

More Rooms and Retail at Miami/Brickell Hampton

By Paris Wolfe

In Miami's Brickell Financial District, land is too valuable for a standard Hampton Inn. That's why Hospitality Operations, Inc. is supersizing its fifth and newest Hampton Inn, and building it atop 10,000 square feet of retail space.

"The land is more valuable per square foot than a typical Hampton Inn," says company president and developer Bernard Wolfson. "Because of that value, we maximized the number of units and designed the building for retail on the ground level."



His newest Hampton Inn & Suites in downtown Miami/Brickell is scheduled to open this October with 221 guestrooms and suites, putting it in the chain's top 15. Plans call for a mid-range restaurant to fill most of the first-floor retail space, with a fast-food joint or service business in the remaining area.

"It's very unusual for us to have a hotel built on top of retail space," says Charmaine Easie-Samuels, spokesperson for Hampton Inn, Hilton Worldwide.

Because the location is so unique, this makes sense. "The hotel's mid-market appeal and the Brickell area's emergence as a hotbed of residential and commercial growth means our street-level storefronts offer big business opportunity for restaurateurs seeking a presence in the area," notes Wolfson.

The Hampton-based restaurant is expected to draw beyond the hotel. "With more and more people moving into the area and the number of visitors in downtown Miami on the rise, there are multiple drivers luring retail business to the area," says leasing agent Lyle Stern.

With parking on floors two through five, the inn starts on the sixth floor. There, guests will find the lobby, lobby bar, pool, meeting rooms, fitness and business centers. The top nine floors are guestrooms. A lobby bar is another departure for the typical Hampton Inn. "Because we're in a very cosmopolitan area we anticipate a number of foreign tourists and they're used to having a bar in the lobby," says Wolfson. "We got special permission for that."

Financing a new hotel was, he admits, a challenge. "We approached a number of banks and lenders. For the most part the loan officers I spoke to liked the concept, but, when they ran it upstairs, people were a little jittery. We finally worked a deal with Wells Fargo. They recognized the opportunity for themselves and made a loan."



That opportunity was rooted in track record—four successful Hampton Inns in south Florida—as well as credit worthiness and, of course, location.

Wolfson is confident in the economy and the Miami location. "I have confidence in Miami's future. I have confidence in our ability to deliver a hotel room at the right place to the public. We're giving them a value alternative in that area.