



Gallery Owner David Castillo Sees Beyond the Glitz in South Beach

By Liz Tracy
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Photo of David Castillo Gallery provided by David Castillo

When Wynwood was just 20 homeless guys whose sleep was starting to be interrupted by hip collectors and wildly untamed Miami art kids, David Castillo opened his gallery right in the middle of the then-very shitty neighborhood. Then, a year ago, this Wynwood pioneer moved his very successful business to South Beach to offer an elevated art buying experience.

Castillo has been slinging art and working at museums like the Yale University Art Gallery since the turn of the millennium. When he opened his gallery in 2005, it was a hit. Every artist in town was vying to be represented by him. Some of the lucky ones he chose were Luis Gispert, Francie Bishop Good, Adler Guerrier, and Jillian Mayer—all art stars at different stages of their careers. He's shown work at the Armory Show, Frieze New York and Art Basel Miami Beach. If there's someone who can approach Miami and its art scene with a mature eye, it's Castillo.

VICE: So you started out in Wynwood?

David Castillo: The gallery opened almost 12 years ago in Wynwood, and it was in Wynwood for just over a decade in what would become the heart of that neighborhood—on NW Second and 22nd. I was one of the first people to be there with an art business. There were no businesses three blocks north or south of me at the time. So it was definitely more than just up-and-coming. There was some sense that it would become a different kind of neighborhood. When I opened the gallery, there were empty warehouses and lots of grass that reached as high as the gates. It was very different from the more pedestrian area that it's become. Which is great for Miami.

Now, the gallery is located on South Beach, on Lincoln Road, right?

I always intended to be there only a decade, which I was. I always had, as part of my personal vision, to have the gallery in a historic building in Miami. I'm from Miami, so I've lived here since the early 70s, since I was an infant. There were certain buildings I admired. Among them, the [Gusman Theater](#), the [Ingraham Building](#), the [Dupont Building](#)—all of which are downtown. But also, on Miami Beach, the [Albert Anis Building](#), which is where the gallery is located now.

The Albert Anis building we're in now has murals by the Russian artist Leo Birchansky. So there was some connection to art. South Beach is considerably more expensive than Wynwood, even by today's market. So it was a leap forward, but it also made perfect sense to me, because when the gallery opened 12 years ago, I'd been a dealer ten years prior. That was more secondary market dealing, that was more historically important works of art, it wasn't primary market. They weren't artists that I was showing and promoting. That said, the gallery itself was emerging at the time, and the projects were more emerging, so it was more suited for that neighborhood that was developing into something else. It was a part of the excitement of that area.

What was it like then in Wynwood when you opened?

People would come out in droves for the openings. We used to get hundreds of people. Especially in the early days, it was shoulder-to-shoulder, you would have thought it was a nightclub. What was interesting, in those early days, unlike what it became later: People were really there to see the art. There was nothing else. We didn't even have a bar early on, it was just an art show. So, if you came, you made a trek from wherever you were, there were no Wynwood Lofts, nothing residential near us.

That was kind of fascinating and exciting. And of course, as the gallery developed, now I show artists where a photograph in an edition of 10 might be \$60,000. So it's a different market, a different development of artists who I showed early on as careers have developed. Like Xaviera Simmons, who has a project up at the [Museum of Modern Art](#) now. As the gallery matured it made sense to be at a more mature location. An environment where buyers and curators can come from all over and sit for three hours and see a show, talk to me, go downstairs get a coffee.

Can you tell me about the changes you've seen on South Beach?

Obviously, South Beach used to have a lot more mom and pop shops. The reality the world over, not specific to South Beach, is that the market developed, whether it's tourism or real estate, things get more expensive. People from here are a little nostalgic. [Lincoln Road has] become much more commercial, which has nothing to do with the reason why I'm on South Beach. With those changes have come positive changes as well. There's more available for people with different tastes, dining experiences, and there are multiple art hotels.

Can you tell me your favorite places to eat and drink on South Beach?

Eating is an interesting one, because it's similar places that I liked before I had the gallery here. They're local, consistent places on Lincoln Road for example, straight-forward, clean Italian food, [Rosinella's](#), not expensive, it's run by its owners. I've been going there since I did live on South Beach, which goes back well over a decade, 15 years. That's always been a staple here for eating. Another place I love on Lincoln Road would be [Quattro](#) for Italian. That would be from the less to more expensive end of my staples. For drinks on Lincoln Road would be [Segafredo](#), which has also been there a long time. Those are kind of local staples that withstood the test of time.

What are hotels you'd tell your clients to stay at?

The classic ones to have that South Beach experience: the [National Hotel](#), the [Sagamore](#) or the [Raleigh Hotel](#). There are just so many. They're all kind of clustered in that area, the ones I recommend.

Which length of beach do you most enjoy?

I like all of the beach from like Third Street to 13th, that whole stretch I think is beautiful. I've laid out and hung out at all those areas of the beach. In the summertime, it's too cold now.

Can you list your off-South Beach hotspots?

Among them, I have to say [Niu Kitchen](#), which I go to all the time and I love to take people there. It's a small place. It's just a really cool environment, amazing Northern Spanish cuisine with a gourmet twist. As far as other places, I haven't been to [Mandolin Bistro](#) in a while, but that's definitely a staple. The fish place [Mignonette](#), is near my house and I really like that.

What about for drinks?

[The Corner](#)! I can't forget the Corner. It's amazing. It's one of those places you can take anyone that's fun for both the parties they do, for dancing as well as for drinks, atmosphere. A lot of artists go there. It's always cool and laid back even when they host parties, it still feels very local.

Favorite art places?

Museums, obviously [PAMM](#), on the Miami side, it's a museum that I go to that also has a lovely restaurant on the bay, [Verde](#), so that's a twofer. Another museum on the beach side is the [Bass Museum of Art](#). There's also [ICA Miami](#), which is getting more programming and on the beach there's also the [Wolfsonian Museum](#). There's a lot to choose from in that regard.

Any other art activities people should hit up in Miami?

There are venues that do lectures. I think that's very cool and engaging for Miami. And there have always been wonderful lecture series in Miami. I remember the FIU Art Museum before it became the [Frost Museum](#), used to do a wonderful Green Lecture Series. They would bring in world famous museum directors and critics. There are venues that are continuing that Miami tradition. The [de la Cruz Collection](#), and [Locust Projects](#)—it's important for the community and it's always so wonderful to see how full they get. People have this idea that Miami is just a nightclub and water, but there are these other really great things that happen here year round.