

2026

ZeHavS
DESIGN STUDIO

OVRTWN CORNER

A DESIGN PROJECT BOOKLET

ABOUT ZE HAUS

WHERE DIASPORA MEETS DESIGN

Ze Haus Design Studio is a multidisciplinary design studio creating interiors, wallpaper, fine art, and collectible objects inspired by the tropics and the African diaspora. Through thoughtful storytelling, we develop spaces and collections that celebrate culture, craftsmanship, and individuality. From hospitality and residential interiors to original artwork and surface design, every project is created to bring depth, character, and a lasting sense of place.

PRESS PLAY

Kenzie Leon Perry, designer-artist and creative director of Ze Haus Design Studio, invites readers behind the scenes of his multidisciplinary practice to explore the design process and development of OVRTWN Corner.

Known for his cultural storytelling and biophilic design aesthetic, Perry uses this design project booklet to reveal the cultural history of Overtown, Miami; his personal connection to the neighborhood; his collaboration with the project partners; and the experiences that helped shape the project's design narrative.

Opposite page: Artist-Designer Kenzie Leon Perry proudly poses in front of OVRTWN Corner's main bar. Photo by André Brown of Hot House Visuals.



RHYTHM & BEGINNINGS

During college, I developed a strong fascination with Black history and architecture, particularly in Overtown, Miami. I took it upon myself to walk its streets, photographing the neighborhood, its art and architecture, and, most of all, the Historic Lyric Theater. I didn't entirely know what I would do with the imagery in the grand scheme of things, but I had one goal in mind: to create a bespoke pillow collection highlighting famous musicians and singers who had performed at the theater.

Overtown was the segregated hub of Black life in Miami. Outside the Central Negro District, as it was called, its residents faced persistent racial and economic barriers. By the 1930s and 1940s, it was a flourishing destination where Black and white visitors gathered for music, nightlife, community, and celebration. Northwest Second Avenue—known as Little Broadway—was lined with notable hotels, clubs, businesses, and the Lyric Theater. Acclaimed performers appeared throughout the district, and Overtown's cultural life earned it the nickname "the Harlem of the South."

The construction of I-95 and the economic shifts that followed integration fractured Overtown's physical and commercial fabric, stripping the neighborhood of residents, businesses, landmarks, and much of the dense social life that once made it feel magical.



Kenzie's original mixed-media work combines art and photography of the Black Archives Historic Lyric Theater, overlaid with hand-drawn images of legendary singers Billie Holiday and Ella Fitzgerald and musicians Louis Armstrong and Duke Ellington. Circa 2007.



Screen-printed pillow covers, designed and created during my early college years, feature singers and musicians who performed at the Black Archives Historic Lyric Theater, along with African motifs such as the cowrie shell and headdress. Circa 2007.

Fortunately, a small number of Overtown's important historic buildings still stand today. Many were designed in the Masonry Vernacular style, using concrete block, brick, stone, or stucco-covered masonry in practical forms adapted to local conditions. Its more prominent buildings drew from recognizable historical styles, including Art Deco, Classical, Bahamian Conch, and Gothic Revival architectural influences. Far less has been documented about Overtown's historic interiors, but photographs of the famous Zebra Lounge inside the Mary Elizabeth Hotel—which no longer stands—reveal a lively midcentury atmosphere with geometric patterns, zebra imagery, Eames-inspired chairs, and live plants and botanical prints.

Despite continued racial and socioeconomic challenges and the visible effects of gentrification, there is light at the end of the tunnel. Residents and entrepreneurs, including the founders of OVRTWN Corner, are working tirelessly to establish businesses, restaurants, museums, food and art festivals, and other community events. I have been fortunate to take part in this renaissance by creating a design rooted in cultural storytelling—one that helps preserve the history, dignity, and life of Overtown.


