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Bal Harbour's Stanley Whitman Looks Back

By DAVID MOIN

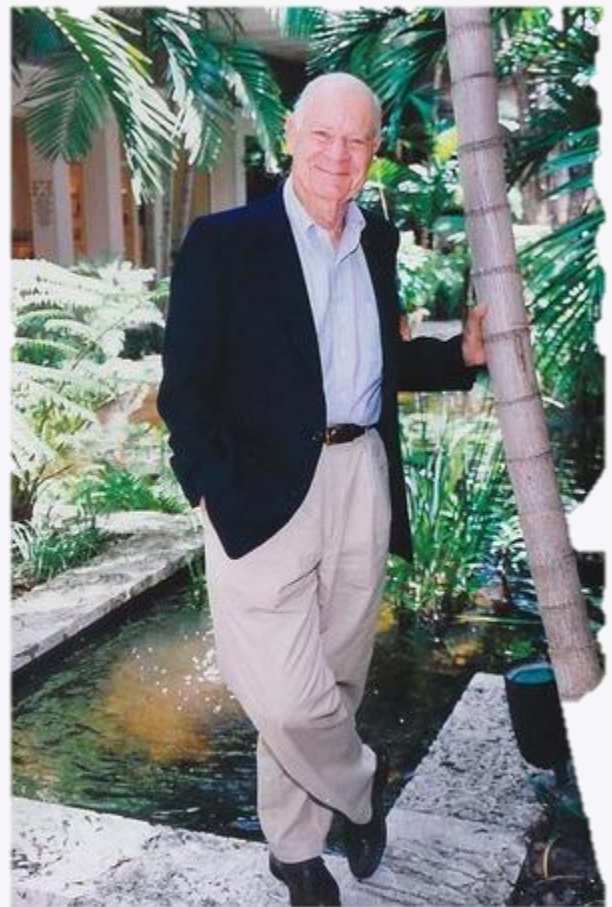
"I've got no right to complain," Stanley Whitman, the owner and visionary developer of Bal Harbour Shops, said last week.

He turned 95 on Nov. 15, continues to go to work two to three days a week, sometimes more, and has his family ensconced in the business, which reassures him about the future.

And he continues to tabulate his luxury center's extraordinary productivity, which he doesn't mind boasting about. "When we opened Bal Harbour Shops in 1965, the Ala Moana shopping center had by far the highest sales per square foot," Whitman told WWD. "By 1970, we passed Ala Moana in sales per square foot, and for every year since we have had the highest sales per square foot in any center anywhere. Last year, we had \$2,600 a foot, and this year we are tracking at over \$2,800."

"The big thing is having my family working here," having entrusted his son Randy and grandson Matthew Whitman Lazenby to the leasing and management. "They're doing a fantastic job. We don't always agree but we always get along."

Almost 50 years ago, Whitman, whose house was on the site of Bal Harbour Shops, saw the potential in luxury long before the rest of the shopping-center industry. He came up with the concept of bringing the luxury retailers of Fifth Avenue to Miami Beach and foresaw that Miami as a tourist mecca would only grow, and that tourism and luxury would be a potent combination.



Stanley Whitman
Photo By Courtesy Photo

“I was the first to successfully develop a luxury shopping center; others have tried with limited success. My success bred my competition,”

Whitman said. “Luxury merchants eventually found out that in certain locations you can do a smashing job.”

He’s compiled an impressive list of innovations, among them bringing parking structures to a mall. “It’s a wonderful solution when you don’t have land. You shorten the walking distance to the stores. The fact that we were the first to charge for parking, customers didn’t appreciate it. But they have gotten used to it.”

His decision to put trees in the parking lot was pioneering as well. “No one ever planted a tree in an urban parking lot. You break up the asphalt and it’s difficult to keep clean, but I did it for aesthetic reasons.”

Whitman had opportunities to create other malls around the country. Yet there’s always been a singular focus on the 450,000-square-foot Bal Harbour, which has set in motion a 200,000-square-foot expansion. That is, until earlier this year when the Whitmans became codevelopers and equity partners in the 500,000-square-foot retail component of the 2.9 million-square-foot Brickell CityCentre. Brickell is a mixed-use project being built in Miami’s financial center by Swire Properties. The Whitmans will bring their high-end retail expertise to help develop and lease that shopping center.

“Brickell is in an area where there are dozens of these five-star hotels,” Whitman observed. “It’s become the primary financial center, with these high-end hotels, tremendous density of condominiums and offices growing there and now, for the first time, we have an opportunity to get into another market. It’s a wonderful opportunity. They get the business tourists. We get the resort tourists.”