

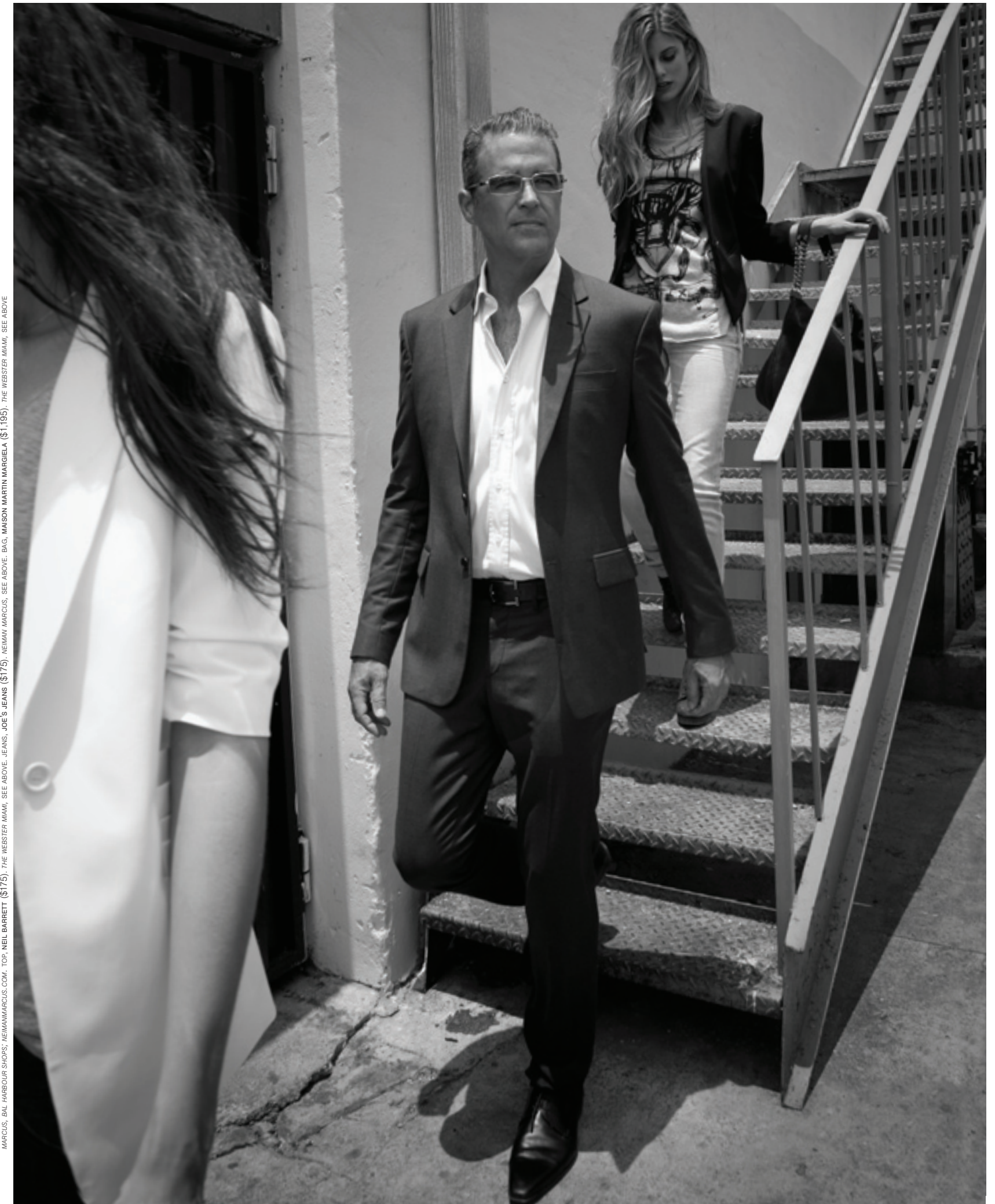
# THE BRAZILIANS ARE COMING

The South American nation's hot streak hits Miami, with spectacular results.

