

Can Miami Marine Stadium make a comeback? Voters will decide in August

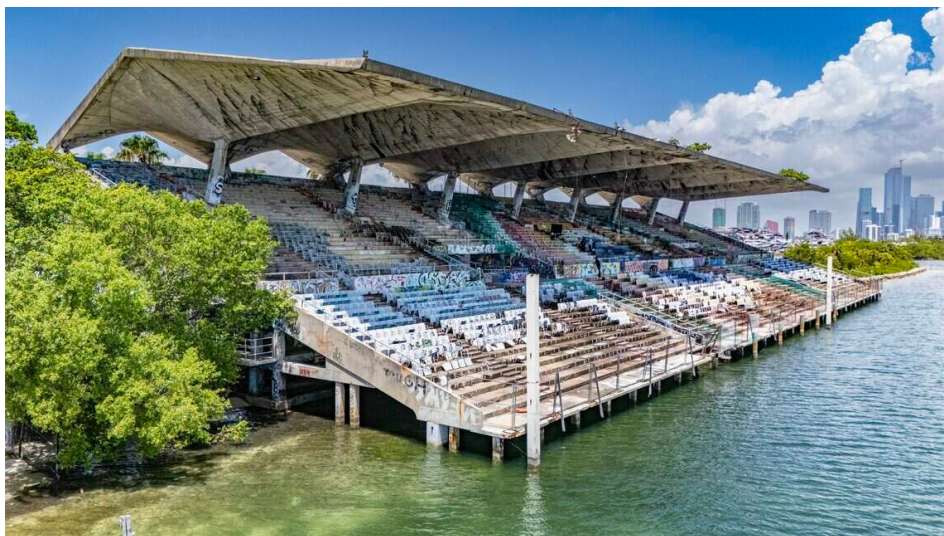
For those old enough to remember, the Miami Marine Stadium was where memories were made. Jimmy Buffett famously dove into the water from a floating stage during his sold-out 1985 concert. Elvis Presley filmed “Clambake” there. Sammy Davis Jr. embraced President Richard Nixon on a campaign event there in 1972. The stadium even hosted Catholic Masses for newly arrived Cuban refugees.

But for anyone who grew up after it closed in 1992, the stadium has been little more than a graffiti-covered concrete shell — an abandoned waterfront landmark known more for attracting trespassers than for hosting the events that once made it a Miami icon.

That could soon change.

Miami leaders gathered Tuesday at the Miami Marine Stadium to urge voters to approve an Aug. 18 ballot referendum that would allow a private operator to restore and manage the iconic venue, reopening it for concerts, performances, educational programming and community events.

“We need this stadium in Miami. There is nothing like it



Miami residents are set to vote this August on the future of the iconic Miami Marine Stadium. Preservation leaders have spent decades advocating for the restoration of the long-shuttered venue.

anywhere else in the world, and it is the authentic Miami experience,” said Miami City Commissioner Damian Pardo, whose district includes the stadium and who made its revitalization a campaign promise after taking office in 2023. “This has the potential to be a beacon on the world stage, representing our city.”

In February, the Miami City Commission unanimously approved an agreement with Global Spectrum, a subsidiary of Oak View Group, to restore and operate the stadium. The

commission [voted to place the proposal before Miami voters](#), who will have the final say on whether the project moves forward.

“This is an important first step,” Pardo said. “We need voters to understand that the action time is now. They need to vote, and we can get this done.”

A similar proposal was expected to appear on last year’s ballot but [was delayed](#) after a federal indictment against Oak View Group’s former chief executive surfaced, stalling the pro-



Singer Jimmy Buffett jumps into the water from the stage in 1985 as fans on boats surround Miami Marine Stadium.

posal.

Preservationists want Miami Marine Stadium open for concerts, water views

The referendum marks the latest step in a decades-long effort to revive the waterfront landmark. The stadium has remained closed since Hurricane Andrew damaged the structure in 1992.

Despite sitting vacant for more than three decades, the stadium has remained one of Miami's most significant architectural landmarks. Designed by Cuban architect Hilario Candela, it was designated a historic site by the city of Miami in 2008 and added to the National Register of Historic Places in 2018. The city also authorized \$45 million in revenue bonds in 2016 to support its restoration and has since hired architects and advanced

planning efforts while searching for a long-term operator.

Longtime preservationist Don Worth has spent nearly two decades working to make the stadium's revival a reality, helping to found Friends of the Marine Stadium in 2008 before cofounding in 2015 Restore Miami Marine Stadium, the advocacy group that continues to push for the landmark's restoration.

"It's just become a passion project. It's too good to let go," Worth said. "This can make people happy, and in a world like we have today, that's a good thing. It's a joyful place."

He says the venue could become a hybrid destination — hosting concerts, cultural events and private gatherings, while also serving as a public waterfront park where residents can enjoy views of Biscayne Bay, watch boats pass or spend time

with their families.

