

MODERN LUXURY

# OCEAN DRIVE



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# America's Riviera

AS THE SPRAWLING CELINO SOUTH BEACH ON ELECTRIC OCEAN DRIVE RISES AS THE PROMENADE'S FIRST-EVER LUXURY RESORT, THE REBORN STREET OF DREAMS BASKS IN NEARLY A CENTURY OF ART DECO SPLENDOR.

BY DIRK DESOUZA



In 1926, as South Beach's potential was just a hinting twitch, the world's costliest-ever hurricane roared across the island, causing \$172 billion in damage to sundry nascent beachfront buildings straddling hundreds of billions of unpaved grains of sand. Within three years, that storm of the century ushered in the Great Depression that gripped America's purse strings until 1939. This summer of a trajectory wasn't what Carl Fisher, John Collins and the Lummus brothers had dreamed of since 1915. The development and banking scions had been downright mesmerized by Miami Beach's natural beauty and untapped tourism potential, seeing well past its nutty history as a vast, failed coconut farm that once sold for 25 cents an acre.

But while America was reeling, Miami Beach puffed its chest in the sunlight, sprouting a bumper crop of revolutionary buildings that marked the first wave of its perennial reputation for defying expectations. Throughout the 1930s and '40s, architects were swimming in commissions to design fabulously chic resort-style hotels and mansions in the art deco and streamline moderne design motifs that captured worldwide imaginations immediately following the 1924 Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratifs et Industriels Modernes. And by the end of World War II, Miami Beach was clustered with 800 exceptional buildings that formed the largest concentration of art deco eye-candy architecture in the world, awash in pinks, lemons and blues. At last, Fisher's, Collins'



and the Lummuses' fairy tale of luxury, taste and fantasy had come true. A small miracle.

Rising from this burst of creativity was the majestic Park Central Hotel, designed by art deco master Henry Hohauser in 1937. Elevated six glorious stories above the new Ocean Drive, surrounded by two- and three-

From top: A model in Lummus Park in 1956; the Bar at Dalia at the Celino South Beach features interiors by Navigate Design.



The courtyard pool at The Betsy South Beach, another renovated architectural masterpiece on Ocean Drive. The Betsy hosts several arts and cultural events including the new poetry program Knight Writers presented in partnership with O, Miami.

transpired under the watchful purview of the Barbara Capitman-founded Miami Design Preservation League, whose noble mission is to preserve architecture and design features of historical importance. Speaking to the importance of the Park Central's legacy, Tabet adds, "Before starting the project, we hired a historian, because to plan the future, you have to understand the past."

The Celino exudes the vibrant glamour of cocktail dresses and tailored jackets, and brims with luxurious yet thoughtful details that echo the hotel's elegant heyday as a social hub. In the main lobby, original terrazzo floors kiss against detailed steel elevator doors unchanged since the 1940s. The soaring lobby, bathed in arresting peaches, mints and turquoise blues, is flanked by breezy flamingo-printed sheers. Overhead, an enormous deep-blue ribbon of fabric forms a stunning art piece that runs past the indoor/outdoor horseshoe bar, past the intimate social salon, past the wood-burning open kitchen and into the glorious main dining room, three civilized terraces later. The scene resembles a Floridita vibe of midcentury modernism with a touch of Latin swagger, punctuated by lush greenery and dramatic chandeliers.

In Tabet's mind, he says, "We wanted to deliver the chic tropical lifestyle that people look for when they come to Miami."

The property is reborn with a rich amenity set for guests. Three lobby restaurants—modern Italian fare commanding the entire lobby of the new all-suite cube, seafood-centric Mediterranean dining anchoring the main building and casual pizza to the north—spill onto spacious outdoor terraces for people-watching.

