

If You Build It...

Developer Scott Robins is betting big with his Sunset Harbour project in South Beach.

Astute Awakening

Scott Robins knew Sunset Harbour had the potential to be the Next Big Thing. Thanks to his company's intuition and hard work, the area is now poised to become South Beach's most popular new neighborhood.

| *By Christina Lawrence* |
| *Portrait by Michael Pisarri* |

The Robins name is synonymous with innovation and, in a sense, renovation. For more than two decades, the members of the Miami Beach-based family have displayed an uncanny ability to pinpoint the blighted areas of Miami and South Beach that they believe have the potential to explode in popularity, then go on to make those visions a reality. Twenty-five years after starting Scott Robins Companies, its namesake is still at it. "It's crazy how fast time goes," he muses. "I got out of college in '85, and now I find myself the oldest guy at all the meetings."

But that's not such a bad thing, especially when one considers the wisdom that comes with experience. Robins has not only seen but also been instrumental in the re-gentrification and resulting boom of South Beach that began in the early '90s, along with his brother, Craig Robins, the CEO and president of Dacra Development; in fact, they still have holdings there. But these days, with chain restaurants such as Johnny Rockets and TGI Friday's having muscled out the unique mom-and-pop restaurants and one-off boutiques that were once credited for lending Ocean Drive, Collins Avenue and Lincoln Road their distinctive appeal, Robins is "over" the whole South Beach thing.

"I personally don't enjoy walking down Lincoln Road anymore," he says. "You look at Lincoln Road now and you see the same stuff you see everywhere else in the world. Businesses that really need to make money can't survive there because of the high rents; only nationally known businesses can. It's very touristy. Probably 80 percent of the customers there now are out-of-towners. Parking is \$15 in some places, \$25 if you want to go to a hotel for dinner. That's not what locals want from their everyday lives, and locals are what give places their flair and their flavor, and keep an area surviving during good times and bad."

In the current market, he says, the hot trend has become developing "neighborhoods"—Robins cites Brickell, the Miami Design District and Wynwood as successful examples. "People like to stick around their neighborhoods now that it's become so difficult to get around because of all the traffic. Whereas 20 years ago they wanted to come to South Beach for that experience, now they prefer to be able to stay closer to home. CONTINUED...



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The Tenant List... So Far

A glimpse at the businesses coming soon to Sunset Harbour Shops

Eberjey will be the Miami lingerie brand's second brick-and-mortar location.

Emack & Bolio's is an old-fashioned ice cream parlor from Boston.

Frankie Boutique will offer high-end women's fashion and accessories.

Ice Box, the Lincoln Road brunch favorite, relocates here soon.

Lucali is a pizzeria out of Brooklyn.

Panther Coffee will serve gourmet java and homemade pastries.

Tequitzlan is a Mexican restaurant and tequila bar.

ThreadCount features luxury linens and bath products.

True Loaf is an artisan bakery and pâtisserie.

...CONTINUED And that's good, because it spreads out the commercial real estate opportunities more and levels out the pricing."

And that's the very notion that led to Robins' interest in Sunset Harbour. Since he resides in Sunset Island, he drives past the area every day. "I saw a place [that could be made] different," he says of his initial interest. "The problem we had to get past was [its zoning] as a light industrial district—meaning it was the only place where you could put car repair or painting shops, warehouses and those sorts of things. It was the last of its kind, and what we had to get past was the city officials pushing back at us when we told them how we wanted to convert it. They kept asking us, 'Where will everyone get their cars fixed?' Our answer was, 'They'll have to go across the bridge, because we have to serve the everyday needs of the residents, and 'light industrial' isn't where things are headed.'" Slowly but surely, Office Depot, Fresh Market and various restaurants like Pubbelly and Sardinia began popping up, opening the door for a neighborhood like the one Robins had in mind to come to fruition.

Robins purchased his first building in the area about five years ago "just because I liked the district," he explains. He didn't have a specific plan for it until Sunset Harbour City Manager Jorge Gonzalez called to say he wanted to build a parking garage and asked if Robins had the property to accommodate it. Robins bought himself a few months to get a proposal together and during that time also acquired additional real estate, purchasing Tremont Towing in the process. "The stars just aligned," he says. "The neighborhood was ecstatic about losing that business and replacing it with parking and retail."

In the deal that was eventually structured with the City of Miami Beach, Robins sold them air rights to get their parking garage built, while he retained ground-floor rights to 30,000 square feet of newly constructed restaurant and retail space. Robins and his partner, Philip Levine, who he says "is my partner on everything—he's instrumental in terms of vision and money, and I'm the operating partner"—have fashioned the Sunset Harbour Shops with a hip, contemporary design by the award-winning architecture firm Arquitectonica. Several businesses are relocating there from Lincoln Road, including Icebox Café and Rancho Grande (the latter will operate under a new name) and a slew of others will join the fray—the kind of lifestyle tenants that draw foot traffic and transform neighborhoods (see sidebar). A bonus for those who don't live within walking distance is a four-level parking garage directly above the shops, which houses 460 spots with short-term parking rates of just \$1 per hour (a rarity in South Beach).

Robins is clearly excited about Sunset Harbour Shops and looking forward to all it will bring to nearby residents, including his own family. When asked to predict the Next Hot Area ripe for development, he replies, "Downtown Miami. It has all the makings—a new museum is being built, there's a performing arts center, the arena, and a lot of empty land with the potential for development. It's the hole in the doughnut. If I were 25 years old and still out there hustling, that's where I'd be."

But he's not 25 anymore. "I'm not sure I want to do all that heavy lifting again," he says. "But let's see where my head is once Sunset Harbour is all done." **M**