MIAMIBEACH

COMMISSION MEMORANDUM

TO: Honorable Mayor and Members of the City Commission
FROM: Vice-Mayor Kristen Rosen Gonzalez
DATE: February 21, 2024

SUBJECT: REFERRAL TO THE FINANCE AND ECONOMIC RESILIENCY COMMITTEE TO DISCUSS THE POSSIBLE PURCHASE OF THE PROPERTY LOCATED AT 819 5TH STREET.

BACKGROUND/HISTORY

1. Was the Agenda Item initially requested by a lobbyist which, as defined in Code Sec. 2-481, including a principal engaged in lobbying? Yes.

2. If so, please specify name of lobbyist(s) and principal(s): Kim Ives

Dear Miami Beach Commissioners,

On February 1, 2023, we will be putting 819 Fifth Street, the building that used to house Tap Tap Restaurant, on the market for sale.

Before doing so, we would like to offer the City of Miami Beach the opportunity to purchase the building at a fair price in the hopes that it could be preserved as a restaurant or some other cultural venue/museum, which would harken back to its storied past.

Tap Tap Haitian Restaurant was founded in 1994 after the overhaul of a former low-income hotel, which is one of the oldest buildings in Miami Beach. Its founder, Katharine Kean, wanted the establishment to be a tribute to the richness and vibrancy of Haitian art and culture. She commissioned the foremost Haitian artists at that time to paint the walls of Tap Tap, both inside an out, with murals, which remain fairly well-preserved to this day.

The restaurant became a haunt of celebrities, super-models, and artists, particularly during Art Basel every December. For two decades, Emmanuel “Manno” Charlemagne, often called Haiti’s Bob Marley, lived above the restaurant, coming downstairs to play with his band twice a week.

After Tap Tap closed its doors in December 2018, the *Miami Herald ran an article* about its role and importance in Miami’s Haitian community. It wrote a similar tribute following Katharine Kean’s death in July 2023.

For these reasons, we, Kean’s long-time collaborators who are handling her estate and legacy, hope that the City might be interested in preserving not just a building that stands as an example of the Miami Beach’s distinctive Art Deco architecture, but also the memory of a landmark restaurant that played a unique, important role in Miami Beach’s history and remains a symbol of Haitian culture.

Although I spoke in October to Commissioner Kristen Rosen Gonzalez and members of the City’s Historic Preservation Board, I would be pleased to meet with Miami Beach representatives again by Zoom or when I am in Miami Beach.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Kim Ives

SUPPORTING SURVEY DATA
N/A

FINANCIAL INFORMATION
N/A

Applicable Area
South Beach

Is this a "Residents Right to Know" item, pursuant to City Code Section 2-14?	**Does this item utilize G.O. Bond Funds?**
Yes	No

Strategic Connection
Non-Applicable

Legislative Tracking
Vice-Mayor Kristen Rosen Gonzalez

ATTACHMENTS:

	Description
🗋	Proposal Letter
🗋	Miami Herald Article

Kim Ives
Crowing Rooster Arts
100 Lafayette Street, Suite 602
New York, NY 10013

December 4, 2023

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Kim Ives

Kim Ives
Cell: 305.610.6913

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RESTAURANT NEWS & REVIEWS

This popular Haitian restaurant on South Beach quietly closed after 24 years

BY **CARLOS FRÍAS**
UPDATED FEBRUARY 07, 2019 9:12 AM



The Haitian restaurant Tap Tap in South Beach, a beloved South Florida institution that was a center for food, art, music — and politics — closed suddenly over the holidays. The owner says she has future plans for it. CARLOS FRÍAS *cfrias@miamiherald.com*

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A poet. A playwright. And a president.

Three figures central to a massive mural at the entrance to Tap Tap Haitian restaurant on South Beach told you immediately what this place stood for — and what it meant to the Haitian diaspora in Miami.

The restaurant that was a gateway to Haitian culture and cuisine — call it the Versailles of Miami's Haitian community — quietly closed over the holidays after 24 years. The corporation that owned the restaurant was dissolved in December.

The owner, Katharine Kean, wrote via text that she can't operate the restaurant because of her own "continuing health issues" and construction of a hotel next door that will leave the restaurant without sewer lines and running water "for an extended period of time. Not possible for a working restaurant."

