

State of Luxury

By Roger Grody

Its emergence as an economic powerhouse and world-class cultural center further enhances demand for the luxury lifestyle that comes naturally in Florida.

Having surpassed New York in population, Florida is now the third largest state in America and its influence is practically unrivaled. Whether the topic is leisure, fashion, politics, or the arts, the Sunshine State is always part of the conversation. Fueled by a resort lifestyle whose currency is surf and sun, Florida is also a dominant force in shaping luxury trends.

State of Play

Florida's obsession with golf is supported by more courses than any other state, with Palm Beach County proclaiming itself "Florida's Golf Capital" and, not to be outdone, Naples is promoted as "Golf Capital of the World."

"Golf plays a pivotal role in the economy of Florida," reports Tommy Hearden, business development manager of Nicklaus Design, the Jack Nicklaus-led company that creates extraordinary golf experiences throughout Florida and the world. In addition to its importance to tourism, Hearden suggests that golf's role in residential development — almost as many people dream of living on the links as on the waterfront — represents a major economic impact.

In fact, golf generates at least \$10 billion annually to Florida's economy and the synergy between golf and real estate is on display at the Nicklaus-designed Bear's Club in Jupiter,

Four Seasons Private Residences Fort Lauderdale



COURTESY OF FOUR SEASONS PRIVATE RESIDENCES FORT LAUDERDALE



Nicklaus Design
North Palm Beach Country Club

where a home overlooking the 11th fairway is listed for \$30 million. Assessing Florida's status, Hearden insists, "I'd rank Florida right up there with any golfing destination in the world."

Golf is not the only sport that is part of the state's DNA, and with 1,350 miles of coastline sailing is irresistible. While much of its waters are too shallow to accommodate superyachts, a luxury clientele and proximity to the Caribbean makes South Florida as significant to the yachting world as the Mediterranean or Dubai. Camper & Nicholson's senior yacht broker Fernando Nicholson — he is a descendent of the founder of the global industry leader — reports unprecedented demand for vessels whose prices rival oceanfront estates.

A combination of supply chain issues and heightened demand has resulted in extremely low inventory, explains the specialist in

superyachts, which can command \$500 million for the pinnacle of luxury. "When the doors first began to open after the pandemic, tremendous demand for yachts occurred, as well as a demand for dreams — to sail to those beautiful places," says Nicholson. Sailing enthusiasts preferring short-term relationships may charter the 400-foot Octopus (sleeping 12 and staffed by 42) for a mere \$2.2 million per week.

To accommodate the lifestyle, Florida offers a sophisticated infrastructure of marinas, yacht clubs and gated communities. Recently opened is Miami Beach's Monaco Yacht Club & Residences, a private 12-slip marina paired with 39 exclusive waterfront residences featuring aesthetics by iconic designer Piero Lissoni. Matthew Barry, managing director of Optimum Development USA, reports, "Our buyers recognize the unparalleled value and

convenience of having their boat docked right at their doorstep, combined with first-class services offered by a luxury lifestyle."

Florida rivals Kentucky as an equestrian paradise, with Triple Crown winners Affirmed and American Pharoah trained in Ocala, a city nicknamed "Horse Capital of the World." The Village of Wellington, outside Palm Beach, hosts the nation's most prestigious equestrian competitions, and the U.S. Open Polo Championship takes place nearby. The sport is expensive — the social calendar entails Chanel, Champagne and caviar — and Wellington ranch prices gallop past \$25 million.

State of Surf & Sun

In Florida, every stretch of sand has its own personality. Sun worshipers enjoy Clearwater Beach outside Tampa, Siesta Key

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near Sarasota or Jacksonville's Atlantic Beach, while surfers head to Cocoa Beach on the Space Coast. South Beach is the place to be seen, while the Keys, an archipelago of real estate strung along the Overseas Highway like pearls, is totally laid-back. Key West, the southernmost point in the continental U.S., is steeped in history, with President Truman, Ernest Hemingway and playwright Tennessee Williams all regulars. Hotels like the La Concha and Casa Marina exude the colorful history of this tiny corner of America, which is proud of its eccentricities.

As prime sites in Greater Miami are picked over, developers seek opportunities in other parts of Florida. Edgardo Defortuna, president and CEO of Fortune International Group, reports his company is securing waterfront sites up the coast and is also exploring Tampa Bay and

Naples. Fortune International's Ritz-Carlton Residences Pompano Beach, which will feature a 30-story beachfront tower and 12-story tower on the Intracoastal Waterway, reflects this trend.

In Fort Lauderdale, a former mecca for spring breakers, the Four Seasons Private Residences has debuted with a penthouse priced at \$15.9 million. Ramzi Achi, principal of Fort Partners, states, "The Four Seasons brand has been known to elevate cities into international destinations...We worked with the best and brightest names to deliver modern oceanfront residences that will forever change the landscape of Fort Lauderdale."

Resorts such as The Don CeSar on the Gulf Coast, Colony Hotel & Cabana Club in Delray Beach and the National Hotel on South Beach reflect Florida's diverse history. Tabish Saddique, general manager of The Vinoy Renaissance St.

