

# Builder putting love back into the Beach

By STEPHEN SMITH  
Herald Staff Writer

Michael Harvey used to hate Miami Beach.

"I suppose like a lot of people who loathe the town where they grew up, it was absolutely my least favorite place in the world," Harvey said. "I thought of it as a fourth-rate, rusted-out tourist town."

Harvey turned into love, money turned into paint and glass and mortar, and Harvey turned into a one-man Beach Chamber of Commerce.

Now, Harvey has undertaken the renovation of the Helen Mar building, bought most of a Wash-

ington Avenue block and is keeping an eye on other Beach buildings. Next week, he will start stripping away decades of neglect from his property on Washington Avenue.

"I think the Beach will come back as a counterculture place," said Harvey, a theater producer who has won a Tony. "I think it will be a place where people from Kendall and South Miami go, to see an interesting play, for an interesting meal, to hear jazz."

"If it's all macrame and soft ice cream, that's not very interesting."

Interesting is what Harvey and his friends, people like the owners of The Strand restaurant, want.

That's why Philip Smith, a New York artist who grew up in South Miami, dragged Harvey and eventual Strand owner Gary Farmer to Miami Beach.

"Miami's been my favorite place in the world all my life," Smith said. "I've told a lot of people about it. And these were the two who listened."

They listened and they saw. What they saw they thought was good — so good that Harvey led a group that bought the Helen Mar and spent a quarter of a million dollars fixing it up.

They found that a few decades ago, people tried to hide the building's architectural wonders, slapping paint and other glop over Deco artistry.

"There was a lot of stuff on the building that we just tried to get off and clean," said Yossi Friedman, the architect who directed the Helen Mar renovation, designed the Strand and will guide the renewal of the Washington Avenue stores. "It just needed a lot of love and tender care."

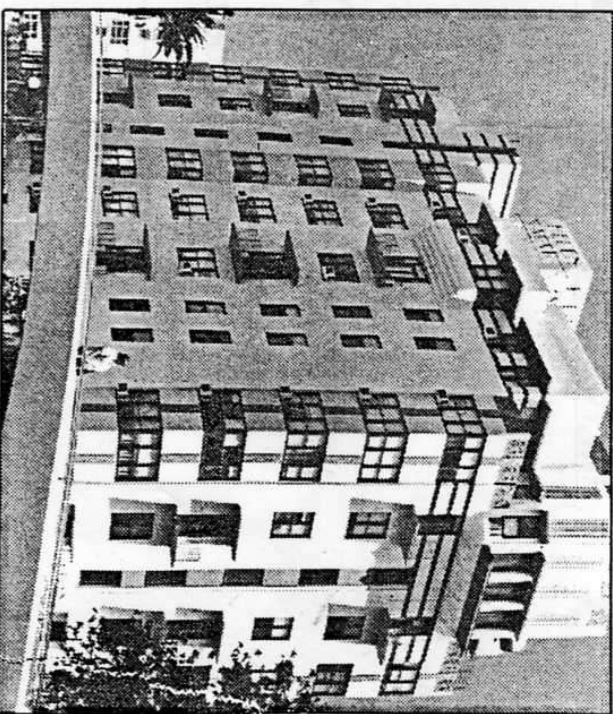
Thus, a new paint scheme, one fatter than pastels, with more muted shades of white and cream. They don't want a seven-story building that will cause Collins Avenue drivers to crane their necks and wreck their cars.

They want a seven-story building that blends in with neighborhood, that doesn't become victim to this trend Smith identifies: "The Beach, I think it's gotten a little too cupcake."

Harvey and his friends Saturday night will celebrate the reopening of the Helen Mar, 2421 Lake Pancoast Dr. It is a building set hard on Indian Creek, with 86 units that will be sold as condominiums. Efficiencies go for about \$24,000, two-bedroom units for about \$62,000.

The celebrating will slide into a week of work, as Harvey goes about restoring the storefronts on the building he bought on the east side of Washington Avenue, from 915 to 945.

It's the bigger chunk of a block that is a noisy slice of Miami Beach, with doctors' offices, a coffee shop, a market called



RANDY BAZEMORE / Miami Herald Staff  
A party celebrating the reopening of the Helen Mar, 2421 Lake Pancoast Dr., will be Saturday.

Cubanacan. Past owners, in benign attempts at upkeep, painted over a ribbon of Art Deco work crowning the top of the building and let shop owners do what they wanted with their stores. Harvey, working with the Miami Beach Development Corp., will try to give the building some unity. He expects the project to cost \$80,000 to \$90,000. He will pay for half, and the city and county will pick up the other half using economic development money from the federal government.