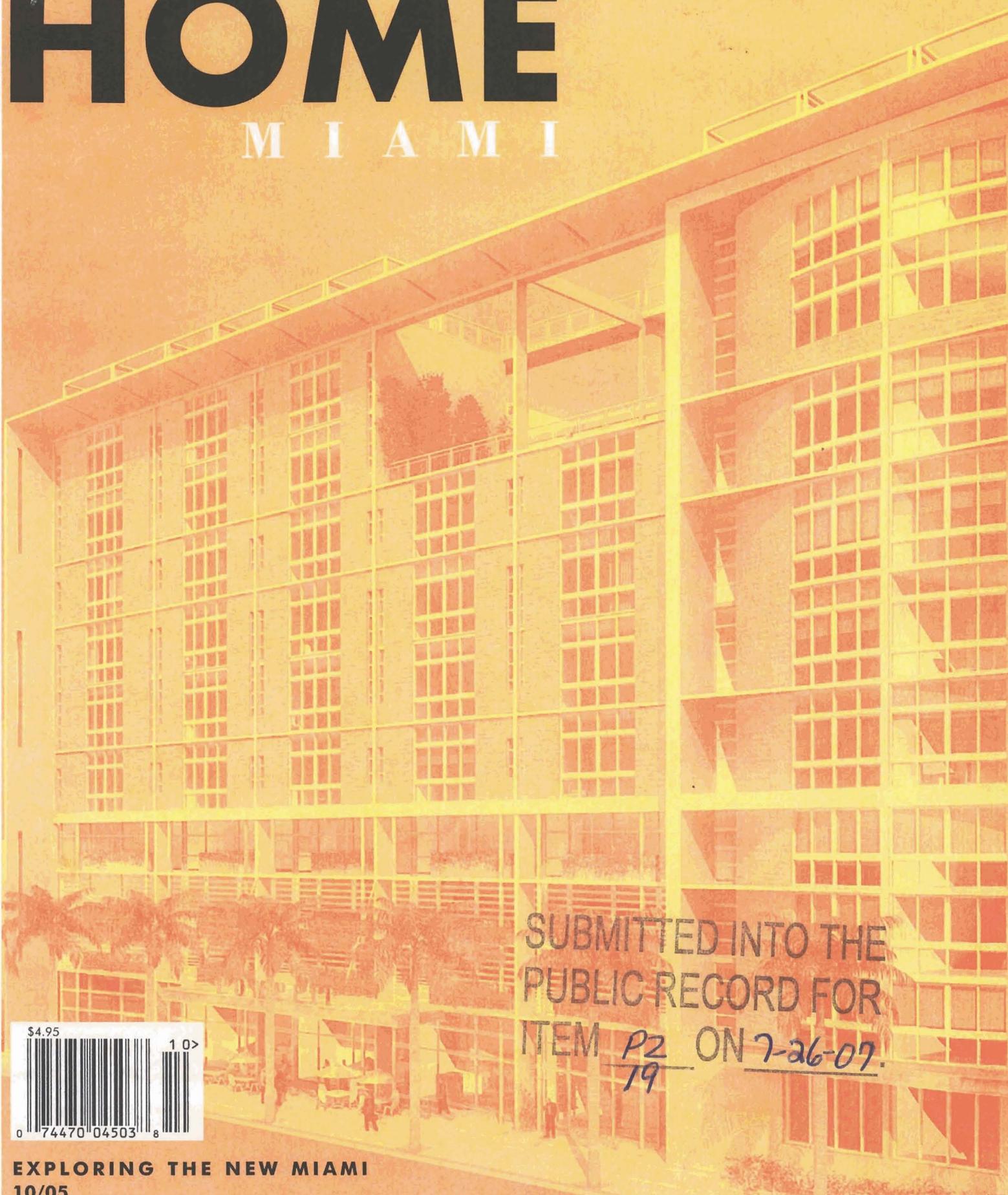


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EXPLORING THE NEW MIAMI
10/05

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Priscilla A. Thompson
City Clerk

Spring Garden: John Seybold's Vision... 86 Years Later.

TEXT NINA KORMAN

ALLIGATORS, ARROWROOT, and an exotic palace of a house. Just a little of the past and present of **SPRING GARDEN**, the idyllic neighborhood that sits just above the Miami River and just below the Civic Center (where Jackson Memorial Hospital and the criminal courthouse are located) and the 836 Expressway.

