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BRUTE

A preservation battle revives interest in the career of architect

FORCE

BY REBECCA KLEINMAN

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PHOTO BY PETER H. BROMER COURTESY OF HILARIO CANDIA

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iami Beach has always hogged the limelight in the Florida metropolis, even when it comes to architecture. The resort's iconic structures—the streamlined towers of the art deco district; emblems of 1950s swank by Morris Lapidus such as the Fontainebleau and Eden Roc hotels; sleek, new super-luxe hotspots like the Setai Hotel—are as much a part of its image as fashion models and mojitos. But in mainland Miami, beyond singular gems such as the Biltmore Hotel and the Bacardi buildings, architecture has become an afterthought, investigated by few tourists, or even South Floridians. The most noted mid-twentieth-century architecture in the state is on the Gulf Coast—designed by a close-knit group of architects known as the Sarasota school, led by Paul Rudolph. In Miami, however, architects of the time did not forge a cohesive design identity. Since the majority of them focused on the residential sector, rather than prominent, widely seen projects, names such as Alfred Browning Parker and Rufus Nims have all but faded from memory. The reputation of others is often

Opposite page: **Aerial view of Miami Marine Stadium designed by Hilario Candela, and one of his drawings for the stadium.**

Below: **Miami Marine Stadium in a photo of December 1966.**

ilario Candela, Miami's maestro of modernism in concrete



PHOTO BY PETER R. BROMER. COURTESY OF HILARIO CANDELA

IN 1992 THE MARINE STADIUM TOOK THE FULL BRUNT OF HURRICANE ANDREW...



revived only when their work is threatened by the wrecking ball.

Such is the case with Hilario Candela. Though the Cuban-born architect, who arrived in the United States as a student in the 1950s and in the following decades built a commercially focused firm, Spillis Candela and Partners, that became one of the largest in the Southeast and, arguably, the entire nation, it took hurricane damage to one of his most stunning structures, subsequent vandalism, and the threat of demolition to bring Candela to the attention of a new generation of aesthetes. That structure is the Miami Marine Stadium—located on Virginia Key in Biscayne Bay, commissioned when Candela was only twenty-eight years old, and completed in 1964—still dazzling and dynamic in its current state of desuetude. Given the high regard that knowledgeable local architects accord Candela, the stadium “wasn’t his first building that came to mind five to ten years ago,” says Jorge Hernandez, an architect and professor of architecture at the University of Miami. “But that’s why you need time and distance

with art. Now people understand modernism’s importance, and the stadium may be Candela’s signature work.”

The 6,566-seat stadium debuted to a robust response. Built foremost as a grandstand for viewing speedboat races, the addition of a floating stage made it a remarkable venue for concerts and other events. It served as a backdrop for the classic (ahem) 1967 Elvis Presley film *Clambake*, and during a performance in 1972 Sammy Davis Jr. brought Richard Nixon onto the waterborne stage and hugged the president—a newsworthy event at the time.

But the structure was always equal to the spectacle. Built entirely of poured concrete, the stadium is best known for its dramatic cantilevered roof, which juts out sixty-five feet, supported by eight huge concrete columns. The underside of the roof rolls along in a series of barrel vaults—technically known as hyperbolic paraboloids—while on top, the vaults are flattened into V shapes, giving the roofline a saw-tooth look. To create the roof, Candela first built a matrix of galvanized steel rods—“It was like

Opposite page, left: Rear of the Miami Marine Stadium. Right: View showing the distinctive hyperbolic paraboloids, or barrel vaults, of the stadium ceiling.

This page, left: Candela's late 1960s' designs for the Kendall Campus of Miami Dade College included this the Science Building. Right: The Fine Arts Building of the North Campus, designed by Candela, built c. 1966.



making a dessert mold," says the architect, now seventy-six—then slathered on the concrete. He recalls the hold-your-breath moments as the roof took shape, topping off a building he considers "more sculpture than architecture."

In 1992 the marine stadium took the full brunt of Hurricane Andrew, and city officials shut down the facility, fearing it would collapse. Standing idle, the building became a favorite canvas for street artists—its paint-spattered walls in surreal juxtaposition to the azure water and mangroves of Biscayne Bay. When local authorities announced plans to raze it, preservationists, led by the group Friends of the Miami Marine Stadium, rallied to its defense. After furious lobbying, this past April the city and county pledged \$3 million to help prime the pump for a restoration fund drive.

