

OCEAN DRIVE

Half a Century of Shopping

By Robyn A. Friedman | September 1, 2015 | [Style & Beauty](#)

The Bal Harbour Shops readies itself for another accomplished 50 years with a planned \$400 million enhancement



Stanley Whitman wasn't afraid to break the rules. He knew just what he was doing when he created the Bal Harbour Shops nearly 50 years ago—although not everyone necessarily agreed with his approach at the time.

Trees in the parking lot? “No one does that. It breaks up the asphalt, takes up parking spaces, and makes the lot harder to clean.”

Trees in the center of the mall? “They block visibility of the merchants; cut them down.”

An open-air mall in South Florida? “It's too hot. No one will come.”

A mall without department

stores as anchor tenants? “Preposterous.”

But Whitman, who, at 96, still works three days a week, has had the last laugh. He succeeded in creating the “Fifth Avenue of the South,” a luxury mecca where high-end retailers attract the wealthy tourists he knew were key to the mall's survival.



Open-air shopping at Bal Harbour Shops today.

Since opening on November 26, 1965, as a 100,000-square-foot, single-level, open-air fashion center with about 35 retailers—and no anchor stores—the Bal Harbour Shops has evolved into the place to shop in South Florida, and, evidently, the world.

The numbers prove Stanley Whitman's prescience. In 2012, *Shopping Centers Today* magazine recognized Bal Harbour Shops as the most productive mall in the world on estimated sales of \$2,555 per square foot. Whitman Family Development still owns the mall, even though it receives about one offer a month to purchase the property. Today, Matthew Whitman Lazenby, Stanley's grandson, who heads up the family business, reports that sales hover around \$3,000 per square foot. And that total might rise soon.

In addition to celebrating its 50th anniversary this year, Bal Harbour Shops is launching an enhancement plan to ensure that the next 50 years are just as successful. In June Whitman Family Development unveiled new renderings of the planned upgrades, which improve the pedestrian experience and bring additional public space to the residents of Bal Harbour Village.

The \$400 million enhancement plan includes widening the sidewalks surrounding the property, installing a new canopy and landscaping along Collins Avenue and 96th Street, and replacing some of the opaque exterior walls with transparent ones to encourage window-shopping and to invite in passersby. Shopping upgrades include the addition of Florida's first flagship Barneys New York, while Saks Fifth Avenue and Neiman Marcus will gain additional space. A number

of new luxury boutiques and restaurants will join the Shops as well, including the famed Freds at Barneys.



A rendering of the Bal Harbour Shops' new look.

“The concept is an enhancement of the [shopping center] that everybody already loves, with one very big difference,” says architect Bernard Zyscovich, the lead designer of the Bal Harbour Shops enhancement plan. “As you walk or drive by the Shops, you’re going to see a lot more interaction on the street as well as inside the mall itself. It’s a strong commitment to make Bal Harbour Shops the community center for the town.”

The ultimate goal of the enhancement is to continue to offer the type of unique experience that shoppers around the world have come to associate with the Bal Harbour Shops.

Decade after decade, the Bal Harbour Shops has been the site of numerous other industry “firsts”: Neiman Marcus opened its first store outside Texas at the Shops in 1971, and when Saks Fifth Avenue joined in 1976, it was the first time the two retailers coexisted in the same shopping center. Famed European brands Yves Saint Laurent, Dolce & Gabbana, and Oscar de la Renta chose Bal Harbour for their first stores outside of New York.

“Stanley Whitman may be described as a very gutsy visionary, as he bucked the shopping center development trend during the early ’60s by creating a shopping center designed to celebrate the

balmy beauty of South Florida,” says Paco Diaz, a retail real estate broker with CBRE Group Inc. in Miami.

Where else in the world can you find Balenciaga, Chanel, Chloé, Fendi, Valentino, Armani, Versace—and that’s just a start—under one, well, non-roof?



Bal Harbour Shops’ visionary Stanley Whitman.

“We have a shopper who comes to Bal Harbour Shops who is seeking an experience that is far from the maddening crowd,” says Lazenby. “We don’t brag about the number of customers we get; we brag about the quality of customers we get.”

Bal Harbour Shops will be hosting its official 50th anniversary celebration on November 12 in partnership with The Miami Project and The Buoniconti Fund to Cure Paralysis. The exclusive event will feature an elegant party in the center of the Shops, with world-class dining, music, entertainment and, of course, shopping.

Also to commemorate the milestone, the mall has planned a series of unique guest experiences throughout 2015, including: Living Well at Bal Harbour Shops, featuring top wellness experts leading mind, body, and soul events such as yoga and meditation in the center courtyard, and Fashion Project, an experimental space devoted to programs that explore fashion and the culture surrounding it, which launched in this past April. In October, Fashion Project will kick off a 50th anniversary celebration by hosting the “Retrospective of the Last 50 Years of Fashion.”

“Fifty years later, Bal Harbour Shops is still unique,” says Lazenby. “There’s a timelessness that many people associate with the shopping center. We want to ensure that we are just as compelling 50 years from now as we were 50 years ago.” 9700 Collins Ave., Bal Harbour, 305-866-0311