

Interview with Shareef Malnik

Kathy Hersh: We are doing an interview today, Friday the 13th, October the 13th, 2017, with Sharif Malnik at The Forge on Miami Beach for the Miami Beach Visual Memoirs project. Tell us about this restaurant and how it came about. Sort of the beginnings of it, if you would, please.

Shareef Malnik: Well, the very early beginnings were that this building and this property was a blacksmith's forge around the turn of the century, so horses were shod here. That developed into ornamental gates for mansions being made here, designed and manufactured here.

At some point in the 1930s, the restaurant had a white-tie casino upstairs. It morphed into a restaurant. In the '50s and '60s, it was The Old Forge restaurant.

In 1968, my father, Al Malnik, bought the property. The main dining room was the grand, big feature of the restaurant. The main dining room was an open-air courtyard. He basically put a roof on it and dropped old from The Old Forge to The Forge, and here we go. That was 48 years ago, and now we've been The Forge ever since.

Interviewer: You took over, really, the running and the directing of it from your father. Right?

Malnik: My father owned and ran, operated the restaurant from 1968, '69, when it started, until about 1990, '91. Around '91, I think, I came in. I took over the restaurant, and I've been running it ever since.

Interviewer: You grew up in the restaurant business then?

Malnik: I did. I grew up in Miami Beach. I was born in Miami, grew up in Miami Beach. I went to North Beach Elementary, which is only a couple blocks down the street. I went to Nautilus. I went to Miami Beach Senior High School, and then I went on to University of Miami undergraduate, University of Miami law school.

I'm a true Miami Beach boy, I think, through and through. Up until I was seven years old, we lived in a condominium called The Hampshire Towers, which I think now is called Galeria. In those days, it was really one of the only buildings on Collins Avenue in the '50s, believe it or not. There were only a couple other buildings. There was The Doral, The Eden Roc and The Fountainebleau. There was almost



nothing in between them, except some old mansions that were boarded up.

In those days, at least I think our parents thought the city was safer and the world was a safer place. When I was seven years old, I was free to come and go as I chose, certainly during daylight hours, alone. I would just play in these boarded-up old mansions next door to our building. I would take my, believe it or not, mayonnaise sandwiches in a plastic Ziploc down to the beach in the morning and I'd come back for dinner as a seven year old.

I even took the city bus from our condo at seven years old, the city bus to North Beach Elementary, until one day. My mom always told me don't pull whatever that's called. I don't even know what that's called that rings the bell that lets the driver know that you want to stop. In case he doesn't hear you, always go up and tell him. Of course, I always wanted to pull it, because I saw all the adults on the bus pull it.

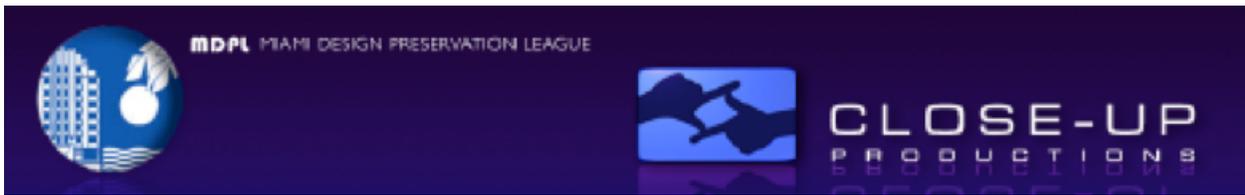
One day, I pulled it and he didn't hear me and he went and shot right past my building. I walked up. I said, "Sir, you passed my building." He said, "Well, you'll just have to go around the whole bus route." By the time we got to the bus depot, we were in a dark garage. I'm sitting in the bus by myself, because they're changing drivers, when I finally started to cry [laughs] [04:35-04:35] and realized that I was scared and got home late at night on that same bus. That was the end of my traveling by city bus to elementary school.

Interviewer: Wow.

Malnik: Yes, I grew up in Miami Beach. When my dad took over the restaurant in '68, I was 10 years old. I saw his passion developing. He is a fantastic businessman. You think of most business people are being left brained, but he's very right brained. He not only utilizes that in business, but your right brain is really your creative side. He's an extremely creative, artistic human being.

