

Eminent Domain

NEWS, STARS, AND TRENDS IN
REAL ESTATE AND ARCHITECTURE

The recently topped off New River Yacht Club is one of a number of projects helping change the face of Fort Lauderdale's riverfront.

Take Me to the River

THE BANKS OF FORT LAUDERDALE'S NEW RIVER ARE SEEING STYLISH NEW DEVELOPMENTS, BOTH IN REAL ESTATE AND CULTURE. BY SEAN MCCAUGHAN

Fort Lauderdale's nickname, the Venice of America, can easily seem more than a bit aspirational if you're stuck in traffic on Broward Boulevard. Sure, the city contains an extensive system of inland waterways, but anywhere outside of downtown, the canal system is distinctly suburban—perfect for motoring the yacht from your mansion to a friend's, but not much else. Downtown Fort Lauderdale, with its sensational Riverwalk, is where the Venice analogy really seems to make sense: It's where the city of Fort Lauderdale got its start and where the future of Fort Lauderdale may lie. Right now, although construction halted during the economic downturn and is only beginning to pick up, new developments and cultural happenings along both sides of the New River are making the city's urban heart beat better than ever.

According to Seminole Indian legend, the New River first appeared after a night of strong winds, loud noises, and shaking ground. They named it Himmarshee, meaning "new water." Along its banks, on high ground inland from the ocean, was where the earliest settlements in the area were built, where the Stranahans opened their pioneer trading post, and where the railway routed. More recently, Fort Lauderdale built its Riverwalk, a pair of pedestrian walks on the north and south banks of the river, centered on Las Olas Riverfront, a once-thriving urban shopping center.

It took 25 years to build the Riverwalk, in piecemeal sections, as new residential and commercial projects came along or rights-of-way opened up. The more developed northern side gained many features, like parks and public

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LEFT: Rendering of Marina Lofts, designed by renowned architect Bjarke Ingels; BELOW: New River Village Phase III.

“Marina Lofts is for those who care about design, an iconic, mixed-use environment that celebrates Fort Lauderdale.”

—ASI CYMBAL

and ground-floor retail and restaurants along the Riverwalk. Renderings promise a contemporary building in beige stucco with an active, pedestrian-oriented frontage along the river. There are also rumors of filling in the south bank’s final missing link with the New River Yacht Club West, the project’s second phase, a taller, deeper building still in the planning stages but slated to replace a boatyard on the east side of the old Florida

safe distance away from construction and near the entrance to Marina Lofts. A dramatic canyon will slice through Marina Lofts’ principal building, creating a grand public entrance to the Riverwalk.

With the influx of new residents into downtown Fort Lauderdale comes a healthy dose of pumped-up cultural offerings. The Broward Center for the Performing Arts, across the river from Marina Lofts, opened new skybox-style seating about a year ago; the \$56 million expansion project includes the recently topped-off Huizenga Pavilion, a new wing that will house a restaurant and banquet hall overlooking the river, and new bar areas in the center’s public spaces. Meanwhile, the Museum of Art Fort Lauderdale also has a new director in Bonnie Clearwater, the celebrated former director of North Miami’s MOCA.

Along with other new residential construction projects, including the 15-floor New River Village Phase III, the massive new Broward County courthouse being built on the river’s south side, and a number of substantial transportation and infrastructural projects coming in the near future, the face of downtown Fort Lauderdale will be considerably upgraded. The Wave streetcar will glide through downtown, from the new Florida East Coast Railway passenger station, across a much more pedestrian-friendly Broward Boulevard, and over the river. A pedestrian plaza above the US 1 tunnel will connect the Riverwalk to the Las Olas Boulevard shopping district.

Meanwhile, in other parts of the city, the former Trump Fort Lauderdale will be converted into the proposed Conrad Fort Lauderdale Beach Residences, while the former Howard Johnson site (700 N. Atlantic Blvd.) will be rebranded as a luxury, purely residential property. Both are being sold by One World Properties.

While Fort Lauderdale is still an extremely popular retirement destination (*Money* magazine recently ranked it among the top 10 nationally), the city’s growing pockets of picturesque urbanity are attracting a younger generation of professionals and creatives, who can’t wait to rent an affordable apartment in a spectacular starchitect-designed building, to walk along a lively riverfront, and to live in an American Venice. **OD**

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buildings, while the south side lagged. That’s all about to change. New residential developments, including The Related Group’s recently topped off New River Yacht Club (400 SW First Ave., Fort Lauderdale; 954-635-5922) and developer Asi Cymbal’s Marina Lofts (marinaloftsfortlauderdale.com), designed by the world-renowned architect Bjarke Ingels, are coming to the river’s less developed south side. The combination of those two rental apartment projects will mean the completion of both sides of the Riverwalk. The New River Yacht Club, on schedule to be completed in the spring, is 26 stories high, with 246 rental units

East Coast Railway tracks.

Just over the railroad tracks from the New River Yacht Club is the future site of Marina Lofts, a project that Cymbal plans to break ground on in the third quarter of 2014. Marina Lofts, says Cymbal, is “for those who care about design and an environmentally sensitive community, to live in an iconic, mixed-use environment that celebrates Fort Lauderdale and its marine uses.” The 856-unit rental apartment project will be built in phases, preceded by the expensive and complicated relocation of a magnificent Albizia saman, or “rain tree,” that stands 61 feet tall and 127 feet wide. The tree will be preserved in its own park a

