



## Brickell dining comes to life

mer NBA superstar Michael Jordan.

The owners of PM opted for Brickell and its urban environment with a regular customer base versus the more transient Miami Beach with its high volume of tourists.

"We think this city is becoming an international city," said Ignacio Leonardi, general manager of PM Miami. "We want to be here for the next 20 years."

The Brickell dining boom correlates with the growth in the residential population in downtown Miami and Brickell Avenue. In the past decade, the downtown population has nearly doubled, reaching 71,600 in 2011 as residents filled up new condominiums. Add a work-day population of about 200,000, and the combination becomes extremely attractive for both restaurants and retailers.

About a dozen new restaurants and bars opened in the Brickell area last year and 18 more in downtown, according to Miami's Downtown Development Authority.

### 'RED HOT'

"Downtown is red hot," said Alyce Robertson, executive director of the DDA. "It has its own personality now, different from the beach. It's a destination in its own right for dining."

No one would have said that five years ago. For years, Miami Beach was the center of the foodie universe. Brickell had Capital Grille, Morton's and local favorites like Perricone's Marketplace & Café, but that's where the spotlight ended.

The boom in Brickell dining started with the 2006 opening of Mary Brickell Village and casual restaurants including burger joints and Irish pubs. But recent options are more upscale. Some industry experts say it's a natural extension of the fine dining scene — with restaurants including Zuma, Il Gabbiano and db Bistro Moderne — that have been so successful on the downtown side of the bridge.

It also helps that sales volumes of \$8 million to \$10 million have become more common at top restaurants both in downtown Miami and on Miami Beach.

"The good news is that we've grown enough in population density and tourism that dining in all of these areas is growing," said Lyle Stern, a Miami Beach broker who represents a number of high-end restaurants. "There's more than enough to go around."

When it came time to relaunch the iconic China Grill brand for its 25th anniversary, owner Jeffrey Chodorow looked everywhere from Midtown Miami to Miami Beach before deciding on 801 Brickell Avenue. The new China Grill, expected to open in December, will feature a complete remake of menu and design; the space will be about 50 percent larger than its previous South Beach location.

For Chodorow, the decision came down to Brickell's unmatched attractions: a large office population that could bring in a lunch and happy-hour crowd, an abundance of parking and a central location with easy

access from points north and south.

Based on the success of China Grill in New York City, Chodorow expects his Brickell Avenue sales to beat the former South Beach location by as much as \$4 million to \$5 million a year.

"If you're going to build an \$8 million to \$10 million restaurant, it can't be just about the scene," Chodorow said. "There have to be solid business fundamentals. Brickell was sort of a no-brainer."

The most heralded new addition to Brickell Avenue could be the arrival of famed California chef Thomas Keller. Multiple industry sources say Keller has been actively looking for a space in the Brickell area.

But nothing is set, according to a Keller Restaurant Group spokesman. "While there have been discussions of possible opportunities in Miami, nothing has been finalized," wrote Gerald San Jose in an email last week.

Many of the new Brickell restaurants are taking advantage of the spaces being developed in new office buildings and condominiums. Du Cap, owned by one of the investors in Zuma Miami, will open early next year at the new office tower 600 Brickell with a French Provencal menu of small plates designed by Chef Philippe Ruiz, formerly of the Biltmore Hotel. Meat Market steakhouse plans to open in the ground floor of BrickellHouse, a 374-unit luxury condo expected to break ground this summer and be ready in 2014.

The 1450 Brickell office

tower and adjoining 1 Broadway rental building is already home to five different kinds of restaurants, and two more are on the way. Developer Alan Ojeda's strategy: options at a variety of price points and service levels.

In late June, Claudio Giordano, the owner of Altamare on Miami Beach, will open TIKL at 1450 Brickell, featuring tapas-style small plates. While he still plans to keep his Beach restaurant, he sees Brickell as the up-and-coming place to be.

"I foresee Brickell becoming like a little Manhattan," Giordano said.

## TEETHING TROUBLE

That doesn't mean opening on Brickell is a slam dunk. Mare Nostrum, which opened in December, shut down this month temporarily as the owners revamp the concept. The restaurant is expected to reopen later this summer but details are to be determined, said Peter Lopez, director of operations for Mare Nostrum and Lucky Clover, an Irish sports bar by the same owners that is also retooling its menu.

"We've learned how different this market is and we wanted to readjust," Lopez said. The changes mean lo-

cal business people like banker Eddy Arriola can step outside his office and walk to dozens of different places for breakfast, lunch or dinner.

"It's so much easier to connect with people," said Arriola, chairman of Apollo Bank.

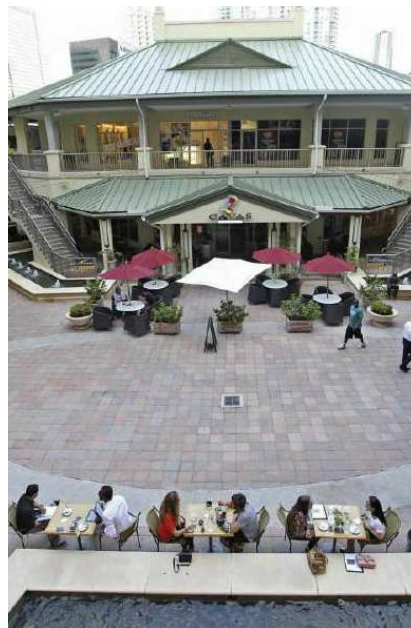
"At lunch or just walking down the street you can bump into 10 people. It's bringing people together."

### New Brickell area restaurants coming in 2012 or beyond:

- China Grill, 801 Brickell Ave.
  - TIKL, 1450 Brickell Ave.
  - Brickell Deli, 1451 S. Miami Ave.
  - Du Cap, 600 Brickell
  - Brother Jimmy's BBQ, Mary Brickell Village, 900 S. Miami Ave.
  - Taverna Opa, Mary Brickell Village, 900 S. Miami Ave.
  - Cipriani, Icon Brickell
  - La Cantina, Icon Brickell
  - Meat Market, Brickell-House, 1300 Brickell Bay Dr.\*
- \* Not yet under construction



**ENTERTAINMENT DESTINATION:** Zlata Braukcic is fed a cherry from her birthday cake by Jana Ern as she celebrates with friends at Segafredo Brickell on South Miami Avenue.



**OUTDOOR EATS:** People enjoy outdoor dining at Mary Brickell Village on South Miami Avenue.