

Chic Metropolitan opens in South Beach

REMARKABLE SEAFOOD AND SPA are standouts in newly updated Miami art deco treasure



ROCHELLE LASH

CHECKING IN

The exciting new Metropolitan by COMO, Miami Beach has an aristocratic pedigree, although the brand isn't well known in North America — yet.

The chic, 74-room hotel opened in March, with front doors on famed Collins Ave., at 24th St., and a beautiful beach out back on the Atlantic Ocean. It brings a classy, exclusive vibe to the rakish party scene of South Beach, with an international flair and rarefied gastronomy.

Designed by Italian Paola Navone, the hotel's decor is a jaunty, contemporary play on an original art deco treasure. Inspired by Asia, COMO Shambhala Urban Escape spa offers Indian head massage, Thai bodywork and Chinese reflexology.

The Met immediately rocketed to the top at TripAdvisor, where travellers have singled out the personal service and sophisticated air. Already, the beautiful people have alighted from Europe, South America and New York to be coddled with five-star everything.

"We are in a residential neighbourhood a few blocks north of the hustle and bustle of Lincoln Rd., so are more tranquil," said general manager Javier Beneyto. "And we have exceptional features for a boutique hotel."

All true. For a small establishment, the Metropolitan produces a remarkable scope of dining, drinking, lounging and spa life: fresh seafood and crudo cuisine at Traymore restaurant; craft cocktails at the Traymore Gin Club; a palm-fringed, infinity-edged pool with sunbeds and cabanas; and a beach club of striking white lounge chairs and sun-brellas set against sand and sea.

The hotel's rooftop of wellness is another distinctive scenario. The open-air hydrotherapy pool has great views of Miami Beach, both seaside and city-side, and a rain shower reproduces various weather experiences: a tropical monsoon, a polar mist and a summer



PHOTOS: COMO HOTEL AND RESORTS

The pool at the new oceanfront Metropolitan by COMO, Miami Beach, has a Zen ambience.



Designer Paola Navone dresses the beds in white and adds pistachio and peach décor.

rain, complete with sounds and lights.

Across the street from Florida's Intracoastal Waterway, the Metropolitan also has its own dock for boaters who would like to stop by for lunch or stay the night. And next door to the property, there are bike paths, beach volleyball and paddle-boarding.

Navone re-crafted the interiors of the 1930s hotel, respecting the spare lines and graceful curves of the art deco building, which has been designated a heritage site by the Miami Design Preservation League.

In the public spaces, Navone used elegant greys and whites — charcoal linen sofas with white edging, a cool zinc bar and Raj-esque white rattan dinner chairs. And everything that is mainly white — such as linen napkins and patio furniture — uses the reverse colour scheme, trimmed in grey.

In the guest rooms, Navone dressed the beds in white leather and added colour pops of Florida-spirited pistachio and peach. It's all a clever, lighthearted mix. Rooms range from a compact hideaway with two twin beds to an extravagant king-sized penthouse suite. All the accommodations are well appointed with Egyptian cotton sheets, iPod docks, satellite TV and fine Shambhala toiletries. Most have water views, either of the Atlantic Ocean and its mesmerizing horizon, or of the Intracoastal with its entertaining flow of pleasure boats.

The Metropolitan is the first North American venture of COMO Hotels and Resorts, a boutique brand based in Singapore with 11 properties in Southeast Asia, the Caribbean and London. The chief operating officer is a former Montrealer, Kuno Fasel, a Swiss-trained hotelier who

was general manager of the Four Seasons Hotel (when Montreal had a Four Seasons, during the 1980s and 1990s) on Sherbrooke St. Fasel still spends time in the Laurentians.

COMO has a stellar reputation for gastronomy. Two of its restaurants have Michelin stars: Nobu at Metropolitan London and Ametsa With Arzak Instruction at the Halkin, also in London.

The Met Miami has a power team, too. Executive chef Jonathan Lane is an alumnus of several Four Seasons hotels; executive pastry chef Emanuel Alves is a French-Portuguese master chocolatier with Michelin credentials; and restaurant and bar manager Sergio Caceres is a worldly sommelier and mixologist who has worked with superstar restaurateur Daniel Boulud.

Even breakfast, with ricotta pancakes and Alves's croissants, is divine. Here is a peek at various menus:

Traymore restaurant: Lane's seafood specialties include grilled octopus, shellfish stew, whole roasted sole with lemon, squid, scallops and peekytoe crab. The desserts — so delicate and zingy — include citrus ice cream, a chocolate-orange fondant and

IF YOU GO

Air Canada, American Airlines, WestJet and US Airways fly non-stop from Montreal to Miami. COMO's Parrot Cay in Turks and Caicos is a 90-minute flight from Miami, and is co-operated with the Metropolitan by COMO, Miami Beach.

Metropolitan by COMO, Miami Beach; Traymore restaurant; COMO Shambhala Urban Escape spa: 855-316-2666, 305-695-3588, 305-695-3600; comohotels.com/metropolitanimiamibeach; 2445 Collins Ave., Miami Beach, Fla.

Price: Ask about a third night free. Low season (until Nov. 30): rooms \$305-\$650 U.S.; suites cost more; including outdoor pool, evening turndown, Wi-Fi, beach club, hot tub and steam room. **Extras:** spa treatments, private yoga or fitness training; resort fee of \$20; valet parking at \$38. Rates increase Dec.-April.

Greater Miami information: 800-933-8448, miamiandbeaches.com.

passion-fruit cannoli.

Pool bar: Pretty young women in short shorts jog to and fro serving iced drinks, lobster rolls, Wagyu burgers, red snapper ceviche and homemade mango Popsicles.

Traymore Gin Club: Tequila, Champagne and scotch, yes, but you can also sample cocktails crafted with 40 artisanal gins and infused with ginger, chili, lime or rosemary. And the bar goes healthy with gluten-free and low-sugar drinks.

COMO Shambhala wellness cuisine: Low in fat, salt, dairy and sugar, mostly organic and strong on raw foods, Shambhala offers kale salads, seaweed soup and seared prawns. Liven Up Your Liver, one of the wellness juices, is a system-cleansing blend of fruits and vegetables.

The Metropolitan Miami is pricey, in part because South Beach is pricey. But guests enjoy beach-inspired luxury, cutting-edge cuisine and intriguing spa experiences. Then there is the most price-less feature of all: cachet.

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