

FLORIDA'S WEST COAST COLLECTION 2017 | PUBLISHED BY SRQ MEDIA

MODERN HOME

Modern Menagerie

MODERN SHOW
FESTIVAL CURATES
HOMES, FURNITURE
AND DESIGN

Brand New Bay

FORMER MAYOR OF
MIAMI MANNY DIAZ
ON REVITALIZING
THE BAYFRONT

PUBLISHED WORK FROM

NWC Construction
Del Vescovo Design Group
Stofft Cooney Architects
Murray Homes



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From the homes of Bird Key to the streets of Downtown Sarasota, the 2017 Modern Show celebrates the art and architecture of the Gulf Coast. It's a warm and sunny Saturday morning in Sarasota and the usually sleepy street on Bird Key bustles with activity, parked cars lining the road as men and women from across the region descend upon one house in particular—a newly remodeled home designed by architect Guy Peterson and built by Sarasota contractor Michael K. Walker.

The Moo Dams

Back in 1965, the Moo Dams (the Moo Dams, the Moo Dams, the Moo Dams) were built at the Modern Show. Pictured left to right: Dean Peterson, David Lopez, David Hesse, Jerry Gordon, Maria Hesse, Jay Hesse, Jay Hesse and Jay Hesse.

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Manny Diaz, the mayor of Miami from 2001 through 2009, led the city through exciting changes, including turning old parks into public treasures. He came to town this spring to speak at events organized by the Center for Architecture Sarasota, and he sat down exclusively with *S&O* to share how Miami's experiences could guide this community forward.

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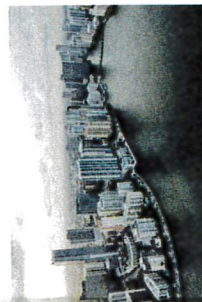
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SHOWN ABOVE FIRM // Seagull Home by Murray Homes, photo by Rym Gamma Photography.

BRAND NEW BAY

Former Miami Mayor Manny Diaz says Sarasota deserves a better Bayfront. **WRITERS** // Axel Ivantier and Jacob Digles



Evolving a downtown waterfront into a cultural asset brings a daunting task. As Sarasota leaders look toward the future of the Bayfront, they can see the work of other communities who have tackled such tasks before. Manny Diaz, the mayor of Miami from 2001 through 2009, led the city through exciting changes, including turning aging parks into public treasures. He came to town this spring to speak at events organized by the Center for Architecture Sarasota, and he sat down exclusively with SFQ to share how Miami's experiences could guide this community forward.

As this community develops and executes a new vision for the Bayfront, how should leaders balance the competing desires for public park space versus the development of cultural resources? You can do both. A lot of the great cultural institutions like museums are located in public space, with green space, in parks around the world. We did that ourselves; we put our museum of art [Perez Art Museum Miami] and our museum of science [Frost Science Museum] on the waterfront. But first and foremost, the guiding principal has to be that there is public use. The public owns the Bay and should be entitled to enjoy it. Nature is one of those things we can enjoy for free, so it's a great equalizer. It's a very important process for the City of Sarasota. I almost fell out of the car yesterday when we drove up and saw a sea of surface parking on your waterfront. Seriously? That's not where it belongs. You can activate that area or choose not to activate it, but clearly it should be green space. You want to be able to see a show and walk around, and take your family or significant other, presumably in that green area, but also on what should be a Baywalk that connects the entire Bay. There is some portion of that there now. You want to just enjoy it with your family, maybe have people selling ice cream. The condition you have now is, you drive in, you go see your show and you get back in your car and go wherever in suburbia or to Siesta Key. It should be more than that.

Like Miami, Sarasota faces the threat of sea level rise on its waterfront. How does a city need to accommodate for that in its urban planning? Reduce your carbon footprint. All of us collectively can help at least slow down

the process if we do a better job getting cars off the road and having green, energy-efficient buildings. I'm not sure if you are required to have those here. We are [in Miami]. On the other side of the equation, start developing a different framework of dealing with the traditional gray infrastructure, like pipes. Every infrastructure project should have, as a check-the-box thing, to address sea level rise.

