

PEOPLE **SAVING** PLACES

SPRING 2013

# preservation

The magazine of the National Trust for Historic Preservation

## **SYLVESTER MANOR**

THREE CENTURIES  
OF HISTORY  
ON SHELTER ISLAND

## **PHOTO TOUR**

REINVENTED  
POST OFFICES

## **SEASIDE SOJOURN**

MONTEREY,  
CALIFORNIA

**Saving Architect  
Hilario Candela's  
Beloved Stadium**

# MIAMI ROMANCE

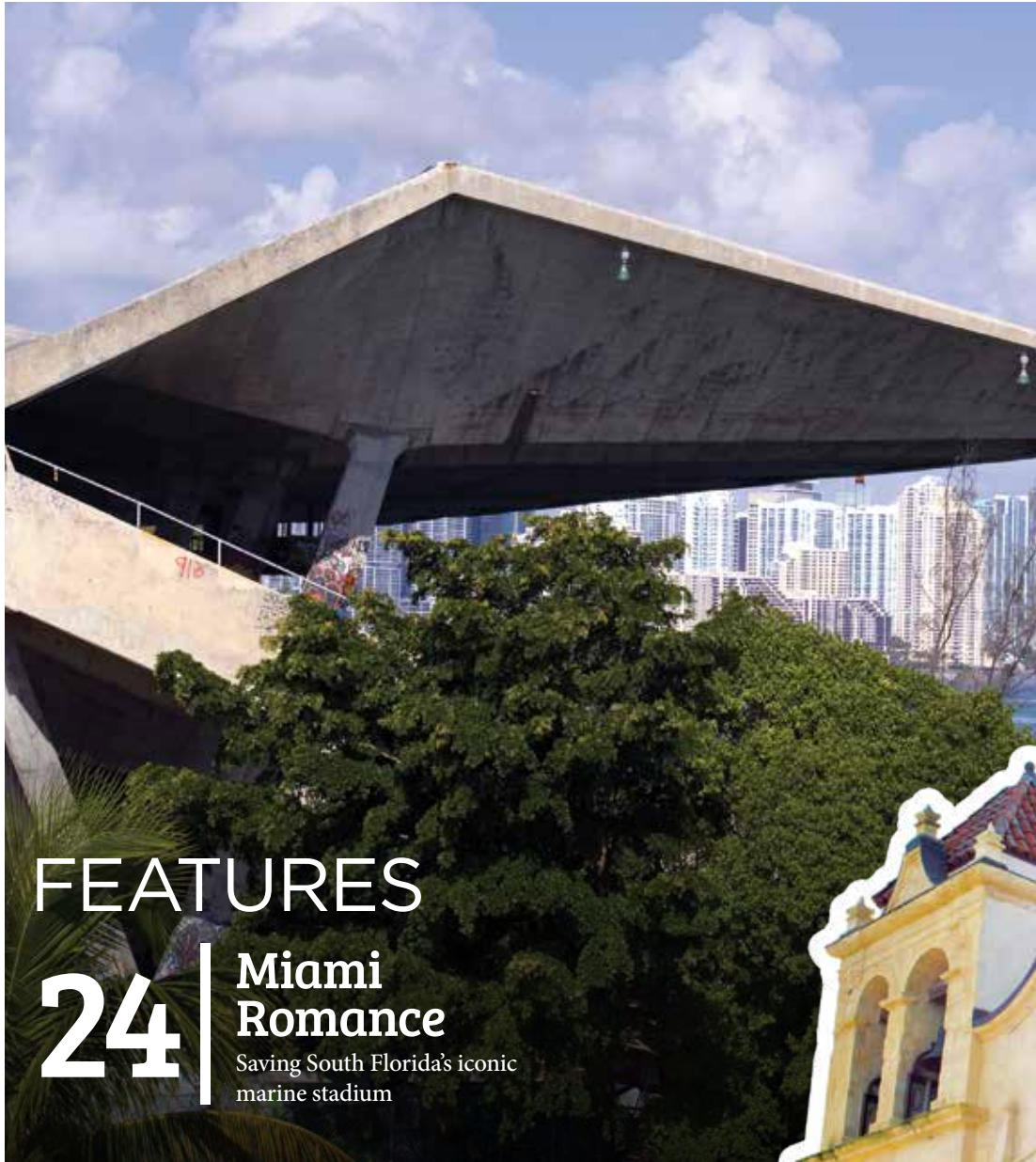


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The National Trust  
for Historic Preservation



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### Miami Romance

Saving South Florida's iconic marine stadium

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CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: KEN HAYDEN; STEVE GROSS & SUSAN DALEY; EMILY NATHAN



# MIAMI R



by  
**CARLOS  
HARRISON**

*photography by*  
**KEN  
HAYDEN**

- Designed by Cuban-born architect Hilario Candela, completed in 1963, and forsaken after Hurricane Andrew in 1992, Miami's iconic Marine Stadium is poised for new life.



