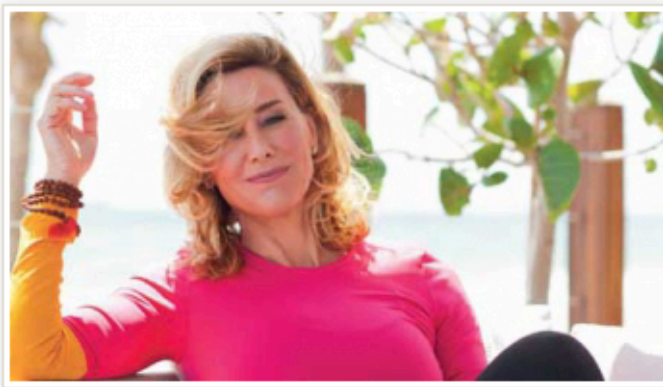


## NEW PROJECT IMAGINES MORE HOLISTIC CONDO LIFE

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By Eric Barton

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If the sales center for the soon-to-come Auberge Beach Residences & Spa Fort Lauderdale were a permanent structure, it would be among the nicest homes on your street. It cost the developer a cool \$2 million and will be dismantled to make room for an oceanfront pool.

The building on the north end of Fort Lauderdale Beach has an open-concept layout, with gleaming white-washed wood floors in the living area flowing around an island that leads into the kitchen. Along the east wall are windows and sliding doors, and on a late Friday afternoon they offer views of pastel colors cast by a setting sun over a wide swath of blue ocean.

Outside, on the corner of a deck the size of a tennis court, stands someone who has a following akin to a religious leader, a modern-day sage, an expert on meditation and mindfulness, someone who has the ability to turn your dark times into something productive and good.

No, it's not Deepak Chopra, although he's present too. We're talking about Pam Butler, a certified meditation and yoga teacher who has built a local following. She brought Chopra here to speak, and the 50 guests paid \$1,200 each for a ticket to the dinner that will follow. Butler takes the mike first.

She's wearing a strapless, ankle-length black pantsuit with a couple of necklaces, one a gleaming medallion. She has shoulder-length blond hair and, at 52, moves with a calm grace. She asks the crowd to close their eyes for a moment. It's silent, except for the steady lapping of the waves.

"Let's take a moment to forget the stress of getting here," she says. She asks the crowd to think about the environment, about the beauty that surrounds them. The sky has begun to turn pink and purple behind her. "I would be happy to meet with any of you and help you on your own personal journey."

Then Chopra takes the podium. He's wearing a black jacket with no collar, blue T-shirt, a red bauble necklace, dress pants and black sneakers with red and white stripes. He has a restful, happy face.

"I don't know what I should talk about. Anybody have any ideas?" he begins.

"Synchronicity," someone calls out, and Chopra launches into a monologue. He talks about how we can work together to create change.

"As you ask people, as you study people who have changed the world, how did they do it? They say family, they say the people who helped them, they often say it's because of being at the right place at the right time, they say God, or they say they were in a state of grace, or they say synchronicity."

Chopra urges the room to consider what Rosa Parks told him, when he asked her why she wouldn't move from her bus seat. "She said, 'Actually I was just tired.' And that started the civil rights movement."

This discussion of synchronicity isn't your average sales pitch for a condominium. This project, the Auberge, has been promised to be something new. It won't be the nightclub-like pools at South Beach high-rises. It won't be a place where residents hide away and see their neighbors only in the elevator. This complex has been promised to be defined by health and wellness and holistic living. And, it might be said, synchronicity.

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**Andy Mitchell was riding bikes** with his father-in-law in 2002 when they stopped at the property right where the Auberge will be. On it was an S-shaped hotel with a large portico. On the sign out front was his father-in-law's name: Ireland's Inn.

Back in the day, Jack Ireland's hotel had been something, a destination for vacationing Northerners and locals who came for the restaurant's fried chicken. But Ireland knew the 50-year-old building needed an upgrade. So he persuaded his son-in-law to quit his job as CEO of a furniture company in North Carolina and come to manage the project. Mitchell came up with a grand idea. They'd buy up nearby property and bring in a Mandarin Oriental. They closed the old Ireland Inn in 2007.

