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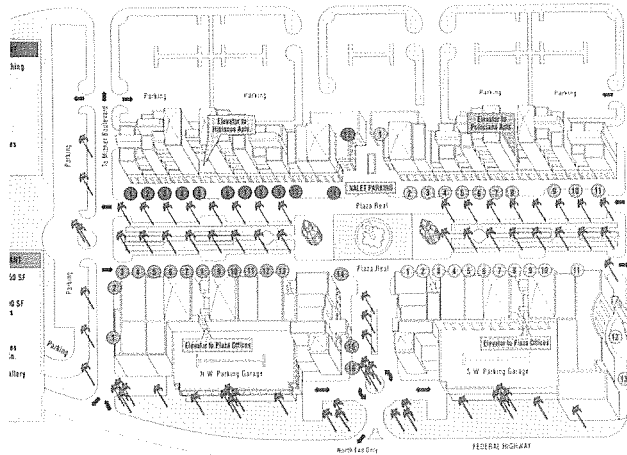
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# Boulevard Embryo: Mizner Park



Plan of Mizner Park.  
Courtesy Smith & Knibbs.



Boca Raton's new, mixed-use development, Mizner Park, offers hopeful news about suburban redevelopment. Replacing a mall which, in the 1950s, had helped sign the death warrant of the city's downtown, this second generation suburban center is a surprise. It looks like a postmodern reincarnation of nineteenth-century Paris and Barcelona served in the instant-recipe style of Mediterranean architecture so typical in Florida and California.

Mizner Park is less of a park than the embryo of a boulevard.<sup>1</sup> The development is anchored by a linear public space that runs perpendicularly to a six-lane suburban arterial, which links to the rest of the city. This linear public space consists of a wide median (the "park"), two roadways with parking along them and two generous, arcaded sidewalks. It is embryonic in that cars can and do cruise along what amounts to one, albeit sizable city block. In reality, cruising becomes looping around the block.

The median, or park, is comfortably furnished with grass and hard surfaces, benches, fountains and palm trees. The space evidently works well for both pedestrians (tired shoppers or mere boulevardiers strolling and stopping to watch the

action) and cruisers, who prefer the privacy of their cars. Crowds occupy the space until early morning hours. They include a mix of young and old people, but almost everybody is white, whether tourists or apparent residents.

One side of the boulevard is lined with cafes, bookstores and other shops below a few stories of offices. The other side hosts the same kinds of uses at the street level but is topped by several stories of housing. It is more upscale and, at least at the time of my visit, much more crowded than the office side of the boulevard. A department store will be added along the main arterial.

Monumental multistory parking structures fill in what becomes the middle of both the housing and the office blocks. On the far side of the housing block, which runs parallel to the boulevard, the parking structure is lined by a row of single-sided, four-story row houses. These are, in effect, back-to-back houses which can be entered from the parking structure, via private enclosed parking stalls, or from the street. The row houses line up in a pleasant fashion and are a wonderful example of how an unpopular housing type can be reinterpreted to provide a desirable residential environment and enhance the public realm.



Mizner Park is a financial success. While a multiplex cinema, located at the corner of the arterial and the beginning of the boulevard, was meant as the project's catalyst, the housing sold or rented with little advertisement before construction was completed — more proof that mixed-use development can flourish in suburbia, if only city officials and developers dedicate the added energy that such projects require.

It is also significant that the project's success centers on the strength of the public realm. Given the opportunity, suburbanites do go out and mingle. Still, like many projects of this sort, the mix represents only a slice of the region's population, and the energy on site seems to have little connection to, or little effect on, the surrounding area.

Just south of Boca Raton, downtown Fort Lauderdale is working hard to revive itself after years of disinvestment and failed plans. With several civic, educational and private projects on the boards or under construction, the main attraction right now is Las Olas Boulevard, which links downtown with the beach a few miles away.

Las Olas Boulevard was a good old-fashioned 1930s Main Street in Fort Lauderdale's down-

town, transformed into an arterial on its run to the beach and ended with a small commercial center at the beach front. But the section next to downtown had been slowly declining as its clientele was getting older and shops and uses were becoming obsolete.

Six blocks of this old Main Street have now been revamped to include a refurbished old hotel, cafes, restaurants and boutiques. The street continues to carry four lanes of briskly moving traffic, with parallel parking at each curb. The narrow median is lined with mature trees that match those planted along the sidewalks. Sidewalk surfaces and widths vary considerably along the five blocks, the result of many years of adaptation from the abutters. Cafes and restaurants overflow with people, thanks to a new law that allows them to put tables and chairs on the sidewalks.

This is a programmatic street redesign. Little was done to the public spaces, although parking was added behind the stores. This ordinary and pleasant streetscape, building on the attraction of people and food, is a great example of how good public places can be created simply by relying on the correct uses in the right location.

#### Note

1. The name refers to Florida architect Addison Mizner (1872-1933), whose Spanish Colonial style was an inspiration for the project. Mizner built many residences in and near Boca Raton, as well as a cloister and other private clubs.

#### Reference

For more information on Mizner Park, see *Redevelopment for Livable Communities* (Olympia, WA: Washington State Energy Office, Washington State Department of Transportation, Department of Ecology, and the Energy Outreach Center), 53-56. This report can be obtained from the Energy Outreach Center, 503 West 4th Avenue, Olympia, WA 98501, (360) 943-4595.