



# Sunk en D r e a m s

by Seth Stutman

During the mid-1960s, in a lagoon near Biscayne Bay, three imposing 1,000-foot towers were to be built and accessed for tours through an underwater glass tunnel. Surrounding it was to be a futuristic metropolis, an amusement park-esque, international bazaar complete with office buildings and living facilities for dignitaries and students. This project ultimately failed, but the lost ideas have been recovered at an exhibit showing now at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida.

*Interama* was a Western attempt to capitalize on the concept of pan-American unity. In the 1950s, *Interama* was designed by a number of lawmakers and famous architects bent on creating a physical center to represent the unity of the Americas that resembled a permanent World's Fair.

Pan-Americanism can trace its national roots back to the 1823 Monroe Doctrine that

stated European powers had no rights colonizing and terrorizing free Central American, South American or Caribbean nations. This doctrine was furthered by Franklin Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy" of the 1930s, and John Kennedy's "Alliance for Progress" in 1961, all of which fostered American solidarity.

Miami fostered this unity by hosting troops poised to fight in the 1898 Spanish-American War, which supported Cuba's drive for independence. Three decades later, Pan-American Airlines (based in Miami) was awarded the first flights into Central America and South America. In 1943, Miami contributed 46 percent of international traffic and became the nation's leading port of entry.

With an unspoken wealth of American unification, it made sense to create a pan-American cultural center, and Miami was the logical location. The Inter-American Center





Authority selected the city to host *Interama* and, with limited funds, bought a 1,700-acre site in North Miami.

The 1960s saw a cultural shift. A Cuban immigration boom established Spanish as a second language in Miami and, following the Cuban Missile Crisis, federal funding was appropriated towards *Interama*. The motto of *Interama* became "The American Way of Life—Progress with Freedom," and plans for the attraction progressed on a large scale. Architects and artists were summoned from the Americas (most notably Louis Kahn, Michael Breuer and José Luis Sert) to create a city with hanging gardens, lagoons, plazas for shopping, patios for dining, and a 1,000-foot structure designed by Minoru Yamasaki to rival the Statue of Liberty.

In its totality, *Interama* was designed to be a cultural, commercial and social mecca. Today's closest comparison would be Disney's Epcot, although *Interama's* grand plans for white, regal infrastructure and marketplace would have dwarfed Epcot's large metallic ball.

By the end of the decade, a shaky U.S. economy, waning international support and lack of political confidence put a hold on *Interama*. Miami attempted to revive the plans while bidding for America's bi-centennial celebrations, but a scaled-down plan for a university, marina and small tower was again dismissed.

Presently, the land that was purchased for *Interama* has many uses that are still slightly pan-American. A sewage treatment plant and landfill keep Florida clean, while the Oleta River State Park maintains some of the beauty that *Interama* would have offered. Also, Florida International University opened up a campus on the land.

While *Interama* was never completed, or started, its legacy lives on at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida. At the exhibit, one can view a multitude of renderings, sketches, construction plans and even a virtual 3-D re-creation of what the park would have looked like. Co-creators Allan Shulman and Jean-François Lejeune have brought a failed project to life, illuminating what might have been in South Florida.

*Interama: Miami and the Pan-American Dream* is on display at the Historical Museum of Southern Florida through January 25. Admission to the entire museum is \$8; it is located at the Miami-Dade Cultural Center, 101 West Flagler Street, Miami, FL. Call (305) 375-1492 or visit [www.hmsf.org](http://www.hmsf.org) for more information. 