He wanted to create a restaurant that he liked. There weren't very many options or choices in Miami Beach at the time. We were one of only a few restaurants that you could go to, Joe's Stone Crabs being one of them. He was allergic to seafood in those days [laughs] [05:42-05:43].

He built The Forge. Put a roof on it. I worked here many, many jobs as a kid, including construction, so I helped build it or build renovations. I



worked in the kitchen. I peeled potatoes. I stuffed escargot shells, countless, thousands and thousands of escargot shells. Sometimes my good friends at school would come and work with me, and we would stuff escargot shells together on the weekends or in the summer.

Interviewer: Did you eat any of that stuff?

Malnik: Yeah, I did. Yeah. I've been subjected, exposed to all different kinds of foods and wines since I was a kid, so I was very open minded with food.

Then I graduated to actually cooking these hash browns, which I was so proud that I could stand in front of the range and the griddle and flip these things and the rings. I worked in the front of the house as I got older. I worked here in the summers. I worked as a manager. I worked in the bar. I was involved in all kinds of things.

Interviewer: Did your friends think it was pretty cool what you did and what your dad did?

Malnik: I think so. Yeah, because it's unusual, especially in those days. You don't really know a lot of people in the restaurant business in those days or families, because there weren't very many restaurants, unlike today, where we're saturated and inundated with just restaurants galore.

Interviewer: Where is your father from? The name Malnik, where does that come from?

Malnik: The name is Ukrainian. Our roots are Ukrainian from my father's side. The name was originally Krokmalnikoff [phonetic] [07:48], then it became Malnikoff. Ultimately, my grandparents dropped the suffix and shortened it to make it easier to pronounce and, I guess, to assimilate more easily into the American culture, so that's where it ultimately ended up as Malnik.

Interviewer: Where did you father start out? Where did he grow up?

Malnik: He grew up in Saint Louis.

Interviewer: Saint Louis.



Malnik: Yeah, my grandparents went there in the '20s. Dad was born in 1933 in Saint Louis.

Interviewer: What made him decide on Miami Beach?

Malnik: That's a great question. My dad decided on Miami Beach because he wanted to escape Saint Louis. It was cold. He was very bright. He wanted opportunity.

He met my mother, who was also from Saint Louis, and he said, "I hear Miami is warm and I hear Los Angeles is warm, and I'm gonna go to law school. I don't know where we should go. Why don't we flip a coin?" He flipped a coin. Heads won, and they drove down to Miami. He entered the University of Miami law school.

I was born while he was in law school. I went to his graduation when I was one year old. I ended up going to the same law school at University of Miami. My sister went to that law school as well. I think my cousin went there, too.

What was really nice, a couple of years ago, I've been judging this competition, this Law Without Walls at the University of Miami law school. I asked my dad to come, and the dean wanted my dad to come in, so we got to judge this international competition together as judges on the same panel at the same law school that we both went to. It was really nice.

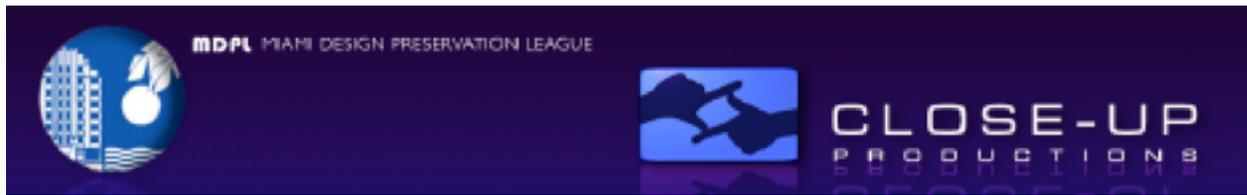
Interviewer: Why law? Is it that the restaurant provided an outlet for his right brain and his creativity, his business acumen? Did he ever intend to practice law?

Malnik: He did practice law. The restaurant was never his full-time occupation, although it was a passion of his that occupied a lot of his time. No, he did practice law, and he was a brilliant lawyer.

Interviewer: How about you?

Malnik: I did not practice law, but I always appreciate the fact that I went to law school. It changes the chemistry of your brain, how you think. I did very well in undergraduate, but it gave me the confidence that I feel that intellectually I could sit down with anyone and hold my own. Law school gave me not only the confidence, but first it gave me the ability.

