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FLORIDA PANACHE

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The Auberge Beach Residences & Spa in Fort Lauderdale is the city's premier property for ultimate seaside luxury

Fort Lauderdale, Florida, is one of those destinations that, fairly or not, conjures up thoughts of spring-break cruises and a touristy culture of blended drinks and novelty T-shirts. But with more people choosing South Florida for second and permanent residences, Fort Lauderdale is fast becoming a real-estate force — second only to Miami when it comes to new developments. And we're not just talking standard, high-rise condominiums.

The focus is shifting to more upscale accommodations, including a revamped W Hotel downtown and the high-end Icon Las Olas apartment development.

Joining these is the Auberge Beach Residences & Spa. The award-winning Auberge resort-and-residence company is known for five-star accommodations, and their Fort Lauderdale project is no exception: The residences will be the first luxury development located directly on the beach in Fort Lauderdale, and also the brand's first residential development on the East Coast.

"The building is the only one on the A1A where the road bends away from the beach and you get these 10 acres of beautiful shore connected to the ocean," says Will Meyer, principal of Meyer Davis Studio, the interior-design firm for Auberge Fort Lauderdale.

The property is being developed at the former site of the city's landmark Ireland's Inn Beach Resort. After the

inn's demolition, Meyer and his team began drafting a plan for the one- to five-bedroom residences. "We needed to celebrate the textures and the colors related to the beach," he says. "The palette of blues and white work their way into the space and make it feel fresh and natural."

In partnership with Fortune International Group, the Related Group and the Fairwinds Group of Fort Lauderdale, the 171 units will be split between a north and south tower constructed by the Coral Gables-based firm Nichols Brosch Wurst Wolfe and Associates. The firm is known for its contemporary chic architecture, including the Edition Miami Beach hotel.

Meyer notes that the common spaces set the tone for residents. The lobby is furnished with natural oak

paneling and hues of blue, gray and sand. The two-story, glass-ceilinged space is filled with natural light, and it also has an ocean view. "Instantly you feel this amazing connection to the water," Meyer says. "The natural materials, the light and the beach just radiate around you."

The residences' floor-to-ceiling windows also look out over the ocean. Decor tends toward rustic: white-plank oak flooring, stone countertops in the kitchen and marble baths. Large private terraces — some with pools — are designed to feel like an extension of the interior space. "We have a beachy elegance that is easy and comfortable compared to other luxury properties," Meyer says. "Everything feels peaceful and sophisticated

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but with a layered approach — like combining a spalike lifestyle with the ultimate luxury amenities."

The on-site Spa by Auberge, in keeping with the brand, will deliver an experience inspired by the location, including treatments and therapies that utilize

custom-blended Auberge products. Also characteristic of the brand: impressive dining. The Auberge restaurant will be perched on the edge of the property on the water, with plans for fine dining and also a more casual beach-club eatery. And since it's all about location here, the residences are minutes from restaurants, galleries, shopping downtown and the marina.

Related Group Founder and CEO Jorge M. Perez notes that the opportunity to create a unique beach-front property in an emerging coastal town enticed them to get involved. Or as Meyer says, "You can see we had fun designing this project — I can imagine myself living here. And that's the goal." Two-bedroom residences start at \$1.8 million. Aubergeresorts.com