"162 signatures
B.T.W 1926
"Good Brand Wine"

THE SET LIST

When the partners of OVRTWN Corner gathered, their goal was to use cultural storytelling as the design narrative while creating a bright, energetic environment filled with historical references. The economic and community hub needed to embody cultural authenticity while supporting varied services and regular programming—all rooted in Overtown's legacy and resilience.

"OVRTWN Corner was developed to create a space where Overtown could tell its own story," Trina Harris explains. "At its heart, OVRTWN Corner is a mix of culture, commerce, and community—a place that celebrates our history and creativity, supports local businesses and entrepreneurs, and brings people together."

The 3,300-square-foot center had an ambitious mandate: a marketplace for Black-owned businesses, a vibrant café, an inviting bar, a boutique food concession area, and a flexible event space with lounge and dining seating. Overtown's history and Instagram-worthy art and murals by Black artists were nonnegotiable. Existing lighting and furniture also had to be reused and repurposed to foster comfort, connection, and collaboration among vendors and visitors. As an avid thrifter and upcycling enthusiast, I was ecstatic.

Opposite page: Give Them Their Flowers, a secondary exterior mural that graces the façade of OVRTWN Corner, painted by Nate Dee (@miaminate).

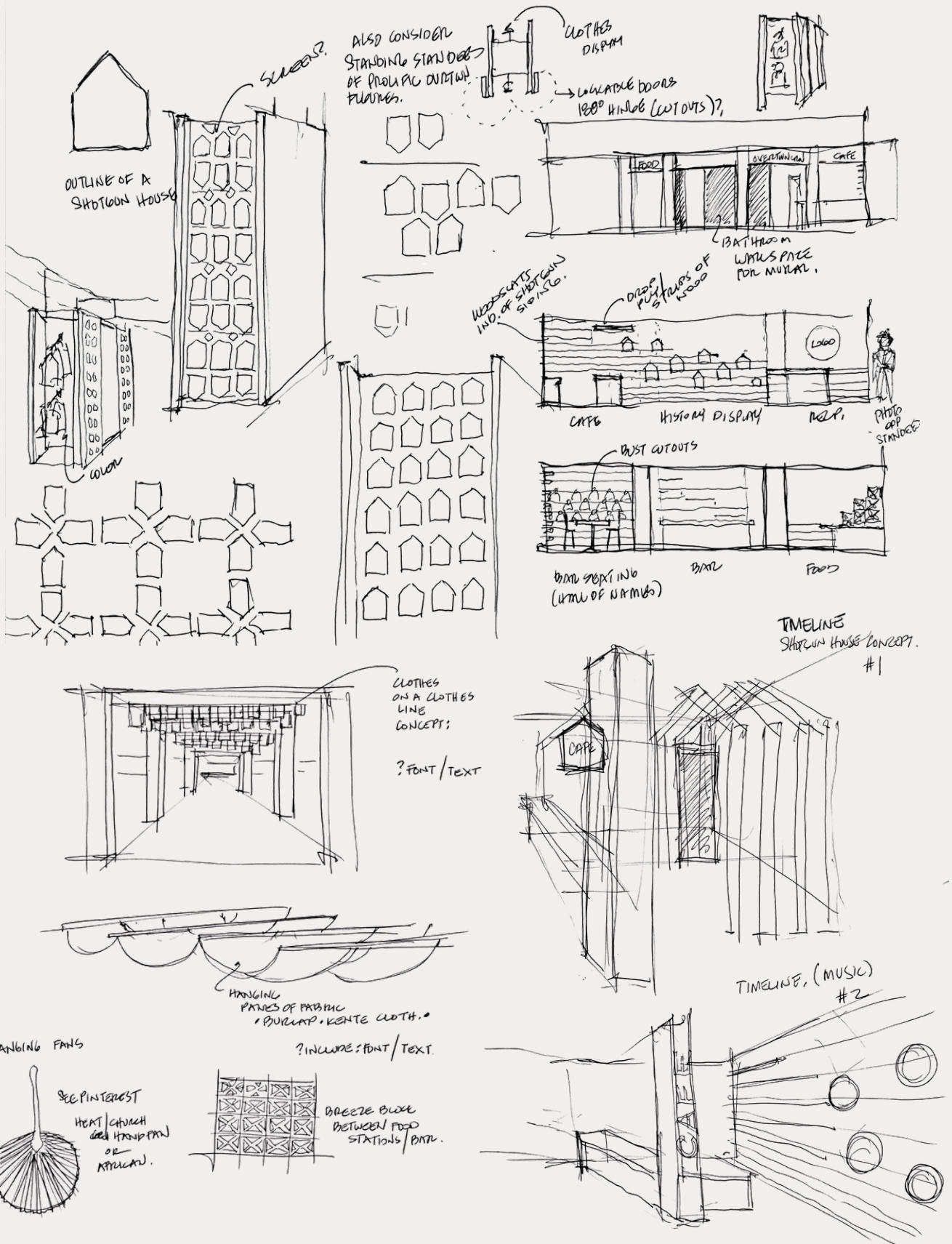
SIDE A & SIDE B

During the schematic design phase, I developed two concepts. The first, Music Vernacular, fused local architecture with musical iconography. The second, Homestead Heritage, celebrated builders and buildings, drawing inspiration from prominent figures, historic structures, and the shotgun houses of early residents. For that concept, I envisioned an installation of rattan fans inspired by humid Miami summers and Sunday church services. The idea also connected to scholarly research proposing that the word shotgun derives from the West African Fon term shogun, meaning “God’s house,” although that etymology remains debated.

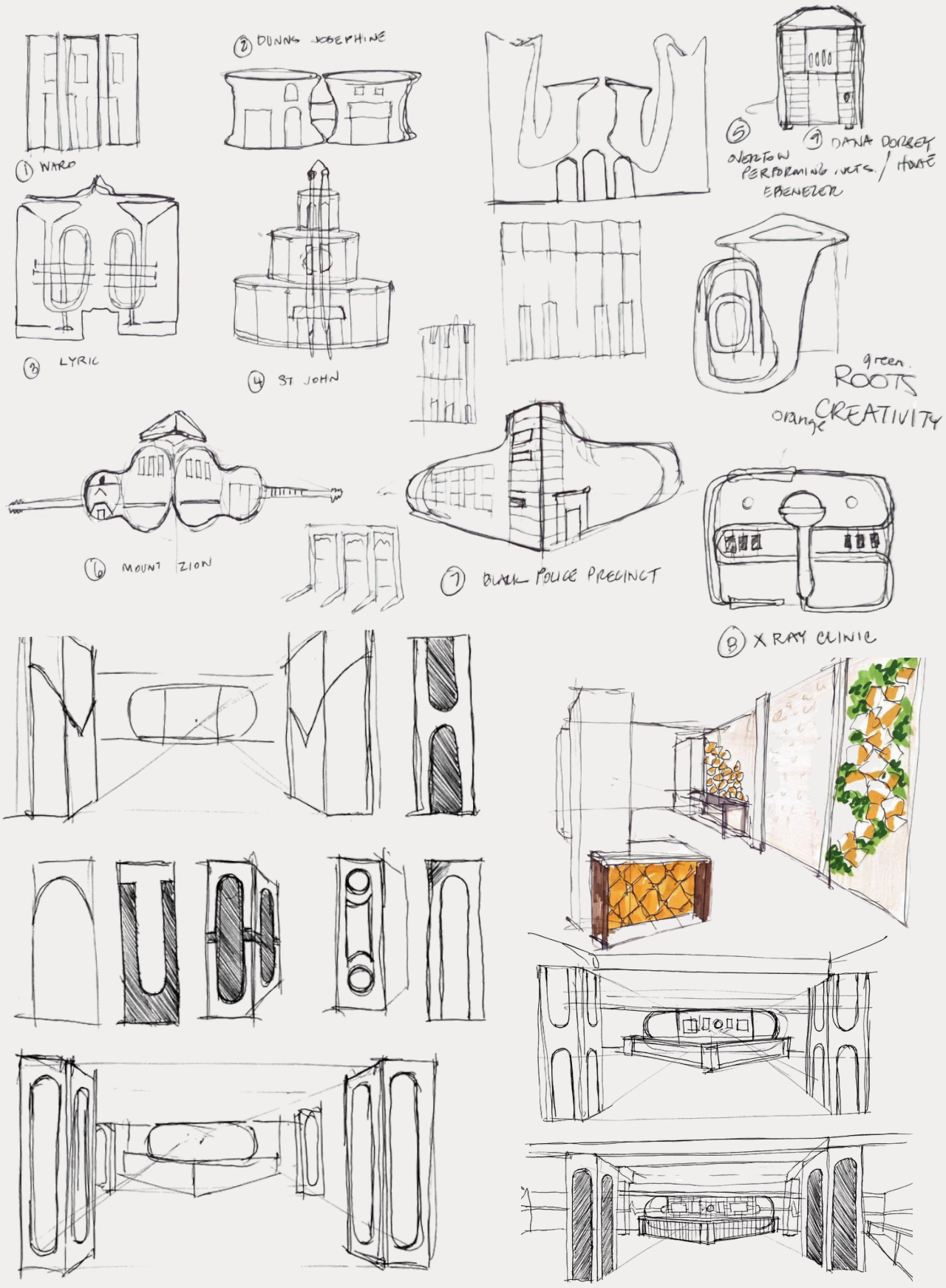
Both concepts included custom wallpaper, but the partners gravitated toward Music Vernacular. The selected concept was eventually defined by four pillars: sense of community, cultural experience, reflection of history, and up-lifting.

