

OCEAN DRIVE REVIVE

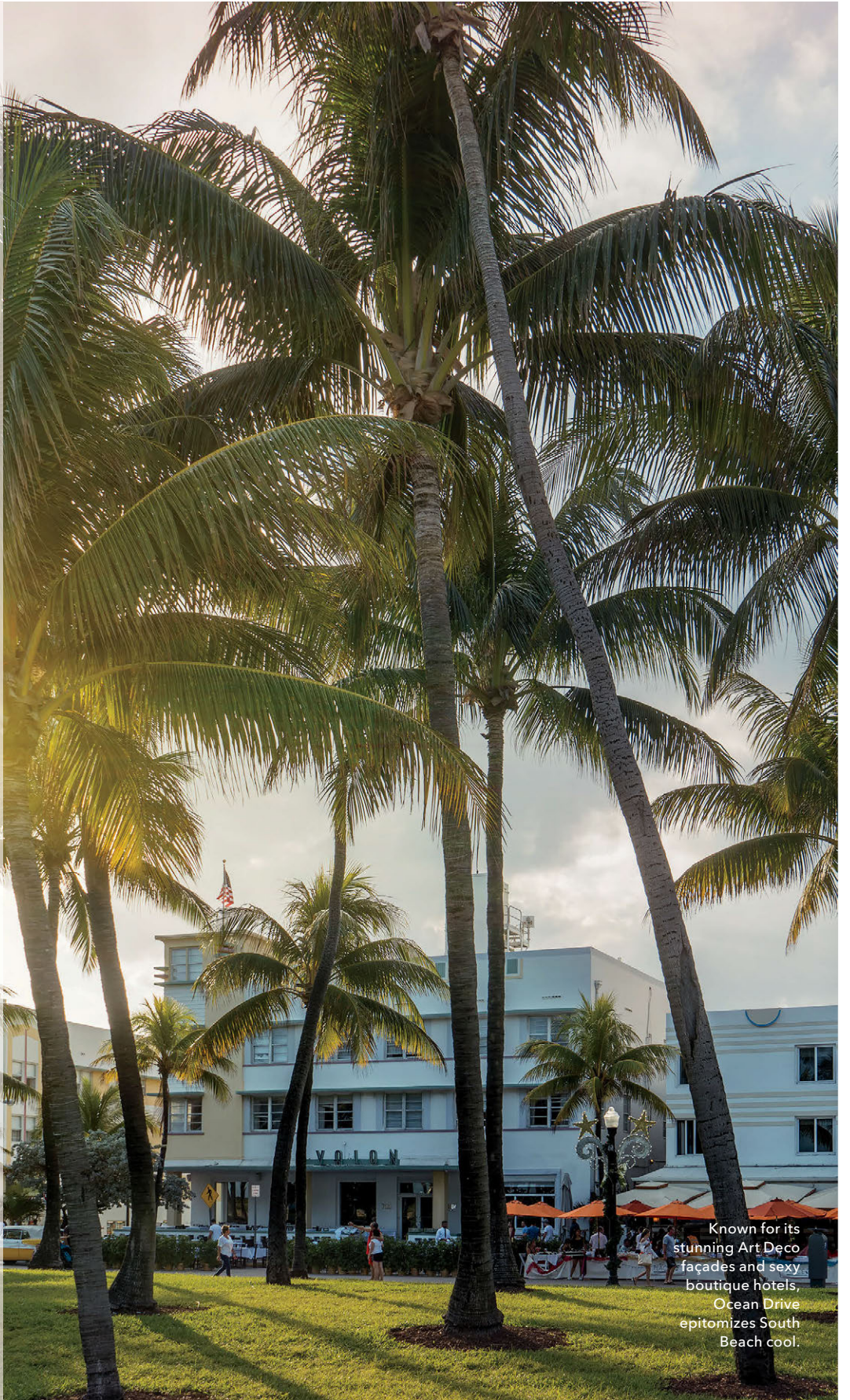
THE HEARTBEAT OF SOUTH BEACH, **OCEAN DRIVE** GETS A REVAMP WITH NEW RESTAURANTS, HOTELS, EVENTS, AND, YES, EVEN REGULATIONS, BRINGING THE AREA BACK TO ITS FORMER GLORY.