Petersburg Resort & Golf Club, states, "The Vinoy is a timeless symbol of Old Florida charm with its rich history, Mediterranean Revival design and laid-back sophistication." Noting its unique blend of Floridian hospitality and modern amenities, he adds, "The Vinoy, beloved by locals and out-of-town guests, is an irreplaceable pillar of St. Petersburg's downtown waterfront."

State of Design

Nothing tells the story of Florida's dynamic growth and audacious attitude more than the ever-changing skyline of Miami. A summer 2022 groundbreaking is scheduled for the 70-story Okan Tower, one of many world-class projects in the pipeline. "Okan Tower will further position Miami's reputation as a global design and architectural destination," proclaims Bekir Okan, its Turkish developer. In addition to luxury

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residences and hotel accommodations, the tulip-shaped skyscraper will claim Miami's highest swimming pool — on the 70th floor.

The Okan Tower's anticipated status as the city's tallest building is being challenged by the Waldorf Astoria Miami, expected to soar more than 1,000 feet above Biscayne Bay in 2025. With nine offset-stacked cubes, the 100-story building is the antithesis of the monolithic skyscraper, but characteristic of innovative Uruguayan architect Carlos Ott.

Nobody can better address the transformation of Miami than Fortune International Group's Edgardo Defortuna, whose projects include the Jade Signature from renowned Swiss architects Herzog & de Meuron and the Carlos Ott-designed Jade Ocean. "The world is in love with Miami," states Defortuna, a native of Argentina. He explains, "People from the entire world want to be here, and Miami is evolving into an international city similar to New York and London."

"Talent brings talent and competition makes it prestigious for those bright minds to design here," says Defortuna of the convergence of world-renowned architects in Miami. Another local phenomenon is the branding of residential towers, pioneered by hospitality companies but now attracting other iconic names — Porsche and Aston Martin from the automotive industry, Armani and Fendi from the fashion world — to convey exclusivity.

State of Change

Florida is in a constant state of change, and while city skylines are transformed daily, there is no better example of the state's reinvention than the polishing of the Emerald Coast. In many ways, the Florida Panhandle is more akin to neighboring Alabama than Miami, but rapid growth is reinventing the region once nicknamed the "Redneck Riviera." The pandemic brought luxury homebuyers migrating from larger cities, contributing to a robust real estate market.

Affluent travelers to the Panhandle, rebranded as the Emerald Coast, gravitate to The Henderson, which Southern Living magazine named the best resort in the South, and new developments are capitalizing on the extraordinary coastline. Alys Beach is one of several planned communities along Scenic Highway 30A, where sugar-white sand and turquoise waters contribute to a laid-back but fashionable lifestyle. "Alys Beach, along with Seaside and Rosemary Beach, have set the standard for urban planning that is studied across the country," says Tom Dodson, Alys Beach vice president of sales.

Marieanne Khoury-Vogt, principal of

Khoury & Vogt Architects, which serves as Town Architects for Alys Beach, reports the community's exterior architecture was inspired by Bermuda, while the homes' interior courtyards were informed by Spanish Colonial residences in Guatemala. "Restrained in regard to ornamentation, The design concept is quite elegant and sculptural," states Khoury-Vogt.


The Buccaneers are not the only game in Tampa, as Florida's largest Gulf Coast city is experiencing a serious renaissance. The transformational \$3 billion Water Street complex includes 3,500 housing units, the most opulent being the 37 one-of-a-kind Residences at the Tampa Edition, Marriott's luxury brand in collaboration with Ian Schrager. The Residences, beginning at \$2 million, are raising the bar for luxury design and amenities in the city.

State of Arts

One would expect Miami to have a strong arts scene, which includes well-established institutions like the Pérez Art Museum Miami, Vizcaya Museum & Gardens and the César Pelli-designed Adrienne Arsht Center for the performing arts. More contemporary expressions of cultural clout are reflected by the much-hyped Art Basel and Miami Design District, where celebrity fashion designers, architects and chefs compete for the attention of discriminating consumers.

More underappreciated are the cultural assets found throughout Florida, not only in big cities like Tampa and Jacksonville, but quieter communities as well. Naples, Boca Raton, Winter Park, and Pensacola boast respected art museums and the small Central Florida city of DeLand is home to the African American Museum of the Arts. Community theater and local symphonies are blossoming across the state and the city of Sarasota is revered by scholars for its Midcentury Modern architecture.

The state of Florida's culinary arts is among the most vibrant and creative in the world, fueled by talent arriving from every corner of the globe. Larry Carrino, president of Brustman Carrino — the prestigious public relations firm represents many of the state's hottest chefs and restaurants — reports that Florida's attractiveness as a place to invest and conduct business spills into the food scene.

"In a very short time Miami has become one of the most exciting cities for dining, and an influx of talented chefs relocated here during the pandemic," explains Carrino. From a statewide perspective, he observes, "Tampa, Orlando and other areas are following their own paths and finding their own flavors, evolving into unique food scenes rather than carbon copies of other cities." 

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