The business day—and energy level—of downtown Miami is waning, but Arthur Furia bounds down the stairs at the Shutts & Bowen law firm at the pace of a category one Hurricane.

"I have a couple of visitors from Italy," he explains. "I was just about to show them the view." Ushered into the 15th floor Miami Center conference room, Biscayne Bay looms like a late-afternoon postcard from paradise. His visitors are near-speechless. The view, he later adds, is a great client recruiting tool for local law firms.

That Furia’s guests are Italian isn’t surprising. Miami is home to innumerable causeways, spans and overpasses. But another impressive bridge is the commercial connection Furia has forged between Miami and the homeland of all his grandparents.

He’s a director at the National Italian American Foundation, an influential Washington, D.C.-based group. He is Florida’s representative for the American Chamber of Commerce in Italy. He’s organized innumerable trade missions, which three Florida governors have led. And in 2008 he was named “Cavaliere Ufficiale” (Knight Official) by the president of the Republic of Italy.

It’s enough to make any nonna proud. And it’s a reminder that Miami’s trade ties aren’t just Pan-American, but also transatlantic. “I like bringing people together,” says Furia.

"I was the first non-Italian-born head of the Italy-America Chamber of Commerce," he says. "At the time, it was mainly Italian companies that happened to be in Miami."

And that energy level? It seems to come naturally, says Bowman Brown, Shutts & Bowen’s managing partner in Miami. "He’s one of the most enthusiastic people I know," Brown says. "He likes what he does."

Furia officially is an Italian citizen. But only since 1998. By birth, he’s a native son of Philadelphia, alternatively the City of Brotherly Love or home of the cheesesteak, depending on whether your interests are historical or culinary. And he’s highly regarded for his acumen in corporate and international business law generally, not just deals involving the land of la dolce vita. Florida Trend magazine put him on its “Must Know Contacts in Miami” list.

“We’ve been going that [International] way for a long time,” says Brown. "We brought in three international tax partners in the 1970s. He fits beautifully into that program and he’s built a nice book of business on his own."

Born in 1953, Furia could have had a typical white-collar Center City life. He went to Villanova University, became an accountant, and then returned to his alma mater for law school.

In 1980, he flew out of wintry Pennsylvania when a Miami law firm called. "They took me to lunch outdoors at Mayfair," the late, luxe Coconut Grove shopping center. "I remember thinking, ‘They pay you too?!’"

He joined Holland & Knight, and became a name partner at an independent firm from 1983-2003. He migrated to Gunster before landing in 2010 at Shutts & Bowen. At the time, the firm was celebrating its centennial year.

In Philadelphia, a single century might brand you a newcomer but in Miami it bestows old-school status. "I think in a business community where people are all new, that validation is very important," Furia says. "That’s why I’ve always needed to be at a larger firm that had resources."

Sunshine aside, he arrived in Miami at a time of the Mariel boatlift, race riots and cocaine cowboys. Italian Consuls of that era were either semi-retired business leaders or novices that were looking for a quick pit-stop before they moved on. The local economy was not the healthiest.

"To say we’re more sophisticated would be an understatement," Furia says, when asked how things have changed. One indicator: A steep drop in "the New York state of mind," as he calls it, where global players formerly felt “real” dealmaking occurs only in Manhattan.

Although he shows no signs of slowing down, he nonetheless prepping Miami’s next generation for leadership roles. He has served on the board at St. Thomas University and is currently a board member of the Miami Dade College Foundation. In that capacity, he helped cement a partnership sending students from MDC’s Miami Culinary Institute to prestigious Citta del Gusto cooking schools across Italy.

"I want to be a good mentor to the next generation," he says. "I want to keep building bridges to help the community thrive in the ways it deserves."

—Gregg Fields