

OCEAN DRIVE

April 2006

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LUCY LIU

MIAMI SCENE



Social Miami is replete with marble-top tables and bars, sleek lines in white and silver, food meant to be shared and artwork meant to be appreciated.

250 Ocean Drive April 2006

The Art of Dining

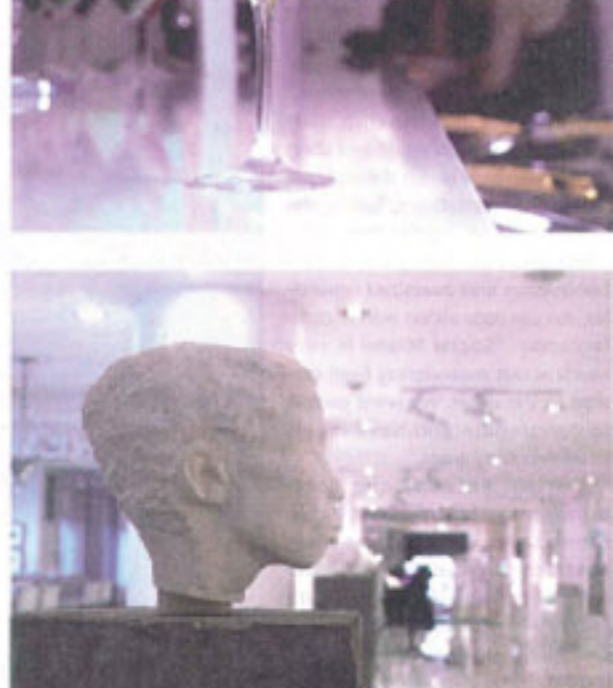
Welcome to Social Miami, where the food, décor and setting encourage a highly civilized and thoroughly shared experience

BY SUZY BUCKLEY
PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEREMY HUDSON

We're not sure if you've noticed, but the Miami Night as we know it is changing. It's becoming less and less about who owns what and who's promoting what when. Even the velvet-rope game is getting a little old: Sure, we're big fans of exclusivity (who isn't?), but it seems as if all of South Beach recently shared one big eureka! moment: What's the point of waiting and waiting and/or bribing and begging to pack like sardines into a deafening club that smells like a moldy ashtray? Don't get us wrong—once in a while, of course, there's nothing better. But for the regular day-to-day, we'd all like something a bit more civilized. We want to sit down and savor cocktails, food and music with our delightful, interesting friends, who will hopefully introduce us to their even more delightful and more interesting friends. Nobody wants to cold call—we want referrals. See, this is the age of the clique, the posse, the group, the entourage. We're experiencing a café-society renaissance, and restaurateur Jeffrey Chodorow put his finger on it, drew up the plans and built it out before anyone else.

Technically, Social Miami serves as the Sagamore hotel's long-awaited in-house restaurant, but it feels more like a cross between a contemporary art gallery and your teenage best friend's basement. "I have always thought that going out to dinner is about so much more than going out to dinner," explains Chodorow, who was one of the first New York-based restaurateurs to invest in South Beach during the burgeoning '90s. After launching China Grill here in 1995, he opened the wildly successful Tuscan Steak and Blue Door at the Delano. He now plans to take this latest drinking, dining and lounging concept, Social, to cities around the world: Social Hollywood opens in Los Angeles later this month. "While food is an integral part, it's about a lot more: it's the next generation of socializing, where each venue relates specifically to its own community." In L.A., the restaurant is housed in the historic Hollywood Athletic Club building, an old haunt of Charlie Chaplin, Greta Garbo and Rudolph Valentino. Here in South Beach, Chodorow chose the Sagamore, an art deco gem built in 1948, awash in hotel owners Marty and Cricket Taglin's collection of photography, paintings, sculpture and video installations. "In L.A., it's celebrity. In Miami, it's art. The city has become one of the most important art centers in the world. It hosts Art Basel, and all the important collectors—Marty Margulies, the Rubells, the Bramans—live here. The Sagamore hotel itself is an art gallery. With its indoor and outdoor video lounges, game room and global menu with local touches, it's going to redefine Miami," Chodorow says.

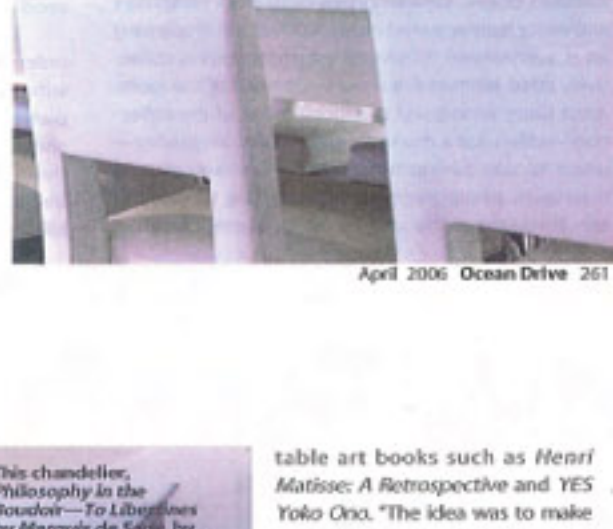
We're experiencing a café-society renaissance, and Jeffrey Chodorow put his finger on it.