Opposite page: Overture, a custom wallpaper designed for OVRTWN Corner.





Schematic sketches of interior design vignettes for Homestead Heritage, the alternate design concept for OVRTWN Corner.



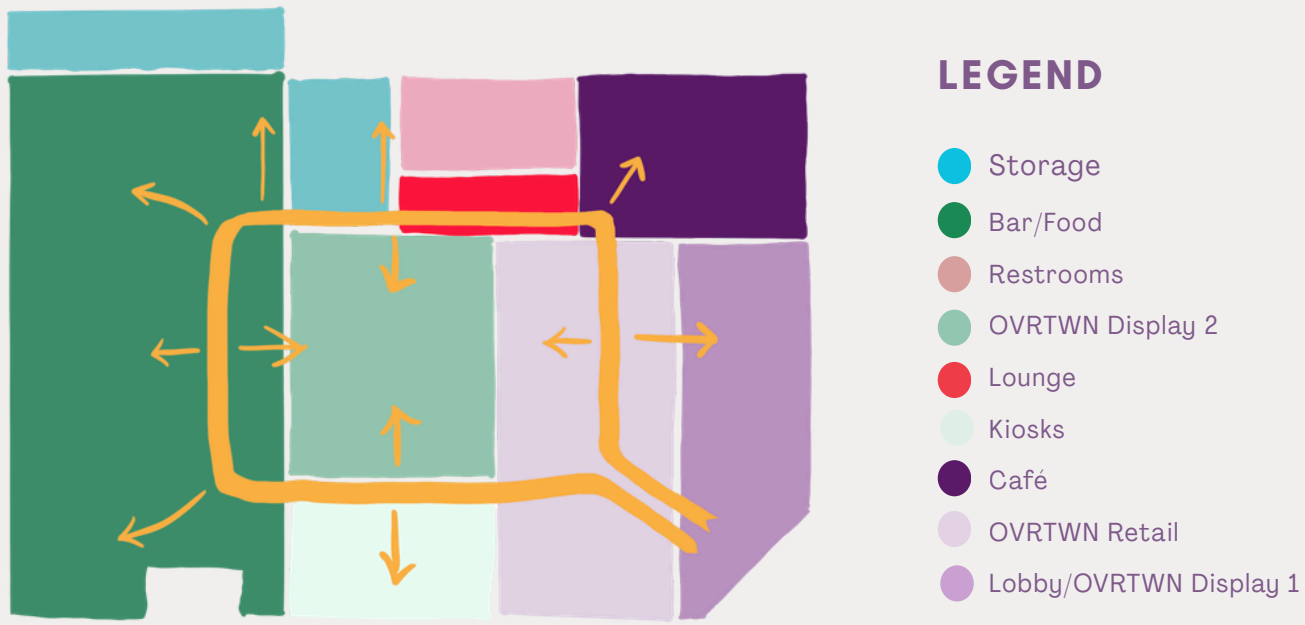
Schematic sketches of interior design vignettes for Music Vernacular, the chosen design concept for OVRTWN Corner.

