



The pool at ONE Bal Harbour

# POSH LIFE

## *Bal Harbour vs. South Beach:* *A TALE of two cities.*

BY NOREEN FLANAGAN



There's a seriously amazing view from the egg-shaped tub at ONE Bal Harbour.

No one shows up for lunch at La Goulue looking anything less than runway-ready. It's the posh marshalling area for the beau monde who gather at Bal Harbour Shops—one of the world's toniest boutique shopping enclaves. The habitués tote their Lanvin, Gucci and Fendi bags with studied insouciance, signalling to all gathered that they move effortlessly in this luxurious world. While they sip

Perrier-Jouët Blason Rosé and nibble on tuna tartare, they maintain a perfect Pilates-honed posture. Between hushed tête-à-têtes, they scan the crowd from behind their oversized Chanel sunglasses.

Sean Donaldson—Miami's celebrity hairstylist—knows these Bal Harbour ladies well. “They have a full-on protocol for their lives,” he tells me. “They know where they’re lunching, and they always have appointments set for their hair and makeup. I love their upkeep. These ladies are highly engineered creatures, and I love them!”

They’re also discreet—unlike their South Beach counterparts, whom Donaldson describes as more “free and flowing” when it comes to revealing details about

their lives. “The Bal Harbour woman isn’t going to discuss taking her private jet to the Bahamas or her gambling escapades.”

But if anyone can winkle out the backstory, it’s a trusted hairstylist. “Ah, yes,” agrees Donaldson, laughing. “When that happens, her stories are more shocking than her South Beach counterpart. They look like they have everything together, but there’s a twist to the stories they tell. They can do things that sometimes even make me blush. My Scottish grandfather always told me that bad girls are good company. While there are naughty girls in South Beach, there are a lot more naughty women in Bal Harbour.”

Not all the “highly engineered creatures” who frequent Bal Harbour come from the 305 area code. This community, which was incorporated in 1946, is the get-away of choice for South American politicians, pop stars and tycoons as well as Russian oligarchs and their label-loving companions. ONE Bal Harbour and the St. Regis Bal Harbour are their hotels of choice because of their service and discretion. “We offer▷



From Gucci to Saint Laurent: Bal Harbour Shops is a world-class fashion haven.



IMAXTREE (RUNWAY)

Shop (Lanvin), spa (Gee Beauty Studio) and dine (Le Goulue): What more does a girl need?



curated luxury,” explains Roxana Medina, the marketing manager for ONE Bal Harbour, as we tour the 260-square-metre penthouse suite. “We’re a large hotel, but we’ve created intimate spaces.”

Even if you’re not staying in the \$11,000-a-night penthouse—which has a private theatre, a designer kitchen and its own lift—you still get a sense of exclusivity because there is only one guest room and one suite per floor. When the elevator opens to our floor, I ask Medina why there are three doors. “That one is for the staff,” she explains. “They also have their own elevator so you’ll never see a housekeeping cart. We want this to feel like it’s your home.”

The mood throughout ONE Bal Harbour is quietly refined, down to the tasteful lighting, elegant mahogany-wood detailing and gallery-quality artwork that hangs in the hallways and rooms. I’m immediately taken with the piece by Jay McCafferty in the entryway to our suite. It’s a series of circular burns on paper that the artist created using the sun and a magnifying glass. The other scene that captures my imagination is the egg-shaped tub (bubbles by Molton Brown) that overlooks the Intracoastal Waterway and the seemingly never-ending beach that extends up the coast.

## MIAMI HOUSEWIFE FOR A DAY...

**8:30 A.M.** My morning starts with a fruit salad and cappuccino poolside at ONE Bal Harbour.

**10 A.M.** Off for an “Aeroga” session on the beach at St. Regis Bal Harbour with Tracie Wright Vlaun and Chris Vlaun of V Art of Wellness. Tracie developed the yoga+aerobics workout while she was travelling the globe as a model. “In the yoga world, this is considered controversial,” she tells me. “You can’t play Rihanna in a yoga class! You can’t work out in yoga!” Before we begin, Chris reminds me to take off my runners. “Rubber soles don’t conduct energy, which means you’re not grounded,” he says. I then get a quick lesson in earthing, a wellness trend that involves spending 15 minutes a day in one’s bare feet on sand or grass. “The earth is negatively charged, and humans, because of exposure to electromagnetic fields, are positively charged with electrons, which leads to inflammation,” explains Chris. “If you’re not in contact with the earth, you develop disconnected syndrome.”

