

IN 24 HOURS

Four Seasons Surf Club evokes Miami's former glamour

Rebecca Wallwork, CNN • Updated 17th August 2017



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The new Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club sits on 900 feet of pristine Atlantic beachfront in the Surfside enclave of North Beach in Miami.

Four Seasons Hotels and Resorts

(CNN) — Miami's sunshine and good times have drawn visitors back for years, but a new hotel concept hopes to bring back some of the glamour of a bygone era.

The city has gone through plenty of reincarnations in its time -- there was the neon-pink "Miami Vice" scene of the 1980s, the elite velvet-rope days of Madonna and Versace and the boutique hotels in the 1990s. Then came the Kardashians and the spring breakers and the glitzy Art Basel crowds.

But none of Miami's changing moods can match the more refined glamour of the city's Jazz Age in the 1920s and '30s.

Elaborate parties and boldfaced names were part of the scene back then, too, but it was also a time of elegance and sophistication -- two words you see scant evidence of along Ocean Drive or South Beach's Collins Avenue hotel strip today.

Which is why the recent arrival of Miami's newest hotel, the [Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club](#) in the Surfside enclave of North Beach, feels like just what the city needs.

The hotel is an antidote to the flaunt-it-all luxury of the [Fontainebleau](#) and [Faena Hotels](#) and the more genteel hospitality of the historic [Biltmore Hotel](#) in Coral Gables.



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Old-school Miami glamour

The Surf Club, however, does have plenty of history.

The social club where tire tycoon Harvey Firestone once threw epic galas and frequent visitor Winston Churchill used to paint in his cabana has been reimagined to include a beachfront hotel (and residences) designed by US architect Richard Meier.

The footprint is large -- the property sits on 900 feet of pristine Atlantic beachfront -- but the overall feeling is intimate, with just 77 rooms and suites that cantilever over the original clubhouse, with chic, residential-style interiors by Paris-based designer Joseph Dirand.

Two of the three new towers by Meier are for private residences, with owners having full access to the Surf Club's amenities.

Those perks are the real deal -- three pools, 40 day cabanas, a spa with six treatment rooms and two cabana suites, and a beautifully designed kids' club.



The hotel is a reimagination of the historic scene from Miami's glamorous heyday in the Jazz Age.

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Plus, there's Le Sirenuse restaurant and Champagne bar, a collaboration between Four Seasons and the owners of Le Sirenuse Hotel in Positano on Italy's Amalfi Coast. (A Thomas Keller restaurant is also set to open on site later this year.)

"You're not in South Beach, trying to fight for a pool chair or spot on the beach," says the hotel's general manager Reed Kandalraft of the abundance of space at the Surf Club.

"You're paying on average \$1,000 a night during high season, so you're going to have a serene, exclusive experience."

That may be a lot of zeros for one night, but Kandalraft claims that fans of Four Seasons' renowned service are happy to pay it.

"We nail the basics," he says. "You can paint the walls gold if you want to, but if you don't serve hot coffee hot or have fresh orange juice, squeezed here at the hotel, if your silver isn't polished and the floors aren't clean, your guests aren't going to accept the place."



Italian flavor: Le Sirenuse is a collaboration between Four Seasons and Le Sirenuse Hotel on the Amalfi Coast.
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'Floating in the air'

Surf Club guests are treated to more than just the basics, of course. Guest rooms are bright and airy, reflecting Dirand's clean-lined modernist style.

"The palette of the room reflects what you see outside your window," says the designer, best known for his work on flagship boutiques for designers such as Chloe, Balmain and Givenchy in Paris.

"The beige color, which is the sand, the green of the palm trees, a little bit of greenish-blue that continues the colors of the water and the sky. You almost feel like the landscape is coming inside and you are floating in the air."

WATCH: In 24 Hours: Morning in Miami Beach

Miami's brilliant natural light is used to great effect, while the furniture, such as the modular table that can be used for dining, lounging or as a desk, is functional and built for modern life.

The Le Sirenuse restaurant and Champagne bar were created from what remained of the original Surf Club building, so they feature many original details such as fireplaces, wooden ceilings and dramatic arches which frame views of palm trees and glimpses of the Atlantic.



The decor is designed to reflect the setting of sand and sea and bring the outside in.
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Best of the best

The sprawling bar area is a tropical wonderland, dotted with palms, couches and chairs in pale, natural shades, grouped into intimate pockets with flattering low lighting.

"I wanted it to have some of the personality of Le Sirenuse [in Positano]," says Antonio Sersale, who worked with Dirand to translate his hotel's warmth into the new space.

"I wanted to make sure that the plants were preponderant and that guests feel at ease."

A stunning green bar -- made from lava stone shaped into waves -- anchors the room, while next door in the main dining room, guests sit down to a menu created by chef de cuisine Antonio Mermolia, with inspiration from Le Sirenuse Positano's La Sponda.

WATCH: Miami: Sun, sea and seafood

"When you're here, you forget that you have 12 floors [of hotel rooms] cantilevered over you," says Sersale from a table in the dining room. "You feel like you've walked into this charming little place, with a fabulous terrace overlooking the sea."

To the hospitality veteran (whose father Franco opened Le Sirenuse in 1951), the feel of a restaurant is just as important as the food. "The atmosphere is everything," he says. "Glamour has to have depth, and to have depth it needs to draw people who are tastemakers. What really makes a place is the people."

The developers and owners of the Surf Club, Fort Partners, clearly agree, especially when it came to selecting their collaborators. "They chose the best of the best to build something unique," says Kandalraft.

"Four Seasons. Le Sirenuse. Thomas Keller. Joseph Dirand. Richard Meier. Whenever they picked someone, they asked, 'Who is the best at what they do? Let's get them.'"



The Surf Club features three pools, a spa and a kids' club.

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Miami's DNA

The goal, says Kandalraft, was to create something timeless and understated -- "not too flashy, not too lavish. When you walk in, you feel comfortable."

For locals as well as the city's tourists, the new Surf Club is also a welcome interpretation of Miami's iconic glamour.

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"Miami is inspired by Europe, Latin America and Art Deco influences -- all translated into a specific language," says Dirand.

"The Surf Club was a kind of bubble in the 1930s, during Prohibition when people came for the parties, the sophistication and the spontaneity. That to me describes the DNA of Miami."