Long an area where pioneers gathered and traded with Indians, the land hosted a tourist attraction called Alligator Joe's in the 1890s. About 40 years before that a coon-tie starch mill, which produced arrowroot flour, sat on what then was known as Wagner Creek (now the Seybold Canal), a tributary of the Miami River.

By 1918, a successful bakery owner named John Seybold came along. He has created the Seybold Building and Arcade, in Downtown Miami in 1914, and now he was intent on developing a neighborhood. He widened Wagner Creek, subdivided the land, paved roads, and lots went up for sale in 1919. Oolitic limestone columns and benches marked the entry to northern end of the neighborhood, while a Venetian-style humpback bridge welcomed visitors to the eastern side.



Although declared an historic district in 1997, Spring Garden has had a difficult time fending off development.

The original Spring Garden subdivision extended from NW 8th Street Road and the Seybold Canal on the east and then west to Spring Garden Drive, a.k.a. NW 9th Court. In 1923 the area grew when Seybold and a few partners developed the adjacent subdivision called the Country Club Addition, five blocks stretching from NW 10th Avenue to NW 11th Place. The boundaries of the

neighborhood today are NW 11th Street on the north; the Miami River on the south; NW 8th Street Road and the Seybold Canal on the east; and NW 11th Place and NW 12th Avenue on the west.

With abundant landscaping that includes live oak trees and royal palms, Spring Garden is reminiscent of lush areas such as Coconut Grove, also sharing its bohemian sensibility and eye-catching variety of homes. Houses, many constructed between 1918 and 1949, depict a variety of architectural styles: Mission and Pueblo Revival, Masonry and Frame Vernacular, Bungalow, and Streamline Moderne. In many cases detached garages built in the same style of the house boasted separate living quarters for housekeepers.

Seybold made sure the area stayed cohesive thanks to deed restrictions on property that ensured minimum 20- or 25-foot front setbacks and specified a minimum price for each home. Land use restrictions made sure that commercial enterprises wouldn't be built on the river or on the canal. And living literally on the water in Spring Garden wasn't possible: Houseboats were frowned upon.

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Unusual houses were not. When *The Jungle Trail*, a silent movie, was filmed in the area in 1919, an elaborate Hindu village set was constructed. Afterward a charmed Seybold commissioned famed architect August Geiger to create a replica of the temple from the film, and, at the northern terminus of the canal, the house known as the Hindu Temple still stands with its minarets proudly reaching to-ward the sky.



When *The Jungle Trail*, was filmed in the area in 1919, an elaborate Hindu village was constructed. A replica of the temple by architect August Geiger still stands.

In fact a surprisingly large number of Spring Garden's 147 homes have experienced little alteration over the years, making it the oldest

intact neighborhood of single-family homes on the Miami River. One thing that certainly has changed from the past is the crime rate. Plunked in the heart of urban Miami, the district has proud residents, many of them professionals employed in the nearby Civic Center, who have fought valiantly to protect themselves and their property, hence the abundance of large dogs and signs warning "Bad Dog," and "Beware of the Dog."

Shielding themselves from insensitive overdevelopment has also long been a concern of the citizens. Active in the Spring Garden Civic Association, they

worked hard to have their neighborhood designated a historic district by the City of Miami in 1997. So far, though, the group has had mixed success in fighting off new development. In one case, a project set to rise on a large plot on the river was halted and neighbors helped raise money to purchase the land and make it a park. In another instance, against objections, the 12-story Seybold Pointe condo tower was built in Spring Garden but across from the residential area and outside of the historic boundaries.

Indicative of the fact the Spring Gardeners love their neighborhood is

the fact that so few single-family homes are currently for sale in today's raging-hot real estate climate. At press time, only two houses are for sale: One is a two-bedroom, one-bath, built in 1948 and listed for \$395,000. The other is a charming 3-bedroom, 1-bath with a 1-bedroom, 1-bath guest cottage built in 1925. That house is for sale by owner and is priced at \$549,000, a substantial increase from the \$205,000 paid for it just two and a half years ago.

Moving into the neighborhood is easier for those willing to live in

one of its few multi-family buildings. Choices range from apartments, condos, and townhouses built from the 1960s to today. A 695-square-foot studio at Seybold Pointe will run nearly \$250,000. Another development, the plush, 16-unit Residences at Riverwalk, has broken ground and will be complete next year. All are 3-bedroom, 3.5-bath, flow-through condos with views of the river and the neighborhood. A deep-water marina will accommodate boats of up to 60 feet in length. A smaller 2,548-square-foot condo at Riverwalk is listed for \$799,990; a larger 5,314-square-foot unit listed for \$1,594,985. "It's the only luxury building in a resi-