By Arielle Castillo  
Photographs by Lyall Aston

IN THE HEART OF THE DESIGN DISTRICT, VIP customers stroll into a high-end kitchen showroom and take it all in: Recycled wood seams up flawlessly against frosted, handle-less cabinets. Carefully compartmentalized caverns appear from behind massive, crocodile-stamped leather sliding doors. Interlocking parts meld together as if by design magic. Everything opens and closes with nary a click. This is the airy Ornare custom closet and kitchen exhibition space, the Brazilian luxury design house's first in the United States. And odds are that the clients ooh-ing, aah-ing and eventually buying these designs will be discussing the details in Portuguese.

MARCUS PANTHERA founder, Mega Model Management



STYLING BY ANNA CHU; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY PAOLA FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PRANO; MODELS: ADRIENNE FERREIRA AND JOSEFINA CISTERNAS FOR MEGA MODEL MANAGEMENT; MODEL ON LEFT: HELMUT LANG (\$575); SAKS FIFTH AVENUE; BAL HARBOUR SHOPS; 9700 COLLINS AVE.; SAKS.COM; JEANS: MARC BY MARC JACOBS (\$188); SAKS FIFTH AVENUE; SEE ABOVE; TOP: BALMAIN (\$1,105); THE WEBSTER MAMI; 1220 COLLINS AVE.; MIAMI BEACH; THEWEBSTERMAMI.COM; MODEL ON RIGHT: BLAZER: ELIZABETH AND JAMES (\$395); NEIMAN MARCUS; BAL HARBOUR SHOPS; NEIMANMARCUS.COM; TOP: NELL BARRETT (\$175); THE WEBSTER MAMI; SEE ABOVE; JEANS: JOE'S JEANS (\$175); NEIMAN MARCUS; SEE ABOVE; BAG: MANSION MARTIN MARGIELA (\$1,195); THE WEBSTER MAMI; SEE ABOVE

From 2007 to 2009, Brazilian buyers corresponded to about five percent of our revenue,” says Cláudio Faria, owner of Ornare’s Miami showroom and a São Paulo native who moved here four years ago to bring the brand to North America. “In 2010, that became 25 percent of our revenue.” He’s not kidding. The showroom is abuzz with a chorus of ringing phones, customers and in-house architects and interior designers conferring over an expanding number of designs.

Much about the Ornare showroom—its particular sense of luxury, its ever-increasing success with buyers from its homeland—is emblematic of a new development in Miami. Though Brazilians have long been considered an especially powerful, even sexy, faction of the city’s multinational fabric, their numbers are growing here by the day. A host of economic and lifestyle factors are making the Magic City inviting for visitors from Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and beyond. And a great many of them are choosing to stick around.

“We’re seeing more and more people spend time here,” says Lipe Medeiros, also a São Paulo native and cofounder of the South Beach-based SoFi Property Group, a high-end real estate team run by Keller Williams Realty. The company is surfing a wave of a new class of Brazilian buyers who are treating their investment properties in Miami as true second homes. “Maybe now they spend six months here and six months in Brazil,” he says.

Brazil’s current boom is having a ripple effect in Miami. As one quarter of the lately oft-referenced BRIC world powers (alongside Russia, India and China), the country is flourishing economically after long years of inflation and financial crises. Earlier this year, a Reuters report on the country’s official 2010 economic statistics painted a rosy picture, to say the least. Brazil’s economy had risen by 7.5 percent, the biggest jump in 24 years, and its currency, the real, more than doubled in US value since 2002 (from approximately \$.25 to its current \$.62)—all while the Miami real estate market continues to favor buyers. This has turned Miami into an increasingly attractive place to live, play and even work, especially considering its close geographical proximity to the mother country.

This perfect storm is benefiting Brazilians who’ve made Miami their home for a while—like Leticia Leite, a 30-year-old who moved from Rio de Janeiro to the US with her family at age nine. Leite is the director of communications for Peixe Urbano, Latin America’s first collective buying website. Though it launched just last year, it now offers daily deals in more than 60 cities in that country and in Argentina, with plans

**BRAZIL BY THE NUMBERS**

**9**  
DAILY DIRECT FLIGHTS FROM MIAMI TO SÃO PAULO

**275,000**  
APPROXIMATE NUMBER OF MIAMI-DADE COUNTY CITIZENS WHO CONSIDER THEMSELVES BRAZILIAN BY BIRTH

**2,447,409**  
THE POPULATION OF FORTALEZA, THE BRAZILIAN CITY CLOSEST IN SIZE TO MIAMI-DADE COUNTY (POPULATION: 2,496,435)