BY BECKY RANDEL

Way back in the day, it was a locale that was the epicenter of Miami's exciting, sexy, and glamorous scene. Since then, Ocean Drive began to lean a bit more "spring break" than spring runway. So the city and local businesses decided to take action, and set up a task force to revitalize the area.

After years of research and a list of detailed recommendations from experts, residents, and business owners, the city—led by Commissioner Ricky Arriola—last fall passed a 10-point plan to address a number of improvements.

One of the first items tackled were the sidewalks; regulations now require businesses to move their furniture west and follow specific design guidelines for umbrellas, chairs, and tables. "The idea was to share the sidewalk with the patrons and the public," says Susanne M. Torriente, assistant city manager, "to create comfort for the people who are sitting, eating, and enjoying, but also for people who are walking by." These are not "pie in the sky" policies, either: Businesses had until mid-January to >



Known for its stunning Art Deco façades and sexy boutique hotels, Ocean Drive epitomizes South Beach cool.

comply, or they would start receiving fines.

The city also relocated 30 overgrown palm trees from the sidewalk to Lummus Park across the street. “The original intent was to have the palm trees in between buildings, and not covering the beautiful Art Deco façades,” Torriente explains of the move.

Another component of the plan is the addition of 12 police officers solely dedicated to the Mixed Use Entertainment District (MXE), which includes Ocean Drive from Fifth to 15th Streets and Collins Avenue from Fifth to 16th Streets. These officers will focus on noise violations and crime, as well as enforcing open container laws. An additional park ranger has been brought in to oversee Lummus Park, which will eventually offer extended arts and cultural programming.

Other parts include third-party hospitality training for all Ocean Drive staff, new lighting in the alleyways, and a halt to chain stores, tattoo parlors, and pawnshops. “The original vision for Ocean Drive in the 1980s was an American Riviera of boutique, Art Deco hotels with charming sidewalk cafés. This vision never contemplated the transformation of Ocean Drive into a retail destination for souvenirs and T-shirts,” the plan reads.

One Ocean Drive business owner who has been deeply involved in (and affected by) this process is Jonathan Plutzik of the Betsy Hotel. Not only did Plutzik contribute to the task force, but his hotel just unveiled a large, two-year transformation, adding a new Art Deco wing, a second full-service restaurant, new guest rooms, and more. Plutzik says of the street revamp, “The businesses in general have locked arms with the city to really make sure that the reality of Ocean Drive matches the incredible global brand that Miami Beach has associated with Ocean Drive.”

