



MIAMI TODAY

Editor/Michael Lewis

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Throwing some light on lighting up Miami

We're still living in the dark ages when it comes to exterior architectural lighting.

In the majority of cases illumination still throws light at buildings much the same way Edison did in 1888. Seldom do today's buildings show signs of having lighting as part of the initial stages of the design process. Yet half a building's existence is spent in darkness.

What a building becomes at night should be an initial design priority. Designing a building for nighttime will alter the finished product in both form and function.

Historically the Greeks became masters at daylight effects. The Aztecs, among other cultures, aligned space to the sun's path to create the right effect at the right dates, with a precision a computer would envy. Stonehenge is believed to include the moonlight's alignment as well as the sun's in its unique placement.

Paris (the old City of Lights) masterminded the spatial sequence of events from illuminated structure to illuminated structure, making spaces and movement in between as important as the illuminated surface itself. Use of light is a sign of sophistication and high



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intellectual cultural achievement.

With few exceptions, Miami is simply a group of separate structures that throw lights at themselves. However, this effort, at a cityscape scale, is mesmerizing.

And although in Miami the spatial and urban potential of illumination has not been explored, Miami has successfully begun to do something new in the history of cities: Several entire buildings can "dress" themselves in colors and change dress to meet the occasion. This city can welcome dignitaries from other countries by coloring the skyline with that country's colors, cheer the home team, celebrate the holiday season or the Fourth of July and welcome home the troops as in 1991.

The 21st Century will be the age of light. Light will be the vehicle for communication, transportation, surgery and space travel

We are already making light turn corners and materialize as holograms. We can emit, transport, reflect, store and release light on command in ways which are affecting our everyday living, thinking and planning.

Light in various forms will energize and motivate activities about which we know as

little today as Alexander the Great or Charlemagne knew about cellular telephones and pocket calculators.

Light has more applications than electricity. This explosion is around the corner. Fiber-optics lasers and movement sensors for remote control are hardly out of the cradle. It is expected that computer language will change to color codes.

It is not good enough to re-build after Andrew. South Florida ought to plan with vision for the future and take a gigantic leap forward from destruction and pain to a future of socio-economic gains far beyond any previous expectations.

Miami is becoming a center of world trade and Florida is the top tourist destination in the USA. A glowing city attracts emulation. Successful emulation requires expertise. Expertise is learned.

South Florida, through the Miami experiment in lighting, can develop a truly unique illumination expertise. Florida architects could lead this revolution in lighting with nighttime architecture instead of lagging behind, then export this expertise for economic enhancement.

To illustrate what nighttime architecture is, let's start with what it is not. It is not lighting as "signage." It is not lighting as "decoration" — not even as "art." Neon added to a building for all three of the above purposes is not architectural lighting. Nor is it custom

designed luminaries. Worthwhile as they are when properly done, those are add-on details unless they formed part of the initial design development.

The creative challenge to the architect and lighting designer is to incorporate illumination at the initial stage of the design process in such a way that it alters the finished product in both form and function.

Other lighting factors which can add a new dimension to our cityscape are:

1. Color change.
2. Turning on and off.
3. Communicating across distances with light so as to allow each individual building to participate in community events.

Doing so, Miami is acquiring a new cultural significance which we are only beginning to experience but which will attract world attention.

This is the mission of Light Up Miami, more than the role of the architect. But to fulfill and architectural potential, lighting must be looked at in urban terms where combinations of dark, light and color in changing sequences across dimensions produce new creations and merge individual buildings in time and space giving new expression to the spaces in between — only possible at night.

Also, lights can be used to reflect symbolically the movement on the Miami River, the tempo of Brickell Avenue, to transform lackluster streets (such as underneath the peplemover) into superior ones at night.

Lighting can be used to connect, to unite, to span or leap from building to building, making of nighttime Miami a new city every night, the "new city of lights."

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