COURTESY FRIENDS OF MIAMI MARINE STADIUM

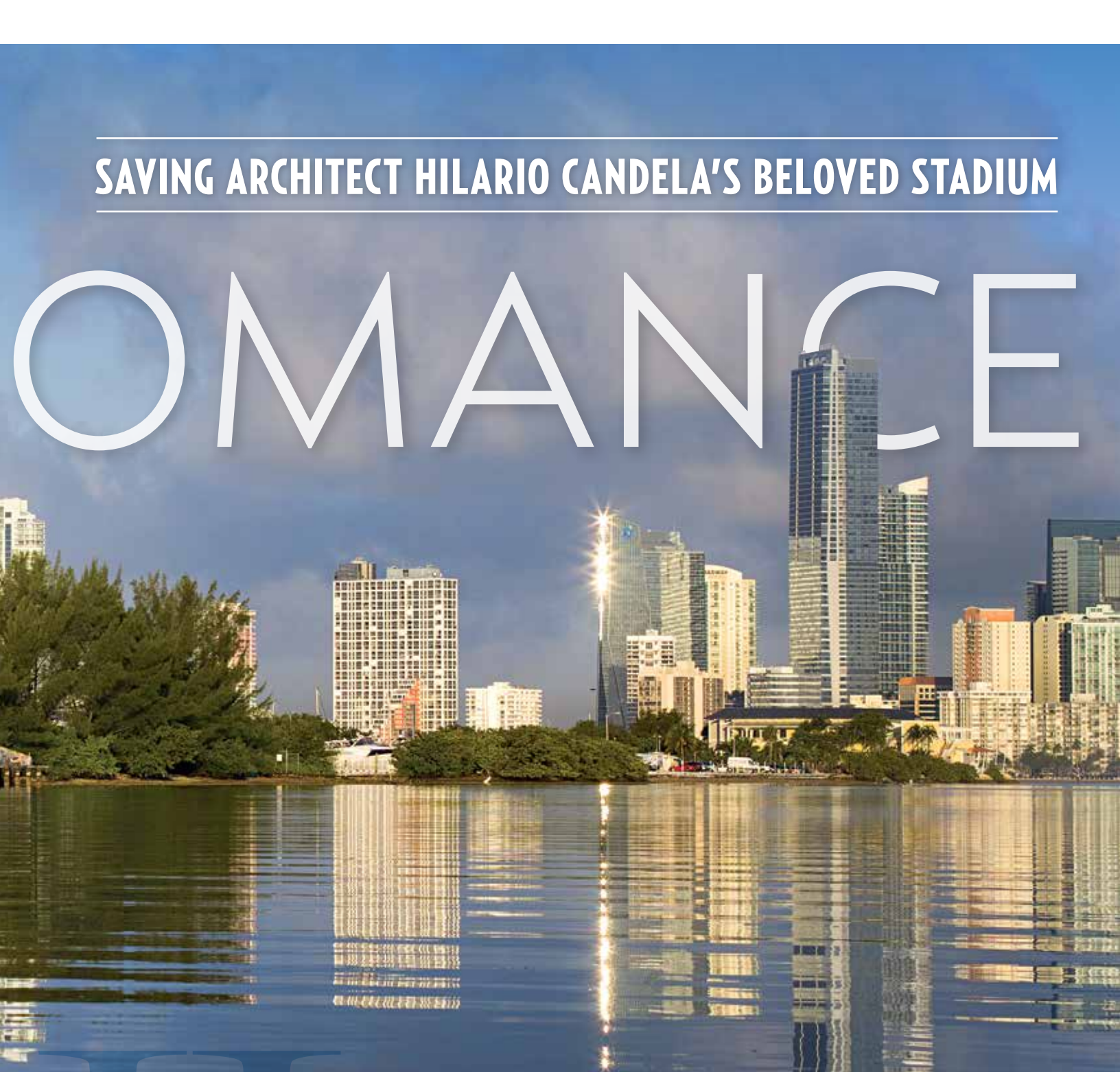


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## SAVING ARCHITECT HILARIO CANDELA'S BELOVED STADIUM

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# OMANCE



**Hilario Candela** remembers how the inaugural day gave a hint of the many purposes the Miami Marine Stadium would serve, and of the hopes the city had for it.

