



The Maestro of Miami Beach

With a luxurious new hotel and a billionaire-filled apartment tower, Argentinean entrepreneur Alan Faena is bringing South American glamour to South Florida.

BY ANN ABEL

At 52, Argentinean real estate developer Alan Faena has already made his mark on fashion, art, hospitality and urbanism. Along with his creative partner, American billionaire Len Blavatnik, he's responsible for turning the derelict docklands of Buenos Aires' Puerto Madero into a highly desirable destination—and some of the most expensive real estate in Argentina—with a development that includes the first Faena hotel, which opened in 2004. But he doesn't consider himself an entrepreneur. Rather, he introduces himself as a storyteller.

Now Faena is writing a new chapter about one of Miami's forgotten neighborhoods, a

White hot: Alan Faena collaborated with movie director Baz Luhrmann and his wife, costume designer Catherine Martin, to fulfill his kaleidoscopic vision for the Faena Hotel.

“drive-by” corridor of Collins Avenue between North Beach and South Beach. As in Buenos Aires, the plan is far more ambitious than building a mere hotel. This utopia—or “Futopia,” in its marketing parlance—that Faena says he's creating stretches five blocks between the ocean and a canal. By 2017 it will include the newly opened Faena Hotel Miami Beach; the Foster + Partners-designed Faena House, whose multimillion-dollar apartments have been bought by Goldman Sachs CEO Lloyd Blankfein and Citadel CEO Kenneth Griffin, who roughly doubled Miami's record for residential real estate when he bought the pent-

house and a unit below in 2014 for \$60 million (he's put them back on the market this year for \$73 million); Faena Art, a cultural organization; another new residential tower next to the former Versailles hotel; a beachside guesthouse; and a Rem Koolhaas/OMA-designed performing arts center and retail space.

Faena and Blavatnik's investment in the development—known as the Faena District—has already topped \$1.2 billion. It's only the second time in history that Miami has allowed a geographic area to be given an official name, Faena tells me proudly over cappuccino at the Mandarin Oriental New York. (The first was the Art Deco District.) And he is all-in—building boardwalks and gardens and improving side streets—and hands-on. He spends most of his time in Miami, working out of a trailer on-site filled with fabric samples and architectural renderings. For someone with such sweeping vision, he's surprisingly involved in minutiae, down to knowing the names of his construction workers.

Faena believes his outsider status helped him dive into the project—that if he had known Miami going in, he would have accepted the idea that the neighborhood wasn't promising and a low-budget hotel would have been a better idea. “When I saw the ocean

Playa playground: Not far from the Faena pool is a gilded skeleton of a woolly mammoth by artist Damien Hirst.



and, two blocks away, the canal, I thought this was the center of Miami Beach. I said, “This is a fantastic place,” Faena recalls. “That was the moment we had to take the bet. We decided to go for the best—to think of the best, to offer the best. If you offer the best in a great environment with great architecture, with great service, with great culture around, people will come. But there’s always a moment of risk that you have to pass to become a success with something like this.”

Blavatnik, who owns the project, had confidence in his business partner and in their location. “The heart and soul of the Faena experience is creativity and innovation,” he says. “Miami was the natural spot to develop this type of highly creative and innovative project, as it’s becoming an epicenter for the exchange of creative ideas worldwide. I asked Alan to lead the development because he has the grandness of vision and skills to take things to the next level.”

The 169-room hotel is the easiest place to get a glimpse of Faena’s vision. It’s stunning, a fantasyland where every cinematic detail was chosen not only for its aesthetic value but also for its ability to continue the narrative of Latin life, including outdoor living and flame-cooked meat. (He also stresses that this is the first time a luxury brand has migrated from South America to North—usually it goes the other way.) The Faena occupies the

shell of the 1947 Saxony Hotel—already owned by Blavatnik, who had connected with Faena through fashion mogul Chris Burch—and pays homage to the golden-age glamour of Miami while remaining thoroughly modern.

The concept and design for the rooms (which begin at \$745 a night), public places and very flow of the hotel was a collaboration among Blavatnik, Faena and the cool Belgian consultancy Studio Job, with commissioned works by artists Juan Gatti and Alberto Garutti, whose two grand chandeliers flicker every time lightning strikes the Argentinean pampas. The most talked-about piece, however, is Damien Hirst’s “Gone but Not Forgotten,” a gilded woolly mammoth skeleton,

which stands at the gateway to the beach.

Filmmaker Baz Luhrmann and his wife, costume designer Catherine Martin, were central to Faena’s design. The couple wasn’t an obvious choice—they’d never worked on a hotel—but Faena wanted fellow storytellers, not hotel designers who would follow formulas. “These people are used to working in cinema,” he explains, “and not used to repeating themselves.” That’s a switch from many big-name hotel designers, who make beautiful, recognizable work “that has no spirit and soul behind it. To bring our spirit from the South of grandeur, I found myself really liking working with Baz and CM, because I’ve always been a big fan of theirs. I thought, I need to work with people like that.”

The idea of “bringing the South to the North” extends to the hotel’s flagship restaurant—conceived by Argentinean rock-star chef Francis Mallmann—where everything is cooked in an outdoor fire kitchen, and also to its 150-seat theater, whose first concert series kicked off in April with Caetano Veloso and Gilberto Gil, and its spa, where special treatments were devised by Faena’s personal shaman.

“I don’t like to make small things,” he concludes. “I like to make things that change a city. Buenos Aires is not the same after the Faena, and I believe it will be that way with Miami.”



TRENDING

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PERSON RIHANNA

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COMPANY RICHARD MILLE

The luxury Swiss watchmaker introduced a mechanical fountain pen with a 12-jewel movement that extends a white gold nib. It will have a limited production run and cost \$105,000.

IDEA THE MACARONUT

In the grand tradition of the “cronut,” New York chef François Payard has introduced another delicious Frankenpastry: the Macaronut Donut, or Macaronut, which crosses a French macaron with an American doughnut.

FINAL THOUGHT

 “The beach is not a place to work; to read, write or think.” —ANNE MORROW LINDBERGH