**14**  
THE NUMBER OF PORTUGUESE-LANGUAGE MAGAZINES AND NEWSPAPERS DISTRIBUTED THROUGHOUT MIAMI

**25,000**  
APPROXIMATE POUNDS OF MEAT SOLD BY MIAMI’S FOGO DE CHÃO MONTHLY

**4**  
THE AVERAGE NUMBER OF “BRAZILIAN BUTT LIFTS” DR. CONSTANTINO MENDIETA PERFORMS PER DAY IN MIAMI

to expand further throughout Latin America. While she met the company’s founder, Julio Vasconcellos, in the United States, he and the company’s headquarters are based in Rio de Janeiro. But Miami, and her professional experience in the United States, has worked out perfectly for Leite. “The fact that I grew up in Miami helped me learn Spanish, which helps now that our company is expanding,” she says.

A similar back-and-forth interplay hums throughout the real estate field, as well. Take Ricardo Dunin, who moved here from Rio de Janeiro two decades ago and four years later founded the Flagler Group. The real estate development firm introduced Miami to the condo-hotel concept through projects like the Sonesta Bayfront Hotel and The Mutiny Hotel, both in Coconut Grove. When new project development became less profitable, he retooled and created Lionheart Capital. The company buys distressed properties, then rebrands and updates them—such as its largest projects, the luxe but temperately priced Ritz-Carlton Residences at Singer Island, Palm Beach.

That kind of ingenuity, he thinks, is a characteristic particular to his fellow countrymen, and a product of their history. “Brazilians tend to be really creative, and the reason is because they always had to be,” he says. “It was something you had to do in order to survive.” That creativity allowed him to look homeward in developing his latest company, Performance. He and Leite’s father founded the real estate development company in Rio de Janeiro, to capitalize on the lust to buy. “If you go to Brazil today, you get reminded of what the US was five or six years ago,” he says. “We launched a building, and in a weekend we sold half the units in pre-construction. Two weeks later, we’re 80 percent sold out.”

The success there is in turn allowing him to pursue more varied projects stateside, like the recently opened Peacock Garden Cafe next to the Sonesta Bayfront Hotel. The lushly landscaped neighborhood spot is not particularly Brazilian, but it’s another example of how the cash flow from the south impacts Miami.

The explosion of restaurants, galleries and other quality-of-life enhancers has in turn become a major selling point for Medeiros and his wife, Anca Mirescu, who’s also a partner in the SoFi Group. Medeiros first came to Miami from São Paulo in the mid ’80s, but in search of a faster pace, decamped to New York to launch the luxury lifestyle store Language. Miami, however, lured him back: “When I returned in 2004, I absolutely fell in love with two Miamis—what Miami is now and what Miami would become in 10 years. We’re getting very close to that.”

He and Mirescu have built a new PR campaign around the idea of “the new Miami,” which touts, on Portuguese-language websites and publications,