Military personnel parachuted from the sky. High-speed powerboats flew past on the race course with engines roaring and rooster tails of water shooting up behind them. One driver, James Tapp, reportedly died that day, in the very first of many boat-racing wrecks to come.

As the celebration continued that night, a symphony orchestra played *Die Fledermaus* aboard a barge pulled in front of the stadium to become a makeshift floating stage. Fireworks lit the sky.



“The stadium was adopted by the community and the stadium adapted itself to what the community wanted it to be. I think it was the confluence of both,” says Candela, who designed the structure when he was just 28, an architect newly arrived from Cuba.

It was 1963, days before New Year’s. The stadium’s unveiling offered the nation the only facility designed specifically for powerboat races. With its boldly cantilevered roof jutting defiantly over the water and its poured-concrete plates folded like intricate origami, it was a tourist attraction unlike any other, meant to put Miami on the national map alongside its better-known neighbor, Miami Beach.

**LOOKING AT THE DECREPIT** husk that remains today, it’s hard to imagine such a grand vision. The once-majestic structure, unique in purpose and design, sits abandoned in isolation behind a chain-link fence, a canvas for graffiti artists and a playground for the acrobatic and free-running activity known as parkour.

Now, though, a dedicated and determined group of preservationists, aided by the National Trust for Historic Preservation, is tantalizingly close to breathing new life into the stadium after five years of effort. They have a bold plan to not only restore it to the luster of its heyday, but also to turn it into the centerpiece of a new public space with a park, restaurant, and maritime museum where people will come not just when there are events, but every day.

“The Marine Stadium needs to kind of resume its place as a community gathering place for people. The architecture is certainly an important part of it, but we want it to work,” Don Worth, co-founder of the Friends

• Despite a chain link fence, locked gate, and “No Trespassing” sign, the Miami Marine Stadium has continued to play an important role in the lives of city residents who use the structure for everything from a skate park and fishing pier to a canvas for elaborate graffiti.

of Miami Marine Stadium (FMMS), explains. “We need activity at the site all the time.”

The efforts of the FMMS in some ways parallel the life of the structure itself, which grew from small and unspectacular origins, tapped into an emotional connection to the sense of place, and surpassed everyone’s expectations.

The city had wanted nothing more than a simple structure with a metal roof, similar to the baseball stadiums of the day, able to seat 6,600. Candela wanted more.

“The relationship of the water and the land to me is very special,” he says. “At the place where the stadium was, I kept looking at the water and the land kissing each other, right at that spot. And I wanted to celebrate that.”

As he looked out on the ripples and reflections on the water, his vision began to take shape.

“That reminded me of the beautiful sails. That was as much an image of our city [as anything else]—sailboats out on the bay, etc... and the ripples of the water reinforced one with the other,” he says. “I had to reach out for something special. Design became the tool.”

And poured concrete, the way to achieve it.

“Concrete was, in my mind, the logical material that would give me the opportunity to create a piece of sculpture. And what I wanted was a piece of sculpture on the water reflecting on what nature was providing us.”

The city resisted the elaborate plan, but with the

**“It’s something that the city should be proud of,” says Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado. “To me, the Marine Stadium is Miami.”**



- Miami Marine Stadium architect Hilario Candela, preservationist Don Worth, and National Trust board member and architect Jorge Hernandez (from left) came together in 2008 to form Friends of Miami Marine Stadium and develop a plan for the restoration and operation of this masterpiece of Miami Modern design.
- The seldom-seen concrete pilings and beams that support a seating area perched above the water have become a hangout for graffiti artists and an impromptu hiding spot when the police arrive to chase away trespassers.







backing of his firm, Candela stood fast. Finally, city officials relented, with a caveat: It had to cost less than \$1 million to build, or Candela's firm had to redesign it at its own cost.

The result was a one-of-a-kind Midcentury Modern gem filled with artistic symbolism. Exposed concrete reflected the raw beauty of the surrounding site. Candela slid the lowest third of the structure over the water to highlight the coming together of land and bay and because it seemed “somewhat contrarian to celebrate water sports from the land.” Gaining support from galvanized rebar, the roof unfolds as a series of twisted geometric waves—structure-strengthening “hyperbolic paraboloids” in architectural parlance—that seem to billow like sails in the wind. Longer than a football field, the 65-foot overhang is braced by nothing more than eight columns at the very rear, achieving Candela's goal of “a flying roof that seemed held by magic.”

