

One Big House, Many Different Lives

Once a condemned architectural gem with a storied past, The Beauty Temple is now a storybook oasis

By Terence Cantarella
BT Contributor

It was a water-pumping station, a house of music, a private residence, maybe a church, a chop shop, flop house, meeting place for mystics, and finally a beauty salon. For decades the grotto-like structure at 5808 NE 4th Ct. in Miami's Upper Eastside was known simply as the Lemon City Pump House. Named for the citrus-rich agricultural community that once flourished nearby, the coral-rock building looked, to most locals, like a stone chapel. But beyond its sweeping entryway arches and heavy wooden doors sprung a once-rich supply of pure drinking water.

Built in 1923 by developer James H. Nunnally, the pump house originally concealed a 38-horsepower engine and pump that drew water from two wells sunk deep into the Biscayne Aquifer. An 8000-gallon storage tank created enough pressure to pipe the water across Biscayne Boulevard to residents of the newly constructed development of Bay Shore (later renamed Morningside).

The Water Plant at Bay Shore, as it was called in a 1920s sales brochure, provided fresh tap water at a time when many U.S. homes still had none. Yet despite its functionality and modern trappings, the pump house soon grew idle.

Two years after its construction, the area of Bay Shore was annexed by the City of Miami and, according to Miami-Dade College history professor Paul George, the house became redundant: "When Bay Shore was a development outside of city limits, the developer had to assure people he could provide water.



The old pump house has been fully restored in its new life as a salon.



A very large backyard is dominated by water features.

Photos courtesy of Sabrina Deca

But once it joined the City of Miami, the city picked up the task."

Defunct and seemingly forgotten, the pump house's historical record grows dark for the next half a century. Hobos are said to have used the place as a crash pad during the 1930s. Local pianist Marvin Maher converted the building into a private home at some point and gave music lessons there for many years. But other than vague recollections and old title deeds, information on the period from 1925 to 1975 is hard to come by. Historical photos, too, seem to have been lost to time.

In the spring of 1976, the story picks up on a much darker note when accused murderer Robert Brent Bowman moved from Ohio to Miami and mortgaged the place for \$50,000. The charismatic, 40-year-old handbag manufacturer brought with him his wife, young

daughter, and a terrible secret.

According to published reports, Bowman allegedly had abducted a 14-year-old schoolgirl in Toledo nine years earlier. He shackled her to a wall in his basement, sexually assaulted her, and strangled her to death. Police found her body in a field several days later.

It would take 40 years and new DNA technology to link Bowman to the killing and finally make an arrest. He's currently awaiting trial in an Ohio jail. His days at the pump house, however, have left some unanswered questions.

Shortly after moving into the home, Bowman began to go through profound spiritual changes. He used LSD, slept inside a glass pyramid, and talked about being spiritually connected to John the Baptist. Around the same time, ads began to appear in local newspapers announcing meetings at the pump house, hosted

by an outfit called Cornucopia Centers. The meetings explored things like "multi-sense awakening" and "cosmic rites."

Veteran South Florida journalist Dan Christensen, writing for the *Miami News* in 1988, reported that police finally questioned Bowman in 1982 about the Toledo killing. Bowman didn't admit to the murder, but hinted that *another* girl's body was buried somewhere on the pump house grounds. Skepticism, money, and departmental restructuring, according to Christensen's article, kept Miami police from conducting a search.

Whatever the case, ownership of the pump house passed to the Veterans' Administration in 1978 after Bowman, who was a military vet, defaulted on his VA-backed mortgage. A doctor snapped up the place for just \$10,000 in 1980 and

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Big Ideas

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sporting venue." The Sports Haven scenario even includes a floor plan: a swimming pool on the roof, a VIP sports bar on the tenth floor, an indoor bowling alley with a café and bar on the ninth floor, indoor racquetball and tennis courts on the eighth floor, indoor soccer and football on the seventh floor, a gaming room with table tennis and air hockey on the sixth floor, a fitness center and gym with "basketball hoops" on the fifth floor, a lap pool on the fourth floor, locker rooms on the third floor, sporting goods stores on the second floor, and a giant sports bar with an "extensive food and drink menu" and "many TVs displaying international and national sports" on the ground floor.

Repurposing the INS building wouldn't be necessary to lure fine-dining patrons. The MiMo Historic District is already home to popular and critically acclaimed restaurants such as Michy's, Casa Toscana, Red Light, Soyka, Moonshine, Uva 69, Balans, and more. The **Culinary Row** scenario points out that the MiMo

area is "uniquely positioned to become a prime destination neighborhood for those looking for distinctive dining options."