Then the bubble popped.

The project was halted. When the economy began to turn around Mitchell and Ireland decided to rethink their plan. They gave the project to design students at Florida Atlantic University and Florida International University, hoping to come up with something unlike anything else on the beach.

They helped conceive a pair of curved buildings, one 17 and the other 22 stories, and offset so that neither blocks the sunlight from the other. The buildings bend inward, so the top story is smaller than the bottom, which limits the shadow cast on the beach. The shape means far fewer condos, 171 total, where maybe double that would fit. Prices start at \$1.5 million and climb to \$9 million for the two 5,000-square-foot penthouses – all planned to open in 2017.

Most important, Mitchell says, Auberge is a residence where people will find a new way to live in a condo.

"It's not about density. It's about making it right. It's about living fully," he says. "Auberge is about finishing the second half of your life strong. For those of us who have been successful, it's time to take care of yourself."

Mitchell hired the developer Related Group, giants of South Florida condos, to construct Auberge. Patrick Campbell, vice president of Related Group, says the company bought into the idea that Mitchell and Ireland had of a project grounded in wellness and an active lifestyle.

"The old thought was you went home at night and shut your door," Campbell says. "The mentality has changed, and now people want a sense of community." Auberge is currently 90 percent sold in the North Tower and 30 percent sold in the South Tower.

So the Auberge will have events, a spa and common areas meant to bring residents together rather than to keep them in separate condos.

Among the first to buy into the property was Butler. Campbell says she mentioned Chopra to Auberge salespeople that maybe he'd come for an event, which is how he ended up speaking on the deck one Friday afternoon. It was, perhaps, synchronicity.

Butler remembers how she first connected with Chopra nearly 19 years ago. Her father had died and, three weeks later, she barely survived the difficult birth of her daughter. When she fell into a period of depression, a friend suggested Butler go spend a week at Chopra's headquarters in California.

"I had no expectations, no preconceived notions," Butler says.

The Chopra center gave her a personalized program of yoga, meditation and holistic eating.

"It was like I took off my stress suit and left it at the door," she says.

"She was a totally transformed person," Chopra says. "It happens to people who come to my center."

Over the past couple of decades Chopra has become a prominent name in holistic medicine and meditation. His videos and books have made him wealthy, and partnering with Oprah Winfrey has made him a household name, even beyond believers. For a 21-day meditation he did with Oprah, he says a half-million people signed up.

Chopra says he saw something in Butler, in her ability to bring other people to her causes. He taught her how to instruct others in meditation, and then he invited her into the inner circle. They went to Egypt and did yoga on a small boat as it drifted down the Nile, and they meditated at night under the Sphinx.

"The path organically unfolded for me," Butler says.

At the Auberge, she has an idea of bringing her teachings to her neighbors, maybe with sunrise meditation on the beach or regular instruction on how to reach an inner stillness.

As Chopra wraps up his talk at the sales center – warning that we are all a symptom of the universe and that we cannot remain in conflict with it – the sun sets behind the building and shadows the deck. Behind him stands a sea-grape tree tall enough to catch the fading light in its papery leaves. There are two seagrape trees, actually, brought together either by the universe or, more likely, a landscaper's twine.

Or perhaps it was just Auberge synchronicity.

***Auberge Beach Residences & Spa,  
2200 N. Ocean Blvd., Fort Lauderdale, 844-352-3224, [aubergebeach.com](http://aubergebeach.com).***

**PHOTO** Health and wellness expert Pam Butler, among the first to buy at Auberge Fort Lauderdale, hopes to bring teachings she learned from her mentor, Deepak Chopra, to her neighbors when the project opens in 2017. (Find her at [pambutlerblisscoach.com](http://pambutlerblisscoach.com)).

She carries the titles of Certified Chopra Primordial Sound Meditation Instructor, certified Hot Fusion Flow Yoga Teacher, and Creative Insight Journey Transformational Coach. She leads a free meditation 7-8 p.m. the first Monday of each month on the beach at Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale. Find her at [returntolife.com](http://returntolife.com).