

The logo for the Dade Heritage Trust, featuring the text "DADE HERITAGE TRUST" in a white serif font on a black rectangular background. The background of the entire page is a photograph of a white Gothic-style window with a repeating pointed-arch pattern, set against a blue textured wall. In the foreground, there are dark green palm fronds.

DADE
HERITAGE
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PRESERVATION TODAY

DISCOVERING
MIAMI MODERN

2011



Photo courtesy of Greg Clark

MiMo: Past, Present and Future

By Nina Korman & Teri D'Amico

In 1998 a big thing happened in a little house in Bay Harbor Islands: Interior designer Teri D'Amico and planner Randall Robinson coined the term "MiMo." It was a snappy acronym for the many varieties of Miami Modern architecture designed between 1945 and 1972. The duo had resolved to begin saving those stylish structures. And experience taught them that mounting a successful preservation effort meant eliciting in the public the very same passion that spurred the protection of Art Deco structures years before. A succinct, catchy word describing the midcentury buildings in question could only add to the cause.

Since the late 1990s, "MiMo" has grown from a mere word, inhabiting the lexicon of more than just South Floridians, into a full-blown movement which has taken hold of the popular imagination. The ar-

chitecture has been featured in numerous movies, television shows, and commercials. The architects, many once obscure or derided, are now celebrated figures, their work earning respect internationally. Preservation efforts too have progressed farther than anyone had ever imagined.

Demonstrations to save the Carillon and Bel Aire hotels in North Beach kicked things off in 1998 as did tours featuring signature structures. Rapidly gaining momentum, the movement added many advocates to its ranks. The Urban Arts Committee of Miami Beach was one of them, forming for the express purpose of showcasing eye-catching MiMo buildings via stunning photographs. Its "MiMo: Miami Modern Architecture, 1945-1972" and "Beyond the Box: Midcentury Architecture in Miami and New York" exhibitions in 2001 and 2002 respectively would feature the work of Arthur Marcus, Thomas Delbeck, and Robin Hill, spreading the wit, whimsy, and wow of MiMo

from the Sunshine State to the Big Apple.

The City of Miami Beach took the lead in preserving MiMo architecture in 2000 by designating the Collins Waterfront Historic District (22nd to 44th Street), which includes Roy France's Saxony Hotel (1948) and Melvin Grossman's Seville Hotel (1955). In 2004 the city moved further up the avenue, designating the North Beach Resort Historic District (63rd to 71st Street), home to Melvin Grossman's Deauville Hotel and Norman Giller's Carillon Hotel, both from 1957.

In 2008 and 2009, the Normandy Isles National Register Historic District and the North Shore National Register Historic District were both added to the National Register of Historic Places. And last year the city designated the Morris Lapidus/Mid 20th Century

Historic District (44th to 53rd Street), which includes the divas of MiMo, the Eden Roc and the Fontainebleau Hotels, among its stellar structures.

In 2004, proof positive that MiMo was indeed making a mark upon the public consciousness came in the way of a book when Chronicle publishers released the informative and richly illustrated *MiMo: Miami Modern Revealed*, written by Randall Robinson and Eric Nash.

By 2006, the City of Miami finally jumped on the MiMo bandwagon (or better said jumped in the tail-finned convertible!) by designating 27 blocks along Biscayne Boulevard (NE 50th to 77th Street) as the MiMo/Biscayne Boulevard Historic District. The area now houses the largest collection of MiMo motels. The Bianco Motel at 52nd Street, the district's first renovated motel, made its debut in January 2010.

The New Yorker at 65th Street soon followed. Despite the recession, the district is experiencing a renaissance with several new businesses opening, and it celebrates MiMo at an annual festival each March. Currently plans are in the works to extend the historic district up to 87th Street.

Last year the City of Miami made an exception to the 50-year-old rule and honored a pair of very young buildings with historic designation: the fabulous Bacardi Buildings on NE 21st Street and Biscayne Boulevard, designed by Enrique Gutierrez and Ignacio Carrera-Justiz in 1963 and 1973 respectively. One the most endangered buildings in the United States according to the National Trust for Historic Preservation, Key Biscayne's Miami Marine Stadium, designed by Hilario Candela in 1963, was also recognized by the city in 2009 thanks to efforts by Dade Heritage Trust.



Miami-Dade County has now joined the movement and recently designated three MiMo multi-family buildings in North Bay Village. Although the little Bay Harbor Islands house where the term MiMo originally was coined as well as many other gems have been demolished, the town still boasts the largest collection of MiMo buildings in the county. Hopefully its town council will begin to truly understand the importance of preserving the islands' quality of life and history in addition to honoring the vision of its founder Shepard Broad.

In the meantime, the county is exercising its jurisdiction in Bay Harbor Islands and is in the process of designating two multi-family buildings on the northern tip of the East Island, which were designed in the early 1950s by architect Charles McKirahan. One of them, the Bay Harbor Club, has been featured on the Showtime television series *Dexter*.

Historically designating structures of the recent past has also become a priority for the National Trust for Historic Preservation, which has a full-time staff member running its TrustModern initiative. This past February, the National Trust brought several donors to Miami for a whirlwind week-end of tours and programs, which featured plenty of MiMo buildings.

On the local level, Dade Heritage Trust continues to actively advocate for MiMo architecture. DHT organized the

stellar "Meet MiMo" Conference on Mid-Century Modern Architecture March 11-12, 2011 at the Eden Roc Hotel to attract national speakers and publicity, with a "Living Legends" luncheon to honor Mid-Century architects Alfred Browning Parker, Hilario Candela, Jan Hochstim and Enrique Gutierrez.

DHT is also helping to create the preservationists of the future. Under the auspices of DHT, students from William Jennings Bryan and Shenandoah Elementary schools were given tours of the architecture of Bay Harbor Islands earlier this year and were commissioned to create MiMo-inspired art. Their work will be displayed at DHT's annual meeting in late spring. Another young preservationist is Hannah Imberman, a local high school student and Girl Scout, who has been collecting personal testimonies documenting the history of the Miami Marine Stadium for a book titled *If Seats Could Talk*.

There is no question that the indelible term MiMo, coined a little more than a decade ago, has helped garner worldwide recognition for a very deserving set of uniquely Miami structures.

For all who have toiled so tirelessly toward this end, it is heartening to see that the preservation torch still burns bright and has been passed to a new generation.

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A DHT Trustee, Nina Korman is a Miami-based journalist specializing in design, architecture, and the performing arts. A licensed interior designer, Teri D'Amico is the founder of D'Amico Design Associates.