Interviewer: Another person we talked to last week, David Walnik [phonetic] [10:53], also went to UM law school.



Steve: Wallack.

Interviewer: Wallach. Sorry. Wallack [laughs] [10:58-10:59]. Wallack. He never practiced law, but he said it came in very handy [laughs] [11:05-11:05].

Malnik: He's a great guy.

Interviewer: Yeah, we had a lot of fun with him.

Malnik: Yeah. He's a very bright guy. You can tell when you're speaking to him.

Interviewer: He's another one who's very entrepreneurial and multi-faceted, which is interesting.

Malnik: Yeah, it is. I think law school, it opens your mind. It's creative thinking. It's a very creative process, because you look at a set of facts. You turn them inside out and come up with the most unusual theories, because if you're just going to stick with the obvious, you're not going to very good at your profession or good at it academically. It's great training, I think, for anything.

Interviewer: Did he anticipate that the restaurant would become as famous as it has?

Malnik: I'm going to answer how I heard him answer this question many times, and that is, "I built the restaurant 'cause I wanted a great place to eat." That's why he did it. He wanted a great place to eat.

Now, as I've seen him over my entire life exercise his artistic prowess on everything that he does to the most minute detail, yeah, I see it as a canvas for him to explore and enjoy art. Culinary, fine art, architecture, design, but, ultimately, I think I would take his answer, and that is I wanted to build a restaurant that was good enough for me to eat in.

Interviewer: So then he sort of gave it over to you at one point, and you did some renovations here. Correct?

Malnik: Yeah. South Beach was percolating. It was the first time that I realized, and I'd been living in London for a short period of time. I had just come back, because I saw Miami seemed to be happening.



A lot of people say, just to digress for a second, that “Wow, you’re so lucky. South Beach is amazing. It’s so much fun. You must have had such a fun childhood.” Well, we didn’t have South Beach when I was a kid growing up. It was quiet. I remember sitting on the dock of the bay watching time go away many, many, many, many hours growing up.

I knew the bay so well when we lived on the bay. I knew the smell. I knew the tides. I knew the sound of it. I spend so much time outside and so much time on the water. I knew the sea life that was there, the smells. I knew what the sound of the wind was like in the trees. That was the Miami Beach that I grew up in.

I knew the feeling of the hot sand between my toes. I knew what it was like to lay next to the pool on the keystone when it was really hot. I was cold in the pool and steam would come up around me. I would feel so warm. That’s the Miami Beach that I remember growing up in. There were no nightclubs.

Interviewer: What do you think of those changes? It’s been good for business.

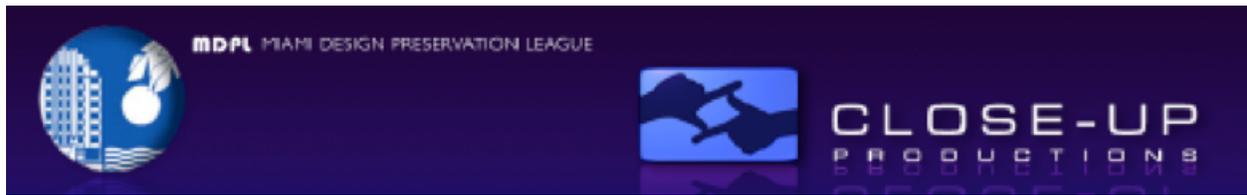
Malnik: I think everything changes. To fight the inevitable is an exercise in futility, which just results, I think, in frustration and having a miserable life. Change has to happen. If something is not changing, it’s deteriorating. That’s just the way the universe works, and I think it’s the way mankind works. I accept and adapt to change.

I think a lot of the change has been really positive, but with all change and with everything, there is negative. It’s just we have to get through it.

Interviewer: Tell us about some of those challenges, because Miami Beach has undergone quite a metamorphosis.

Malnik: It has. When I grew up, I said, “Wow.” At some point when I was in college, I would travel to New York and say, “Ah, I wish Miami was more like New York.” Especially when I was in high school, when it was really very little going on here in the ‘70s. OK? Boy, I wish this was more like New York.

Well, when you get it to be a little bit more like New York, you also get some of the problems that New York has. It’s just the way things are. It’s never going to be perfect. Wow, I wish there was more to do here. Well, when there’s more to do here, there’s also going to be more



traffic. For every action, there's an equal reaction. That's just the way it works.