At the time of its construction, the 326-foot-long roof was the longest span of cantilevered concrete in the world. The engineer used at least three types of concrete between the thickest 10- to 12-inch portion at the back of the stadium and the 6-inch-thick edge above the water.

The finished structure exuded dynamic tension, poised above the water like a diver ready to spring into the air. Spectators could hear the water lap-

ping at the bulkhead beneath their seats, but remain shielded from the sun and cooled by breezes blowing in from the bay.

Total cost: \$960,000.

**THE FINISHED STRUCTURE** was greater than anyone had imagined and stands, today, in the pantheon of Miami Midcentury Modern-style projects now known as MiMo—alongside Enrique Gutierrez's fabulous “floating” Bacardi Building tower, with its Spanish-tile murals, and Morris Lapidus' Fontainebleau hotel, with its Baroque curves and breathtakingly spacious interiors. Randall C. Robinson Jr., who coined the term MiMo along with Teri D'Amico, ranks the stadium among stellar examples of the style.

“This is perhaps Miami's last still-standing great work of engineering from that period,” Robinson says. “And what's special about it is that it was not only a marvel of engineering, but it was done in such a way that was very aesthetically pleasing.”

**The finished structure exuded dynamic tension, poised above the water like a diver ready to spring into the air.**



- Supported by columns with elements that pierce up through openings in the seating area, the football-field-sized cantilevered roof is a marvel of engineering designed not only to shade spectators from the harsh subtropical sun but also to be sculptural, evocative of sails on Biscayne Bay and water rippling in the wind.
- The floating roof is formed of a series of structural “hyperbolic paraboloids” that create energy and elegance from what could have otherwise been a mundane overhanging sun shade.



## CANDELA'S ARCHITECTURE OF ENVIRONMENT AND PLACE



HE MAN PERHAPS BEST-KNOWN for designing the Miami Marine Stadium comes from a long line of doctors. His father, grandfather, and a brother all chose medicine. Hilario Candela chose architecture.

"I was always taken emotionally by visual things," he says, and his mother's influence guided him to find fulfillment as an architect, even though she wasn't one herself. "She had a perception of space which for a non-trained person was rather unique. And she got me interested in that."

He got his training at Georgia Tech, a decision brought on by political turmoil that closed the University of Havana. That came in the last of his native Cuba's pre-Castro years, and he returned to the island after graduation to join the architectural firm SACMAG, which was formed by two boyhood friends. When Fidel Castro seized power in 1959, the firm was put in charge of building Havana's National Theater. Candela assisted, his first public project.

In 1960, he went into exile in Miami, where he joined Pancoast, Ferendino, Grafton, Skeels & Burnham. His first project was to oversee the construction of the first of Miami-Dade College's buildings. It was a prophetic assignment. After that, he designed every building on the school's three campuses built over the next 30 years. All bear his signature angularity, sweeping open spaces and exposed concrete, along with his characteristic devotion to the surrounding environment and sense of place.

During those three decades he also rose to become the senior partner and design director at the firm, eventually known as Spillis Candela and Partners, providing the artistic vision for every one of its projects and leaving an enduring imprint on South Florida's architectural landscape.

Some of the structures that he was responsible for designing include:

- The majestic yet austere Mailman Center for Child Development at the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine, with its dramatically arcing face swooping skyward, anchored by a solid rectangular tower.
- The former Florida Power & Light Company headquarters in southwest Miami-Dade County, a 634,818 square-foot compound.
- NOAA's Atlantic Oceanographic and Meteorological Laboratory, near the Marine Stadium, notable for its interconnected concrete modules fitted together like giant Legos.
- American Express Southern Regional Operations Center in Plantation, Fla., a solidly modular building with the imposing presence of a fortress, softened with the clean appeal of an Apple store.



Set on Virginia Key, an island between the mainland and Key Biscayne that's better known as the home of the Miami Seaquarium, the stadium offers spectacular views of Miami's skyline. It quickly realized its attention-getting purpose.

"You have to remember," says local historian Paul George, "in '64 when it opened there weren't any [Miami] Dolphins. And the [University of Miami] Hurricanes were a mediocre football team. There

weren't a lot of things competing with it in the community in terms of activities. So that was going to be a unique new venue."

