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Developers turn rooftops into compelling spaces

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Jeff Zbar Correspondent

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When [Harvey Hernandez](#) joined his general contractor, media and others in March atop the 12-story Gale Residences Fort Lauderdale Beach for the property's topping off, they flew an American flag and erected a ceremonial



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Keith Menin of Menin Hospitality and Harvey Hernandez of Newgard Development Group in the future swimming pool on the sun deck of the Gale Residences Fort Lauderdale Beach.

palm tree to honor the event.

But the developer has bigger plans for the rooftop space.

Across the fourth- and eighth-floor spaces, he envisions the Sunset Lounge, a bar and restaurant, two rooftop pools, and cabanas overlooking the Intracoastal Waterway.

“Historically, developers didn’t pay attention to the roof. It’s where you put mechanical equipment,” said Hernandez, CEO of Newgard Development Group. “In a place like South Florida, where we’re surrounded by great scenery and great weather, why not take advantage of the rooftop?”



The amenity deck of the Hyde Midtown Suites & Residences will include a tennis court, putting green, pool and bar.

In the push to separate one hotel, condominium or other high-rise property from a rival space, developers are answering the question by maximizing – or “activating” – the rooftop.

In years past, this would have been a challenge. The equipment required to power a tower’s elevator or air-conditioning units was relegated to the rooftop. They not only limited available square footage; their noise and bulk made for an audible eyesore.

With modern technology, elevators require less equipment, which often can be placed elsewhere. Same for the air conditioning units, which are smaller and often can be relocated elsewhere on, in, or around the property.

Gale Residences, with its rebranded, historic Escape Hotel next door, aren't the first to activate rooftop space. Centro in downtown Miami has a rooftop pool, lounge and gym. A planned office project in Wynwood will feature a restaurant. At BrickellHouse, another Newgard property, the rooftop includes a pool, with a restaurant and bar planned for late 2017 or 2018. All offer views of Biscayne Bay.

With most hotel rooftop projects open to the public, commercializing the spaces "has more value than a roof with a pool," Hernandez said.

Some developers are stepping up the amenities to match the owners. The Related Group's Hyde Midtown Suites & Residences will offer a seventh-floor outdoor amenities deck with what the developer says is the only rooftop tennis court in Midtown Miami, as well as a bocce court, putting green, pool and bar. Along with an infinity-edge pool, tennis court, and grilling station, Related's Hyde Beach House amenity deck will feature a fire pit and movie screening area.

Brickell Heights, also from Related, will feature a pool, fire pit and ninth-floor vegetable garden by renowned seed-to-table pioneer Dylan Terry. One Thousand Museum by Zaha Hadid Architects includes what promoters claim is the city's only private rooftop helipad.

Along with the Sky Deck and lounge, Paramount Miami Worldcenter will offer an enclosed observatory behind 12-foot, floor-to-ceiling glass windows ideal for star-gazing from the 60th floor.

"We felt this was a great amenity," said Nitin Motwani, managing principal with Miami Worldcenter Associates.

The time is right for well-planned, top-floor and roof-top spaces, said [Keith Menin](#), principal with Menin Hospitality. The company is partnering with Newgard to open the Sunset Lounge atop the Gale Residences Fort Lauderdale Beach. What makes any rooftop space a potential success is what it has to offer: open space, unobstructed views and a proven commercial plan.

At 8,000 square feet and the Intracoastal and waterfront homes as a backdrop, the lounge's planned tapas, cocktails and light DJ-spun music could set the stage for the district, Menin said.

And while most condos continue to offer penthouses instead of commercial spaces, rooftop amenities and commercial spaces will differentiate hotels and select condos, Hernandez added.

“Rooftops are great spaces if they’re great rooftops,” noted Menin, who brought his first poolside bar to the Sanctuary Hotel on Miami Beach’s James Avenue in 2003, later did the Gale Miami Beach, and brought to life the “speakeasy-inspired” Drumbar atop Chicago’s Raffaello Hotel. “You can’t just go the rooftop and just start programming. You need space, and music and sound. Fort Lauderdale hasn’t had an amazing canvas like this, with the space and view.”