



NOW YOU SEE IT ...

Miami, the Magic City, is becoming known for its modern art and culture. **Judith Ritter** visits some of its quirkiest neighbourhoods.

Despite more hurricanes than usual last season and a run of home foreclosures, Miami, in Florida, continues to live up to its nickname: the Magic City. This effervescent holiday destination in the southern United States seems resilient to climate change and economic woes, and a vibrant new arts scene – as well as all the restaurants, clubs and events that go with it – is bolstering that reputation.

An off-shoot of Art Basel, the international art fair, was adopted by Miami in 2006. Since then, the event's patrons, a host of hip hangers-on and a font of new money from Latin America's ultra rich have made the city a popular destination for well-heeled sophisticates. The best way to experience it is by visiting some of the quirkiest neighbourhoods.

"This is the epicentre of the visual world right now," says Haitian painter Edouard Duval Carrie, grinning and waving his arm in a broad arch at the city below. It is not clear whether he is talking about his studio – a clutter of finished and unfinished canvases rich with sun-drenched colour and filled with scenes both boisterous and mystical – or the area in which it is located: Little Haiti, home to the only Haitian

cultural centre in the country. Situated on the northern edge of the city's sleek Design District, Little Haiti is expanding and promises a warm welcome to artists and art aficionados.

Hop on a "tap-tap", a shared taxi, along Northeast 2nd Avenue up to Little Haiti and explore its bookshops and music stores, such as Sunny's Sounds, which has the latest French-Caribbean hits, and the trend-setting Haitian Cultural Arts Alliance. For a street party, keep an eye out for artists opening their studio doors to the public, while for live events, head to the Little Haiti Cultural Complex.

The area is home to a growing number of small cafes and restaurants, such as Chez le Bebe, where, according to customer Carrie, you'll find not only great conversation but also great conch, goat stew and black beans with rice.

A neighbouring area is also being revitalised, according to long-time resident and art patron Dindy Yokel de Tellez. "Miami today is like [New York's] SoHo was in the 80s," she explains as she drives towards Wynwood.

Among rows of undistinguished cement-front

warehouses, Wynwood's many refurbished industrial buildings contain trend-setting galleries such as Locust Projects, their stark white interiors filled with alternative art and abuzz with international collectors scouting for the next big thing.

"The art market is exploding here," explains Perry Milou, who recently relocated his gallery to Wynwood from Philadelphia. "It's wide open and there's a feeling anyone can play." And play is what visitors to Wynwood can do on the second Saturday of every month, when galleries stay open late and there's a street-party atmosphere.

Anyone looking to round out a gallery visit with good food and lively conversation would do well to head for the Buena Vista Bistro. Here, thanks to Frenchman Claude Postel, there's the ambience of a Parisian restaurant offering "good wine that's affordable", and the food is magnifique. Also recommended are the Lost and Found Saloon, an eatery with a cowboy vibe, and Circa 28, where decor of velvet chairs and ornate chandeliers attracts a boho-chic crowd of collectors and artists, who schmooze and dance beneath a disco ball.

Miami's downtown is also changing. It has long

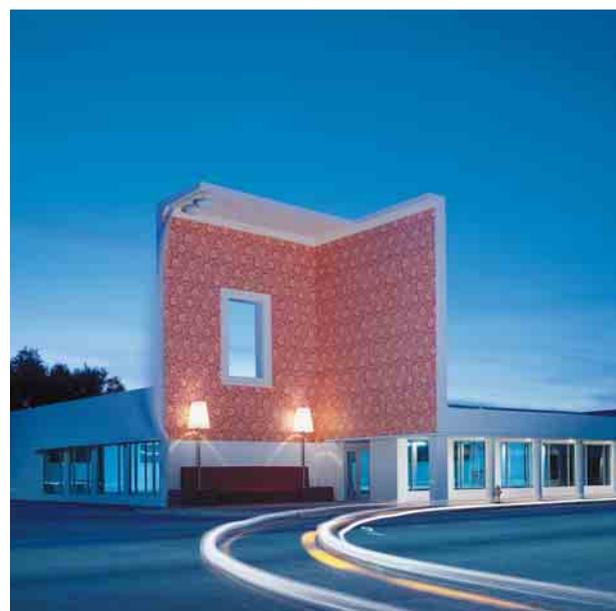


Clockwise from above: the Miami skyline reflected in Biscayne Bay; painter Edouard Duval Carrie; his neighbourhood: Little Haiti; the Design District's Living Room; owner and chef of the Buena Vista Bistro, Claude Postel.

been a high-rise hub of Latin American banking but, until recently, and with the exception of Tobacco Road – a live-music venue that has been drawing crowds since 1912 – it was a no-go (or why go?) district at night. Now, sleek clubs and chic restaurants are staking their claim. Next to Tobacco Road is the stylish seafood restaurant River Oyster while down the road, Manny's Steakhouse, an upscale "meatery", is doing a roaring trade.

Who's behind this rebirth? Architect Cesar Pelli. Renowned for creating Hong Kong's Two IFC and Malaysia's Petronas Towers, Pelli recently worked his magic in Miami. He designed the grand Adrienne Arsht Centre, the 2006 opening of which kickstarted the renaissance now underway in the heart of the city. Performances at the centre, which range from opera to hip hop, are a big draw and a host of late-night venues have sprung up to help audiences round out an evening at the Arsht. Not to be missed are the edgy White Room and Parkwest Nightclub.

Sure, South Beach bacchanalia still has its charm but Miami is more than that – it is an international city of art and culture.



Getting there Cathay Pacific (www.cathaypacific.com) has a code-share arrangement with American Airlines (www.aa.com), meaning you can fly from Hong Kong to Miami with a connection in either New York or Los Angeles on a single ticket.