

**Interview Subject: Saul Gross, Preservation Developer**

**Date Recorded: 2-18-12**

**Location: MDPL office, Art Deco Welcome Center**

**Date of Birth: 8-9-54**

Saul talks about what attracted him to Miami Beach in 1983 as a real estate developer specializing in historic renovation. The Miami Beach Community Development Corporation was recruiting developers with the enticement of federal money and tax incentives to renovate the district. He was impressed with the fabulous buildings, the ocean, the scale and saw real opportunity. He had been working in New York City, New Haven and Seattle and thought he'd like the change.

"You could be a big fish in no pond," because no one else was really in the game yet. He describes how there was a small group of very successful, innovative people who met regularly to talk about what they were doing which was way ahead of the curve.

Saul partnered in opening one of the first live jazz bars on the beach in the Edison Hotel.

The presence of the Marielitos made doing business difficult because of theft of tools overnight and half finished buildings would be full of drug paraphernalia the morning after, but by the early 90's the effort was very successful.

He talks about the struggles even today to preserve the district because historic preservation is taken for granted and there's a national pushback about government regulation. He cites the Apple store controversy on Lincoln Mall in which the Apple corporation wanted to destroy a building in order to expand and it was disallowed.

Saul believes they have shown that preserving buildings and making money are not incompatible.

In 2001 he chaired the City of Miami Beach Design Review Board at a time when investors were putting lots of pressure on the city to increase heights

of buildings. He was able to help mediate many cases because he was an investor himself so he understood where they were coming from yet he understood the importance of maintaining the historical context and scale, where you could actually look down a street and see the ocean and sky.

He talks about the commercial success of South Beach and how now it is occupied year round when previously there was only a winter season.

His bottom line is that the city needs to collectively market to the kind of people and business wanted that will keep the historical context and yet be innovative.

In terms of Miami Beach's past, the best days are always ahead.