

Tropic

LAUDERDALE LIVING & DESIGN

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CULTURE

Comes to Fort Lauderdale Once Again

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Tanned girls in teeny bikinis, sashaying along the sand. Buff boys surfing the white-capped waves. Rowdy college kids guzzling gallons of beer and demolishing motel rooms. For many, those images conjure a certain season – spring, when a young coed's fancy might turn to a vacation in sunny South Florida. Specifically in Fort Lauderdale, the former Spring Break capital of the country. Fueled by cutesy mid-century movies like *Where the Boys Are*, the city's reputation was once all about good clean fun. But after one too

Fort Lauderdale made a huge effort to build cultural institutions from the late 70s to the early 90s. That push is on again thanks to great patrons and some new, private/public partnerships.

many cases of alcohol poisoning and several freak accidents, the yearly festivities eventually descended from harmless teenage hijinks to sleazy debauchery.

By the mid-1980s Fort Lauderdale was determined to discard its increasingly sordid image. The city conducted a very conscious, well-publicized, campaign to discourage youngsters from spending their holi-

days in its midst. It worked – almost too well. And the formerly wild resort town became free to develop a mature identity and appeal to a more sophisticated audience.

What to do first? Embrace culture, of course. Music, art, literature would bring people in. Build a cultural campus of sorts in downtown, and they would come. At least that was the hope in late 1970s Fort Lauderdale which was emerging from a sustained period of economic hardship and grappling with ways to drive people to the city center. By the 1980s the city's attempts to re-brand itself as a bustling metropolis for discerning locals and tourists began in earnest. Public funds were utilized to commission internationally



Museum-goers can shop or have a chef's salad and a glass of wine at the new Books & Books on the main level of the city's Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale.

renowned modernist architects or their firms to create dazzling downtown structures such as the breathtakingly brutalist Broward County Main Library (1984, Marcel Breuer Associates) and the pristine, serene Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale (1986, Edward Larrabee Barnes). In the early 1990s, a few blocks west on the New River, the eye-catching Broward Center for the Performing Arts (1991, Benjamin Thompson Associates) rose and the Museum of Discovery and Science (1992, Verner Johnson) followed, both anchoring what has been dubbed the Arts & Science District.

Crafting a more substantial skyline wasn't easy but it did draw a new, appreciative audience. Folks who had never set foot in Downtown Fort Lauderdale flocked there to see shows (approximately 700,000 still fill the Broward Center each year), attend concerts, or even catch the latest IMAX 3-D movie. Developing the heart of the city as cultural destination was all well and good, yet for nearly a decade-and-a-half, between 1992 and 2006, not much else was built to further the cause. And whether a stubborn electorate unwilling to put forth needed tax dollars, frugal non-profits, stingy philanthropists or perhaps unmotivated politicians, who was at fault wasn't entirely clear.

Laying blame is a waste of time, however, in the Fort Lauderdale of 2011. Culture is making a comeback in a big way. That much is evident on the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale's very white exterior walls, which have been suddenly strategically splashed with color. To honor the 25th anniversary of the sublime structure, the museum invited the artists Jen Stark, Arturo Herrera, and Roberto Behar & Rosario Marquardt to contribute a mural to the facade. The bright, striking paintings energize the blank white walls, celebrating the building as well as connecting it to its northern neighbor, the Broward County Main Library which boasts a colorful ceramic tile mural done by Ivan Chermayeff in 1984.

Perched on the museum's second floor terrace on a bright Sunday afternoon, executive director Irvin M. Lippman gazes west across Andrews Avenue at a former arcade slated to house the museum's new art school. "It's tying the four corners together," he calmly explains of the project. Blockbuster exhibitions are one thing to unite people. And since the soft-spoken Lippman signed on in 2003, there have been many – Vatican treasures, King Tut relics, Princess Diana memorabilia. But in his mind, the museum should extend well beyond its 76,000-square foot building, becoming "a part of the fabric of daily life," as architect Ed-

ward Larrabee Barnes once described as the role of museums. Hence the new murals; the re-imagined plaza and staircase by local architect Margi Glavovic Nothard and the landscape team from the firm EDSA; and the partnership with Nova Southeastern University, an alliance formed in 2008 which has provided

While the Museum of Art has had many blockbuster exhibitions – Vatican Treasures, King Tut – executive director Irvin Lippman envisions a campus model, extending the Museum's reach far beyond the Museum's physical walls.

a welcome financial boost and access to countless resources. This civic component is key to health and growth notes Lippman: "Making people feel as if they're a part of a community is the museum's role to an extent. You can't be passive."

A proactive stance is paramount as well when it comes to paying for it all. The museum receives funds mainly through private philanthropy and some

county-based and national grants. Nova Southeastern's development department has been very helpful as well says Lippman. Surprisingly, though, the City of Fort Lauderdale, after which the institution is named, provides no funds to the museum. "We have to earn our keep," Lippman smiles.