STUDIO SESSION

Before considering finishes and decorative features, spatial zoning and circulation were paramount. The wide rectangular space called for a primary path that would guide visitors from a prominent reception desk past the various functions and murals. A central lounge—flanked by dining tables and chairs—would serve as the community's living room.

The angled forms of the bar, café, and reception desk were inspired by OVRTWN Corner's dynamic logo, which resembles a vinyl record composed of inner and outer circles with diagonal stripes of bright red and deep plum. Behind the reception desk, a large mural presents a timeline of Overtown's history through monochromatic text and images layered with light-teal color blocking.

In front of the mural, a retail area displays Overtown merchandise and gifts. Mobile kiosks for micro-businesses resemble the road cases used by touring musicians and crews. The custom wooden chests are mounted on casters, stained to complement the other wood finishes, and fitted with chrome hardware. Each case includes adjustable shelves, a detachable clothing rod, and discreet storage. Most importantly, the kiosks and other retail components can roll away to create more room for events.



A design parti illustrates the spatial zones and circulation that organize OVRTWN Corner.



The reception area introduces OVRTWN Corner through layered views of the custom mural, lively color, natural finishes, and mobile retail kiosks designed for OVRTWN swag and merchandise.



Mobile retail kiosks frame a cultural timeline chronicling Overtown's history, seamlessly connecting local commerce, community, and cultural storytelling. Photos by André Brown of Hot House Visuals.





VOCAL STYLING

The color scheme was a very important factor in the design of the space. The owners imagined a brightly colored atmosphere that still maintained a sense of balance and cohesion. Ultimately, we all agreed upon a neutral base that allowed key components, such as the murals and artwork, to shine alongside pops of complementary colors, including dark blue, teal, purple, yellow, and red. Yellow became the primary accent color used to distinguish key zones, including the main bar, food counters, and café.

Beyond the retail area is the café. Its front counter and angled return are finished with solid yellow hexagonal tile, while the back wall features hexagonal tile patterned in yellow and white. The patterned hexagonal tile was an ideal selection because its random arrangement resembles the energy and complexity of Overtown and its history.

Across from the café, a custom wallpaper mural on the central wall reimagines nine historic Overtown buildings as musical instruments. Two sculptural busts create a three-dimensional relief: a woman whose Afro resembles vinyl records faces a man wearing headphones with vinyl-record earpieces. The mural is visible from outside the center, especially at night when accent lighting brings it to life.

When designing this wallpaper and mural, I focused on memory, place, and history. The historic buildings were an obvious choice for me because they directly honor Overtown's sense of place within a historical context while acknowledging their continued existence in the neighborhood. More importantly, the mural creates a meaningful connection to the community, combating erasure and restoring a sense of belonging. This is a direct response to the ongoing gentrification occurring in Overtown.

What I admire most about the wallpaper design is that you don't immediately realize the buildings resemble musical instruments. That discovery creates a sense of awe and curiosity. When it came to the couple, I was influenced by great singers and musicians such as Ella Fitzgerald, Billie Holiday, Louis Armstrong, and Sam Cooke. However, I wanted residents and visitors to see themselves reflected in the mural in a more contemporary light.