**11 A.M.–3 P.M.** An hour later—fully reconnected—I head to the hotel for a shower before catching the limo service to Bal Harbour Shops for lunch at Carpaccio with Cheryl Stephenson, the mall’s >

To Alicia Keys’ “Girl on Fire,” Tracie Wright Vlaun puts us through our Aeroga paces. I embrace the earthing trend (below).



Sean Donaldson’s hero product for beach hair: Kérastase Spray à Porter



marketing director. Over the resto's signature crispy margherita pizza and iced tea, she speaks fondly of the Whitman family, who opened the retail hot spot in 1965 and who remain vigilant that it maintain its unique cachet—not to mention its impressive sales figures. (In 2012, it hit a record high of \$2,729.60 sales per square foot, which is six times the national average.) We later tour the shops, stopping in at Bottega Veneta to look at (ogle) the Stone Croco Medium Cabat bag, which retails for US\$61,500. "There are only three in the world, and it's the only one in the States," says Stephenson. "The Bal Harbour Shops are known for bringing in items that can't be found anywhere else. That's part of our allure." It's also why the Swiss jeweller Fawaz Gruosi recently opened his latest de Grisogono boutique here. "I have wanted to be here for years, but nothing was available until now," he tells me over champagne at a party to celebrate the opening of his store. This fall, Gruosi—who is famous for transforming black and "icy" diamonds into highly coveted gems—will bring in 20 exclusive pieces he has created to celebrate his two decades in the business.

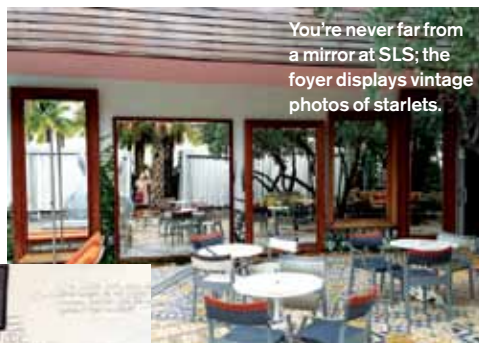
**4 P.M.** Next—like any lady who lunches—I'm off for an oxygen facial at Gee Beauty Studio, the only day spa in this posh playground. "A lot of our clients are from Brazil, and they're very diligent about their beauty regimens," my facialist, Pearl Armenta, tells me. "They're a little obsessed—but it's worth it because they have beautiful skin." Now that I've been earthed, feted with champagne and gently caressed with an oxygen wand, I'm ready for my late-afternoon beauty nap. It's not easy trying to be a "highly engineered creature"!

**6 P.M.** I'm off to the St. Regis Bar for its nightly champagne sabering ritual before heading to the hotel's J&G Grill for the chef's tasting menu. We start with Laurent-Perrier bubbles paired with a black truffle pizza with fontina cheese, followed by hamachi sashimi in soy dressing. My favourite savoury dish is the soy-glazed wagyu short ribs with apple-jalapeno purée and rosemary crumbs. But my day ends with a dessert that wouldn't touch the lips of any carb-obsessed Miami housewife: salted-caramel ice-cream sundae covered in peanuts, popcorn and chocolate sauce. ▷

The de Grisogono pearl-and-black-diamond bauble that launched Fawaz Gruosi's career



The open-air courtyard at Bal Harbour Shops



You're never far from a mirror at SLS; the foyer displays vintage photos of starlets.

