

Across-the-Bay Watch

The Action in Miami's Design District

Where in South Florida do you find numerous production companies, photographers, and German catalog teams? South Beach, right? No, South Beach is where you find more tow trucks than parking spots, more Prada-bag-bearing shoppers than professional posers, and lots of disgruntled fashion folks watching the masses slide past the velvet ropes of their secret VIP paradise, make themselves comfortable, and slowly shove the modeling industry into a corner.

"South Beach has lost its flavor—its artsy, down-to-earth feel," laments Nadia Shahrik, Director of Men's Board/Women's Board. In September, Shahrik turned her back on the craziness, commercial expansion, riff-raff, and rising rent, and took her agency over the causeway to Miami's quaint center of art and design: the Design District.

While Shahrik is the first agent to move into the neighborhood—"the guinea pig"—numerous industry "relatives" are by her side (Artistry Management), or downstairs (Industry Productions), or down the street (Day Light Miami, Thomas Heidemann Productions, Wild Site Productions,

ABC Costume Shop, Logo Graphics...). Ross Powers' multi-faceted mega-studio is also down the street—and has been for over a decade.

"Twelve years ago this area looked like a ghost town. There were eighty homeless people living under the bridge, and all the buildings within fifty yards of my property were boarded up," says Design District pioneer Ross Powers. "People told me, 'You're crazy to move to there, and you're crazy to build a studio! No one wants to shoot in a studio in Miami,' but," explains Powers, "as the industry grew, studios became necessary." Powers reports that about eight studios have popped up in his neighborhood since then—along with "lots of photographers, production companies, magazines, cafes, galleries, and celebrity shoppers [such as] Cher and Michael Jackson"—so the location doesn't seem too crazy after all.

With a photo studio, cafe, five bars, three stages, three art galleries, and rooftop and backyard studios in the works, Powers has all the facilities necessary to realizing his motto: "Production by day, performance by night." He is creating opportunities for burgeoning talent by hosting events which combine fashion shows, live music, art openings, and fashion shoots. Of course the industry-focused guest list means more exposure for the budding Design District.

Miami International Studios is consider-

ing the Design District for its mammoth motion picture/TV complex. "It will be the first of its kind in Miami," says Deeny Kaplan, President, "with the best of L.A. molded to the Miami market." While Miami Beach is the first choice, Kaplan cites congestion, city-owned property, and space limitations as negatives—none of which apply to the Design District. Drawing parallels to Hollywood's history, Kaplan projects up to a ten-fold increase in property value wherever the complex is constructed. Are you die-hard SoBe-ers seeing stars and dollar signs yet?

"I look at numbers," says Shahrik, "and my billings are up 30 percent since the move. A lot's happening over the causeway!"

"South Beach does offer locations, the Art Deco backdrop, the beach... and it will always be important to the industry," assures Powers, "but tourism will once again predominate there. The Design District is necessary to the industry."

After a leisurely drive through the sane streets of the Design District, the causeway spit me out into bumper-to-bumper boat show traffic on Alton Road. I peered back over Biscayne Bay's tranquil blue waters, and... I saw the light at the end of the causeway.

BELOW: Mission Studios
LEFT: Power Studios



Beauty and the Beat: MTV's Fashionably Loud

South Beach was the place to be for MTV House of Style's "Fashionably Loud" event held at the National Hotel. Again we see that ever-potent combination of musicians and models, with dresses and tresses and voices to die for.

Hot supermodel hosts Rebecca Romijn-Stamos and Niki Taylor warmed up the crowd and kept everyone in a steady state of afternoon delight. With a fashion show featuring the innovative creations of designers

Jean Paul Gaultier, Tristen Webber, and Julien Macdonald, and live performances by hip-hop star Jay-Z and rock groups Orgy and Kid Rock, there wasn't

much somnolent sunbathing taking place in the area.

The excitement grew as MTV's Model Mission finalists strutted their stuff down a sand-filled runway, alongside supermodels Alek Wek and James King. The neophytes dreamed of a \$250,000 modeling contract with the renowned IMG agency, as the prestigious panel of judges—Todd Oldham, Dave Narvaro, and MTV's very own Carson Daly—held the fate of a future supermodel in their hands. At the end of the fashion show, the models were judged on everything from walk to poise and personality.

A spectacular time was had by all, particularly winner and superstar-in-the-making, Crystal McKinney. Congratulations Crystal, and to all the runners-up, don't give up; those judges don't always know everything!



FROM LEFT TO RIGHT:
Rebecca Romijn-Stamos, Todd Oldham, Niki Taylor, James King, Alek Wek, Jay-Z, and Crystal McKinney