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**Travel**

**The belle of South Beach**  
By **Stuart White**  
April 07, 2009

Betsy is back. The queen of South Beach finally reopened her doors at the start of last week and is Miami's hottest hotel right now.  
The historical colonial building on world famous Ocean Drive has been forced to wait two years to unveil a stunning \$15 million makeover. Good things are definitely the result.

As Florida's party city continues to ride hip and trendy waves, the stand-out belle of this glamorous neighbourhood stuck with tradition, for behind the grand columns of The Betsy the chaos of the street is replaced by absolute tranquility.

Casual, elegant, sophisticated and relaxing, with no turntable spinning DJ in sight (and it was music conference week). This timesess place, named after Betsy Ross, the woman who stitched the first American stars and stripes flag, has a big heart and soul, and the old girl a near love.

Celebrity chef Lourent Tourondel – America's answer to Ramsay and Oliver – has launched the BLT Steakhouse as the hotel restaurant and together they are the perfect match. The Kobe beef steak (cattle are fed beer and treated to dairy massages) at \$25 an ounce is extravagant, but this was the finest cut of meat I had ever eaten.

And, after all, this is Miami. Home to Miami Vice, A-list celebrities, one of the world's most famous beaches where tiny bikini bungee alongside testosterone-powered man-tanks, Ferraris and Lamborghinis cruise next to vintage Buicks on the wide streets, and pretty much anything goes. The only boundary on flamboyance is the imagination.

Walking around SoBe, as they like to call it here, is like being in a movie – the famous Scarface champagne scene starring Al Pacino's Tony Montana was filmed just down the road from the hotel. Just looking around makes you smile, sometimes laugh – watch out for the big guy with the snake wrapped around his shoulders.

Just lift your chin to absorb the lines, shapes and colours of the super-sexy art deco district architecture. Nowhere else is like this, nowhere.

Espanola Way is lined with mojito bars (Mojito's Lounge stuff real sugar cane in your alcohol and let you write on the wall) and pays homage to the strong hispanic and latino influence, with Spanish being Miami Beach's most commonly spoken language, while Lincoln Road is an outdoor pedestrianised super mall. Call in at El Rancho Grande for a proper Mexican feast.

Also check out the Versace Museum at the home of the former Italian fashion designer who was shot dead on his Ocean Drive doorstep in 1997.  
This crisis will not last forever and everyone should do whatever it takes to get to Miami at least once in their lifetime.

Betsy's customers will no doubt be some of the city's most spoiled. Up on the roof is a cocktail bar, spa, sunbathing terrace, chill-out zone and five star sea view. The hotel also has a private space on that beach with chairs, brolies and safari-hatted butlers, who will go back to your room to fetch anything you forget – like darker sunglasses to fully admire corners of what can sometimes resemble a human zoo, or frozen fruit.

Also pack your trainers as jogging with all the different shapes and sizes on the boardwalk that starts opposite the hotel and lines the sand is part of the experience. This is how to earn those American portions.

The Betsy itself has 20 plush one bedroom suites and 43 stylish deluxe rooms, which qualifies as boutique, positioned around a courtyard pool. All are soundproof to block out the SoBe party outside. Everything is new except the shell of the building, protected deary by city governors, the main reason the re-fit was repeatedly held-up, and the original tiles that line reception.

It was built in 1940 by L. Murray Dixon, the man responsible for the majority of the most famous South Beach hotels built in the tropical art deco style. Today, the exterior stands as the lone surviving example of Florida Georgian architecture on Ocean Drive and is in stark yet graceful contrast to his other designs. It really does look a picture.

But I must take you back inside the show-stopping restaurant to finish. Award-winning chef Tourondel takes care of breakfast, lunch and dinner and you must get a piece of the action when in town. The steak was the best I had ever tasted, perfect, and worth every cent.

And my only complaint about breakfast is it leaves you too full for lunch, especially if you order the house-special popover (a type of Yorkshire pudding full of spinach, ham, eggs, bacon, bechamel and hollandaise sauce).

The walls inside the hotel are lined with iconic rock music art to provide a modern cutting edge to the classic colonial style. Do not be surprised if you are checked in alongside the likes of Mick Jagger and David Bowie when you call in to see Betsy. She will make you feel like a star.

**Factfile**

**Stuart stayed at The Betsy Hotel, 1440 Ocean Drive, Miami Beach, Florida. For more information and best booking rates and packages visit [www.thebestynotel.com](http://www.thebestynotel.com) or email [info@thebestynotel.com](mailto:info@thebestynotel.com)**

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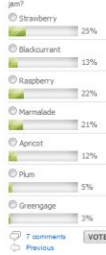
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