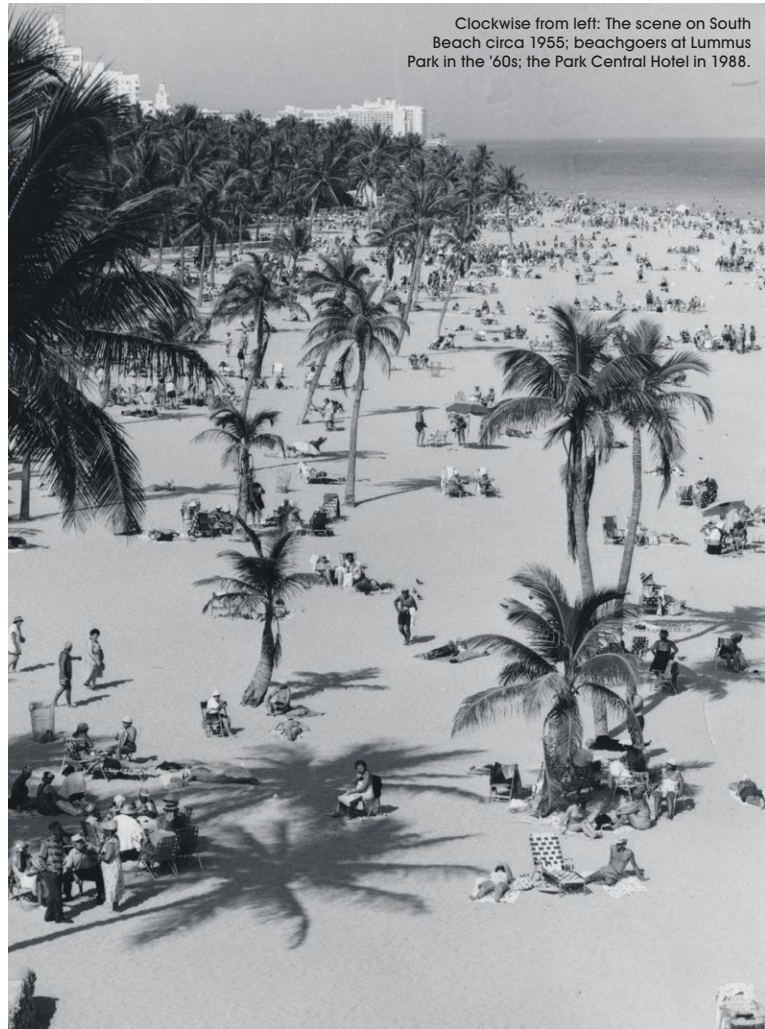
story hotels, Hohauser's design was among the most ambitious and soaring of its time.

Eight decades later, the iconic Park Central name now cedes to its latest incarnation, Celino South Beach, the newest and grandest Ocean Drive hotel development the promenade has perhaps ever enjoyed. The

resort, the passion project of Ricardo Tabet of Optimum Development USA, isn't just comprised of the Park Central Hotel proper, it's lassoed three additional buildings, to boot—The Imperial to the north, The Heathcote to the south and a modernist new-build white cube just beyond the Heathcote.

It's no stretch to suggest the newly composed contemporary compound commanding 280 feet of America's Riviera may be the most ambitious hotel project in Ocean Drive's history (Tabet refers to it as "The Celino District"). The yearslong, \$110 million refurbishment of the three historic structures

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Clockwise from left: The scene on South Beach circa 1955; beachgoers at Lummus Park in the '60s; the Park Central Hotel in 1988.

...CONTINUED Poolside, an alfresco dining gazebo is joined by mature gnarls of shade trees, tranquil terraced landscapes connecting to Ocean Drive, and two whimsical bars focused on creative cocktails. Indoor cycling classes, yoga classes, dancing classes, hair and makeup services, and a gift boutique are also on the menu. The cherry on top is a semiprivate sixth-story sundeck and glass-bottom pool overlooking Lummus Park's palm trees and spectacular ocean views; while dining inside, if one cranes upward beyond the five-story Mr. Brainwash mural, swimmers just may glide by. For overnight guests, the Celino houses 106 standard rooms, 14 luxe one-bedroom suites and 12 airy signature balcony and terrace suites outfitted with luxurious modern furnishings and soft color palettes.

But what about the rest of Ocean Drive? The Celino helps the globally known strip complete a systematic recent renaissance of refreshing upgrades and investment. Over

the past 15 years or so, over \$1 billion has been spent, publicly and privately, to align Ocean Drive with global jet-set sensibilities. Though purists may disagree, Ocean Drive begins at South Pointe Park, one of the world's most spectacular oceanfront green spaces, then dances northward with world-class newness and opulence—the towering Continuum complex, Nikki Beach, Prime 112, Prime Italian, One Ocean, Ocean House, Enrique Norten's 321 Ocean, Rene Gonzalez's Glass, The Local House/Sense Beach House, the refurbished Clevelander Hotel, the refurbished Tides Hotel, the refurbished Versace mansion, the refurbished Cardozo Hotel, the expanded Betsy Hotel, Il Villagio and Michael Graves' 1500 Ocean Drive.

The award-winning Betsy, designed by Henry Hohauser and L. Murray Dixon between 1937 and 1941, recently doubled its room count and enlarged to

include gallery and conservatory spaces, an alley restaurant, rooftop pool and gratis office space for a classical music nonprofit and a poetry nonprofit to stage over 60 free public performances a year. The hotel's owner, Jonathan Plutzik, has long chosen to emphasize culture and community, which, along with the Celino, The Tides and Gloria Estefan's gorgeous Cardozo, collectively help Ocean Drive not only reassume its luxurious mantle but remain a dynamic social mecca for years to come.

At this very moment, over \$500 million is being invested to improve and beautify hotels, cafes, boutiques, bars and restaurants from Fifth to 15th Street, while the City of Miami Beach improves Lummus Park with over \$5 million in infrastructure to attract more special events like concerts, art shows and food festivals. Miami locals are falling in love again with America's Riviera, rediscovering that a bike ride along Ocean Drive, followed by lunch at one of its breezy outdoor cafes is truly one of life's great pleasures. ■



## The Betsy – South Beach

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