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Modern Maturity

The new Midtown Mile
helps Atlanta's wild child
settle down. >>

By CANDICE DYER



IN OUR CIVIC FAMILY, Midtown has historically functioned as a rebellious child, shrugging off the fretful parents who try to preen it in their starchy, clean-cut image. “Maybe this is just a phase,” the grown-ups have sighed in response to the neighborhood’s loud music, shaggy comportment, and flexible interpretations of gender.

In the 1960s, there were few places in the South where a gentleman could wear his hair longer than his collar without fear of jail or gunfire, but Tenth Street offered cheap rents to unkempt war protesters, who reveled and rutted with peachy peaceniks during lengthy Allman Brothers Band jams at Piedmont Park. A fondly remembered underground ’zine called *The Great Speckled Bird* documented the rise of the Southern hippie, with Midtown as the countercultural nerve center for the entire region. The paper riled the establishment enough to get its newsroom, on the edge of the park, firebombed.

Of course, the best parties always leave

a mess the morning after.

“When we moved here in 1978, the neighborhood was overrun with prostitutes, halfway houses, and other hellholes,” says Sandy Corley, an artist and Myrtle Street resident who started the community’s first Neighborhood Watch-style group. “I used my sculpture van to haul the muggers and dealers who had been arrested by an off-duty cop over to Krispy Kreme to wait for the paddy wagon. They’d all be in handcuffs, so my street name was ‘Bracelets.’”

Then the mightiest of all gentrifiers arrived: gay men escaping small-town repression. They made Backstreet, one of Atlanta’s last 24-hour bars until it closed its doors in 2004, ground zero for strobe-lit, ecstatic Pride. Midtown traded beads and tie-dye for drag and rainbow flags. Property values soared, and the area’s population has doubled in size and income in the past decade.

Now, with the neighborhood comfortably labeled BoBo, or “bohemian

bourgeois,” the Midtown Alliance, in conjunction with a dozen business and civic leaders, is planning the Midtown Mile, a luxe shopping district spanning fourteen blocks of Peachtree Street, from North Avenue to Fifteenth. The 1 million square feet of street-level retail, inspired by Chicago’s Magnificent Mile, will comprise local boutiques and national luxury chains—Barneys New York and Bergdorf Goodman are on the wish list—along with specialty grocery stores such as Dean & DeLuca. Trump Towers Atlanta, already in the works, will provide a crash pad.

The next revolution, it seems, will wave something by Hermès.

Still, whatever its guise, Midtown has always been guided by an ethos of socially conscious hedonism: not so much too busy to hate as too festive for it. “Midtowners entertain,” Corley says, “so we need a quality source for huge chunks of meat and humongoid jars of sundried tomatoes. Just no more smoothie stands and bland burrito joints, please.” ■



MIDTOWN MIRACLE

By the time it’s finished in 2012, the fourteen-block corridor of Peachtree Street dubbed the Midtown Mile will feature more than a million square feet of shopping, dining, and services. Twenty-seven projects on and around the Mile are scheduled for completion by 2010, and seventeen new high-rises will render the skyline virtually unrecognizable. The Midtown Alliance isn’t able to confirm specific retailers, but here’s a sneak peek at a few of the projects:

1) The Premiere at Fox Plaza – 2.4-acre community with 18,000 square feet of retail, 210 residences. Opens 2010.

2) 6th and Peachtree 32,000 square feet of retail, 106 hotel rooms, 188 residences. Opens 2010.

3) Viewpoint – 3-tower development with 75,000 square feet of retail space and 1,000 residential units. Will incorporate historic Neel Reid building. Opens 2008.

4) Midtown Square 35-story tower with nearly 2 million square feet of office space, retail, residences, and a luxury hotel.

5) 12th and Midtown 2.5 million-square-foot development with 150,000 square feet of retail and 1.2 million of office space, more than 500 hotel rooms, 600 residences. First phase opens 2008.

6) 1010 Midtown \$159 million, 35-story, 630,000-square-foot

development features 38,000 square feet of retail space, 443 residential units. Built on the former site of Vision nightclub. First phase opens 2008.

7) 1138 Peachtree 700-foot “illuminated wave”-shaped Mandarin Oriental building features 3-story spa (20 stories up with skyline views), residences costing more than \$10 million, 200 luxury hotel rooms, and 6 stories of above-ground parking. Opens 2010.