



words\_marissa vonesh. photo\_sidney sherman. design\_ana gonzalez & marissa vonesh.

**One Sunday a month**, a dirt lot in the middle of downtown Miami is **transformed** into an arena for cultural creatives, foodies and music hipsters alike. At the Miami Flea, sponsored by the **Arts & Entertainment District**, you'll find killer pieces and experience a **tight-knit community** you never knew existed in Miami.





The Miami Flea allows local businesses to share their items and residents to explore eclectic items.

# WELCOME to the *Miami Flea*

Rows of white tents bustle with women in **refurbished denim jackets**, men in striped fitted t-shirts, chubby 1-year-olds and **dogs** with their tongues permanently slopped to the side. A mixture of sizzling beef and **woody incense** wafts through the air.



Velvet Vardo

## CULTURAL HUB

After buying an 81-unit loft building on North Miami Avenue, Nir Shoshani and Ron Gottesmann, the principals of NR Investments, stood on the building’s rooftop pool and saw a multitude of empty lots and dilapidated buildings nearby. They also noticed a stop for Miami’s metro-mover – one of downtown Miami’s main forms of public transportation. The combination offered an opportunity to build something new, something different: an urban village.

“An urban village requires public transit, density, mixed retail and a concept,” Shoshani said. The public transit was already provided, so NR Investments was left with the task of attracting people and vendors to the area. One year – a year filled with conceptualizing and planning – passed and the Arts & Entertainment District was born.

A+E creates free, local events, like the Miami Flea, tailored to attract energy to the district. The events are based upon the views of the community which they serve. “We are curating space – creating a neighborhood,” Shoshani said, his voice almost lost amongst the chatter of the spirited Miami Flea crowd. “When community is important to you and not an advantage trick, you allow the community to create it for you.”

Beyond nurturing culture, A+E allows local businesses to flourish, as mixed retail shops move into the district and pop-up shops gain enough following to expand. Already nine vendors at the Flea have stores, according to Shoshani.





# Rooftop Unplugged

Dip your toes into a pool and enjoy some of Miami's most talented musicians at **A+E's Rooftop Unplugged**. After exploring the urbanite Filling Station Lofts, indulge in an **intimate concert** complete with bulb lights, a view of downtown Miami and other Miami locals. The event happens once a month, and the best part, **it is free** - all you have to do is RSVP online. **Located at 1657 North Miami Avenue**. To get there, go to the University Metro Station stop and catch the green or orange line headed North. Get off at Government Station and hop on the Miami Metro-Mover until the School Board Station stop.



## THE FLEA

The district has already gained massive attention and the lots and buildings that were once abandoned and rundown have been bought out by multiple investors. A+E's events, too, have captivated and cultivated a following of young urbanite artists.

Each Miami Flea features 115 to 120 vendors and the Flea currently receives over 600 applications a month on average.

"We always try to have 30 percent new. We ask people to be patient," said JennyLee Molina, owner of JLPR, a public relations firm in Miami, and the head of production and operation for the Flea. The Flea strives to incorporate vendors with a story, vendors that are driven locally, vendors that donate to a cause, vendors that fit the archetype for the style of community that A+E is attempting to establish.

Stephanie Farokhnia, for example, bought a vintage bus from Craigslist and repurposed it into her very own "boutique on wheels." Farokhnia, propped in a high stool chair outside her bus among racks of lace, denim and leather, looks like a collecting queen. After collecting purses and building her own closet, Farokhnia was inspired to create Stevie Wanders Vintage.

The Flea also offers the opportunity for local artists to perform and local restaurants to give the city a taste.

The A+E District serves as a bridge between downtown Miami and Wynwood, a popular arts destination. The A+E District looks similar to Wynwood in that they are both investing in culture and art, yet, the development of Wynwood took over

a decade, whereas the A+E District has formed in a matter of years. Furthermore, criticism and the negative impact of gentrification have been heavily documented in Wynwood, such as in Camila Alvarez and Natalie Edgar's documentary "Right to Wynwood." The A+E District does not seem to have these patterns.


"The area used to be empty plots; no smaller buildings have been destroyed," Molina said. "Miami Flea is adding to the community, not taking away. It is speaking to community in a way Miami hasn't known."

Between vendor tents, lawn chairs and picnic tables, Miami locals enjoy the free flea and all it has to offer. Juniors Sofia Estevez and Lucy Alvarez grew up in South Florida and have found that the Miami Flea offers a local escape with a unique atmosphere.

"Miami Flea showcases the Miami personality," said Estevez, a junior studying public relations.

"I love the vendors and funky performers," added Alvarez, a junior studying public health. Sipping on a cool, sweet lemonade, Estevez and Alvarez joked about how the Flea created an atmosphere perfect for young couples with French bulldogs and cute babies.

The success of the Flea continues as the A+E District plans to have its third anniversary this November.

"We've invested sweat, said, grinning and wiping a bead of sweat from his forehead, "money and tears." 





**The Tippy Gardener** is your destination for handmad gifts and tiny treasures. This pop up shop is full of hand crafted pots with original handwriting to accompany your tiny cactus and personal style.





