

Miami's art scene is scorching hot. We asked a gallery owner to share the top spots to enjoy exhibitions and classic cocktails

Gallerist David Castillo shares his insider guide to the very best of Miami and Miami Beach.

By **Kate Dingwall** Special to the Star

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To find a vibrant arts community, Miami-born gallery owner David Castillo never had to leave his hometown. “It’s a particularly special city to create in,” he says. “Miami is always in continual growth and transformation.”

Over the past couple of decades, he’s been immersed in that creative community. In 2005, he opened his namesake contemporary gallery in Wynwood — he’s since moved it to the Miami Design District — to spotlight artists exploring the diaspora and identity, like Lyle Ashton Harris and Xaviera Simmons. He’s placed works from his artists in the Museum of Modern Art (MoMA), the Guggenheim, Tate Modern and many other prominent institutions. At his own gallery, Castillo is now hosting a solo show by painter Vaughn Spann; a ceramics exhibition by Sanford Biggers will be up next.

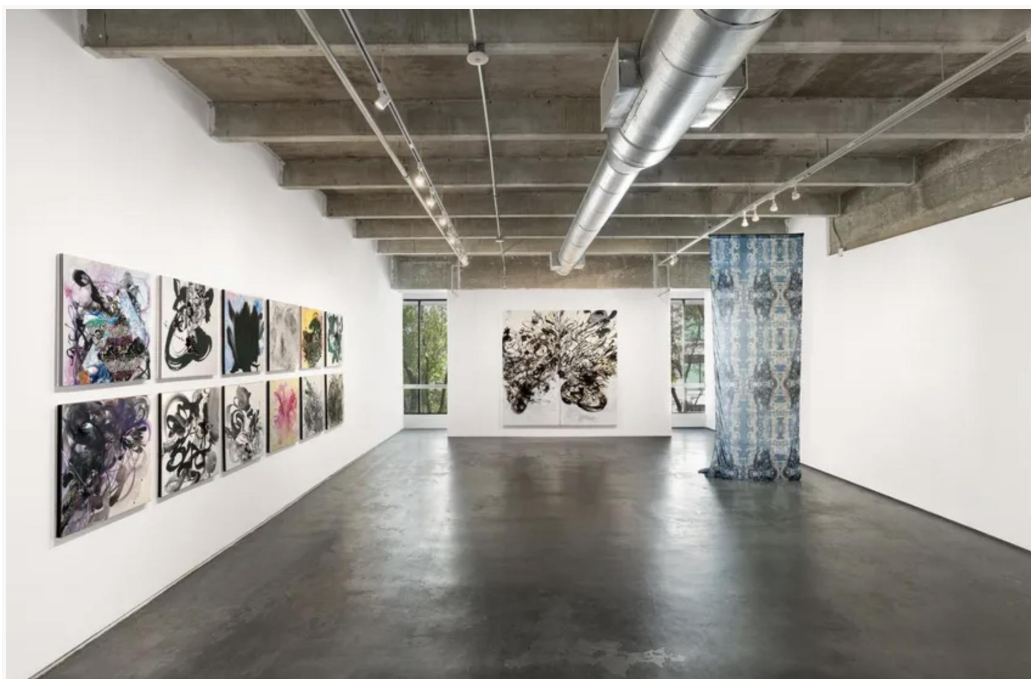


Outside the arts, he finds it hard to resist the city's natural beauty. "The serenity that the landscapes of lush greens and water provides is simply spectacular," says Castillo. "You never have to go very far to encounter a park or the sound of water in Miami. And it's a city that is always on the cusp of everything. Whatever you want to eat, do or buy, Miami has it all." Where to start? Here are some of his favourite spots in Miami and nearby.

For world-class contemporary art: de la Cruz Collection

"If you want to see what has been happening in contemporary art for the past 40 years, this is the place to do so," says Castillo of this first-rate private museum in the Miami Design District, run by passionate collectors Carlos and Rosa de la Cruz. The two have been early supporters of some of the most significant artists of our time, and the gallery is an excellent display of their personal collection, so expect treats like a portrait

of Carlos de la Cruz's mother by none other than Dalí, alongside major works by Wifredo Lam and Rufino Tamayo.



For a speedy lunch: Sushi Yasu Tanaka

“Miami has no shortage of sushi restaurants, but this place in MIA Market in the Miami Design District is truly outstanding,” says Castillo. “It’s easy to miss — there are many quality stations inside this high-end food court — but once you do locate it, you’ll find the finest-grade sushi and amazing customer service, all set inside a fun atmosphere with bar tables and cosy booths.”

**For lush museum grounds: Vizcaya Museum and Gardens**

Situated in a pristinely preserved 1916 estate, this isn’t merely a museum but an ode to old-school Miami and older-school European design, with architecture inspired by an Italian villa and extensive gardens. “It’s a special place that people from all over the world and all walks of life can enjoy,” says Castillo. “It’s a true piece of Miami’s complex history — the buildings and grounds are classrooms in and of themselves. (And) it’s sheer beauty to walk the grounds on a sunny Miami day.”

For all-day dining: MC Kitchen

“This spot in the Miami Design District is truly one of my favourites: a go-to for both lunch and dinner,” says Castillo. “It’s elegant without being stuffy, the atmosphere is airy, clean and simple, and it offers consistently great Italian cuisine.” Think veal Milanese, pizzas topped with ingredients like brussels sprouts and black truffles, or saucy plates of spaghetti and meatballs. “Have an MC Spritz and absolutely anything on the menu,” he says. “You will not be disappointed.”

**For oceanside exhibitions: The Bass**

It’s not easy to miss this destination museum on Miami Beach, thanks to the 42-foot-tall, candy-coloured sculpture by Ugo Rondinone outside the gallery. Inside, you’ll be greeted by permanent and rotating exhibitions of equally vibrant contemporary art from global artists. “Not many museums offer exhibitions of some of the best artists of our time right across the street from the Atlantic Ocean,” says Castillo. Take in the art, then a dip in the ocean to refresh yourself

For quintessential cocktails: Joe's Stone Crab

“This Miami Beach spot is a classic,” says Castillo. “This seasonal restaurant has some of the best food in Miami and the atmosphere is always exciting, with lots of movement and conversation in the air.” He points out that there’s often a wait, but you can pass the time by sliding up to the bar and sipping a classic cocktail. “Some of the bartenders have been with Joe’s for many, many, many years.”