

# Miami Marine Stadium: A Revival of Magic, Concrete, and Spray Paint

By Travis Cohen

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Photos by Claire Nelson

You roll under the toll of arches, where you'll pay your \$1.75 in shiny stained quarters and leave the mainland via Rickenbacker conveyance. You ride the long curvaceous bridge above the Bay that takes you to Key Biscayne. Another few minutes of driving and you'll find yourself presented with a tall, unbarred fence and a looming dilapidated structure, longer than a football field and seemingly streamed in a multitude of colors, hidden by a lush overgrowth of trees. Pull in, move along the course of the roundabout until the undeniably immense and interesting concrete creation is at your side, and bask in the air of aged abandonment. This is [Miami Marine Stadium](#).

And while it has sat silently upon its watery foundations for the last two decades like a beautiful corpse in the sun, there is finally a spark of hope that Marine Stadium will soon be resurrected as a unique venue for extraordinary entertainment.

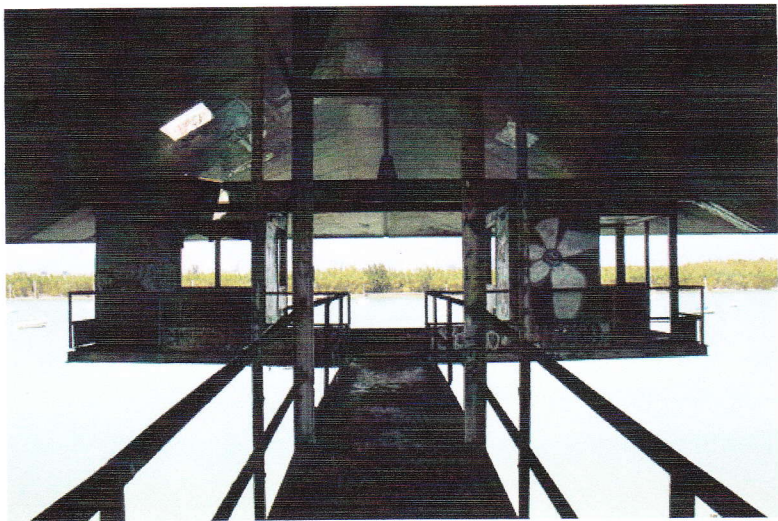
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Designed by Hilario Candela when he was 26 years old, the stadium was constructed in 1963 and remained open for just under 30 years, falling dormant when the city declared the building unsafe in the wake of Hurricane Andrew's destructive tear through Miami in 1992. It seats just over 6,500 in a strikingly modern cantilevered grandstand of poured concrete, held aloft by a series of angled pillars that stand out as a stark predecessor to the hard lines and soaring supports of the Herzog & De Meuron 1111 Lincoln Road parking installation.



"The building's been deserted for 20 years after it was closed for hurricane Andrew," explained Donald Worth, Co-Founder of the Friends of Miami Marine Stadium, the grassroots organization working to revive this fascinating place. "Five years ago...I went to a meeting of the Miami-Dade Heritage Trust, a local historic preservation organization, and suggested we form a group. I met George Hernandez there, who is a professor of architecture and was involved in the trust, and we started a group. When we had the first meeting, I expected five people would show up, because with historic preservation meetings, you generally have five people show up and it's always the same five people -- and there were 20 people and I didn't know any of them."

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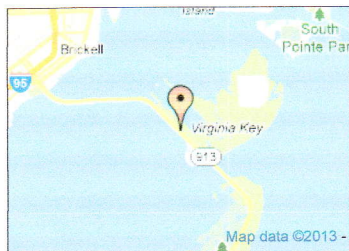




According to Worth, the movement to bring the stadium back to life has had the public's favor from its inception, when he, Hernandez, and Candela, the trio Worth referred to as "the Three Amigos," began to garner support from the public. But there have been challenges to overcome with the City of Miami, which nearly demolished the building just as soon as Worth's organization manifested itself.