The original concept of the stadium as a place for watching boat races expanded rapidly, and the events hosted there made the stadium as much a part of South Florida's history as its architectural legacy.

It was where Sammy Davis Jr. famously hugged

- The award-winning Mailman Center was completed in the early 1970s, and stands with Candela's other concrete structures as prime examples of Miami Modern architecture.





**ONLINE:** For a slide show of behind-the-scenes images from our photo shoot, visit [PreservationNation.org/online](http://PreservationNation.org/online).

Richard Nixon and where a diverse parade of musicians including Arthur Fiedler and the Boston Pops, Jimmy Buffett, Ray Charles, The Who, and Basia soothed, serenaded, and flat-out rocked crowds from a floating stage. (Buffett's boisterous concert drew an overflow audience that spilled out of the stands and filled boats packed into the basin.)

"Fight Doctor" Angelo Dundee hosted many a fight night there, and the "Cuban Bomber," local phenom Frankie Otero, lost his North American Boxing Federation Super Featherweight title to Jose Luis "Maestrillo" Lopez in a split decision in May of 1972.

Hollywood used it as a backdrop for the 1967 Elvis movie *Clambake*, a typically hip-twisting musical romp featuring Presley as a rich kid trying to make it incognito as a water-skiing instructor at a Miami hotel and managing at the film's climax to win the all-important powerboat race.

Facing the dawn sky, the marine stadium also became one of the most popular local sites for Easter

sunrise masses, and indelibly etched in the memories of the Cuban exile community as the locale for the annual "Our Lady of Charity" celebration.

"It was spectacular, because the Virgin Mary would come across the water like it did in Cuba many years ago, and thousands of people waved," Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado recalls. "Everybody knew that the place to be in September was the Marine Stadium to honor the patron saint of Cuba."

By 1992, the events were but memories. The stadium, a largely forgotten relic of a bygone time.

"The conventional wisdom is that when [Hurricane] Andrew came that was it for the stadium. The reality is, it was abandoned before then," says Paul George. "I went there with a friend of mine in the summer of '86, and there was a powerboat race, and we were among the few people there. I had the sense then that the place was close to being abandoned. People had just moved on to other interests."

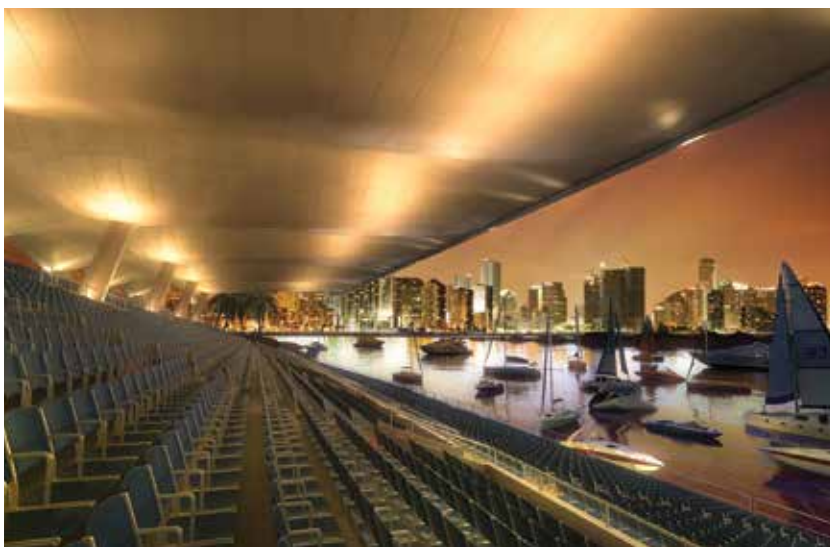
The city seized Andrew as an opportunity. It



• Situated to face the dawn sky, the Miami Marine Stadium hosted sunrise church services on Easter and other important holy days.







• Renderings for the restored Miami Marine Stadium are designed to illustrate the variety of possible uses for the property. A proposed park setting could provide a venue for everything from outdoor festivals and soccer games to a staging area for triathlons.

condemned the stadium as unsafe—falsely, as a later study would prove.

“The city alleged it was damaged by Hurricane Andrew,” Worth says. “It never was. And they wanted to use that as the excuse to demolish the stadium.”

The reason, he posits, is simple.