Previous spread: A bold portrait anchors the café, where honey-toned tile, cascading greenery, and red seating create a warm, energetic setting rooted in Overtown's musical identity. Photo by André Brown of Hot House Visuals.

The owners of OVRTWN Corner wanted Instagram-worthy photo opportunities, so it was important for the mural to be fun, whimsical, and eye-catching. I used vinyl records in an inventive way, and the pops of color on the record labels against the sepia-toned characters create the perfect backdrop for visitors to capture a dope selfie.

In the far-right corner, a T-shaped service counter and back counters support the boutique food hall. Yellow subway tile covers the counter fronts and back wall, while a warm wood-look tile accents the supports at each end. That wood finish continues across the main bar, whose V-shaped form projects toward the center of the room and invites visitors to enjoy signature drinks named for Overtown landmarks, including the Hampton, the Lyric, and the Dorsey.

The shape of the bar was important because I didn't want it to resemble the same mediocre linear or square bars typically found in hospitality settings. In addition, its shape allowed more guests to sit at the counter while maintaining adequate circulation between the numerous structural columns within the space.

Yellow subway tile continues along the main bar's back wall, which is completed by the OVRTWN Corner logo and LED screens used for digital menus and marketing graphics. The walls flanking the main bar needed their own distinctive art to make the space shine. Biophilic elements were included in the design scope, but I didn't want to create a generic faux-plant installation. Instead, I incorporated musical references through the use of iconic boomboxes. As a result, framed faux-plant panels accented with retro boomboxes painted in complementary colors flank the bar's back wall.

To tie the space together, creamy white quartz countertops keep it light and airy, contrasting with the dark bronze ceiling. The deeper color helps camouflage the inherited soffits and beams while visually unifying the irregular ceiling plane. Columns, walls, and wallpaper carry warm shades of light gray throughout the space.

To the left of the bar, a small lounge converts into a stage for a DJ or live musicians. Opposite it, a communal dining area includes linear bar-height counters and stools along the windowed façade, with dining tables arranged beside the path toward the rear. Brightly colored aluminum chairs and stools bring energy to the room.

Next spread: A custom mural layers joyful portraiture and vinyl-record motifs over wallpaper featuring historic Overtown architecture, creating an immersive celebration of place, people, and music.











An open, flexible layout connects dining, bar, and lounge areas, while saturated color and polished concrete unify the multifunctional hospitality experience.



Jewel-toned velvet seating, lush greenery, and custom boombox artwork create a vibrant lounge that celebrates Overtown's rich musical legacy. Photos by André Brown of Hot House Visuals.

OUTRO

“The space gives residents something that feels authentically ours while inviting visitors to experience the richness of Overtown for themselves,” Harris says. “The design captures exactly what we envisioned: bold, creative, welcoming, and deeply rooted in the character of the community. Every element feels intentional, honoring where Overtown has been while showcasing who we are today and where we are headed.”

Beyond designing OVRTWN Corner, I carved rubber stamps and used them to create limited-edition ceramic coasters and bespoke napkins as gifts for the founders. It was a small, handmade gesture at the end of a project that brought my relationship with Overtown full circle.

OVRTWN Corner became more than an interior design project. It allowed me to translate Overtown’s history into color, pattern, form, and function. From the custom wallpaper and mobile kiosks to the limited-edition coasters and napkins, each element was designed to honor the community while supporting how it gathers, creates, and conducts business today. The project affirms that cultural storytelling does not belong only in museums or archives—it can live within everyday spaces and allow a community to see itself reflected in the present.



A modern table setting featuring limited-edition ceramic coasters depicting historic buildings reimagined as musical instruments, paired with napkins adorned with the Overture wallpaper pattern.



ZE HAUS DESIGN STUDIO

Phone
786-556-2016

Website
www.ze-haus.com

Email
info@ze-haus.om

Instagram
@ze_haus

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