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WYNWOOD



MARICE COHN BAND/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**ALL KINDS OF ART:** As wall artist Shark Toof, left, finishes up a painting at Northwest Second Avenue and 27th Street, Josh Sobel takes a photo of his friend Alexandra Agro.

## NOT A PASSING FANCY

Wynwood's once-forlorn warehouse district is gaining a foothold as an arty, walkable urban neighborhood

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Eli Papir, 30 years in the hosiery and textile wholesale business in Wynwood, survived when others around him didn't, operating out of a block-long, windowless warehouse painted a sickly green.

He switched to supplying fabric to furniture makers as the clothing industry that once sustained the industrial district vanished, and he minded his business as something strange began

to happen in the neighborhood: Dodgy young artists' studios and art dealers and collectors began occupying the dreary blocks of cheap, vacant warehouses, cheek-by-jowl with body shops and discount footwear distributors. Dubious banners went up proclaiming the graffiti-marked collection of derelict warehouses an arts district.

For a long time, he waited for more to happen.

Today, after fits and

• TURN TO WYNWOOD, 6B

# Neighborhood gaining ground

• WYNWOOD, FROM 1B

starts of hype that struck some outsiders as oversold, something real is finally jelling in Wynwood. The whole daring collective enterprise of transforming a dying warehouse district into an arty, walkable urban district appears to have taken on a long-elusive — if still far from complete — solidity.

Seizing on the intense passing flurry of attention on the district each December during Art Basel week, veteran urban revivalist Tony Goldman and his family purchased a set of warehouses across the street from Papir's business, opened one and then a second restaurant, creating a destination for visitors. In a burst of color and inspiration, they incorporated the neighborhood graffiti as their brand, turning their properties into oversized canvases for museum-quality street art and generating reams of publicity for Wynwood.

Now, on the blocks around Goldman's restaurants and Wynwood Walls, properties are being renovated and two new coffeehouses, one tavern and at least two retail shops have moved in, joining neighborhood art galleries, some long struggling, that are for the first time enjoying a measure of daily foot traffic. A few blocks away, O Cinema, a funky art movie house in — what else? — a renovated warehouse, has opened to rave reviews. Chef Jimmy's Wynwood outpost, on the ground floor of a new mid-rise residential build-

ing on North Miami Avenue, draws a steady clientele. Monthly art walks are so mobbed by partiers that some gallery owners and merchants have actually complained.

So this year, as Art Basel time once again rolled around, Papir decided to hop on the bandwagon. The facades of his warehouse are now covered in massive, and spectacular, spray-paint murals by street artists from California and Brazil, recruited by Wynwood street-art entrepreneur Aric Weis. This time, Papir and others believe, the action won't vanish, Brigadoon-like, after Basel.

As renovations and new uses expand beyond galleries and art studios to retail and restaurants, radiating from main corridors into still-forlorn side streets, Goldman and others say, the district's separate islands of redevelopment are gradually coalescing into a whole.

"Why Wynwood? It's pretty easy," said Mauricio Gomez, who moved his designer-furnishings shop, elemental, from Miami Beach to Northwest Second Avenue earlier this year. "It's all creatives. It's all artists. It's perfect for what we do.

"It's going to become a real neighborhood, just like New York."

But Goldman, an early investor in New York's SoHo, cautions it will take time, patience and investors — not speculators — willing to nurture and preserve Wynwood's arts bent and low-scale character.

"We can really develop a beautifully organic neighborhood," said Goldman, who has amassed two dozen properties in the district. "But you can't push the process. We want to maintain the cool factor forever.

"Wynwood is at a point now where the change is visible, and we are seeing much more interest from tenants wanting to be there."

Case in point, he said: His Wynwood Building, an old warehouse mall once home to discount clothiers, has been painted entirely in zebra stripes and is undergoing conversion into business spaces for creative enterprises. Goldman said he expects to start moving in tenants within months.

The district's budding transformation rests on several pillars stretching back far more than a decade. When the Bakehouse Art Center took over an old bakery and, years later, when prominent art collectors Martin Z. Margulies and Don and Mera Rubell bought nearby warehouses to display their art to the public. Then developer David Lombardi began buying and renovating warehouses and storefronts, and built Wynwood Lofts, live-work studios for artists and other creative types.

The warehouse district, however, has one significant drawback: It contains little housing, and the warehouses — unlike SoHo's lofts — are largely unsuited for residential conversion.

Most of Wynwood's longtime, working-class residents live on adjacent blocks of single-family homes, small apartment houses and neighborhood bodegas, still largely untouched by renovation or gentrification. While that means few have been pushed out by redevelopment, some residents feel excluded.

Margulies, a developer with no business interests in the area, warns against overblown hopes. He says the Wynwood transformation will remain incomplete without an influx of residents, a deeper, year-round art market and banks eager to lend.

"There is definitely progress, but what's lacking is people living there to make a neighborhood. I don't think anyone's going to move in there because Shepard Fairey made a wall, though it does create excitement," he said, alluding to the famed graffiti artist's Wynwood mural. "There's a definite need for reasonably priced housing in that area. The future of Wynwood is young and affordable."

The galleries, too, he said, face an uncertain future. There is substantial turnover — a French gallerist, Emmanuel Perrottin, opened a gallery in Wynwood to great fanfare only to close a few years later — and talented artists in Wynwood must look to sell elsewhere to survive, he said.

"Some of the artists are very good and very frustrated," Margulies said. "A lot of the galleries are struggling, but it's not for lack of trying. It's a tough market here."

Goldman says he plans to develop new live-work housing inside the warehouse district within two years, a goal the city of Miami has supported. Its new Miami Z1 zoning code and a recently created cafe district lifted commercial-only restrictions in the district to encourage development of residences combined with work space for artists and entrepreneurs, and propelled the opening of the new restaurants, cafes and watering holes.

But some business owners say the city needs to do much more. Sidewalks remain a cracked-up mess, streets are potholed and the district lacks trash cans, creating a garbage mess after the monthly art walks that business owners must clean up.

While rubbing up against the raw streetscape is undeniably part of Wynwood's appeal, stroll a few blocks down any side street, and it quickly begins to feel sketchy, especially after dark. There are still long stretches of abandonment, lots of graffiti of the non-authorized tagger type and mysterious activities behind the gates of crumbling warehouses.

There is some street crime and drug trafficking remains a neighborhood problem decades after the killing of a drug dealer by police spawned days of rioting. Earlier this year, the entire clientele at Joey's, the Goldmans' Italian restaurant, was held up at gunpoint.

Still, Wynwood gallery owner Susan Kelley says she feels secure enough at an age when others are retiring to consider moving into the neighborhood from the

Beach. And though her gallery would have a hard time without the Art Basel week spike, business is good.

"We're seeing more sophisticated visitors to the gallery, and it's really fun to see people on bicycles and strolling around," she said.

"I've even said to my husband, it would be really cool to come live here."



**BRING ON THE CUSTOMERS:** Susan Kelley gets her Kelley Roy Gallery, 50 NE 29th St., ready for the opening of Art Basel earlier this week. The area appears to be taking off at long last.

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