The report notes that special events sponsored by the nonprofit MiMo Biscayne Association already promote the district's restaurants, but "more can be done" to attract more restaurants, food markets, and gourmet shops. One possibility: "development of a unique food mall" or "a two- to three-story restaurant center along the Boulevard that would house an array of ethnic restaurants and entertainment from around the world." While encouraging more "trendy, high-end restaurants," fast-food places would be discouraged.

Culinary Row also suggests that motels could offer gourmet food and wine, and "make a better usage of their bars and lounge areas by organizing weekly special parties and events." The report imagines that "the MiMo District's motels could also host 'Taste & Toast' events, where visitors pay for the drink and get the buffet access free. This same idea could be applied to business lunches for a flat fee."

Artists can also be used to promote the MiMo Historic District. "The lower

costs of rent and ownership may attract artists, galleries, studios, and exhibits, which would all benefit the district," the report states. Thus the **Art Hub** scenario, in which the district creates incentives for art galleries to open, asking local artists to "paint artistic walls and murals throughout the district," attracting Art Basel in December, and organizing gallery walks that also showcase the district's architecture. This scenario also proposes that the district partner with the Arsh Center for the Performing Arts and host local Haitian art and cultural events.

The five scenarios are just one aspect of the Barry report, completed this past December, which also includes opinion surveys, zoning analyses, comparisons to other Florida historic districts, and even suggestions for obtaining grant money.

Nancy Liebman, vice president of the MiMo Business Improvement Committee, says she wants city officials to be aware of the threats to the district cited in the report — in particular a 35-foot height limit that was enacted along the historic district as part of the Miami 21 zoning overhaul. "Having a 35-foot

height limit is not going to allow the district to grow into a real destination," Liebman asserts. She advocates a 53-foot height limit that would allow strip malls and motels to build up and become mixed-use projects.

In fact the 35-foot rule is not yet law. Miami Mayor Tomas Regalado suspended the enactment of Miami 21 until more discussions are held. As a result, buildings in the MiMo Biscayne Boulevard Historic District are still allowed to reach 80 to 120 feet in height. "I guess it's a good thing there's a slowdown in development," Liebman says.

Although the 35-foot height limit is in limbo, it will likely figure into additional studies. "Florida Atlantic University is doing a financial study, and they're going to have a lot more to say about the 35 feet," Liebman promises. The FAU study is due this summer. A streetscape report, which is being prepared by two University of Miami urban planning professors, will also look at a future district with and without a 35-foot height limit. That report is due in June.

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Beauty Temple

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partitioned the interior into 11 separate rooms, creating cheap residential rental units exclusively for women. Three years later he sold it to retired art teacher Everett Gum — at a \$75,000 profit.

With the neighborhood newly awash in drugs, violence, and prostitution during the 1980s, however, Gum had trouble maintaining the place. According to his daughter, he bought the house as an investment, and it's unclear whether he ever lived there. Court records show he evicted tenants twice during that period, and a news report from 1988

described the home as dilapidated and vacant.

By 1994 the pump house had become an encampment for vagrants. Hundreds of used tires accumulated on the property — possibly dumped there by the proprietors of an automobile service station across the street in the present-day Andiamo Pizza building. Cars, stripped to their frames, and mounds of debris also littered the large backyard.

A near death blow was struck that same year when a destructive fire tore through the place, collapsing the second floor and tall cathedral ceiling. Initial speculation was that homeless squatters had accidentally sparked the blaze. But

according to the *Sun Sentinel* (which described the place as an abandoned church), investigators found flammable liquid on the premises and concluded there was "no doubt the building was burned intentionally." The perpetrator and motive remain a mystery.

Exposed, charred, and in ruins, the house drew the attention of Miami code inspectors, who gave Gum 90 days to clean and secure his property. But with \$100,000 in liens against it for accumulated code violations, Gum opted to have the pump house demolished instead.

Miami Herald reporter Geoffrey Tomb documented the pump house's plight in an April 1995 article that

sparked an immediate public outcry. His story prompted Miami Mayor Steve Clark to order the demolition halted. Volunteers descended on the place to help with a clean-up effort. And most significantly, Gum agreed to donate his property to the preservation group Dade Heritage Trust, which persuaded the city to remove the hefty liens by promising to restore the pump house.

Habitual building-savior Sal Patronaggio paid just \$16,500 for the property a year later and tried to fulfill that promise. He hired a machete-wielding homeless man, still living amid the ruins,

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Another Neighborhood, Another Mutiny

This time the rival faction has formed in Miami's historic Palm Grove district

By Margaret Griffis
BT Contributor

Political scientists have long debated whether the Domino Theory — in which small changes trigger a chain reaction across political borders — accurately described the realities of the Cold War. Maybe it did, maybe it didn't. In 2010, however, Miami's Upper Eastside could prove to be a new testing ground for the old hypothesis as homeowner groups compete for the ears of both residents and politicians.