I get that and I understand that. If things change to a degree that you don't like it, you can go somewhere else. Go back to a sleepy beach town that Miami Beach used to be and enjoy it somewhere else. That's fine, too, but things change. Nothing stays the same. This restaurant doesn't stay. Relationships don't stay the same. If you insist on staying the same, then life will pass you by.

This whole evolution of Miami Beach, where I saw it percolating, for me, it also depends on what stage you're at in your life. In 1990, when I saw all this great stuff going on in Miami Beach, it made me move back here from London. I'm not leaving. This is amazing. What I liked in 1990, at the age I was in 1990 and the age I am in 2017, obviously, my likes are different. I have a business on Miami Beach, but now I live in Coconut Grove [laughs] [17:27-17:28]. OK?

Stuff happens, man. My wife and I, she loves it and she's from California, from Topanga. She lived in Topanga Canyon for 20 years. She's a displaced hippie. That's the bohemian village that we have left.

That suits me now, but I never forsake all the great things that happened in Miami Beach, because I think they are great. I think it's an amazing city. I still have a business here. It's a very big part of my life.

Interviewer: Tell us about the '90s and when things started rolling and you came back. What happened then? You got involved with the restaurant then.

Malnik: I took over the restaurant. I opened up several nightclubs next to the restaurant. Really, from the 50,000-foot view, think of Miami in the '90s as a snapshot in time that was so unusual and so special that will never happen again ever in the same way.

If you looked at a microcosm of what was happening in the late '70s, you could look at Studio 54. I think it was open two years when Steve Rubell and Ian Shragar owned it and Roy Cohn. Then it became different things, but that two-year stint that they had was the most unusual, culturally unusual, avant-garde, unique lifestyle that no one had ever seen before. I was magical. It was just unbelievable.



I remember I went to Studio 54. I was at University of Miami. It must have been 1978, '78 or '79. I went there on New Year's Eve, and I went with Steve Rubell and Roy Cohn. You couldn't get into the place. I went on New Year's Eve. The only way I can get in was going with the owners. It was the most outrageous, interesting representation of what was happening in society. It's really amazing. I've never seen anything like it.

Well, as uniquely amazing was Miami Beach in the '90s. There was something new that was happening. It was just this magical energy in the air. There was a lifestyle that was happening that was very unusual. It could never be duplicated and, by the laws of the universe, could never last forever.

Things like that don't last forever. They're finite. They're a snapshot. It was very special to be part of that and to be around it, to witness it, to enjoy it.

Interviewer: Would you say it was the people that converged on the spot then?

Malnik: Yeah. The real, I think, essence of anything that's creating are the types of people and what they stand for, but you have to look at those people with a backdrop of what's happening or not happening in time, in our culture. Where are we at on this spectrum of life? Where is the community? What does it need?

Yeah, so you had this artistic community. You had the gay community. People started saying, "This is a pretty bohemian, interesting lifestyle," so you had to be open minded and like this sort of loose, artistic, fun, underground world that Miami Beach was in the early '90s.

When the fashion industry discovered it, because it was so cheap and beautiful, all the sudden you had beautiful people here, but the commercial aspect of it hadn't followed yet. Now you had this really beautiful yet very down-to-earth group, several groups of people. You didn't have the gawkers yet and the T.G.I. Fridays coming in. It was just a very hip and cool place.

Very different than what you see in society now, where what made you hip and cool wasn't how much money you had. In fact, that would be vulgar. You could have a lot of money, but don't show that you have a lot of money. Say who are you, what do you stand for and who do you know. That's what would get you into a place. It was a very unusual time.



Of course, when you have something that's that spectacular, then everybody wants to be there. That's progress, I guess, and people start building for it, trying to attract, trying to make money off of it. Then it became too expensive, so the artists had to leave. It drove a lot of the gay community out, and then the models couldn't afford to stay here anymore, then what we had that was so beautiful was gone.

Not completely gone, but parts of it were gone. We do still have great things in Miami Beach, but it's a different Miami Beach. It'll be different again one day.

Interviewer: Miami Beach went through a terrible time, of course, when Marielitos came out of Cuba, and there was a lot of crime. Was this area affected by it? Do you think there was a general downturn and people maybe afraid to come to Miami Beach, because of the bad publicity?