Drinks made with fresh fruit juice are a house specialty.



One of the seven installations of *The Dead Teach the Living* by Christine Borland.



In *Cuba* by Angel Marcos serves as the perfect backdrop to this table.

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SOCIAL MIAMI

According to interior designer Mark Zeff, the art was the driving force behind Social Miami, and all the other elements—including the food—sprung up around it. "We tried to bring the indoors outdoors and vice versa. From the minute you get out of the cab, all the way through the lobby and dining room, outside to the end of the pool where it meets the [boardwalk] to the beach, you're experiencing the whole environment," says Zeff, who stuck to a crisp, minimal color palette of white and silver with splashes of green throughout. Outside the restaurant, before the pool, lies a lush garden lined with white- and palm-tree-green striped banquettes and oversized umbrellas. An outdoor video wall is coming soon. "Social Miami is very much about meandering from one area to the other. We want people to congregate and have meals wherever they want."

When entering the hotel through the lobby—past Pablo Cano's *Lady Liberty* and St. Catherine trash-can sculptures and the colorful crowd in Massimo Vitali's *Pic Nic Poker* photograph—guests can veer right for drinks at the indoor Thassos-marble bar. Elevation Jaxx plays over the basement lounge video-art pieces from Kota Ezawa's *The Simpson Verdict* to Tracy Moffatt's *Bad, Funny, Sex and Love* run without sound on three flat-screen televisions. An adjacent, enclosed screening room (the Orchid Room) with heavy gray and white drapes and original terrazzo flooring features regular video installations by visiting, major, emerging and world-recognized international artists.

To the left of the lobby lies Social Miami's centerpiece, the welcoming game room, with mahogany wood floors, a lopsided three-ring chandelier and every permutation of seating arrangement imaginable: a long, green sofa bench, a round wooden poker table with high-back wooden chairs, sunken green high-back armchairs and white leather swivel chairs. Conversation-sparking art is everywhere: 85 silver-print photographs, collectively titled *Women Are Beautiful*, cover half the room. Artist Garry Winogrand produced much of the collection—which has a markedly eerie, stalkerish quality—when he was having trouble in his first and second marriages, photographing unsuspecting women he saw throughout the streets, parks, buses, elevators



This chandelier, *Philosophy in the Basement—To Libertines* by Marquis de Sade, by Ceith Wyn Egizio, adds a touch of drama to this pristine dining area.

"The idea was to make Social feel like your own home."



Mural-sized photographs, *Effie* Tower and *Wall Street*, both by Doug Hill.



The sleek white and silver entry to Social Miami.

and cafés of New York City. And William Eggleston's gelatin-silver prints—*Nightclub Portraits*—are large, close-up stills of a young black male, white male and white female taken in a darkened club in 1973, but look like they could have just as easily been taken in a darkened club in 2006.

