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BAL HARBOUR SHOPS' GOLD ANNIVERSARY

BY ALEX TRAVERS

THERE ARE MANY places to shop in Miami: the Aventura Mall, Lincoln Road, Bal Harbour Shops, the Design District. All of these offer high-end fashion brands and unique experiences. But Bal Harbour has a rather distinctive appeal.

Much about what makes Bal Harbour Shops special involves its exclusive offerings. The other hallmark for which Bal Harbour is known is its serenity. Even on days when the sun struggles to make appearances through the clouds, shoppers can leisurely explore stores in an outdoor setting surrounded by fountains and fishponds and greenery. And, as was intended by founder Stanley Whitman from day one, it's remained this way since its inception.

This year, Bal Harbour Shops turns 50. "For our fiftieth anniversary," says Matthew Whitman Lazereby, president and CEO of Whitman Family Development, "as we honor and uphold my grandfather's original vision, we've planned a series of events that fit the DNA of Bal Harbour Shops to show gratitude to our loyal customers." London-based exhibition designer Judith Clark, for

This page: Retail visionary Stanley Whitman, the founder of Bal Harbour Shops. Opposite page: Bal Harbour Shops today.



example, is working with Bal Harbour Shops on an experimental space devoted to thought-provoking projects and public programs that explore fashion and the culture surrounding its design, production, and consumption.

Bal Harbour's beginning comes from untried, more unconventional history as well. This area was an army barracks in the Second World War, and when retail experts first listened to Whitman's proposals, the idea of an open-air luxury shopping center here seemed as many bold ideas often do at first, absurd. Indoor malls, with their mix of offerings and services, were flourishing. Plus, they all took advantage of a relatively new and much desired amenity in South Florida: air conditioning.

It has been said that Bal Harbour's early success is owed to Neiman Marcus, the Texas-based retail store that Whitman convinced to open its first outpost at Bal Harbour in 1971. Although this may be partially true, it seems speculative to proclaim this as the sole



reason for Bal Harbour's ability to draw crowds. My guess is that the combination of fresh, exclusive products, all cherry-picked by Whitman, and its outdoor design allowed consumers to shop in a tropical setting for items they would otherwise only find in Europe. At the very least, it was a decision worth talking about. Perhaps Whitman was also, in his own forward-thinking way, obliquely acknowledging something significant about the lack of luxury offerings and shopping experiences in the United States. If he could attract both locals and wealthy tourists, then Bal Harbour had the potential of becoming a shopping mecca. Today, arguably, it is exactly that.

Still, the ambitions to set the bar higher do not wane. There are plans to add 300,000 square feet of retail space and a third specialty department store (Neiman Marcus and Saks Fifth Avenue are the current two). "We look forward to another 50 years of engaging partners, partners, and colleagues," declares Whitman Lazrus, "connecting them with an even better Bal Harbour Shops." ♦

This page: A historical revisiting of Bal Harbour Shops. Opposite page: Bal Harbour Shops is located at 2900 Collins Avenue in Bal Harbour, FL.