Malnik: I think so. It's kind of a paradox, because you had the Marielitos, which did make it dangerous. I think there were several things that happened, killing of tourists, that wasn't Marielitos. There have been a bunch of things that happened that made people afraid to come to Miami Beach, but at the same time you had Miami Vice, which attracted people to Miami Beach, because it made it sexy to be involved in the cocaine cowboy and drug trade. It seemed really interesting. There's this paradox that's going on.

There was a time where tourism really was hurt, because some tourists were killed. I think there was a German tourist that was killed. That was really bad. There were some riots, too, which I think scared people from coming to Miami Beach. That was a short period of time. I think that was in the '80s.

I bought and built the only free-standing house on Ocean Drive. I converted this building into my home, which I lived in for 12 years. Other than Versace's house, which is now not a house, it's really still the only free-standing, single-family house on Ocean Drive. When I bought it in '96, people thought I was crazy, because there was nothing down there. Marielitos were still hanging out in the park. It was dangerous.

Interviewer: Where was this where you bought the house?

Malnik: It's between Second and Third Street on Ocean Drive, facing the park. I said, "Well, you know Fifth to 15th Street seems to be really



happening.” It was an iconic street. In fact, it was so iconic that Ocean Drive Magazine named the magazine after the street, because it hadn’t turned into the sort of tacky street, unfortunately, that it is now. I know they’re trying to do a lot of things to change that. I support that and all the laws and regulations that they’re enacting to try to turn it around, and they will, I’m sure, one day.

At any rate, I’m like, “If Fifth to 15th Street is so popular and so amazing, wouldn’t First to Fifth?” Why is this? There’s sort of bifurcation, this invisible line of Fifth Street? No. I’m going to buy this little place and I’m going to move in there, and I did. I moved in in 1998.

Interviewer: You lived there 12 years you said?

Malnik: Yeah.

Interviewer: Wow. You were right on the ocean then.

Malnik: Yeah. Right across from the ocean, facing the park. I still own it. I am selling it, because my wife wanted to live in The Grove. She didn’t want to live in a house that I was a bachelor in.

[laughter]

Malnik: Go figure.

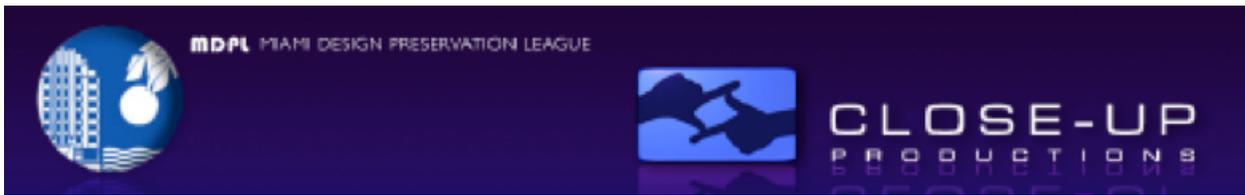
[laughter]

Interviewer: Now, I’d like to hear some stories. We hear of all the famous people that came here and you must have had some encounters with them as a child. It really has continued to attract a lot of well-known people, because of the quality of the food and, of course, the wine, a famous wine cellar. Would you have any stories that you can recall, family stories?

Malnik: Well, everybody pretty much has come through The Forge in different eras. I guess in the early ‘70s or late ‘60s, early ‘70s, the sort of Rat Pack, Dean Martin, Frank Sinatra, Sammy Davis people.

Interviewer: Did that impress a 10-, 11-year-old boy?

Malnik: No. I had no clue. I would meet them and they would sometimes come by the house. It was nice, but it didn’t really mean that much to me.



Then when I was a little kid I met Muhammad Ali here while he was champion of the world. I had dinner with him.

Interviewer: That impressed you.

Malnik: Very much so. Yeah.

Interviewer: Tell us about that. Was it in this restaurant that you had dinner together?

Malnik: It was in this restaurant. I've had several sort of Muhammad Ali crossings throughout my life. One was when I was a young boy. I had dinner with him as champion of the world in the main dining room. He was very kind and sweet. Another is when I was a young teenager in my Boston whaler, I ended up in a houseboat that he was in and got to see him and hang out with him.