However, she said she hopes to continue using the building as an event space for musical performances, art exhibitions, conferences and book signings.

"But running the restaurant full-time was not feasible at this time," she wrote.

For now, a hand-painted sign on the door that reads "closed for construction" and "bon ane (Happy New Year)" are the only indications of its fate.

The three figures in that mural outside the closed restaurant, riding in the back of a tap tap, the colorful jitney buses popular in Haiti, told the restaurant's story.

Tap Tap was about culture. The poet Felix Morisseau-Leroy was the first to write poetry and plays in his native Creole. He shuffled into the restaurant in his late 70s, and was helped to a table, but when the music kicked in, he was on his feet and dancing.

It was about music. If you are Haitian, you knew that immediately from the portrait of the folk singer Martha Jean-Claude. And the musician whose death inspired a state funeral in Haiti in 2017, "Manno" Charlemagne, the so-called Bob Dylan of Haiti and a former mayor of Port-au-Prince, lived above the restaurant for years and performed there for more than 20 years. It was a launching pad for many Haitian Miami musical acts.



The late Joseph Emmanuel “Manno” Charlemagne played at Tap Tap Restaurant in South Beach during a Miami Film Festival party honoring Haitian films. He died in 2017 and had lived above the restaurant for years. Jacqueline Charles *jcharles@Miamiherald.com*

And it was about politics. Kean once threw out a group diners who showed up wearing shirts protesting Jean-Bertrand Aristide, the first democratically-elected president of Haiti, who is also featured on the mural outside. They returned to protest later in the day — and one of them quietly slipped around the side to the kitchen for a plate of food. Protesting, after all, is a hungry endeavor.

“It wasn’t just a restaurant. There was a real connection to the culture that I deeply love,” said Gary Sanon-Jules, who was the off-and-on general manager of the restaurant for more than seven years. He confirmed the closing. “You walked in and saw the Haitian culture all around you, and it was fantastic.”

And in that way, Tap Tap was first and foremost about the food.

The restaurant opened in 1994 when South Beach was only beginning its renaissance. It served as an ambassador for Haiti’s culture, music and cuisine to the tourists — and locals — who rediscovered to the hottest part of South Florida.

A neon red heart above the glowing Tap Tap name, facing busy 5th Street, was an on-the-nose indicator that Haiti’s heart beat here.

And, of course, pork fueled that heartbeat.

READ MORE: Haitian food is delicious. Here's your primer on how to order in Miami

Griot, patrons learned, were maybe not so dissimilar from Cuba's fried pork chunks. Its *bannann peze* are the island's own version of fried green plantains. The red beans and rice, *diri kolé ak pwa*, could fit nicely on another Caribbean plate. Then there was pikliz. The spicy pickled condiment of shredded cabbage, carrots, Scotch bonnet peppers and vinegar set Haiti's cuisine apart.

And how many local Haitians over the decades started their New Year at Tap Tap with the pumpkin soup *joumou*?

Tap Tap was a place a diner could experience it all, in a room flush with color and culture. Walls were painted in snaking vines, exotic fruits and Afro-Haitian deities. Rustic tables and chairs were colorfully hand-painted.

Upstairs was an indie theater, dedicated to playing everything from art films to documentaries that highlighted Haiti.

"The focus was always on Haiti," Sanon-Jules said. Kean, who bought the building in 1993, texted that she is out of town for the week and would provide more information about the restaurant's future.

"She wanted the Haitian community to be proud of it." But, "Katherine didn't mind carrying her political beliefs on her sleeve."

And always, there was music. Charlemagne was a regular since he was also an artist-in-residence upstairs. And there was live music on any given night of the week, where, as one Miami Herald reviewer noted, "Haitian rum drinks are passed freely."

"It's a festival of color inside. Walls are painted in various bright and breezy shades and then adorned with beautiful paintings. The place is a maze of rooms, some filled with many tables and some privatized to include only one."

The buzz of Tap Tap is what most will remember. And by comparison, on this busy stretch of South Beach, the silence that now remains — until further notice.

This story was originally published February 6, 2019, 12:00 PM.

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