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Miami is America's good-time town. This pincushion of condominium towers used to be the preserve of sun-seeking retirees from the north and Latin American immigrants from the south. But, galvanised by the Art Basel Miami Beach art fair, the city is gaining a reputation as a place of culture, and is now vaunting its museums as much as its hotels and nightclubs. So it only makes sense that it would launch a design fair.

MIAMI

Miami is the first destination on the international design circuit to treat design like art

right the Inflatable Villa, by Miami architect Luis Pons
below Aqua, Craig Robins' latest "New Urbanist" development
below right the Moore Building, in the Design District
main pictures and far right scenes from Miami Beach



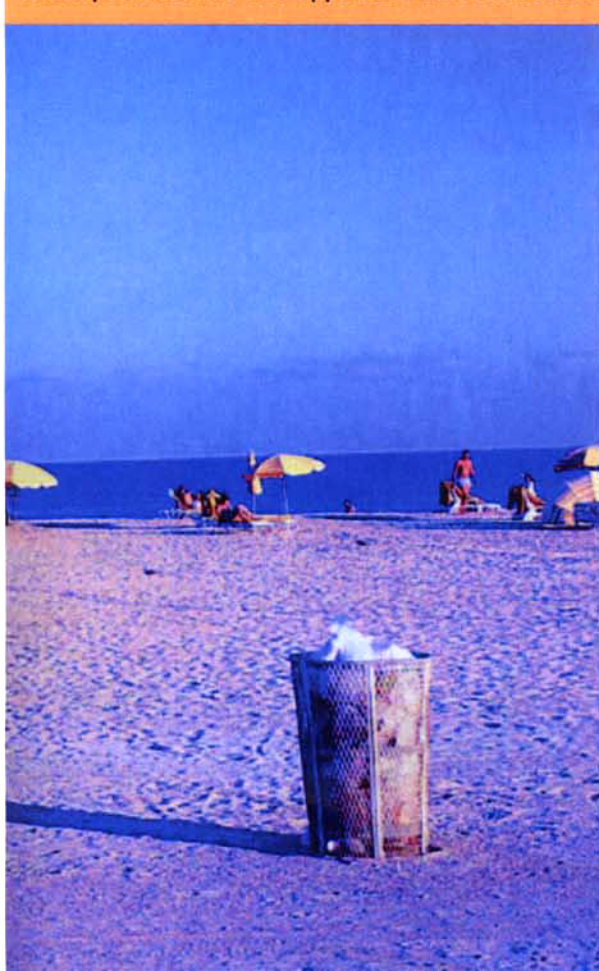
— selling it to connoisseurs, not consumers.



The impetus for this new approach comes from Miami's art fair. In the first week of December

the art world decamps to the city for Art Basel Miami Beach. Only in its fourth year, this huge event was attended by more than 200 galleries exhibiting an estimated \$2 billion worth of art, and attracting 1,000 journalists and five satellite fairs for less established galleries. But this year there was a design parasite, called design.05 Miami. By emulating the Art Basel model, design.05 has distinguished itself from the growing number of design fairs taking place in cities all over the world.