I had a very interesting experience. I was on my way back. I was flying from overseas to New York on a 13-hour flight. I sat next to Muhammad Ali for 13 hours, and we talked most of the flight. That was very amazing.

Interviewer: Did you learn anything about him you didn't know?

Malnik: I learned something, because you don't really know any of the celebrities by virtue of their marketing and brand, because you have no idea what they really are like. I did learn that he was 100 percent sincere in everything that you saw, read or heard about him. His entire life was sincere. That's who he really is. That was pretty amazing.

He's a very peaceful person. When you see a guy that refused to go to war, not because he's afraid to go to war or to die. He really believed it was wrong. I normally would not support someone who refused to fight for their country if our country was in danger, which that's a debatable thing, but it's not for us to decide, but because of his spiritual, I have to say I have a lot of respect for him. I really do.

Interviewer: We did interview Steven Haas, who was manager here for a long time. He told us about having Oprah's birthday party here once [laughs] [30:06-30:07]. We've talked to Joanne Bass about some incidents of famous people at Joe's. She has some hilarious stories. I was just wondering if there were some things in the lore here that pertained.



Malnik: In 1993, it was interesting. South Beach was really starting to happen, and I realized for the first time there were people that were in town that didn't even know about The Forge. Our entire life, everyone knew The Forge. It was like one of three restaurants. You knew Joe's and you knew The Forge. You knew Pumpernick's. There wasn't anything else to know.

It was shocking. I couldn't believe that there were people that didn't know The Forge. The Forge is cyclic. Everything is. We still had some of the old-timers here, and I'm trying to figure out how to get this new crowd here.

First, I was talking to Mickey Rourke, who was also a Miami guy, Miami Beach guy. I say, "Hey, Mickey, you've got to come. I took over The Forge. You gotta come one night." He says, "Oh, yeah. I'll definitely come. I'll come on Mother's Day. I'll bring my mom." I was like, "Ah, God." This is what I'm facing. This is what his impression of The Forge is.

[laughter]

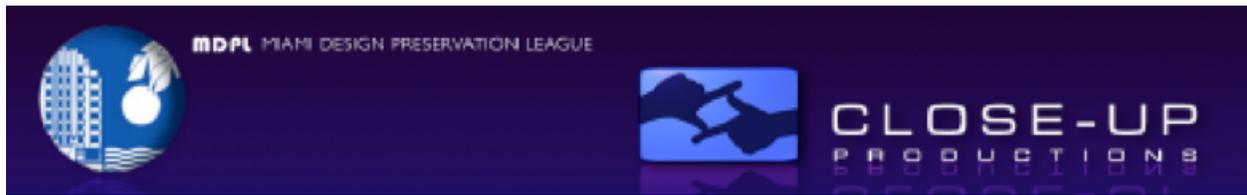
Malnik: Little did I know that actually Mickey had worked here once. He was a busboy at a time where they wore red jackets. He got fired and he refused to wear a red jacket for 20 years, because it so traumatized him, according to Mickey. I think he's over it now, finally.

So I said, "OK, this is not gonna work." Brett Ratner, who's also a Miami Beach guy, and he's basically my little brother. He's my father's 11th child, literally. He grew up in our house. Now he's this huge success. Brett and I decided to throw a Wednesday night party once a week. The thought was if I could throw a party once a week and I could bring Mickey and other people that first night, they'll think it's like this every night. I'll worry about it after that.

I thought I would do it for a short period of time. Anyone I would get to the restaurant, I'd invite them on a Wednesday so I get this critical mass of cool people, so that they thought the restaurant was cool. That Wednesday night party ended up going for 16 years. It was one of those snapshots that we talked about that was never duplicated anywhere in the world, because it was unbelievable.

Interviewer: What all went on?

Malnik: Man, on any given Wednesday, you might see literally on the same night Michael Jordan, Madonna, Denis Rodman, and Madonna and



Denis Rodman has this whole thing. It was like they were fighting at different tables. Michael Douglas. It was insane. You could not believe the unique mix of people.

I would personally make sure that I did all the seating, because I needed the right mix of people. The right ages, the right look, the right people, the right history throughout the restaurant, and I made sure I did that every Wednesday for 16 years. If I was out of town, it depends on what year it was, but once the internet came out, I would do it by email. It was pretty spectacular.