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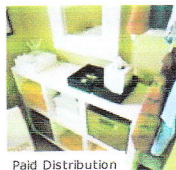
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"The first thing we had to do was stop a wrecking ball. In 2008, the understanding was that this place was going to be demolished -- it didn't have a life, it was a white elephant, it was damaged by the hurricane -- so we got the city of Miami's historic preservation board to designate it as historic," stated Worth.

"In the last five years, we've really worked in two areas: advocacy and feasibility," he continued. "Advocacy has been all about getting the public engaged in it, and the National Trust for Historic Preservation has been a great partner with us. They're the foremost preservation organization in the United States. They named this [stadium] to their 11 most endangered list in 2009, declared it a National Treasure last year, and now we're working really closely together."

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In the peak era of its use, Miami Marine Stadium was one the world's most impressive staging grounds for powerboat racing, hosting everything from the Unlimited Hydroplane classes to Grand National divisions. Apart from races, the stadium was also a premier venue for concerts, with acts like the Beach Boys and Queen coming to perform on a floating stage for the thousands who would watch from the seats and the scores more who would drop anchor alongside the show and enjoy the music from the comfort of their own boats.

It was a wholly singular place and remains such. Only now, there are no performances, no roaring monstrous engines tearing circuits about the bay, no enthralled spectators filling the wooden seats. The concession stands hold no sustenance and there isn't a single ticket stub littering the grounds.



Instead, the grounds are littered with half-empty Coronas, condoms, and spent spray cans. The seats are splintered and a handful have been torn out of the floor and taken. And nearly every inch of concrete has been covered in a thousand types of paint, from Krylon to Montana, with every class of graffiti represented. From pissant middle-school grade tags to engrossing works of art from crews like GUK and MSG, the stadium has become one of the most prolifically used **penits** for all types of writers in the city of Miami.


The Friends of Miami Marine Stadium intend to maintain some aspect of this flourishing art space when the stadium reopens, though they're not entire certain how precisely they'll bring that to bear. For now, they're focusing on making this decades-anticipated restoration a reality, which, optimistically speaking, could be approved, funded, and completed in as little as three years.

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"We've made contact with about 40 promoters and event organizations who want to use it for concerts, racing, athletic events, festivals, spectacles, and movie shoots," said Worth. (The stadium has already been used in the Michael Bay film *Pain & Gain*.) "We know it'll cost about \$37 million to repair and for an endowment fund. We have \$10 million identified; we have a major construction company that's given us estimates; we've had an engineering study done that found the stadium was never damaged by the hurricane. We're now going back to the city of Miami to get our site plan approved and then we'll begin raising money."

Worth speaks of the process with a palpable conviction and an excitement that's infectious. He has an obvious fondness for Miami Marine Stadium and high hopes for its glorious return.

"One of the things we've done over the last four years with the National Trust has been to compile memories about the stadium for a book called *If Seats Could Talk*. We've got 182,

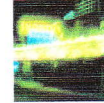
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and the word that people use about this place is *magical*. When you go in there, it's a special place. It just gives you the chills every time you go in...

"It's a tough project," he noted. "It's a tough project, but it is a doable project. We're more convinced than ever that this thing will be a spectacular success for the community."

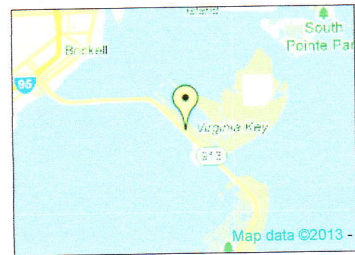


To find out more about the project to restore the Miami Marine Stadium, visit [savingplaces.org/treasures/miami-marine-stadium](http://savingplaces.org/treasures/miami-marine-stadium).

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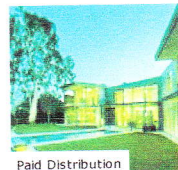
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