Across town in Davie, the architect Margi Glavovic Nothard knows the difficulties an institution can face in staying afloat financially and otherwise. A

A private/public partnership, Young At Art is the vision of one woman, Mindy Shrago, an artist herself who established a small children's museum in a shopping mall in 1989 and has been the guiding force ever since.

project she has been involved with on and off for the past ten years will finally come to fruition this spring. That is when the \$20-million Young at Art Museum/Broward County Library will debut. A private/public partnership, it is the vision of one woman, Mindy Shrago, an artist herself who established a small children's museum in a shopping mall in 1989 and has been the guiding force ever since. "This has been my life's journey," Shrago says, "A labor of love."

Despite its name, the sprawling 55,000-square foot Young at Art is not just for kids. One-fifth of the space will be devoted to a branch of the Broward County Library, for which the county is providing funds. The rest of the building will be funded privately plus accommodate art classes aimed toward kids and adults, exhibition space, a recording studio, a dark-room, gift shop, café, and studio space. Anything to stoke creativity in just about anyone.

The environmentally conscious new building Nothard designed to house the museum/library is as inspiring as the organization's mission. Viewed from I-595 and Flamingo Road, the sharply angular structure resembles a giant butterfly-roofed home from Palm Springs, California, or what could be a spaceship docking site. Firmly rooted on its undulating landscape, it manages to feel both solid and ethereal thanks to Nothard's whimsical sense of color, precise use of glass and manipulation of natural light.

"This project has been a privilege and an opportu-

nity for all of us," says Nothard. "It's transformational on so many levels to participate in a cultural paradigm shift."

Young at Art is by no means Nothard's only large-scale project. For several years, she has been the go-to architect for complex civic or artsy endeavors. A few miles south in Hollywood, she designed the critically acclaimed ArtsPark in Young Circle (another 10-year project). She's creating a unique affordable housing project called Kennedy Homes on Broward Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale. A few blocks south is the Museum of Art, where she is still working her magic on the plaza, and a couple of blocks north is the Girls' Club Collection, which she designed in 2006.

At night the Girls' Club building glows, bathed in opaque white light. During the day, the most arresting feature is a pair of angular rusty doors. Behind them are exhibition space on one side and the studio of Francie Bishop Good on the other. Good, a diminutive, spirited brunette, is a hybrid who admittedly "wears many hats." A photographer, collector, fundraiser, philanthropist and board member of museums and organizations, she and her husband, David Horvitz, established Girls' Club in 2006 as an educational and scholarly fa-



**Rendering from Glavovic Studio
of the new Young At Art Museum/
Broward County Library soon to
open just off I 595.**



The Girl's Club building on NE 2nd Street has become a de facto landmark for the Arts on the edge of Flagler Village.

cility that highlights women's contributions to contemporary art.

A resident of Fort Lauderdale since 1980, Good has witnessed the changes in the local art scene and views part of her role as "helping pull people together, to garner enthusiasm for the arts." During the four days of Art Basel

"Art makes a society better," Girl's Club co-founder Francie Bishop Good says. "And one of the nice things about being an artist means you don't have to follow the rules!"

Miami Beach, Girls' Club was included on the official guide to private collections and attendees were taken there by bus to see the latest show. However, most of the year, even with Girls' Club's thought-provoking workshops, lectures, and exhibitions, Good admits it can be a battle to get people through those rusty doors. Good, though, remains undeterred. She will be one of nine or so artists who will open their studios the first Saturday in February when inhabitants of the Third Avenue Art District throw their huge annual tour. And although she dubs

making art "a lonely sport," it continues to be a top priority for Good, as does promoting the work of other women artists and educating the public in her adopted hometown of Fort Lauderdale.

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Crib Notes: Culture in Greater Fort Lauderdale

Broward Center for the Performing Arts

This world-class performing arts center has been center stage for great performances in Fort Lauderdale for close to two decades in a handsome building designed by Benjamin Thompson Associates. That center is now embarking on a whopping \$45,000,000 expansion and renovation of the 2,700 seat venue, adding an arts education center and two-story pavillion and terraces connecting the Center with the Riverwalk. *Broward Center for the Performing Arts, 201 SW 5th Avenue, Fort Lauderdale*

Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale

At 76,000 square feet, the Museum of Art has recently joined forces with Nova Southeastern University and is actively expanding programs through its AutoNation Academy of Art and Design. The past year has seen the revitalization of its Plaza fronting on Las Olas as well as the welcome addition of Books & Books bookshop and café in its main lobby. *Museum of Art | Fort Lauderdale, 1 East Las Olas Blvd., Fort Lauderdale*

Young At Art

Soon to open in a 55,000 square foot LEED gold certified, state-of-the-art facility in Davie, this studio/school/library/museum will be like nothing else in the United States. Although open to all ages, its primary mission is to promote engagement with the arts, placing "children of all ages on pathways towards success in school and life." *Young At Art, 11584 W. State Road 84, Davie*

Girl's Club Collection

A private foundation established by Francie Bishop Good and David Horvitz, the Girl's Club houses exhibitions and educational programming, all with the goal of nurturing the careers of female artists and serving as a resource for scholars and curators. Emphasis is placed on exposing the work of local artists to a broader audience. *Girl's Club, 117 NE 2nd Street, Fort Lauderdale*