Last month the *BT* reported on a faction of Shorecrest residents who broke away from the long-standing Shorecrest Homeowners Association (SHOA) to form a parallel group called Shorecrest United ("One Neighborhood, Two Personalities"). Troy Howard and Chris Masciatti, founders of the breakaway group, believed that a new organization, using different tactics, would allow them to better serve



Democracy in action: President Bob Powers (left) and the board of the Palm Grove Neighborhood Association.

their small neighborhood, which lies east of Biscayne Boulevard and north of NE 79th Street.

That upbeat view is not shared by current SHOA president Jack Spirk, who sees Howard's and Masciatti's methods as too aggressive for SHOA.

Spirk also believes that "the confusion of having two groups [will] impede progress" for the community. Although it's still too early to predict how the Shorecrest rivalry will pan out, the separatist sentiment has now spread across the Little River and into Palm

Grove, where residents have likewise broken away and formed a second neighborhood association.

Palm Grove is an officially designated City of Miami historic district, a distinction conferred on the neighborhood just last year. It is bordered on the north by the Little River, on the east by Biscayne Boulevard, on the south by NE 58th Street, and on the west by the FEC railroad tracks. The Palm Grove split, however, has taken a tack different from Shorecrest. Instead of having two groups covering the entire neighborhood simultaneously, the freshly minted North Palm Grove Community Organization (NPGCO) will concentrate on the upper half of the community, above NE 70th Street. But the older Palm Grove Neighborhood Association will not retreat to its southern flank. It will continue to work throughout the district.

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to help him clean the grounds; used a pressure-washer to drive snakes out of the rock walls; and eventually installed a new roof. "It was junkyard back then," he says, "but I fell in love with it."

The pump house had another admirer as well. Former actor J.B. Kilpatrick had been eyeing the place for years. A decade earlier, despite facing ridicule from buddies, he had taken his sister's advice to attend beauty school while pursuing his movie career. Now, scouting a new location for his South Beach hair salon, he and his wife Sabrina D'eca decided to make Patronaggio an offer.

Shortly thereafter, in 1999, they bought the pump house for \$208,000. "It was like the Wild, Wild West back then," Kilpatrick recalls. "There was no fence in the back, so people were all over the property. They were even in the damn trees. One guy tried to hit me with a hammer. Another time, five guys kicked the door down when I was inside. I picked up my bow and arrow and fired a few shots. They ran out so fast you wouldn't believe it."

Such mayhem wouldn't last long. With developer Mark Soyka's burgeoning



J.B. Kilpatrick spent three years chiseling out the lagoon.

commercial complex next door, the growing focus of historic preservationists on nearby Biscayne Boulevard, and Kilpatrick's D.I.Y. talents, things finally started to turn around for the embattled pump house.

"Every day I would cut hair on the Beach until maybe 2:00 in the afternoon, then come here and work on the place until 3:00 or 4:00 in the morning," Kilpatrick recalls. "My vision kept getting bigger and bigger — until I ran out of money. And this is what I ended up with."

What he ended up with is a fully restored stone sanctuary with

a cathedral ceiling, glazed concrete floors, dark interior woodwork, and lush tropical landscaping. The crowning jewel: an elaborate, coral-rock water feature that took three years to chisel out of the ground. Spread halfway across the back garden, its water cascades from an upper pool into a larger lagoon, where hand-carved stone steps

descend like a Roman bath beneath the glimmering surface.

There was, however, one problem with his little Eden. The property carried a decades-old residential zoning restriction, which barred him from establishing his salon business. Kilpatrick grimaces as he describes the unexpectedly long process of having the property rezoned commercial (seven years by his count): "I almost lost everything waiting for the zoning change. Everyone at the city was onboard except Sarah Eaton [the city's former historic preservation officer]. I

put so much money into this property and spent so many years not making any money back from it."

He credits historian Paul George, who spoke on his behalf at a Historic and Environmental Preservation Board meeting, with finally persuading Eaton to approve the change. And if not for a generous investment by his late father-in-law, Alfonso D'eca, and mother-in-law Joyce, he insists the pump house project would have died long ago. He and wife Sabrina finally hung a sign outside in 2006, christening their building and business with a new name: The Beauty Temple.

Standing in front of their coral-rock masterpiece on a recent workday, Kilpatrick acknowledges a spiritual connection to the place after his protracted struggle: "This is where my heart is. This is my soul. If I sold this property now, my life journey would change completely. There's definitely some powerful energy in this place."

For more information about The Beauty Temple, visit www.beautytemplesalon.com or call 305-751-5077.

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