“This is waterfront property in Miami. This is ridiculously valuable land,” Worth says. “Aside from [the fact that] any government would be challenged to run a very complicated facility like this, you have developers whispering. And that still continues: ‘We can take this decrepit site and turn it into a great source of tax revenue.’ And developers have a lot of sway around here.”

In the summer of 2007, the city asked contractors to develop a plan for eliminating the stadium. The threat that the stadium would be razed sparked an immediate reaction. By the following February the stadium Friends had formed.

“When we started this project, nobody thought we had a chance,” Worth says. “People looked upon us as a well-meaning group, but ultimately naïve and way overmatched for the task at hand.”

**LIKE THE STADIUM ITSELF**, though, the group exceeded expectations. The members commissioned engineering studies that disproved the city’s contention that the hurricane had damaged the structure. They won a historic landmark designation from the city. And they earned the support of the National Trust, which named the stadium to its 2009 list of America’s 11 Most Endangered Historic Places and designated it as a National Treasure in 2012. In 2010, the World Monuments Fund added the stadium to its Watch list.

The Miami Marines, as they refer to themselves, also found that the stadium occupied a special place in the community’s sentiments and gained the support of local leaders, including Miami-Dade County Mayor Carlos Gimenez and Miami Mayor Tomás Regalado, who made restoring the stadium a priority of his administration.

“It’s something that the city should be proud of, and it’s been an eyesore for 20 years,” Regalado says. “To me, the Marine Stadium is Miami. And there’s nothing more I would like to do as mayor than to have that venue working for all the residents to enjoy.”

To make that happen, though, the Miami Marines estimate it will take \$37 million to restore the stadium, conduct ongoing maintenance, and construct a neighboring multipurpose building.

Another \$40 million to \$45 million will be necessary to convert the site into a full-fledged Miami Marine Park. According to the agreement they’ve signed with the city, they only have until May 2014 to do it.

They’ve already raised or identified \$10 million: the National Trust Community Investment Corporation is helping to structure \$4 million to \$5 million in federal historic tax credits, \$3 million is expected from a county historic preservation bond fund, and another \$2 million has been pledged by an anonymous corporate donor. They also expect to get another \$1 million to \$2 million from the state of Florida to repair the stadium pilings.

They have a variety of strategies for raising the rest. Worth says they hope that selling the naming rights for the stadium will bring in as much as \$20 million. Considering that prices for naming the nearby American Airlines Arena, science museum, and performing arts center went for \$30 million or more each, Worth says, \$15 million to \$20 million for the iconic marine stadium seems possible.

After that, they’ll be looking at “raising money at different levels,” Worth says, from both large and small donors.





One idea being considered is to create naming-rights opportunities for aspects of the stadium, such as the seating—contributors could have their names permanently placed on the seats for something like \$2,000 each. It might not sound like much, but with more than 6,000 seats in all, such an effort could bring in a least \$12 million.

Despite the tight deadline and the daunting total the group needs to raise, Worth remains cautiously confident.

“Up until now we’ve been the little engine that could,” he says.

But hurdles remain.

The Miami Marines have had talks with the organization behind the Miami Heat’s operations about running the stadium. But the Miami City Commission and the Miami Sports and Exhibition Authority must still approve its final operating plan, which includes multiple components aimed at making the stadium a vibrant, and profitable, attraction.

The group’s vision for the site includes what Worth calls a multipurpose “flex-park” available for use for

everything from soccer games to a staging area for rowing competitions or a transition location for triathletes between the swimming and cycling portions of a race.

At the opposite end of the stadium, says FMMS co-founder and National Trust Board of Trustees Vice-Chair Jorge Hernandez, the group’s plan calls for a new building to house a welcome center, restaurants, and a maritime museum displaying innovations in the marine industry.

“It will have an educational component, as well,” Hernandez says. “Kids will go there, and there will be, for example, classes on safe boating, classes on the ecology of the bay—and it will pull people there when there aren’t events.”

If they are successful, the marine stadium will serve as an example for others—of thinking beyond restoration, or mere preservation, to rebirth. **P**

**CARLOS HARRISON** is a frequent contributor to *Preservation* and a Miami native who saw boat races, concerts, and at least one Our Lady of Charity mass at the marine stadium. He hopes that someday his kids will get to do the same.

- Primary supports for the stadium are grounded in Virginia Key’s sandy shore. Eight, three-armed columns provide the only structural support for the massive sculptural roof.
- Miami Marine Stadium hosted the 1975 Champion Spark Plug Regatta.
- The press box and lighting platform was cleverly suspended beneath the stadium’s floating roof.