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Four new restaurants open in Miami Design District with another on the way

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Restaurants have kept foot traffic flowing to the Miami Design District in recent months and more chef-driven concepts have signed leases in the luxury shopping and high-end dining destination.

The district's recent openings include Itamae (which opened in November); MIA Market (December); and Okami and Cote (February). Coming soon: [ZZ's Sushi Bar will open in the first half of April.](#)

Itamae's [David Morales](#) is making a larger bet on the area after expanding from a pop-up within the St. Roch Market. After two years at the food hall, March 2020 closings from the pandemic forced the venue to shutter. So he and his partners, chefs Valerie and [Nando Chang](#), sought out a stand-alone space for their sushi concept, for which [Valerie Chang](#) was nominated as a James Beard Award Rising Star.

In April, the partners signed a lease for space at 140 N.E. 39th St., formerly occupied by cafe Ella. While Itamae hasn't opened its indoor dining room yet, it has reached maximum capacity every weekend since opening, Morales said. The restaurant currently offers outdoor seating for 40.



JOCK FISTICK

Miami Design District

"It's been incredible," Morales said. "As someone who's been spending a lot of time in the district the last few years, if it wasn't for everybody wearing masks, you'd have no idea there was anything different, in terms of traffic."

Eager crowds are what attracted New York-based Major Food Group to the area, too.

Co-owner [Jeff Zalaznick](#) moved to South Florida in early 2020, joining a wave of wealth residents from the Northeast flocking to the area. He was quickly drawn to the Design District's high-end retail scene and admired the steady flow of people he saw walking the district, even during the height of the pandemic.

At the restaurants there, he said, he noticed groups waiting outside consistently, which he judged as a measure of the high demand for eateries in the area.

After ZZ's Sushi Bar's April opening, Major Food Group plans to open another South Florida concept this fall.

"I think by the time we open the second restaurant, the Design District is going to be one of the best [food and beverage] destinations in Miami," Zalaznick [previously told the *Business Journal*](#).

What's to come

The next step for the Design District is to ride the momentum of the past year, said [Scott Sherman](#), a partner in [Tricera Capital](#).

Miami-based Tricera is developing a three-story retail development in the district, and Sherman said the company is interested in acquiring more property in the area.

"When I go there now, with all the people from the Northeast, the district feels more active than it did pre-Covid," he said.

That's why out-of-state restaurant groups are important to the district's future. It's crucial that consumers stay drawn to the area – which would benefit the retailers and showrooms in the Design District, too, he said.

Space, however, is limited. Sherman said while there were some retail and restaurant casualties during the pandemic, most of those spaces are already occupied or are in the process of being built out.

DD41 is one development in the district that has yet to break ground. Developed by Miami-based TSG Realty, [Jonathan Carter](#) of Colliers International South Florida is handling pre-leasing for the project.

He said the ground-up development — plans for which have yet to be finalized — is already attracting interest from retailers and restaurant groups from across the U.S.

"We haven't even brought it to the market yet, but a lot of groups out of New York, Chicago and Los Angeles are already interested," Carter said. "People from Europe are interested, as well."

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