

Be Amazed, Miami!

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
April 2015

We are part of a civic renaissance the likes of which we will never see again



orn and raised here, I ran as fast as possible from Miami in the early 1990s to escape what had become an aggressive poser town falling all over its post-1980s hungover self to show you how hip and sexy it was.

South Beach, the only place to find some semblance of cosmopolitan culture, was one big velvet-rope “F-you,” where a good meal was as rare as a reasonably priced mojito and a waiter who actually cared.

After 18 years out West in search of my artistic voice, I moved back here from San Francisco five years ago to look after my mom and raise two babies amid family.

The Bay Area, with its unparalleled natural beauty, exquisite food, and anything-goes creative attitude, was a hard place to leave. And I returned to Florida with no shortage of trepidation. But I could not be happier to be back because, as someone who’s been around since Kennedy was president, I can tell you that right now, *today*, is the most astounding time Miami has ever known.

In the 20-plus years since I left, our Frankenstein monster of bolted-together suburbs has been subsumed by an actual world-class metropolis, with a proper urban core characterized by high

Be Amazed, Miami!

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
April 2015

human population density and vast human-built features relative to the areas surrounding it. Our backyard, the Biscayne Corridor, is the epicenter of it all.

Few get to witness, in real time, such a rare evolution of their hometown. Los Angeles had this moment a hundred years ago. New York had it centuries ago. Our happy place is emerging as I type these words. Yet each day many of us walk the streets oblivious to our good fortune. And we even have the audacity to complain.

Sure, we have headaches, traffic is awful, and the nature of our culture still tends toward hot-blooded and ostentatious. But after so many contentious decades, the individual ethnic flavors of our one-of-a-kind soup have finally begun to integrate into a full-bodied ambrosia, bursting with *sabor*. Young, enthusiastic families are voting with their wallets to build richer lives in our neighborhoods. The Vagabond Motel just went from a fetid dump to the hottest spot in town. A prototype game-changing Whole Foods now serves our bustling city center. Ditto the PAMM and soon-to-be-opened science museum. And necessity is mothering inventions like Uber and All Aboard Florida, critical first steps on transport issues.

And it's not just soccer moms moving in. The taste-makers are flocking -- and doubling down. From Michy to Michael Schwartz, Zaha Hadid to Frank Gehry, everyone who's anyone seems to have a signature project going up in Miami right now.

As an artist in San Francisco, I was part of a dynamic creative scene that ranged from Burning Man to ballet. But it was mature, with a rhythm that had long been in place.

The art scene here is young and wonderfully naive, bubbling out of the sea like lava. Nowhere on earth will you find a more powerful concentration of mind-blowing street art.

If you are not amazed, you're either not paying attention or you're a fool. In the words of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel: "Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement..., to get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. Everything is phenomenal; everything is incredible; never treat life casually."

Be Amazed, Miami!

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
April 2015

New York is freezing its coconuts off while we fly kites in Morningside Park beneath azure skies. More cutting-edge art and scrumptious food exists within a five-mile radius than most cities have in their entirety. Our kids skip to the music of Spanish, French, Creole, and other exotic tongues, as pelicans, manatees, and dolphins cruise past.

For decades, Miami deserved its bad rap. We were a city in name only. Like everyone, I was born in the suburbs because suburbs were all we had. The mall was where we went for “culture” because there was no city center to bring us together. People got shot for cutting someone off in traffic.

Those days are gone. We’re each part of a civic renaissance the likes of which we will never see again.

Be stoked!

Someone recently sent me the following, which is floating around the Web. It suits Miami perfectly: “Be present. Make love. Make tea. Avoid small talk. Embrace conversation. Buy a plant. Water it. Make your bed. Make someone else’s bed. Have a smart mouth and quick wit. Run. Make art. Create. Swim in the ocean. Swim in the rain. Take chances. Ask questions. Makes mistakes. Learn. Know your worth. Love fiercely. Forgive quickly. Let go of what does not make you happy. Grow.”

I never thought I’d say this, but I am elated to raise my kids in Miami. Congratulations, people. You live in *the* place to be.

Stuart Sheldon is an artist, author, and Miami native. Follow his blog at stuartsheldon.com and [@stuart_sheldon](https://twitter.com/stuart_sheldon).

Be Amazed, Miami!

Written by Stuart Sheldon, BT Contributor
April 2015

Feedback: letters@biscaynetimes.com