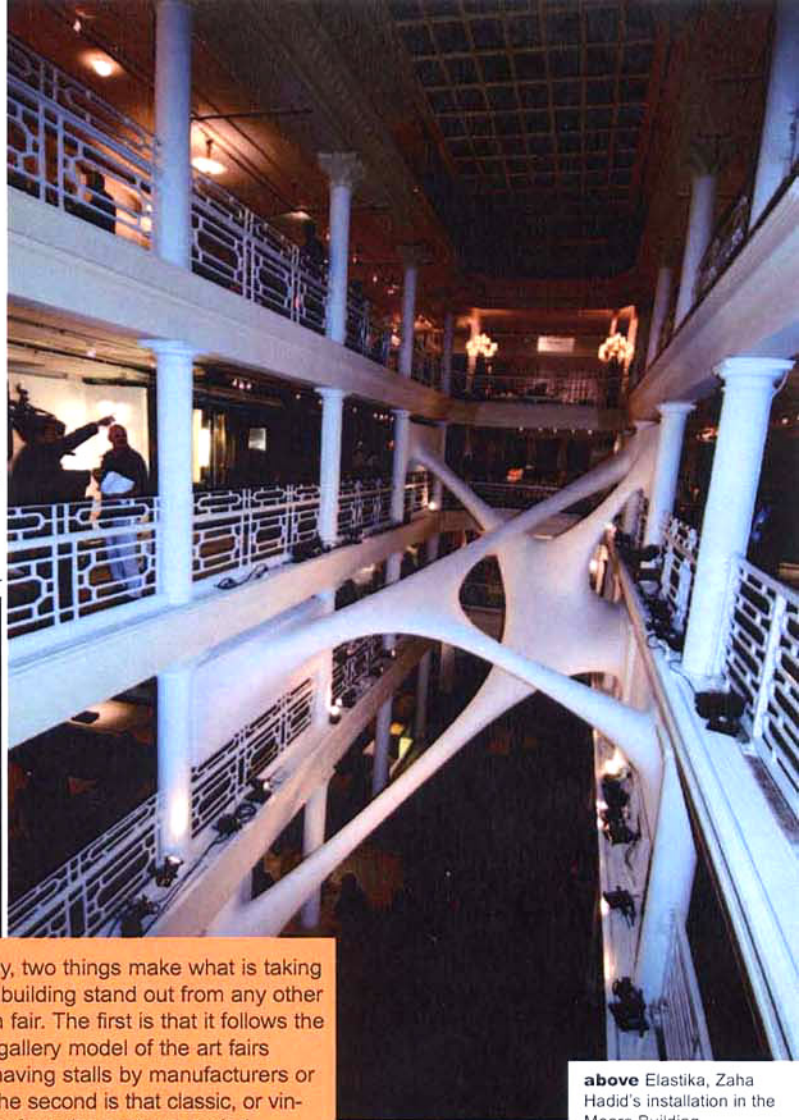
Arguably, the reason why Art Basel Miami Beach is such a success is because of the city's tropical appeal to dealers, buyers and art-world apparatchiks wanting a break from their wintry European and northern American cities. The focus of their attention is South Beach, the glamorous art deco strip of the Miami Beach peninsula that sits off the mainland, away from downtown Miami. Here, the art crowd can saunter one block from their fashionable hotels on Collins Avenue to the Convention Center on Washington Avenue and then two blocks back to the beach. That sliver is about as much of Miami as many of them know.





above Ron Arad's aluminium Blo-Void 3, 2005

below Materialised Sketch series, designed by Front, 2005. The pieces were drawn in the air with a motion sensor



above Elastika, Zaha Hadid's installation in the Moore Building

below Ettore Sottsass' desk, Cabinet 59, 2005



Design.05 is a good ten-minute drive across one of the causeways, in the Design District. Miami has to be one of the few cities in the world with a "design district" - not even Rotterdam, Milan or London have one - and yet the city is not especially known for designers or manufacturers. This warehouse-rich former antiques district is in the grip of regeneration, an aspiring Clerkenwell or Tribeca. Its revival has been spearheaded by Miami's most prominent developer, Craig Robins, who owns a significant portion of the Design District's 18 blocks.

"Art Basel might be the most interesting cultural happening in the United States right now," says Robins. "It has helped redefine Miami as a great city of cultural substance. Not only is it a town to come and have fun in but it's a place where you can learn and be stimulated creatively."

Robins has a clear vested interest in the success of this latest cultural venture, design.05, since it will drive up the value of the area he owns so much of. In fact, the fair takes place in his headquarters, a 1920s warehouse called the Moore Building. One of the building's attractions during the fair - and a major draw for the art crowd - is a massive polystyrene installation by Zaha Hadid that bridges the atrium between the four floors like strings of chewing gum. Around this centrepiece, 15 leading design galleries, invited chiefly from London, Paris and New York (although one is from Shanghai), are exhibiting - and selling - some of their finest furniture.

Straight away, two things make what is taking place in this building stand out from any other major design fair. The first is that it follows the commercial gallery model of the art fairs rather than having stalls by manufacturers or designers. The second is that classic, or vintage, furniture from the post-war period onwards is for sale next to contemporary items. The work of Jean Prouvé and Charlotte Perriand is especially well represented, supported by pieces by other modernists from Le Corbusier to Donald Judd. But there were also new works, notably by Ron Arad, Ettore Sottsass and the Swedish design group, Front. "It's a shift from the traditional trade show and the way design has been presented up until now," says Ambra Medda, who, with her partner Amy Lau, organized design.05. "We wanted to be more exclusive, invitation only," explains Lau. "And we wanted to ask who we thought were the best dealers in the world and to give them a lot of space so they could cultivate an environment and curate their shows."

