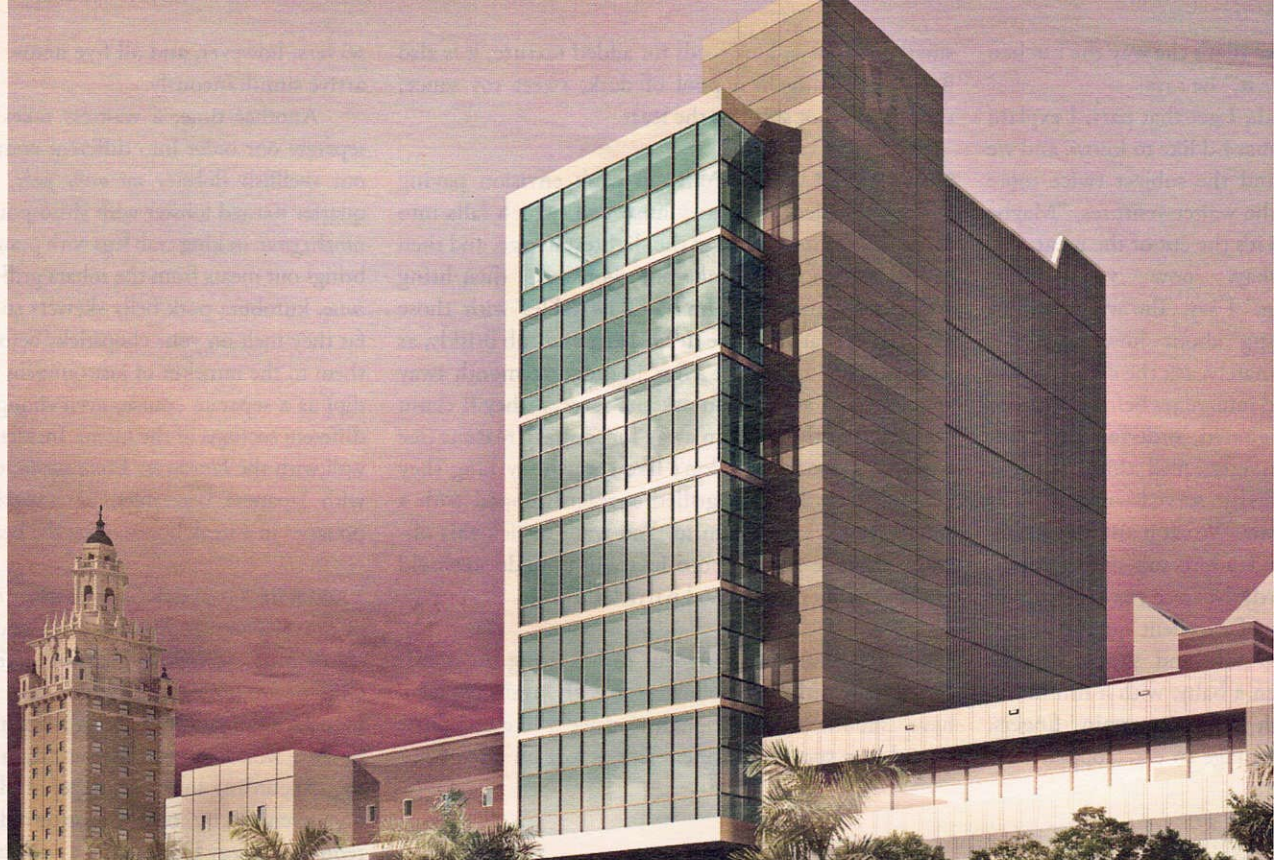


REPORT CARD

The eight-story Miami Culinary Institute building is the first LEED gold-certified culinary campus in the country.



Stop, Chef!

The new Miami Culinary Institute is the first-ever school for responsible cooking | *By Margit Bisztray* |

Many students who enroll in culinary training programs are reaching for the stars—as in the stardom of the celebrity chefs they’ve seen on TV. Yet trends and shifts in the cooking world indicate an opposite direction, namely back down to earth. After all, are there more buzzy food-world adjectives today than “local,” “sustainable” and “farm-raised”?

The Miami Culinary Institute at Miami Dade College, opening in January, aims at aspiring cooks with a conscience. It will be the first school of its kind in the U.S. to earn LEED gold certification (which takes into account factors such as water efficiency, energy use, materials and indoor environmental quality), and that’s just a part of the on-trend concept here.

Miami Dade College President Eduardo Padrón developed the idea of defining a “new revolution in culinary training” and providing education ranging from beginner/home entertainer level to that of the industry master. The school offers classes for cooking enthusiasts looking to pick up skills, a four-year bachelor program for students and development courses for professionals refining their craft. The eight-floor building includes a café and restaurant open to the public, an HD television-equipped demonstration kitchen and wine training stations. Partnerships with 12 other culinary schools across the globe (in locales from Portugal to China to Spain) will enable televised instruction in real-time with, for example, a pastry chef in Lyon, France, sharing tips on handling mille-feuille, or a cattle farmer in Argentina describing the attributes and benefits of grass-fed beef.

“It’s a truly global, cultural approach to education,” says MCI’s Founding Director John Richards. “Furthermore, tuition

will be half of what it is at most private institutions.” This is important to Dr. Padrón: that the opportunities here should be accessible to Miami locals.

Richards is also in the process of forming a “chefs council” of locals (including big names from the local culinary scene, which he can’t confirm until early in 2011, he explains). The council members will serve as consultants, advisors and mentors to the students. Richards encourages council members to drop in at the school for convenience and offer impromptu advice to working students. “The members have agreed to help make sure students are successful,” he says. “I’ve had to reprogram so many students who came out of cooking school expecting to become celebrities. Their expectations were so unrealistic. We’re not aiming to put out ‘chefs’. We’re aiming to put out great cooks who can become great chefs. We’re going to teach them exceptional skills that meet realistic expectations.”

Cooks-in-the-making will develop relationships with local growers and purveyors, including Paradise Farms and Schuler Winery in Homestead. In turn, they will provide the farm with compost from the school’s kitchens, essentially returning the value of the resources.

“This is exactly how the curriculum is different from other schools,” says Richards. “It starts in the ground where food grows, where it is raised. And it ends in the ground, too. It doesn’t end in a box of frozen whatever gets dropped off.” **M**