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Southeast Construction

Features - August 2007

Destination Rejuvenation: Canyon Ranch

[Restoration Project in Miami's North Beach Aims for Rejuvenation](#)

By Debra Wood

Redevelopers of the former Carillon Hotel, a Miami Modern architectural icon and a tony 1960s vacation destination, aim to reclaim some of the building's former fame when it is reborn as the centerpiece of Canyon Ranch Living-Miami Beach.

"Miami Beach is the ultimate urban resort in the world," says architect Bernardo Fort-Brescia, a principal with project designer Arquitectonica of Miami. "This building is part of that way of life and that philosophy."

Glistening new glass towers flank the original Carillon Hotel designed by Norman Giller, who also designed the now-demolished Diplomat Hotel in Hollywood, Fla. The 600-room, beachfront Carillon opened in 1957. In its heyday, stars entertained in the lounge and Northerners flocked to the resort for all-inclusive vacations.

Canyon Ranch

advertisement

The Canyon Ranch component differentiates the project from other South Florida condominium developments.

The Tucson, Ariz.-based company expects to attract health-conscious people to its resort and spa. Canyon Ranch touts itself as the "world's premier health resort," with a mission of "inspiring (people) to make a commitment to healthy living, turning hopes and intentions into the highest enjoyment of life."

It operates spas in Las Vegas, Kissimmee, Fla., and aboard the Queen Mary 2; resorts in Tucson and Lenox, Mass.; and residences in Tucson and Chicago.

"It's a shot in the arm for the whole area," says David Park, director of facilities for Canyon Ranch. "The folks who live here are thrilled with this coming in, because it means a rejuvenation."

The former hotel will be converted into 150 condo-hotel units on floors two through 10 and condominiums on the upper five floors. When Canyon Ranch became involved in 2003, the building had been stripped to the concrete shell—not even the elevator cables, wiring or a bolt remained, Park says.

Arriving guests will pull up and see the Atlantic Ocean from the driveway, as will restaurant patrons.

"You immediately have left the city and arrived at a resort," Fort-Brescia says. "[The entrance] defines the resort and creates the project as an enclave."

Two new, concrete residential condominiums towers are rising to the north and south of the Carillon. Upper-level units boast views of the ocean on one side and the city of Miami from the other.

“The original building was very much a modernist building and a very white building,” Fort-Brescia says. “We tried to keep that idea, so the new buildings have more glass, but they have a white frame that ties the beach color pallet with the old.”

Current work

Bovis Lend Lease of Miami started its \$123 million contract in January 2005 to renovate the existing hotel and build the 22-story, 143-unit South Tower and a five-story health spa that connects to the former hotel. Completion is scheduled for this year. Bovis officials declined to be interviewed for this story. CondoSuperCenter, a real estate sales Web site, is listing units in the South Tower, ranging in size from 820 sq ft to 3,060 sq ft, for sale from \$860,000 to \$2.4 million.

KM-Plaza Construction Services of Miami began work on the \$110 million, 900,000-sq-ft, 206-unit North Tower in January 2006. The 37-story structure, which also connects to the old hotel, topped out in May, and Brad Meltzer, president and principal of KM-Plaza, says he anticipates completion in May 2008.

“It is a Canyon Ranch, so it has a lot of unusual features not typical of a condominium,” says Alan Kaplan, project executive with KM-Plaza.

The sixth-floor pool deck features an area that overlooks the Intracoastal Waterway to watch the sun go down at the end of the day. The project includes an exercise lawn with trellises, a yoga room, meditation pods and a beachside pool. There also are three private pools on the 23rd floor.

The interior finishes reflect Canyon Ranch’s commitment to good living. Blue Bahia stone comes from Brazil, teak from Costa Rica, bamboo from China, stone and cabinetry from Italy. A special terrazzo flooring with imbedded seashells covers the lobby floor.

The post-tension concrete North Tower sits on 909 auger-cast piles, reaching to depths of 140 ft. Due to the structure’s close proximity to the ocean and a water table within a couple of feet of the surface, the site required dewatering.

Five levels of parking sit atop the ground-floor, beachside lobby, with condominium units above the garage. The parking is on the street side of the structure, with two-story town houses facing the ocean. A six-story, decorative wavy concrete wraps around the building and shields the parking structure from view. Metal grids between concrete sections will allow people in the garage to see out.

Originally designed as a poured-in-place decorative detail, K-M Plaza suggested using tilt-up methodology for the waves and shaved \$400,000 from the cost of the project, Kaplan says. Work on the wave walls was just beginning in June.

A window-wall system graces the rest of the exterior. It uses a special blue-hued glass that blocks light leaving the building, so as not to distract sea turtles nesting on the beach.

A decorative masonry façade protrudes from the building and serves as its signature icon. Construction of it required extending the floor slabs out and placing the masonry blocks at the end after the structure was complete. The plans originally called for poured concrete, but K-M suggested the block, which produces the same effect at less expense.

“The new buildings are a completely different scale than the older building, and that makes them identifiable and visible from far away,” Fort-Brescia says. “That uniqueness of image will separate it from other resorts along the coast.”

Restoration a Long Time in the Making

As the North Beach area lost its luster, tourists abandoned the Carillon Hotel. In

1983, then owner Carol Management Corp. of New York closed the property due to slow bookings and sold it to developer Joseph Gamel, who offered long-term leased units to individuals.

The Carillon Resort Hotel filed for bankruptcy in 1987. Four years later, the city, citing fire-code violations, evicted its tenants, and the building stood abandoned for years.

Tiara Towers, a Florida company, owned the property from 1989 until Transnational Properties of Miami Beach obtained the deed to the hotel in 1992 for \$12.2 million during a U.S. Bankruptcy Court proceeding. The city of Miami Beach approved a renovation plan by Transnational in 1998, according to Miami Beach public records, but litigation and foreclosures kept construction from commencing.

Even the architectural firm filed a lien against the property in 2001, while owned by Transnational, which was satisfied in July 2002, according to court records.

In 1999, current owner WSG Development of Miami Beach gave Transnational a second mortgage on the property. WSG foreclosed on that mortgage in 2000, according to Miami-Dade County court documents.

In 2002, WGS became a majority owner of the Carillon property, with Transnational retaining a minority stake. Two years later, Hypo Real Estate Capital Corp. of New York loaned WSG Development \$155.5 million to renovate the 15-story landmark hotel and build a 21-story building with 143 units. Lehman Brothers, as mezzanine lender, provided \$66.6 million for the project, including the second tower.

WSG announced a \$386 million construction loan from Hypo Real Estate the following year. At that time, WSG's Eric Sheppard reported that sales had surpassed \$500 million, with prices for units in the two towers ranging from \$1.2 million to more than \$9 million.

WSG did not return telephone calls requesting more information about this project.

Team Box:

Owner: WSG Development, Miami Beach

Program Manager: Fulcrum Management, Miami

Architect: Arquitectonica, Miami

Interior Design: Rockwell Group, New York

Contractors: Bovis Lend Lease, Miami, hotel renovation and South Tower
KM-Plaza Construction Services, Miami, North Tower

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