



Hidden Walter Mercado shrine at Miami Dade College. / Photo by Eric Hjerpe

## Someone Hid a Walter Mercado Shrine on Miami Dade College Kendall Campus

AALIYAH PASOLS | JANUARY 30, 2020 | 9:20AM

The 305 still clearly possesses *mucho, mucho amor* for the late astrologist and pop culture icon Walter Mercado. The evidence? An impromptu shrine, seemingly placed there by a devoted fan, was discovered under a stairwell at the Miami Dade College Kendall campus.

A printed image of Mercado is the centerpiece of the tribute, and below it lies a variety of offerings. Some include Mercado trademarks, such as the words “Mucho Amor” and a set of mini tarot cards. Whoever created the shrine got creative by embellishing it with quintessential Miami iconography such as a small Café Bustelo bag, a mini green Publix bag, a bottle of Royal Violets perfume, an incredibly tiny Goya sazón packet, and an equally wee Royal Dansk Danish butter cookie tin (famously used by Latino families to store **anything** but Danish butter cookies).



The shrine includes plenty of classic Miami symbols. / **Photo by Eric Hjerpe**

Twenty-one-year-old Miami Dade College student Eric Hjerpe tells *New Times* he was heading to class when he stumbled upon the hidden homage.

"I was looking around the building for my class, and while I was descending the stairs, I thought it would be cool to take a look under them to see if there was anything interesting," he says. "I was expecting [to find] graffiti or something."

A friend shared Hjerpe's discovery on Twitter this past January 14. He says the diminutive Mercado altar is still there more than two weeks later. Much like the battery-powered candle that flickers at the shrine, Miami's love for Mercado continues to burn.



The Mercado shrine hides under a stairwell. / **Photo by Eric Hjerpe**

Since 1970, Mercado had delivered flamboyant horoscope predictions and advice to Latinos daily, capturing the attention of roughly **120 million people** each night thanks to his larger-than-life personality and wisdom. His beloved segment, which ran on the show *Primer Impacto*, eventually spread to include Miami and other Latino markets in the United States, broadening Mercado's already massive reach. Audiences felt drawn to the gender-nonconforming psychic, who dressed in glamorous robes and addressed each Zodiac sign intimately, making viewers feel as though he was speaking to them directly.

Although Mercado lived in Miami part-time, he passed away where he was born, in Puerto Rico. Kidney failure claimed the 87-year-old this past November 2.

The Magic City has expressed its appreciation for Mercado in several ways over the years, including the recently premiered documentary *Mucho Mucho Amor* and a museum exhibit hosted at HistoryMiami. In August 2019, the museum debuted "**Mucho, Mucho Amor: 50 Years of Walter Mercado**," a monthlong exhibition that celebrated the career and life of the famous astrologer. His capes, tarot cards, jewelry, and other memorabilia were on full display, and he even made an appearance during the exhibit's opening, when he emerged from behind glittery golden curtains while riding on a golden throne.

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Last August also saw the debut of La Cocina Coctelería, a Hialeah-themed hangout and the City of Progress' first cocktail bar. Tons of typical Hialeah symbols are scattered throughout the bar, including a replica "Ñooo! Que Barato" sign, La Caja China boxes, and, yes, Royal Dansk Danish tins. But one of the most notable features of the bar is the women's restroom, which also **functions as a shrine to Walter Mercado**. Colorful illustrations depicting him and his famous phrase are displayed on the bathroom stall doors, while photos of him and books he wrote appear throughout.

Perhaps the Mercado admirer at Miami Dade College didn't think it appropriate to pay respects next to a toilet and felt compelled to find a secluded spot to show veneration. Whatever the intent, the sweetness of the sentiment is palpable.

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