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# A HOTEL WITH HEART

AT THE BETSY, A VISION TO WEAVE COMMUNITY WITH LUXURIOUS SPACES IS CHANGING THE FACE OF HOSPITALITY

Even from the street, The Betsy looks different. A colonial-style hotel amid art deco gems on Miami's Ocean Drive, it unapologetically stands out as its own architectural story. Its classi-

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cally arranged façade with tall columns defining a welcoming portico and flanked by two pedimented massings reflects the Florida Georgian style - the only building of its kind on Ocean Drive.

Originally designed by L. Murray Dixon in 1940, the former Betsy Ross Hotel has been given new life by chairman and principal owner Jonathan Plutzik, who was intent on honoring the landmark's history while modernizing it and making it a truly meaningful space with a sense of community and an authentic commitment to culture.

Plutzik, whose father was American poet Hyam Plutzik, says "The idea of PACE - philanthropy, art, culture and education - was very much a part of our initial vision. My family brings a great inter-

**L. Murray Dixon**  
ARCHITECTURE  
**Les Bellinson**  
RENOVATION  
ARCHITECT

**Diamante Pedersoli,**  
**Carmelina Santoro**  
INTERIOR  
DESIGN







est in things literary and that has served as inspiration. We wanted to be authentic in whatever we did; not a property pretending to have an interest in those programs. We wanted to be connected with people who share our genuine enthusiasm about the PACE space.”

The cultural centerpiece of the property is the Writer’s Room. Rooted in the work and inspired by the legacy of Hyam Plutzik, the room is offered to writers and poets at the final stages of completing a significant work. They stay with the compliments of The Betsy for up to seven days, and are asked to hold a literary salon and reading for interested guests of the hotel and people from the community. Guests have included Poet Laureate Billy Collins, New York University Creative Writing Professor Thomas Healy, FIU Creative Writing Chair Les Standiford and others.



“We’re not the originators of the idea of a writer’s residency,” Plutzik muses. “We were excited about the prospect of dedicating one of our rooms to this function, and being able to connect with literary figures at various points in their careers. We are developing a real reputation nationally and internationally. We have people from around the world wanting to come to Miami Beach to write and hold a salon.”

For the renovation, Plutzik worked with Miami architect Les Beilinson, who had devoted his professional life to the preservation of South Beach’s art deco properties before dying in June 2013. “We weren’t going to make tremendous alterations to the bones,” Plutzik explains. “We were taken by what was there: the big transparent windows, the lobby, the sense of sun and light, the beautiful presence on Ocean Drive. We were obligated, and







**New York icon BLT Steak made their Miami Beach debut at the Betsy. A classic steakhouse-bistro with both indoor and outdoor dining, the restaurant has quickly gained a following among hotel guests and locals alike.**

genuinely interested, to preserve many things, such as the ornamental ceilings, windows and solarium on the roof. The terrazzo floor is an exact replication of the original floor."

Italian interior designer Diamante Pedersoli looked to the architecture for design cues. "The building has a beautiful Old World feeling and a colonial feel that you might find in the Caribbean or on an island in Africa," she says. "Because of the architecture and the lighting, the building really comes out into the street at night, but in the day the opposite happens. The beach, sand and ocean come inside the building because of the massive windows and that sense of transparency."

In the lobby, she concentrated on the notion of transparency, incorporating living palm trees and neutral fabrics in a palette of sand and brown.

Stripes and patterns, straw weaves and raffia, as well as British Colonial pieces, lend the sense of island living. Fortuny white silk light fixtures "give warm light whether you are inside or looking in from the street."

The lobby, Pedersoli says, was a challenge because it incorporated so many functions. "It was a front desk, a lobby, a bar, a lounge and a restaurant, in one open space." Her solution was to partition the restaurant from the front desk with shutter "walls," creating a sense of privacy and delineating the functionality of the spaces.

The guest rooms were a blank canvas. Plutzik was not interested in imitating anything already existing in South Beach. "We wanted to make a different choice," he says. "We consciously said, 'Let's try where we can, to not make the obvious archi-



tectural choice.' We wanted the residential feeling of an apartment, a sense of coming home."

Pedersoli infused the rooms with modern island-inspired design - clean and crisp, and fresh as a tropical shore after the summer rains. She worked with four color schemes, each connected to nature: green, reflecting the foliage and palm trees; ochre, representing the sand and proximity to the beach; coral, inspired by the reefs offshore; and lilac, the color of tropical flowers.

The centerpiece of the room inventory, the Writer's Room, is different than the other offerings. In size, it recalls a New York studio. Its arrangement is focused on working, with a sofa that folds out into a bed, bookshelves, all the technological bells and whistles, and an antique writing desk that once belonged to Hyam Plutzik. The walls are lined







with cork and covered with natural linen trimmed with leather and nail heads, facilitating the pinning of notes, ideas and inspirations.

It is one, though not the only, expression of The Betsy's commitment to community and philanthropy. It is part of the hotel's mission to "foster community while providing a luxury hotel experience." And by hosting literary events throughout the year, the Betsy not only offers an inspirational retreat for writers, but they provide a beautiful setting for them to share their craft with hotel guests and the community at large.

"It really is about coming home," Plutzik says. "We want guests to feel as though they are experiencing something beyond great food and a great bed. We want them to feel like they are part of The Betsy family experience." ▲

**ABOVE:** The Writer's Room is different than the other offerings. In size, it recalls a New York studio. Its arrangement is focused on working, with a sofa that folds out into a bed, bookshelves, all the technological bells and whistles, and an antique writing desk that once belonged to Hyam Plutzik. The walls are lined with cork and covered with natural linen trimmed with leather and nail heads, facilitating the pinning of notes, ideas and inspirations.

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