CLÁUDIO FARIA owner, Ornare Miami furniture design company



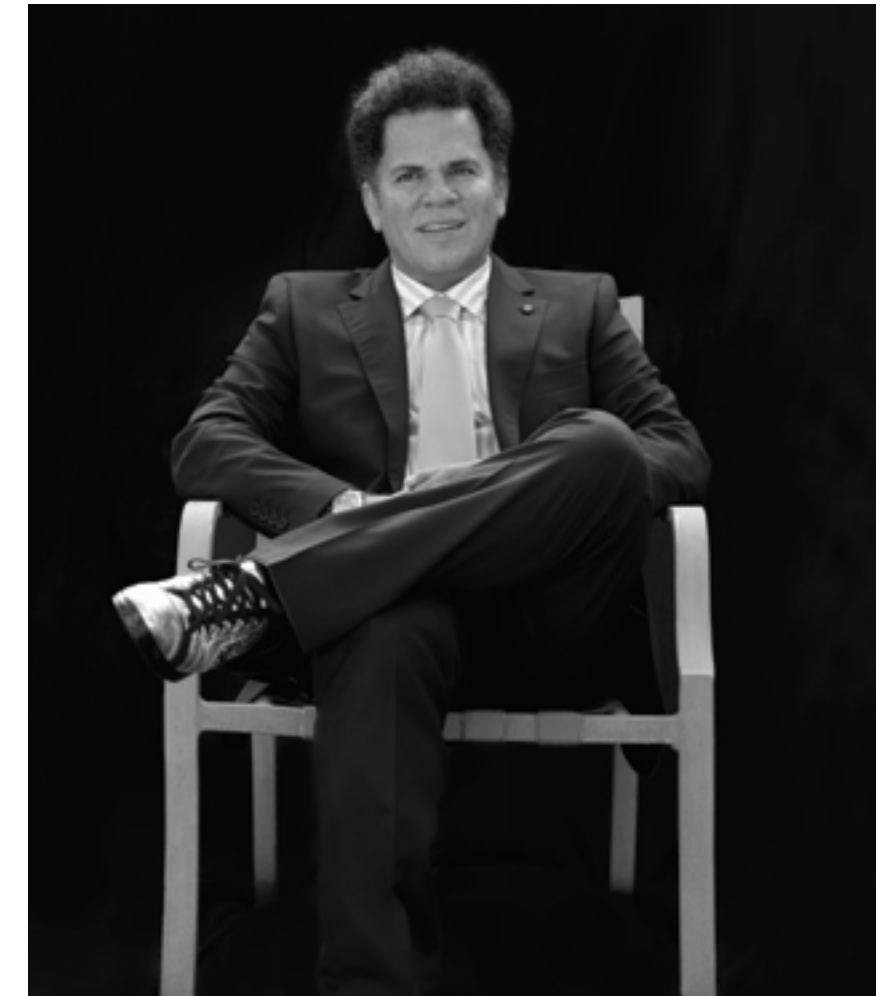
LIPE MEDEIROS founder, SoFi Property Group real estate sales and marketing team



RICARDO DUNIN founder and president, Flagler Group real estate development firm



ROMERO BRITTO world-renowned artist



STATS: TIME TABLES.ORG/AMIA (FLIGHTS); IBGE.GOV.BR (POPULATION); BRAZILCHAMBER.ORG (PUBLICATIONS); FOGO DE CHÃO (BEEF); CONSTANTINOMENDIETA.COM (BUTT LIFTS)

STYLING BY ANNA CHU; HAIR AND MAKEUP BY PAOLA FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PRIANO



STYLING BY ANNA CHU; HAIR BY PAOLA FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PIRANO; MAKEUP BY MARISSA NEMES FOR ARTISTS BY TIMOTHY PIRANO; DRESS, NICOLE MILLER (\$440); SANDS FIFTH AVENUE, BAL HARBOUR SHOPS, 9700 COLLINS AVE.; SANDS COCK SHOES, STUIV'S OWN

developments such as Art Basel Miami Beach and the rest of the burgeoning cultural scene. “We’re demystifying for Brazilians the old Miami from 25 years ago, when they would visit the electronics shops downtown and go to Walt Disney World with their kids,” says Medeiros.

It’s working, especially with a new class of younger, cash-rich buyers. “It’s what I call the ‘beginner buyer.’ It’s somebody who never owned anything outside Brazil,” Medeiros says. “They made money in Brazil and have money in Brazil, and maybe a beach house in Brazil, an important car or a plane. Maybe they owned five gas stations and suddenly they own 170, and they want to buy in Miami.” The SoFi Group makes sure to step in and hold buyers’ hands through the American buying process, which is markedly more complicated than it is in Brazil, where deals are often settled on a handshake.

But concierge-level service is typical for Brazilians doing business in Miami. Medeiros, Dunin, Faria and Leite all concur. “The Brazilian people are very optimistic and friendly,” adds Marcus Panthera, who brought his Mega Model Management agency to Miami from Brazil. “In my work I need to have a very busy social life, and I believe being Brazilian helps me a lot with this.”

Beyond the relationship-focused business acumen, something many in the current Brazilian wave seem to share is a unique sense of style. In fashion, that’s best represented by the Osklen boutique on Lincoln Road in South Beach, the Southeastern flagship store for the line by designer Oskar Metsavaht. The pieces there are luxurious in an understated way, with soft fabrics and smart tailoring coexisting with a breezy, beach-boho feel.