Tests have shown that the stadium, though in need of some repairs (and a lot of paint thinner), is still structurally sound—testimony to the strength and resilience of Candela's favorite building material. His love of concrete began while studying the work of Le Corbusier and Pier Luigi Nervi while at Georgia Tech.



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Other influences came from his distant cousin Felix Candela, famed for his graceful arced structures made of reinforced concrete, and the elegant concrete arches of the Tropicana nightclub in Havana designed by Max Borges Jr., for whom Candela apprenticed during summers in his native land.

More than any other qualities, Candela is drawn to concrete's honesty and rawness. In the mature years of his career he could properly be classified as a member of the brutalist school, but with a twist. He always incorporated Caribbean design staples for controlling sunlight and capturing breezes, such as covered walkways, brise soleils, and plazas. When Miami Dade College requested a high security wall around its downtown (Wolfson) campus in the late 1960s, Candela insisted on a see-through, walk-through building with an atrium that welcomed the whole community. "That move accomplished a lot," he says. "Besides allowing shade and air flow, the space is now used for events like the Miami Book Fair and showcases a view of the white coral façade of a nearby 1920s

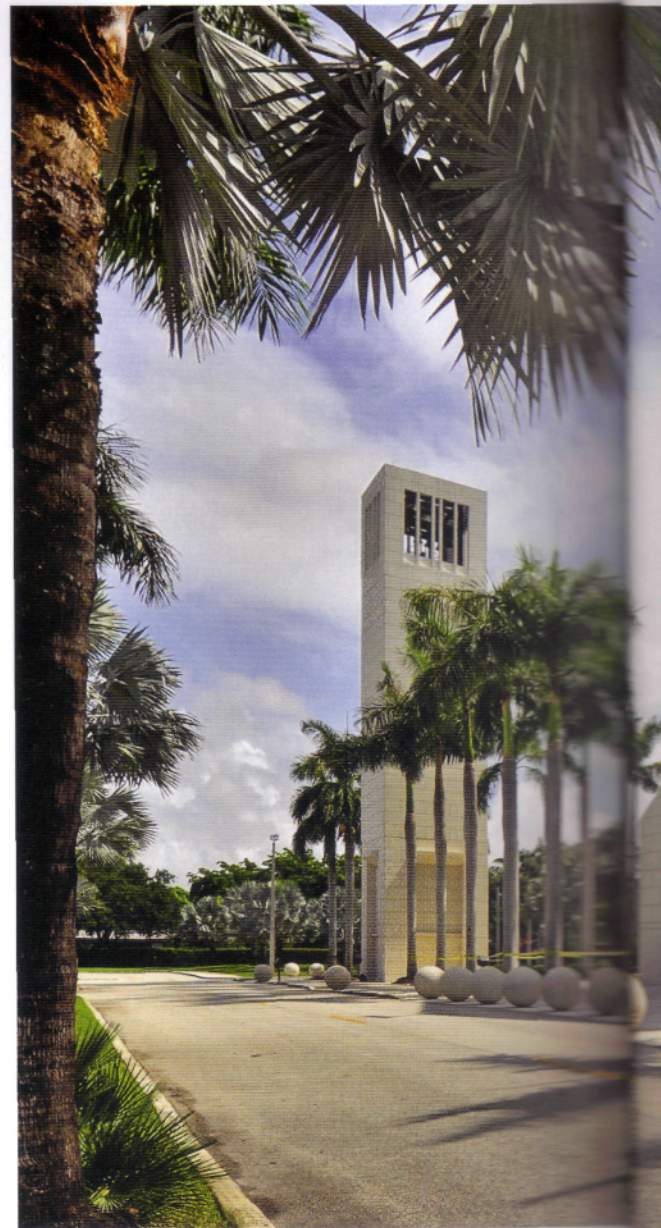
courthouse, creating a dialogue between the structures."

Around the same time, Candela received an enviable commission to design the college's 185-acre Kendall Campus to the city's south. He conjured a complex of buildings on pylons, or with shade-giving overhangs, plus covered gathering places, and copious plantings. "That is pure Candela—open civic spaces in concrete against a tropical backdrop," says Hernandez.

Though officially retired, the days of office towers and corporate complexes behind him, Candela continues to design residences for friends. One of his last professional projects was to design a new home for Miami's Church of the Epiphany, his own parish. The exterior is a modern take on Gothic architecture, and the sanctuary includes ingenious secondary walls of wooden louvers that create superb acoustics for the church's grand pipe organ.