"A park doesn't have to look like Central Park," said Worth. "A park is a state of mind that transports you, and that's what this place does. So why not keep it open for selected hours? Allow somebody to bring their family in here, row, watch the rowers row at sunset. Watch the buildings light up. You would have a terrific experience."

What would the Miami Marine Stadium restoration look like?

Preservation advocates say years of exposure to the elements have left the waterfront structure in need of extensive repairs before it can safely welcome visitors again. Although the city has already completed stabilization work, including installing new pilings beneath the portion of the stadium built over the water, engineers still must repair deteriorated concrete and corroded steel caused by decades of moisture and salt-water exposure.

"There have already been some repairs done to stabilize the structure," said Christine Rupp, executive director of Dade Heritage Trust. "Those columns that are going into the water are constantly exposed to the moisture, which really damages the steel."

Rupp said hiring an operator before finalizing restoration plans will ensure the renovations meet the venue's future needs, including lighting, audio-visual infrastructure and other systems needed to host events.

Ricardo Lopez, principal at RJ Heisenbottle Architects, said restoring the stadium will involve carefully repairing the original structure rather than replacing it.

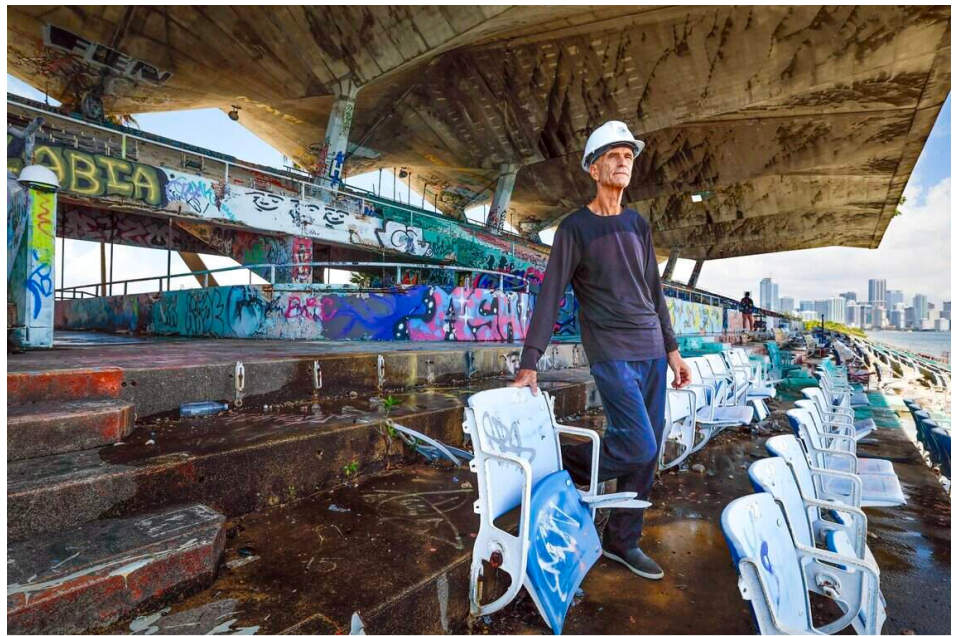
“As you look around, you see a lot of exposed steel, and that steel is corroded,” Lopez said. “We have to repair that steel. We have to dig into the concrete further and see how far that rust goes.”

Once those repairs are complete, crews can begin installing modern lighting, plumbing and audiovisual systems while preserving the stadium’s iconic architecture.

Among those backing the effort is Savannah Buffett, daughter of Jimmy Buffett, whose 1985 concert at the stadium remains one of its most celebrated performances. She said the restoration would allow a new generation to experience a venue that many young South Floridians have only known as an abandoned landmark.

“I sort of grew up watching what became of this place,” Buffett said. “It fell into no use, but the street artists, graffiti artists and skateboarders sort of adopted it and let it live on. To think that we get to resurrect it, actually have concerts here, not have to sneak in, take down the fences and let the whole community in — young people, older people, people who got to experience it and people who never did — is really exciting.”

Buffett said her father, who died in 2023, spent years ad-



Don Worth, cofounder of Restore Miami Marine Stadium, visits the stadium on Rickenbacker Causeway on Tuesday, July 7, 2026. Miami residents are set to vote this August on the future of the iconic stadium.

vocating for the stadium’s restoration and would have been thrilled to see the project moving forward.

If approved by voters Aug. 18, the agreement would give Global Spectrum a 10-year contract to manage the Miami Marine Stadium, with three options for renewal. The company would invest \$10 million in the project, oversee the renovation and receive a monthly management fee, while the city would retain a significant share of revenue generated from events and sponsorships.

“Sadly, Jimmy will never stand on this stage again, but I know that when the music returns, so will he, smiling down with that unmistakable grin, dancing right along with the band and the audience,” Buffett said. “I really look forward to the day when the music and

magic return to this extraordinary venue.”