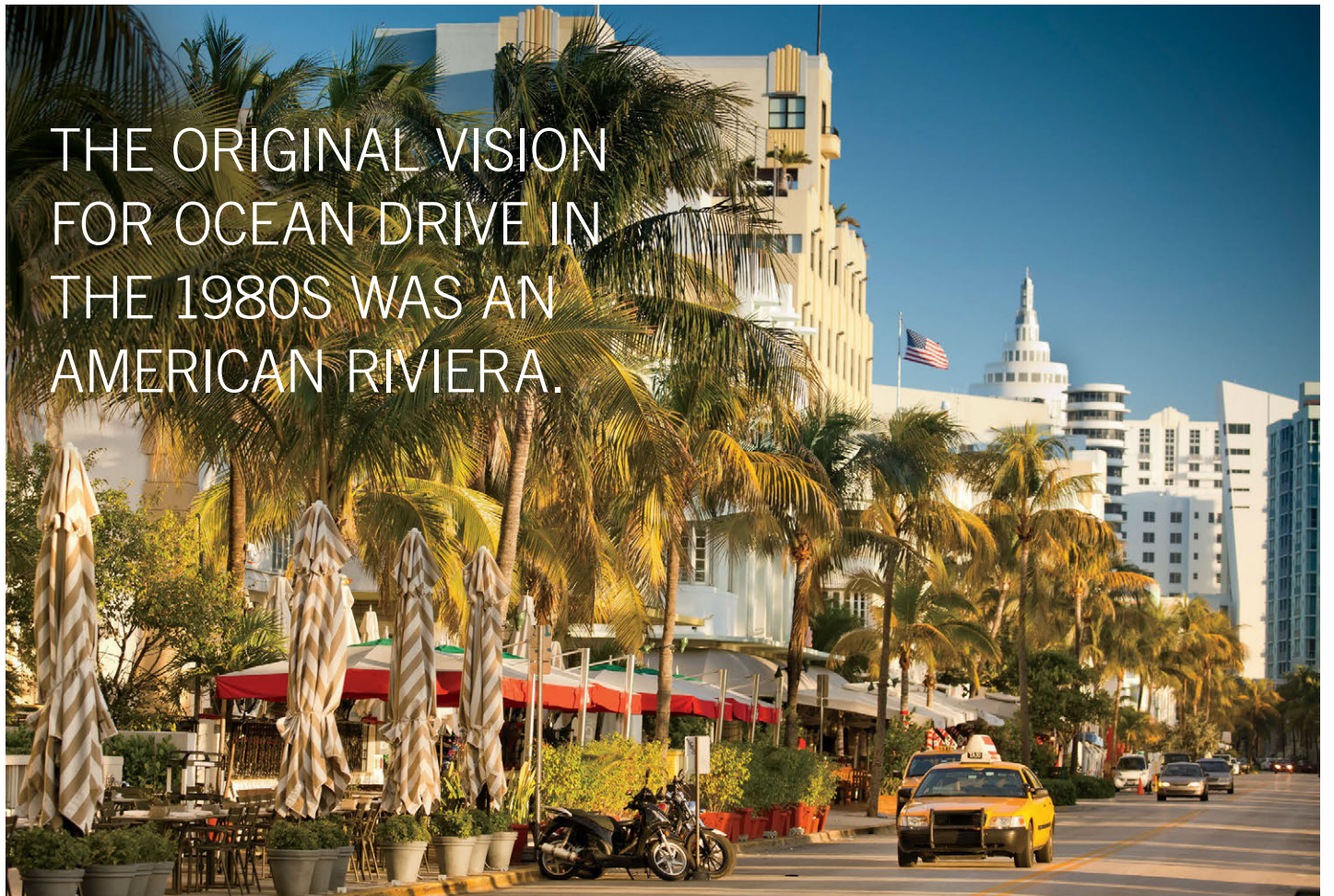
He points to the hospitality training as one major upgrade, along with the overall cleanup. “The most important thing is imposing high standards on all of the operators and creating a sense of openness on the sidewalk so that all people feel comfortable walking freely.” Plutzik also notes how quickly these changes have taken effect. “What’s exciting for me is that you can see it happening right before your eyes.”

Simultaneously, or possibly serendipitously, Ocean Drive has attracted newfound interest from restaurants, retailers, and national events. The 40-year-old Art Deco Weekend began its own revitalization two years ago to “coincide with the citywide efforts on Ocean Drive,” says Chairman Lori Bakkum. She says they have more than doubled their presentation of arts and design (PAMM, the Bass Museum, and The Wolfsonian-FIU are all new partners), and counted over 150,000 visitors at last month’s event. The famed South Beach Wine & Food Festival continues to see increased attendance

The annual SOBE Wine & Food Festival draws crowds to the beach with star chefs, cooking demos, and tastings from local eateries. BELOW: An outpost of popular restaurant Sugar Factory recently launched on Ocean Drive.



PHOTOGRAPHY BY RA-HAUS (FOTOGRAFIE (SUGAR FACTORY) (OCEAN DRIVE); JAVIER SANCHEZ (THE BETSY HOTEL)



A guest room at the revamped and expanded Betsy hotel. ABOVE: Hospitality training and opened sidewalks will promote a welcoming atmosphere.

every year, particularly at its Grand Tasting Village, off the sands of Ocean Drive. This year, they've even added a nightlife element from David Grutman of LIV nightclub.

More recent arrivals on the scene, the innovative outposts of Sugar Factory and Down N Dirty Tacos are pulling in big numbers, while new restaurants including Lolo's Surf Cantina, which opened last month in the beautifully refurbished Stanton Hotel, are receiving national attention. Bringing the glam back, the new Forte Dei Marmi at Ocean 150 is a recently opened cultural space that features a restaurant from Michelin-starred Antonio Mellino and his son Raffaele, as well as the swanky FDM Arts Club, an invitation-only, private music and arts club.

Future plans for the street include the creation of a Business Improvement District, a major crackdown on "hawking" or aggressive solicitation (the city is currently fighting the issue in court), and a continued focus on bringing the area back to its former glory.

As Plutzik summarizes, "Our goal is certainly not to fundamentally change the vibe. Iconic Ocean Drive should remain iconic Ocean Drive, but we can deliver that experience in a tighter, safer, more cleaned-up way." After all, as Torriente points out, "There is no other street like Ocean Drive." ■