

## Check in Time for Philanthropy: Jonathan Plutzik '76



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BY DAVID E. NATHAN

While the traditional South Beach hotel caters only to the body — think bronzed bodies at the beach, pampered bodies in the spa, well-fed bodies at restaurants — Jonathan Plutzik '76 believes Ocean Drive is ready for a change.

The Betsy, his two-year-old boutique hotel, seeks to distinguish itself from its neighbors in one of America's trendiest vacation spots by indulging its visitors' minds as well as their bodies. That's why the property stocks its 63 guest rooms with thoughtful reading material selected by a local bookseller, places poetry-inscribed bookmarks, not chocolates, on the pillows at turn-down time and employs Plutzik's sister, Deborah Briggs, as VP of programming and philanthropy.

"One of the stereotypes of South Beach is that there are a lot of youthful people walking around in swimsuits who are not very introspective or engaged," says Plutzik, who retired from Wall Street in 2003 and purchased the former Betsy Ross Hotel with his wife, Lesley Goldwasser, two years later.

"It was our view that this town was ripe for a place that was beautiful but also a little more thoughtful. We are committed to both inner and outer beauty," says Plutzik. "We made lots of choices that go against the South Beach expectation."

Flashy, edgy and in your face the Florida Georgian-style Betsy is not. For the extensive renovation that was completed in 2009, Plutzik hired designers with residential rather than hotel experience to give the place a more comfortable feel. Public spaces are considered art galleries — recent exhibitions include 50 limited-edition prints of rock stars, photographs of the distressed beauty of downtown Havana and pictures from "The Power of the Invisible Sun," a book by philanthropist Bobby Sager '76, Plutzik's Brandeis classmate.

The Betsy's programming ranges from poetry and book readings to developing oral histories to partnering with charitable organizations like Zara's Center, a respite program for AIDS orphans in Zimbabwe. The CEO of the Apollo Theater in Harlem visited to speak about the future of American theater, and the head of the National Book Award discussed the outlook for book publishing in an electronic world. The Betsy sponsored the John Lennon Educational Tour Bus, a free mobile recording studio in which students of all ages make music and video projects, as well as a multi-media initiative to honor local soldiers on Veterans Day.

"We take seriously our role as a catalyst for energized discourse and innovative thinking in this community," Plutzik says. "We want to be community role models and a philanthropic force for good."

The mind-over-body approach seems to be working. The Betsy made Conde Nast Traveller's Hot List for 2010 and is ranked fourth on TripAdvisor's popularity index of 199 Miami Beach hotels.

"It's rewarding that people see and appreciate what we're trying to be," Plutzik says.

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