami, a place where developers are building 10,908 apartment and condo units, according to a recent report from the Miami Downtown Development Authority. Another 20,101 dwellings are on the drawing board.

However, Araujo and his partners, Choice Hotels International and Raoul Thomas's CGI Merchant Group, aren't building their hotel anywhere near there. Instead, he sees the next frontier.

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