


## Experts Differ on the Definition of Sense of Place.

Source:  The Miami Herald (Miami, Florida) (via Knight-Ridder/Tribune Business News)

Publication Date: 27-JUL-03

Byline: Scott Andron

Jul. 27--Defining "sense of place" isn't easy.

"Sense of place is like the Supreme Court definition of pornography: You know it when you see it," says John McIlwain, a senior fellow at the Urban Land Institute in Washington. "It's a very old concept that we have lost over the last 50 or 60 years: It's something unique or particular to your location."

Other experts say it's easier to define sense of place in terms of what it's not.

"A lot of our development just lacks character," says Peter Ross assistant director of the Broward County Office of Urban Planning and Redevelopment. "It has been lowered to one common denominator.

It's this sameness. Everywhere you go looks the same. There's nothing that tells you where you are."

Some factors that contribute to sense of place include architectural features, like South Beach's art deco facades, and vegetation, like the long row of mature palm trees on Hollywood Bouelavrd east of Young Circle.

Also important is the scale. Locations that are scaled for people -- like East Las Olas Boulevard in Fort Lauderdale's entertainment district -- tend to have a stronger sense of place than locations that are scaled to cars -- like the enormous interchange of U.S. 441 and Sample Road in North Broward.

The reason for this is simple: People can experience a place more clearly when they're walking around than when they're speeding along an interstate or other large highway.

In fact, one might argue that while speeding along Interstate 595, it doesn't matter whether your car is technically in Davie, Plantation or Sunrise. Whichever city you happen to be in at 70 mph, the place you're in is the same: your car.

Terrain features such as rivers, hills and ridges can also contribute to sense of place and Broward has a mixed bag in this department.

The county has essentially no topography, which only adds to the region's visual monotony.

But the Atlantic Ocean and the Everglades are assets to the extent that people can see them from public areas.

To see more of The Miami Herald -- including its homes, jobs, cars and other classified listings -- or to subscribe to the newspaper, go to <http://www.herald.com>.

(c) 2003, The Miami Herald. Distributed by Knight Ridder/Tribune Business News.