Similar sensibilities can be found in Ornare’s interior handiwork. “It’s contemporary and clean, but the use of the materials—the raw materials combined

**BY DEFINITION**

**CAIPIROSKA**  
(ky-pee-ROH-skah)  
A VARIATION OF THE CAIPIRINHA COCKTAIL MADE WITH VODKA, LIME, SUGAR AND ICE

**FOOTVOLLEY**  
(FUT-vol-lee)  
A COMBINATION OF BEACH VOLLEYBALL AND FÚTBOL WHERE PLAYERS PROPEL A SOCCER BALL OVER A VOLLEYBALL NET USING ANY BODY PART EXCEPT THEIR ARMS AND HANDS

**BRIGADEIRO**  
(bree-gah-DAY-roh)  
A CHOCOLATE TRUFFLE MADE FROM CONDENSED MILK, BUTTER AND COCOA POWDER

with a modern look—makes it very unique,” says Faria. “Organic is very characteristic of a Brazilian product.”

On the other end of the spectrum, the particular Brazilian joie de vivre is apparent in the almost omnipresent marketing of the bold, bright neo-Cubist pop art of Romero Britto. His primary-colored, thickly outlined paintings, prints and sculptures decorate countless public spaces from the suburbs to South Beach. Britto’s success story, however, is not one of riches to further riches. For one thing, he hails from Recife—not moneyed São Paulo or Rio—and arrived on a whim after visiting a friend. “If you are a rich Brazilian moving to Miami, maybe you move to Fisher Island and you have friends quickly,” he says. “When I moved here, I did not have the success I have today. Today I know a lot of people, but when I just moved here, the most difficult thing was basically integration and friendship in the community.”

As Britto’s artistic star rose, though, so did his profile in the Brazilian community, both among expatriates in Miami and back at home. Now, in his homeland, his work is as hot a commodity as it is here, and he says he’s enjoying increasing numbers of Brazilian collectors buying in dollars. “I have Brazilians flying here just to see me,” he says.

As they and their peers continue these round-trips, Miami life is taking on a distinct new flavor. “I estimate that Brazilians will account for more than \$1.5 billion in real estate sales in the next 36 months here in Miami,” says Medeiros. “I think if you look forward two to three years, we’re going to have a lot more Brazilian businesses, like restaurants. I have clients already researching the possibilities of opening branches of high-end hotels here. Generally, Miami is becoming cooler and hipper in the eyes of Brazilians.” **00**

DEFINITIONS: FREDERIC P. MILLER, AGNES F. VANDOME AND JOHN MCBREWSTER; COCKTAILS WITH CACHACA (CAIPIROSKA); FUTEVOLEI.COM.BR (FOOTVOLLEY); COLLINS PORTUGUESE CONCISE DICTIONARY (BRIGADEIRO); PHOTOGRAPHS BY THINKSTOCK.COM (PIZZA, FOOTVOLLEY, STEAK, SOCCER)

**THERE'S (ALMOST) NO PLACE LIKE HOME**

You can find little bits of Brazil throughout Miami, if you know where to look.

“Tutto Pizza Beer House is a very small and cozy restaurant on Coral Way, close to Brickell, that’s owned and operated by a Brazilian chef. The food is great and has many typical Brazilian ingredients.”

—LETICIA LEITE

“I love the beach by Ocean Drive and Third Street, where Brazilians meet to hang and play footvolley.”

—RICARDO DUNIN

“Texas de Brazil Churrascaria. The waiters are very nice and the food—such as the *picanha*, a kind of Brazilian steak—is as authentic as you’re going to get.”

—ROMERO BRITTO

“There are so many great Brazilian designers. For clothes, I love Osklen, and for jewelry, Jack Vartanian. His pieces are very unusual. He doesn’t have a store in Miami yet, but you can buy them online.”

—LIPE MEDEIROS

“KingKone Hand Rolls, on Alton Road in Miami Beach, presents Japanese food in a Brazilian style; there’s a place that sells these cones on every corner in São Paulo.”

—CLÁUDIO FARIA

“I train in Gracie Jiu-Jitsu at the Valente Brothers studio in North Miami Beach, and have played soccer twice a week at Flamingo Park for the last 10 years.”

—MARCUS PANTHERA