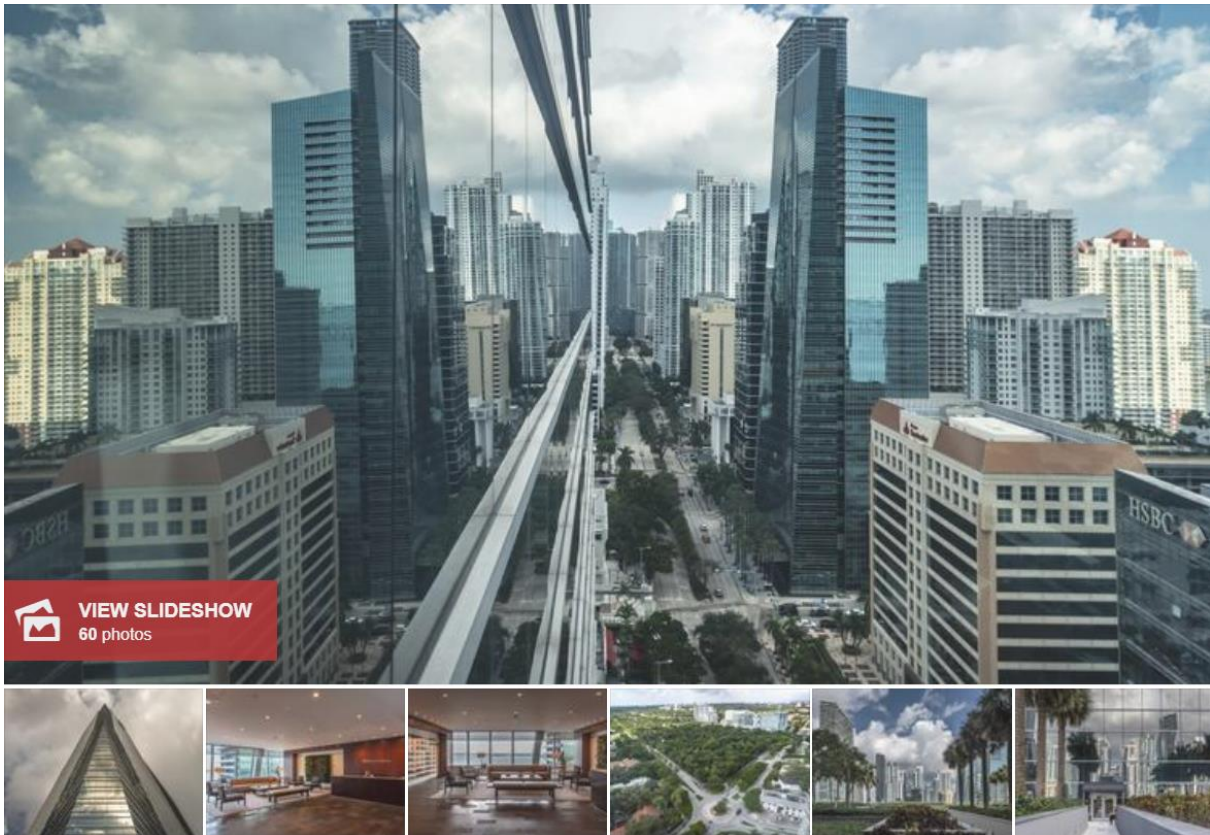


## Strolling the Strip: How Brickell went from sleepy business district to bustling city center



By **Ashley Portero** – Reporter, South Florida Business Journal

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*Editor's Note: This is one in a series of articles on iconic thoroughfares across the tri-county area that are undergoing significant changes. Our Strolling the Strip stories aim to give readers an overview of the transformations happening at these popular destinations with photos and voices from the business community.*

Ten years ago, Miami's Brickell was the neighborhood where local lawyers and bankers congregated in office buildings by day and quickly abandoned for buzzier locales by evening.

That began to change during the Great Recession. The crisis hit during a surge in high-rise condo construction, leading to plummeting real estate prices and a flood of new, younger professionals itching to live in an urban center.

That was the first step in Brickell's revitalization said **Christina Crespi**, deputy director of the Miami

Downtown Development Authority.

"The new condos and residents sparked a change that helped fill the lagging office market," Crespi said.

Downtown Miami's residential population – including Brickell – hovers at 92,000, a 38% increase since 2010, according to the DDA. When you count commuters, the area's daytime population surpasses 250,000 and generates a \$38 billion annual economic output.

With the population surge came a variety of commercial amenities, including outdoor plaza Mary Brickell Village and luxury shopping mall Brickell City Centre. The plethora of surrounding bars and restaurants have helped create an entertainment district that rivals South Beach.

But it didn't happen overnight. **Danet Linares**, vice chairman of **Blanca Commercial Real Estate** and DDA board member, said banks – previously the anchor tenants of many Brickell buildings – began scaling back in 2009, leaving thousands of square feet of vacant office space in their wake.

The Blanca team notably leased-up 1450 Brickell Ave. during the height of the recession. The state-of-the-art office tower, featuring building-length hurricane impact glass, was under construction in 2009. Two years later, the building was 88% leased.

"We marketed heavily and shifted to attracting law firms and insurance companies," Linares said. "Our pitch was: You're next to hotels like the Four Seasons, close to major highways and an easy drive from South Miami. All these little things make sense to people commuting every day."

Those factors were attractive to Bilzin Sumberg, which leased an 80,000-square-foot office space in 1450 Brickell back in 2010. The law firm was the first major tenant in the building.

**Al Dotson**, managing director of Bilzin Sumberg, said the firm relocated from Downtown Miami to Brickell for three reasons: The first-class office space available at 1450 Brickell, the building's proximity to highways and public transportation, and the "favorable terms" they were able to negotiate for lease.

Back then, Dotson said, the neighborhood had, "no activity after 5 p.m." Now his team has several options for dining and entertaining clients.

"The commercial and entertainment options now are a huge plus for our clients. They appreciate coming to our office and seeing the vibrant atmosphere that surrounds it," he said.

Brickell isn't done transforming, said the DDA's Crespi. Soon, the neighborhood will be home to Brickell Flatiron, which when completed will be the country's tallest residential tower outside of New York City.

The construction of the Underline – the 10-mile linear park and trail that will run underneath the Metrorail – and the planned development of multiple green spaces are the next steps in Brickell's transition to a true urban core.

Crespi expects the area will continue to attract locals who are sick of sitting in South Florida's notorious traffic jams.

"Being able to walk to work, take out a client, walk home, make dinner and see the kids well before bedtime – that quality of life keeps bringing people to Brickell," she said.