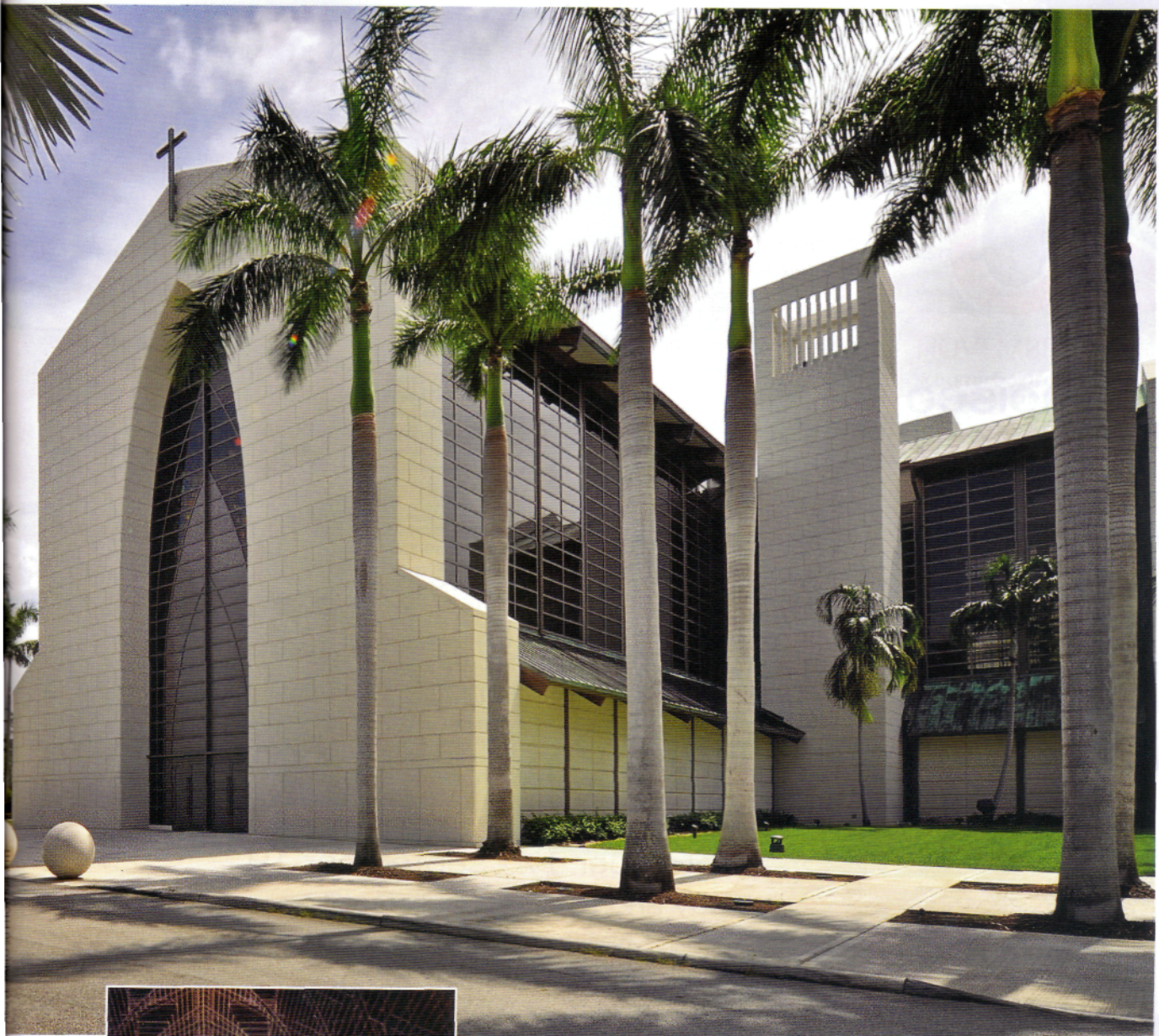
Interior of Candela's Church of the Epiphany in Miami.

Church of the Epiphany, designed by Candela, 1994-1997, completed in 2000.



To conceive an architectural environment that heightens the purity of sacred music seems a sublime, if ironic, bookend to a career that essentially began with the design of a structure for those who thrill to the roar of powerboats. But if a restored Miami Marine Stadium goes down as his magnum opus, Candela says, "It won't bother me to be remembered for it." **M**

Rebecca Kleinman writes about homes, gardens, cuisine, fashion, and travel for several regional and national publications and guides. She lives in Miami Beach.



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Hilario Candela in his office at
Spillis Candela and Partners
with a photo of the Church of
the Epiphany design behind.