



The Betsy-South Beach is not your average Ocean Drive hotel



You never know who you're going to run into at The Betsy in South Beach. Is that Amy Tan in the Writer's Room, penning her next best-seller? Could that be the principal cellist of The Cleveland Orchestra in the Gallery, where eminent musicians revel in the pitch-perfect acoustics? Did you see the celebrated opera singer hitting high notes, or were you taking in a poetry slam in another room?



Hotel owner [Jonathan Plutzik](#) nursed an iced tea and huevos rancheros on recent morning in the hotel restaurant. Live jazz carried over from the lobby, where The Betsy's annual jazz festival was getting into full swing. "Our whole brand is built around PACE – philanthropy, arts, culture and education," Plutzik said. "We are a five-star hotel – of course the beds need to be really comfortable and we need great service – but on top of that, we've built this program to do events with musicians, literary people and community groups."

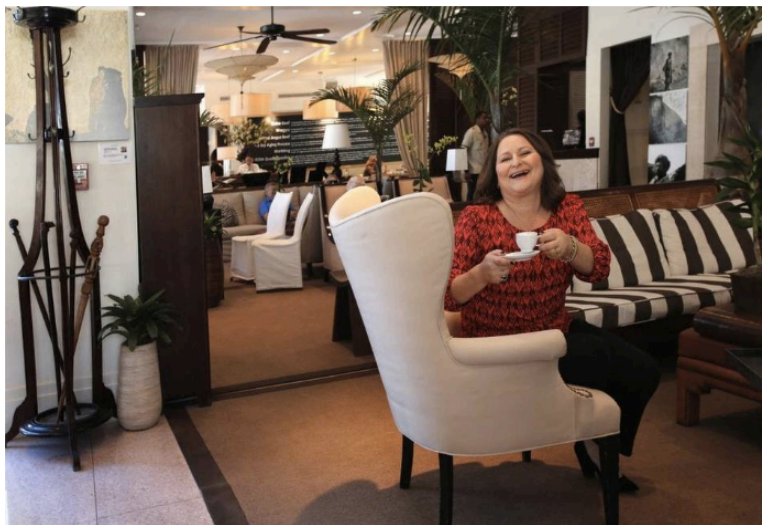
[Read More: Wine and dine at The Betsy-South Beach's Grape Escape Happy Hour](#)

In February alone, the hotel managed 32 cultural event in the month's 28 short days. Plutzik said he is determined to change the perception that Miami is skin-deep and short on substance: "We let the brand of Miami be about hard bodies and bathing suits and clubs, but Miami is one of the greatest cultural centers of the world."

WHERE CREATIVITY IS GOOD

His father was poet Hyam Plutzik, three-time Pulitzer Prize finalist. The younger Plutzik had walked away from a lucrative career on Wall Street in search of a new beginning. He bought the historic Betsy Ross Hotel in a bankruptcy sale, reopening it in March 2009 after a multimillion-dollar restoration. "I was opening a luxury hotel during the worst financial crisis since the Great Depression, when the world was suffering," Plutzik recalled. "I grew up in a household where money is bad, creativity is good."

To help foster creativity, Plutzik called upon his sister, the conservatory-trained singer and foundation director [Deborah Briggs](#). They had a mutual desire to provide an upscale hotel experience centered around cultural programming. Today, Briggs runs the thriving PACE program.



When the opportunity arose to more than double the hotel's footprint by taking over the historic but rundown Carlton Hotel next door, Plutzik launched a two-year expansion that merged both buildings into one property. The Betsy's original Colonial-style wing stands as the only example of Florida Georgian architecture in the area, and it connects to the fully renovated Art Deco wing in the former Carlton by a piece of public art called The Orb. Suspended four stories in the air in an alley between Ocean Drive and Collins Avenue, The Orb looks like a giant beach ball from the outside, concealing a seamless passageway between the buildings.



“Our inspiration for the Betsy-South Beach design was the client’s program, which pairs hospitality with arts and culture,” said Allan Shulman, principal of Shulman + Associates, the Miami architecture firm that led the hotel’s revitalization project. “Spaces for the arts, which define the brand, are woven into all facets of the building.”

ARTISTIC ALCOVES

While most hotels with extra space add more guest rooms, Plutzik turned a prime spot in the middle of the new Art Deco wing into a dedicated Library. “It’s a really quiet, contemplative space, an experiential cocoon,” he said of his favorite hideaway, where quiet classical music plays 24/7 and the shelves are lined with curated selections from Plutzik pal Mitchell Kaplan of Books & Books.

Over in the Writer’s Room, more than 500 writers have toiled for up to a week at a time in a soundproof haven furnished with Hyam Plutzik’s oversized walnut desk. In exchange for food, lodging and inspiration, the writers host an onsite event, usually a book reading and discussion. The 14th Place Terrace is a prime spot for such discussions, where the so-called Poetry Rail has emerged as another piece of public art and features words from 13 poets with ties to Miami Beach culture, including Muhammad Ali, Langston Hughes and, of course, Hyam Plutzik.



Not to be outdone, the hotel's common-area walls display exhibitions that include a retrospective of paintings by Fay Lansner and works by photographer Robert Zuckerman, as well as more than 200 rare photographs of the Beatles and the Rolling Stones by Bob Bonis.

ENCLAVE OF HOSPITALITY

The rooms and the service, meantime, live up to the hotel's spot on this year's Conde Nast Traveler Gold List, as well as its Forbes Four Star and AAA Four Diamond designations. Poster beds set the relaxed yet sophisticated tone, and Malin & Goetz products stock the herringbone marble bathrooms. Nightly turndown service includes poetry bookmarks made of recycled paper and wildflower seeds that can be planted to bloom.



At sunrise, supplement the 24-hour fitness center with complimentary yoga on the roof deck. Stop by Miami's only fully outdoor spa, where you can pamper both yourself and your pooch in a side-by-side massage (Plutzik's Golden Retriever, Katie, serves as the Canine Executive Officer).



Come sunset, sip a drink from the rooftop bar amid panoramic views of the beach and Miami skyline, or head downstairs to the Conservatory, an inviting lounge in the old lobby of the Carlton with libations like the Betsy Frappuccino and dishes from Laurent Tourondel's LT Steak & Seafood. For the full dining experience, make a reservation at the restaurant for a satisfying filet or buttery king crab. Plans are underway for Tourondel's Poeti, a more casual trattoria-style Italian restaurant with a walk-up window for gelato and crepes.



This enclave's prime position in South Beach means you're only steps from the sand, from Lincoln Road, from New World Symphony. The hotel's tagline — from a Hyam Plutzik poem — sums it up best: "Expect no more. This is happiness."