

UPWARDLY MOBILE

Anticipating a new era of urban aerial mobility, architects and developers are prepping buildings to accommodate 'skyports' on the roofs of residential properties. **Paul Sillers** reports

Fast-forward to the mid-2030s. A svelte woman wafts serenely above the sun-drenched Florida metropolis in an autonomously piloted flying taxi, en route to a skyport atop one of Miami's landmark residential towers. As the vehicle commences its descent, a designer-bearded mystery man in a sharply tailored suit receives notification on his smartphone that his companion's arrival is imminent, and he ascends the glass elevator to greet her in the 'sky lobby'. Moments before touchdown, the rooftop swimming pool magically transforms into a landing pad. The couple embrace in the convivial high-rise world of tomorrow. Welcome to the sumptuous promotional video for the Paramount Miami Worldcenter, a 60-storey luxury development scheduled for completion next spring.

Rewind to the present and Daniel Kodsi, CEO of Royal Palm Companies, the developer of the Paramount, spoke to *Business Life* about the environmental impetus behind this futuristic scenario, revealing why he's convinced that skyports will become a ubiquitous feature of our urban destiny.

"We have to look at the sustainability of our cities," Kodsi explains. "Current traffic patterns are unsustainable, so inevitably we're going to have to find alternative ways to transport people as populations continue to grow."

Miami grows by 30,000 inhabitants annually, so it might seem like an obvious choice for skyports. "I sit on boards such as the Urban Land Institute and a lot of our conversations are about traffic," says Kodsi. "The Interstate-95, our main thoroughfare, just cannot be expanded as there's property on either side of the highway."

Kodsi points out that flying taxi tech is

developing quickly: "We look at the skyport as the future train station. Everyone's going to build multi-family housing around these skyports and, moving forward, we'd definitely consider some form of skyport for every project we do."

"The building across the street from us has a 700-foot tower similar to ours and they have a helicopter pad on the top with FAA approval, so if that's possible I don't think there's going to be a major issue in having skyports." But it won't happen overnight. Kodsi reckons it's "at least ten to 15 years out" while safety, legal and insurance issues are resolved.

And that metamorphosing swimming pool? "This technology is already in use," says Kodsi.

"They have these hydraulic lifts that raise the bottom of the pool and the water seeps around it and creates the landing pad."

Of course, flying taxis aren't an operational reality yet, but the Paramount has been designed so that when the time comes the building has the infrastructure in place to accommodate the skyport option (subject to Condo Association consent). In the interim, Kodsi says, "We're leaving in the pool but we're calling it an observatory. We're going to put in a telescope and a glass roof. They have the use of the space, 700 feet up in the air with a 360-degree view of the city, so it's a great observatory area for residents to use when the building is completed – and then, of course, we'll see what the future is." ■

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"We have to find other ways to transport people as populations continue to grow"

Smooth landing
The Paramount Miami
Worldcenter skyport