



Miami's New Faena District: A Billion-Dollar Love Letter to Art and Design

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by Sandra Hale Schulman

MIAMI BEACH—The opening of the Faena District was a mind-blowing experience. The festivities began just before Art Basel Miami Beach arrived and continued through Miami Art Week. While the multitude of art fair tents came and went, this new district dedicated to the arts is in it for the long haul.

More than a billion dollars was poured into creating the new Faena District courtesy of [Len Blavatnik](#), a Ukrainian-born and New York-based natural resources and media mogul, with Argentinian developer [Alan Faena](#) serving as creative director of the multi-building project and district at large.

Currently four blocks long, located on Collins Avenue from 32nd street to 36th Street in the section of town known as Middle Beach, the Faena District is comprised of an uber luxury hotel filled with high end art; a condo building (the penthouse sold for \$60 million); a Forum venue designed by the international architecture firm [OMA](#) for performance and exhibits and a retail complex bazaar with artist designed boutiques with more buildings in development.

The Faena Forum and the Faena District—an official designation by the City of Miami Beach—opened with fanfare on November 27, 2016.



Faena Forum ribbon cutting with Rem Koolhaas and Alan Faena. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.

Just for fun for Miami Art Fair Week, an over-the-top [Juan Gatti](#)-designed party tent in the form of a geodesic dome was installed on the beach in front of the [Faena Hotel Miami Beach](#). The temporary so-called *Time Capsule* played host to VIP parties for Mercedes sponsored events and featured a state-of-the art 360-degree film projections all the way around the ceiling inside.



“Time Capsule” designed by Juan Gatti. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.



Inside the “Time Capsule” designed by Juan Gatti. Photo by Sandra Hale Schulman.



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The Faena District is imagined by the perennially white clad Argentinian [Alan Faena](#)—a hard to miss dapper guy who tops his ensembles with a feather festooned fedora—who has created his own mini-empire that derives its identity from the arts and design worlds, similar to a project he constructed in his native Buenos Aires. Faena’s partner in dreaming is his wife, [Ximena Caminos](#), who will be planning the programming at the Forum venue.

In conception and execution, the Faena District is a few notches above Miami Beach’s routinely over-the-top standards, done with world class style on a scale that has even the region’s deep pocketed developers shaking their heads in disbelief.

The District was formally anointed with an art parade on Sunday, November 27, 2016 that drew thousands to watch the surreal procession, mostly produced by Miami artists and cultural groups. Titled “Tide by Side,” the event boasted a list of illustrious international art world creative people, and featured no fewer than 30 Miami based cultural groups.

In line with the longstanding tradition of parades in Latin America, the mix of performers included, among many, the Cuban collective [Los Carpinteros](#) who performed their entire dancing and conga playing routine backwards all the way up the the four blocks of the district.

“I’m honored and amazed we delivered this place to Miami Beach and the community and the world,” said Faena to the press at the event. “This is a present to the community, not just for now, but for the next generation.”

Highlights of the parade included: the segment by [Celeste Fraser Delgado](#) and [Damian Rojo](#) of [Carnival Arts](#) featuring 130 handmade printed and silkscreened costumes; a devil faced snake float; conga players in carriages; and a “Santeria Siren” in a boat.

“We started planning this a year ago,” Rojo said after the parade. “Part of the theme is a religious

battle of voodoo and part of it is poking fun at the luxury of this place. I made shopping carts filled with discarded picture frames and glitter encrusted cutouts of TVs and diamond rings. We hired lots of elementary school kids from the inner city to perform; they were so excited as they had never done anything like this before.”

Another big hit of the parade—accompanied by music composed and performed live by the avant-garde musician [Arto Lindsay](#)—was the huge wedding cake shaped float called “Pelican Passage” by Miami artist [Carlos Betancourt](#). Topped with a golden pelican and trailing red vinyl streamers and feathers, the float shot out confetti and lottery tickets to the oohs and ahhs of the crowd as it made its way up the street.



“Pelican Passage” float by Carlos Betancourt.

Ximena Caminos, in a red sequin covered horned cap and sequined tailcoat, stood in the middle of the street, dancing and kissing Faena and shouting encouragement to the revelers.

A tour of the Forum later in the week, given personally by Caminos, showed off the exquisite, unique round design with angular windows and two floors of performance space that can be reconfigured for dance, art exhibitions, and concerts. Madonna gave her blessing to the new performance space with a benefit show for her Raising Malawi charity at the end of the week, with the cheap seats starting at \$5,000.

“This Forum is really what makes this District unique,” Faena said at the press preview. “We started this five years ago to be an incubator, a theater that amplifies visions. We’ve been working with the best minds in the world from the areas of art, architecture, design. It’s an organic seashell pattern to reflect the location on the beach.”

“It’s about joy,” said Caminos. “We want to connect people and create platforms for social interaction. We want to be fearless.”



Rendering of Faena Forum. Courtesy OMA. Copyright OMA.

Next door at the four-story converted small hotel now called the Bazaar, pricey Viktor & Rolf couture hangs in boutique windows surrounding a courtyard. In a room upstairs, I was given a one-on-one virtual reality experience, a spooky 5- minute ordeal that had me seated in a small curtained room while wearing a goggle headset.

People appeared and disappeared in the view. Hands touched me from behind when it appeared the person was in front. A black hooded Grim Reaper figure reached for my throat. Fascinating, if a bit unsettling.

The Faena Hotel, which opened last year, is filled with art, from the golden columns and Juan Gatti murals in the lobby to the [Damien Hirst](#) gold leaf woolly mammoth skeleton out by the pool. Another piece by Hirst is a unicorn sculpture in the new Asian eatery, Pao by Paul Qui. The rooms, designed by Aussie film director Baz Luhrmann and Catherine Martin, boast bright turquoise and red rugs, couches and bedding, lush views of the ocean and art by Miami artist [Gonzalo Fuenmayor](#).

It's luxe upon luxe upon luxe everywhere you turn. Perhaps the hope is that the money and art and dreams invested in Faena District might hold back the tide of the rising seas.

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