Interviewer: You reached out to these people or was there word of mouth then [crosstalk] [34:08] that brought them?

Malnik: First I reached out like I did with Mickey, people that I knew. People started hearing about it, and then if anybody was in town, they had to be on a Wednesday. Ocean Drive Magazine, Jason Binn is a dear friend of mine, the founder of Ocean Drive, and Jerry Powers. I took an ad out just because I kind of felt sorry for them.

The magazine hadn't even started yet. He's like, "Please. I really want you in the first issue." It was about this thin. Now it's like that. They hadn't even named the magazine yet. They're like, "We don't know if it should be Ocean Drive or SoBe News. What do you think?"

We threw their first Open Drive party. The Ocean Drive party was a very famous party every year. Everyone looked forward to the Ocean Drive party. I don't know what it's like now.

Interviewer: It was annually?

Malnik: Annually they threw a party that was the biggest party of the year in Miami Beach for many years. During the '90s, it was insane.

Interviewer: It was here?

Malnik: It was always somewhere in Miami Beach.

Interviewer: Oh, OK. Not necessarily at The Forge.

Malnik: No, no, but I threw the first one at The Forge.

Interviewer: Oh, you threw the first one.



Malnik: We did it on a Wednesday, because we were doing the Wednesday party. We knew we had a hit when all the cars were lined up and backed up all the way to the Julia Tuttle Expressway. We were like, “OK, we’re on to something here.” It was pretty special.

Everybody and anybody has been through here. Gorbachov in the wine cellar. We had Michael Jackson’s birthday here. He was a dear friend of the family. Justin Timberlake just did something in the wine cellar. It’s just been a non-stop, beautiful assortment of people, both celebrities and non-celebrities. It’s the local people, the stories.

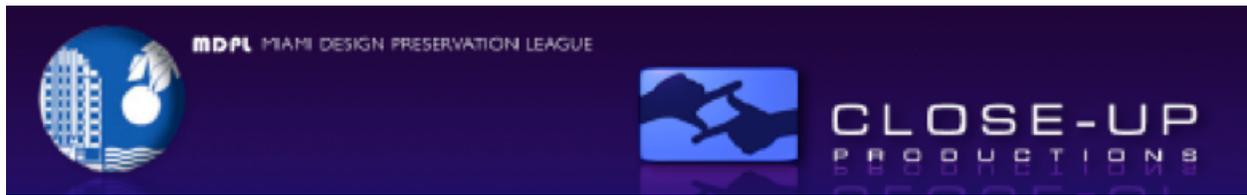
I kind of feel that I’ve had my finger on the pulse of what’s happened here, because I get to not only witness people coming in and out, but I get to talk to them. I get to hear their stories. There are sad ones, and there are happy ones. I get to see generations, new generations and some older generations that are gone. It’s been an amazing opportunity for me to chronicle what’s happening in my city by virtue of the fact that everyone in the city pretty much has come through here.

Interviewer: I’m just wondering. The restaurant business is so very competitive. One of the cachets of Miami Beach was always there was always something new going on. To maintain a loyal following like that, what would you say? Aside from having excellent food and so forth, was it relationships? What was it? What was it that you had? Did you figure out what that thing was that you had that kept people coming and all kinds of people coming?

Malnik: That’s a great question. I wish I had a really great answer for you. All of the above. There’s this intangible thing that happens in a restaurant space. Sometimes you’re ahead of the curve and sometimes you’re a little behind the curve. You’re trying to stay on the curve, as long as you average out.

I think that one of the things that I did in the early ‘90s was I made an old restaurant new. I think that was really critical. Quite frankly, I’m so impressed with the restaurants that don’t change anything ever and they just stay popular. I always have to breathe new life into the restaurant, I feel. New food, changing it up here and there to keep it fresh.

That’s been my experience with this place. I guess everywhere is different, but most restaurants don’t last 48 years. It’s almost impossible. Every year is not going to be your best year.



There are too many restaurants that are happening and people want to try new things. I don't blame them. I want to try new things. Every time somebody tries a new restaurant, that's one night that they're not in your restaurant. That's OK, because if you stay consistent and have integrity in everything that you do, they'll come back. You have to just look at life that way.

