

For \$65 Million, Miami Garage Has Party Space, Boutiques, Camel

By James S. Russell - Jul 20, 2010

I recently watched the Miami Beach sun cast golden late-afternoon light into a seventh-level aerie atop a surreal parking garage that serves at times as party space. The premiere of “Sex and the City 2” was celebrated here, with a camel.

This \$65 million bravura composition of intersecting planes and angular piers, called 1111 Lincoln Road, does indeed park 300 cars in its mostly wall-free structure. It includes fashion retailers and residences.

The different levels rhythmically jut forward and recede a bit. The floor heights range from the parking standard of about 7 feet to as high as 34 feet. The tall floors are best for parties.

The day I was there, the garage had the primordial calm of a Giorgio de Chirico painting, with towering clouds visible in every direction.

The architectural allure and the view are why the garage is in demand for weddings and other fetes. Developer [Robert Wennett](#), president of Urban Investment Advisors LLC, cooked up an idiosyncratic commercial formula: Architecturally spectacular parking structure attracts high-end retail, which helps sell a penthouse residence and attract events.

The Basel-based architectural firm Herzog & de Meuron designed 1111 Lincoln Road, which is the culmination of the busy pedestrian mall designed by Morris Lapidus.

You might mistake this skeletal concrete frame for yet another abandoned condo project. Inside, access ramps sinuously warp and curve as they rise within the squared-off planes of each level. A sculptured stair dances in counterpoint.

Alchemist's Wares

Standing improbably alone on the fifth floor, a glass jewel box of a store is a delight to encounter. Called [Alchemist](#), it sets out the wares of sought-after designers like Rick Owens, [Martin Margiela](#) and Chrome Hearts as if they were precious artworks. It need not share street frontage with beach-

wear boutiques, because it is a destination for aficionados. With only parked cars for company, the cognitive dissonance of its location telegraphs chic.

Wennett is finishing an all-glass rooftop restaurant and building a penthouse residence.

By any conventional real-estate formula, neither the building form nor the odd revenue-producing combination makes any sense. It's hard to see where the architectural concept ends and Wennett's commercial savvy begins.

"Herzog and de Meuron took this on because they knew I was interested in what they could do," said Wennett while giving me a tour, "not in how their brand could sell."

Unloved Bank Building

Technically the garage is an addition to a beefy, unloved cast-concrete building put up in 1968 and formerly occupied by [SunTrust](#) bank. Its deeply recessed windows and bulging forms shout fortress. Herzog and de Meuron moved to soften the old bank's bruiser toughness by giving it a strip of shops facing Lincoln Road. The snazzy garage lifts the bank from glum ordinariness. Its offices are fully leased to media and design businesses.

Wennett moved the bank branch to the ground floor of a new two-story structure across an alley. He built four courtyard residences on top, with crazily fretworked fencing designed by the architects.

Describing this melange doesn't explain it. You've got to see it, which of course is the point. Asked how it makes money, Wennett says he knew he needed a strong architectural statement for his site, at the farthest end of Lincoln Road, "so that it feels like something is happening at this end of the street. We would not get the income without the architecture. I couldn't attract the kind of tenants I've got."

Paving and Pools

With \$6.2 million from the city of Miami Beach, landscape architect-du-jour Raymond Jungles extended the pedestrian mall a full block to front 1111. He installed striped black-and-white stone paving, towering bald cypresses, round burbling pools and a curvy Dan Graham glass sculpture.

This bossa nova setting helped Wennett lure high-style fashion retailers as well as Taschen, an art-book store, [Inkanta](#), a design store, and a just-opened Miami outpost of restaurateur [Danny Meyer](#)'s Shake Shack. Wennett personally sought the retailers he thought would make the whole add up to more than the sum of its parts.

He is tapping into what I call the “Art Basel Miami Beach Effect” (updating the [Frank Gehry](#) “Bilbao Effect”). It’s a landmark to Miami’s increasingly cosmopolitan and international allure.

([James S. Russell](#) writes on architecture for Muse, the arts and leisure section of Bloomberg News. The opinions expressed are his own.)

To contact the writer of this column: James S. Russell in New York at jamesrussell@earthlink.net.

To contact the editor responsible for this column: Manuela Hoelterhoff at mhoelterhoff@bloomberg.net.