There's been a push-and-pull in Sarasota between business leaders who want a conference center on the Bayfront and neighborhoods that don't want vertical construction. How do you bring these parties together? I'm not a fan of doing a convention center on the Bay. It might be good for convention-goers but not the people who live here. When I'm in Sarasota for a convention, I'm here for the weekend and then leave. You live here 365 days a year. You should have much higher weight in what happens on the waterfront than me. I would caution those in the business community to do a lot of research on convention centers. We went through the same back-and-forth when we had an old convention center on our waterfront. We talked about retrofitting it and opted not to. It did not make any business sense. The convention world has gotten highly competitive. There are some threshold numbers in terms of square footage and amenities to attract the conventions you want. I'm not talking about garage sale kind of things—that's not going to be profitable. You want the American Institute of Architects. You want the American Medical Association. The big guns. In order to do that, if you are not above 700,000 or 1 million square feet, with a convention center hotel connected to the center, you are not able to compete.

So would Sarasota be better off with simply green space?

Sometimes we make a mistake when we talk about green space being to the extreme, where a park should only have grass, a few trees and a couple of benches. What tends to happen is you have people using the park who you don't want using the park, just because it's empty. You need something like, I don't know, an ice cream kiosk, something that means you are going to do more than sit on the bench and look at the water. You can also get a cone, look around, do stuff. That's where you want your cultural venues. That's where we have our performing arts centers, with opera and ballet in one building and a symphony in another building. We have other smaller venues in the downtown area. That's where you want most of your cultural venues, in the urban core. And it's a huge economic impact for the urban core. There is no greater stimulus in my opinion than an investment in the arts. Beyond that, it's important to have things like outdoor concerts, Shakespeare in the park or even just movies in the park—active uses of the park where people do something besides sit on a bench. Any kind of programming that can be done around the waterfront, around the arts, is great. It's almost like that with the Van Wezel, but—I stress—you don't want people just going there to see Shakespeare in the park and then leave. You want to create something that keeps them there.

How important is having strong leadership at the helm of a city?

It is extremely difficult to get things like this done without a strong mayor/leader at the top. I don't mean to pick on anyone in particular, but it is not in the nature of the job for the city manager. You have five commissioners who select a mayor of the year here. Not that it can't be done—anything is possible—but that system is not conducive to the long-term planning and execution of a plan like this. I pissed off a lot of people because I pushed programs through. When we put the museums at our park, the usual cast of characters who show up at City Hall to complain about everything came to complain we shouldn't be putting concrete in a park. I reminded them that the last time I was at Central Park, I also visited The Met. It added to the activation of the park, and just got it done. The structure you have here makes it very difficult for someone to say, 'I've heard everybody but I don't care what they have to say. I'm just going to get it done, and I'm going to stake my political will and political reputation.' The bureaucracy is risk-averse to begin with. When I got elected, the city manager and top staff were all well-meaning, good, honest people doing their job, but their perspective, having been city employees 20 or 30 years, was to keep the trains running. They were in shock when I expressed my displeasure. To them, the lights were working, the video presentation works, we cleaned up the streets and whatever consultant called to complain, we addressed the complaint. Why aren't you happy? Well, anybody can do that. You don't need me for that. I want to make better, faster, sleeker, intelligent trains.

How did you change that culture?

Little by little. I brought in private sector people who I convinced to give me a couple years of public service, then go back and make lots of money. A lot of them did. The attitude went from 'No, I can't do it' or 'We'll look into it' to 'Hell yeah, we can.' That started to permeate around the entire organization. You have to have some wins. You tell people we set this goal, then you go back and say, see, I told you we could do it. Then they start believing in themselves. If you are a mayor, and you presumably are doing it for the right reason, which is to get things done, not build some kind of career, then risk doesn't matter. My downside is I don't get re-elected and I go back to practicing law in my law firm and making lots of money, like I was doing before I decided to do this crazy thing. That's a downside I can live with. In the meantime, we're going to do the right thing and push this city forward. **MH**

Photo of Manny Diaz by Wyatt Kashiwan, opposite page.

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