I think changing things up. I think relationships also. Having people here that are consistent. People like to come back and recognize things. I know that sounds contradictory, changing things up and recognize things. You need to have certain things that remind people that they're home, but it's like getting a new sofa in your home. It's your home. You know it, but you spruced it up a little bit and there's something nice in there that makes you feel like it's fresh again.

The most important thing is consistency. I have it in my staff. People call me and text me for reservations. I encourage it. That's what I do. I own a restaurant. People are like, "I don't want to bother you." I'm like, "You don't bother me. Text me. I want to make your reservation for you." Actually, I'd prefer to do that. My GM, his cell phone is on his card. That's what we do, and I think that personal relationships are huge, so all of the above.

Steve: Are you [crosstalk] [40:10-40:11] optimistic about the future?

Interviewer: What would you like, Steve?

Steve: About the future of Miami Beach, about business in the future?

Malnik: I like to think of myself as an objective, pragmatic optimist. Now, those are probably a contradiction in terms. I was just wearing a T-shirt that said, "If it's humanly possible, I know I can do it." Regardless of the odds, if it's humanly possible, with my tenacity, I think I can get it done, whatever it is. If you don't have that attitude, you definitely won't get it done.

There's this fine line between being an optimist and being objective and pragmatic. You don't want to be pragmatic where you are a pessimist and you don't try anything. If you have a 10 percent chance of getting something done, you've got 10 out of 100 chances to do it. You can still do it. It doesn't mean you don't do it. You be pragmatic, see what the odds are. I consider myself optimistic and realistic.



I do think that Miami is only going to grow. I think we're going to have our ups and downs, especially in the hospitality industry, because there is such an inundation of service and hospitality businesses. A lot of them are going to go 'bye-bye, unfortunately. You have to be so over-capitalized to be here, to be able to get through a hurricane, where you have 11 days of no revenue. Not everybody can afford that.

The rising tides and flooding concern me hugely about Miami Beach. Our mayor has done a great job in trying to combat that and bringing attention to it, because I don't really feel like we've ever really taken the threat seriously. I'm glad that we are now.

The house that I bought at Coconut Grove is 18 feet above sea level. We just had Hurricane Irma. I didn't have to think about flooding. It didn't even cross my mind. Whatever storm surge, it's probably not going to be more than 18 feet, so I'm not going to worry about it. Right? I had no flooding. That was a great feeling. All these houses and mansions on North Bay Road that are old, they're going to have to be rebuilt [laughs] [42:50-42:50] much higher above sea level. It's not going to work.

I see that as the major problem that we're facing. I understand traffic and we're going to have mass transit, but the traffic is one of the payments that you have for progress. If you want progress, you have traffic. Those things don't worry me as badly, as much as flooding.

Interviewer: There's always been, and we've heard this come up, especially in interviewing a lot of people in public life on Miami Beach, the tension between the residential aspects and the business aspects. There are people actually living here [laughs] [43:33-43:33] who want peace and quiet at night, and then there are people whose business thrives on the nightlife and the boom-boom and all that. There is a natural tension that that creates, which is interesting to see how that manifests itself. That's part of the struggle I see going on here.

Malnik: Yeah, but, to me, it's normal and natural that things are going to change. First of all, the market dictates what businesses you have. That's a fact of life. Too bad the modeling industry isn't here anymore. Well, it got too expensive. You can't have both. You want your property to be worth more money, you're going to charge more rent, models aren't going to stay here, so don't complain that you don't have the modeling industry. It would be really nice to have them, but you're not going to have them, because we outgrew that.



Miami Beach was a party town. That's what we were founded on. I think that's an important facet that we need to try to maintain, because it does elevate the city. It does market the city. I think it makes the city and your businesses, even non-hospitality related, more valuable and your property values higher. Getting rid of it, I think, would be very short sighted, extremely short sighted.

At the same time, it's going to change the nature of the nightlife, because you do have residents here now. There has to be some compromise on everybody's side. If you were looking for a quiet little place to live, you shouldn't have moved to Miami Beach. If you're looking to have a 24-hour nightclub, Miami Beach isn't that place anymore.

You know what? Everybody needs to find a way in the middle, because it's the natural evolution of the way the world works. Nothing stays the same. It just goes back to what we were saying before.

[end transcript]