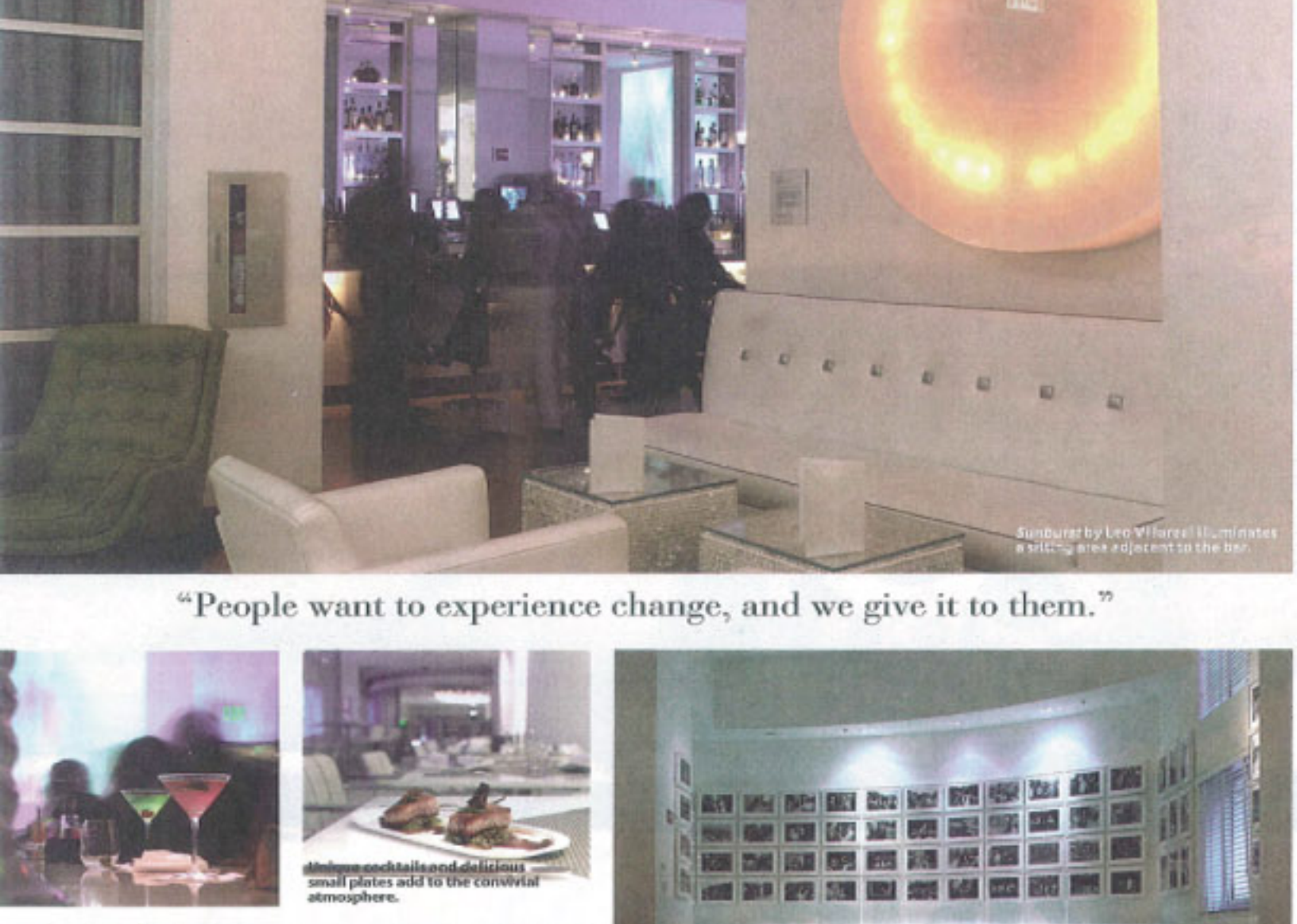
Lounge lizards will have a field day here: They can order drinks with fresh-made juice—or more than 120 wines by the glass—and oversized appetizer-style plates while playing pool, backgammon, Monopoly, chess, checkers or cards. And at Social, there's no such thing as waiting uncomfortably alone before your friends arrive, resorting to texting or BlackBerrying to kill time: Sit comfortably while flipping through coffee-

table art books such as *Henri Matisse: A Retrospective* and *YES Yoko Ono*. "The idea was to make Social feel like your own home," explains Zeff. "If you were going to invite people into your home for a huge party, you'd encourage them to do whatever they want—have a drink, eat and play around."

Groups of gourmets, tapas aficionados, and the I-don't-know-what-I-feel-like-tonight set will adore the upstairs restaurant, spearheaded by consulting chef Michelle Bernstein. "Why is it that if you go to South Beach, you feel like you have to be fabulous and sophisticated to be accepted?" asks Bernstein, the former star chef of Azul at Mandarin Oriental, Miami, who recently opened her own restaurant, Michy's, on Biscayne Boulevard. "Here, anything goes." The restaurant serves plates and portions to suit every diet and finicky palate, from the succulent, sweet oxtail ravioli and bluefin-tuna tartare to mini Kobe burgers topped with Gruyère cheese and Social Miami's signature fried minced-lamb cigars. Chodorow recently sent Bernstein to study cooking in Morocco, which inspired the dish she calls "long, thin, crispy, waxy-looking sticks of French brick dough filled with minced lamb, pine nuts, raisins and Moroccan spices." As is the case throughout Social Miami, the dining room's seating options are nearly endless: Sink into an oversized white leather armchair near a low, glass-shaded coffee table for quick bites and intimate chats, or book one of the more formal, large, circular, marble for group dinners of 10 or 12. A few dining stations feature stainless mesh scrim partitions that can be drawn

for more privacy. Ironically, Social Miami provides a kind of nook-and-canny-laden milieu where it's easy to be as social or antisocial as you want. Dine in hiding with your friends from thronelike chairs behind a chain-mail curtain, cozy up with a lover and a martini under a plasma-TV screen in a corner at the lobby-side bar or hold court with your extensive crew on a long white leather bench sofa in the game room.

"People want to experience change, and we give it to them," Zeff says. "With 1,000 channels on television and 1,500 magazines, plus everything available to us on the Internet, today we're living in a world where everybody needs a different experience all the time." ■



Sunburner by Leo Villalba illuminates a sitting area adjacent to the bar.

"People want to experience change, and we give it to them."



Shrimp cocktails and delicious small plates add to the convivial atmosphere.



The Thassos-marble bar punctuates the lounge area, while electronics and looped video-art set the mood.



Women Are Beautiful by Garry Winogrand is a series of 85 photographs that grace a wall of the game room.

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