The result is that **this is more of a collector's fair, certainly not an event to come and buy in bulk or to find the most ergonomic task**

chair. "It's definitely geared to a connoisseur of design, a person who has a level of sophistication and appreciation," says Lau. The model adopted by design.05 is a lucrative one for the exhibiting galleries.

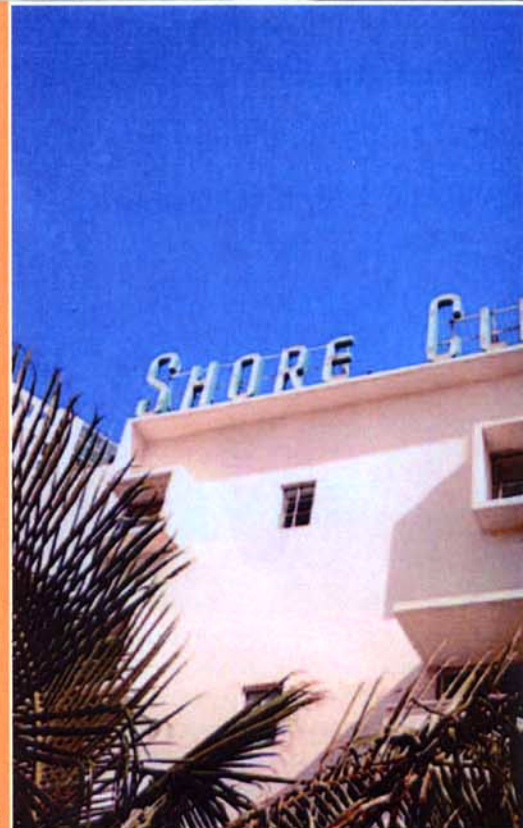


Given the financial precedent set by the Art Basel fair, where multi-million dollar works were selling to both private collectors and museums, it didn't seem unreasonable for rare design pieces to be selling at hundreds of thousands of dollars. "I think everyone who was exhibiting did very well," says Barry Friedman, whose gallery, Barry Friedman Ltd., was showing the most contemporary work. "We sold several pieces at six figures each." While design.05 may be geared to wealthy connoisseurs, the period pieces give the event a historical dimension much like a museum's. It is a fair where people can come and learn about design history. "It makes you see design as much more in a continuum," says San Francisco-based product designer Yves Behar, who was exhibiting a chandelier for Swarovski in a separate space. "There are trends and recurring themes - it's a conversation that makes design look very alive." Like Art Basel, design.05 is surrounded by satellite events and exhibitions in the Design District. Ron Arad had his own installation around the corner in which a series of one-off mirrored tables sprawled across the floor and up the walls. Around another corner, New York retailer Murray Moss was presenting pieces from the Moss Gallery, including work by Gaetano Pesce, the Campana brothers and Dutch designer Marten Baas.

Here, in the heart of what

Moss calls "the design ghetto", daily-panel discussions took place, one of which was titled Crashing the Art Party

if the title took a humorous approach to the fair's parasitical status, the panel was rather more defensive about it. At Moss' suggestion that people might merely be buying furniture that goes with the art they bought across town, Gaetano Pesce and MoMA's Terry Riley - who has built himself a house in the Design District-argued determinedly that there was no point making a distinction anymore between art and design, not least because their methods are overlapping. Yet there was little need to justify design.05's presence in Miami. Aside from it making perfect business sense to draw on the city's momentarily inflated population of buyers and culturati, the fair has established what will almost certainly become a popular model of design exhibition: commercial and exclusive yet accessible and educational, a fair for collectors and enthusiasts not just design world professionals or bulk buyers. Miami may not yet be the year-round cultural capital that it aspires to be, but as a lifestyle capital it is self-assured. And the irony is that it took a brash, style-conscious beach town to demonstrate how to run a design fair that is about quality rather than just novelty.



top left chairs by the Campana brothers at the Moss Gallery show
top right furniture by Prouvé and Perriand at the Galerie Patrick Seguin stall
above an art deco hotel on Collins Avenue
left Ron Arad's installation of mirrored tables, Paved With Good Intentions