## PARTY TIME...

If Bal Harbour caters to the beau monde, South Beach is all about the demimonde. A hedonistic herd of beautiful people are preening poolside at SLS when we check into the Philippe Starck-designed hotel on the famed Collins Avenue art-deco strip. Ayo Akinsete is the

hotel's new manager, and the London-born, former New York-based city boy is still adjusting to beach-town life. "I'm not wild about Miami, but the SLS is its own world," he tells me. "We try to be a little bit

hip and cool, and our interactions are a little bit organic." The decor is signature Starck—eclectic and whimsical—starting with the foyer, which has a collection of vintage photos of starlets surrounded by Spanish and

## MIAMI'S NEW HOT SPOT

Hipsters (yes, they exist in Miami) head to Purdy Avenue's **Panther Coffee** to get their java fix, **Icebox Cafe** for coconut butter cake, **Pubbely** for fried chicken and **Eberjey** for their bikinis (which give new meaning to "teenie") and bras (up to an F cup).

Chinese writings. "It was done by a French graffiti artist; I don't know what it means, but it's really cool," says Akinsete. At this point, the doorman pipes up that some of it is text from *Don Quixote*. Chivalry isn't something that Stephan—who mans the door to the hotel's Hyde Beach, a 750-square-metre public party space—worries about when he's deciding who gains access to the nighttime haven. "I turn away 40 people a day," he says. "If you are a guy and you bring your girl and you see 10 guys with tattoos and they look at the butt of your girlfriend, you're not going to be happy about that, so I keep the crowd upscale and very nice." Instead of curated luxury, the SLS delivers a curated crowd.

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## ELLE ESCAPE



## BLACK BOOK FROM MIAMI'S QUEEN OF THE NIGHT

If you want to know where to dine, shop or be seen, Tara Solomon's got your back. The PR maven honed her contacts while penning the popular *Miami Herald* column "Queen of the Night." When she has a craving for...



The Forge's \$10-million reno and \$5-million wine cellar are almost as impressive as its pistachio soufflé.

**VINTAGE COUTURE** "I make a beeline for C. Madeleine's, where the 1980s Thierry Mugler power suits, *Mad Men*-era cocktail dresses and Chanel chain belts are in pristine condition."

**WINE AND STEAK** "I go to Miami Beach's landmark the Forge for a glass (or two) of Super-Tuscan Tignanello, from the high-tech Enomatic wine bar, and a rare filet mignon."

**A DAY AT THE BEACH** "I wear a flowing caftan, heels and giant sunglasses for the chicest beach scene in Miami: Soho Beach House, where one can have grilled octopus and a crisp rosé delivered oceanside to a private cabana on the sand."



Soho Beach House's seaside playpen

**A NIGHT ON THE TOWN** "I take a disco nap before getting my glam on for WALL at W South Beach, the trendy lounge and celeb hangout where the likes of Lenny Kravitz, Jennifer Lopez, Demi Moore and Leonardo DiCaprio go to play."

**OLD-FLORIDA COMFORT FOOD** "I order the alligator and oyster empanadas at Florida Cookery at the James Royal Palm Hotel and eat them alfresco by the pool."

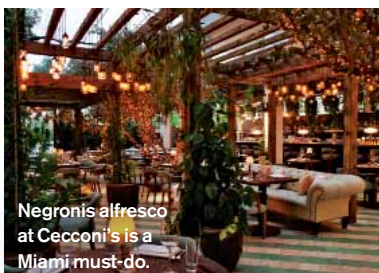
**MID-CENTURY MODERN FURNISHINGS** "I stroll the blocks of antique shops on NE 125th Street, where Hollywood Regency-style lacquered furniture and turn-of-the-century ceramic foo dogs are among the many retro temptations."

**PIZZA** "I forget calories and lose myself in the black truffle pizza at Cecconi's—it's so decadent, it has been described by some as life changing."

**THE PERFECT LATTE** "I find the nearest Panther Coffee for an oversized cup of freshly roasted and brewed nirvana made with unsweetened almond milk." □



Craving frogs' legs in lime leaves? Head to Florida Cookery.



Negronis alfresco at Cecconi's is a Miami must-do.