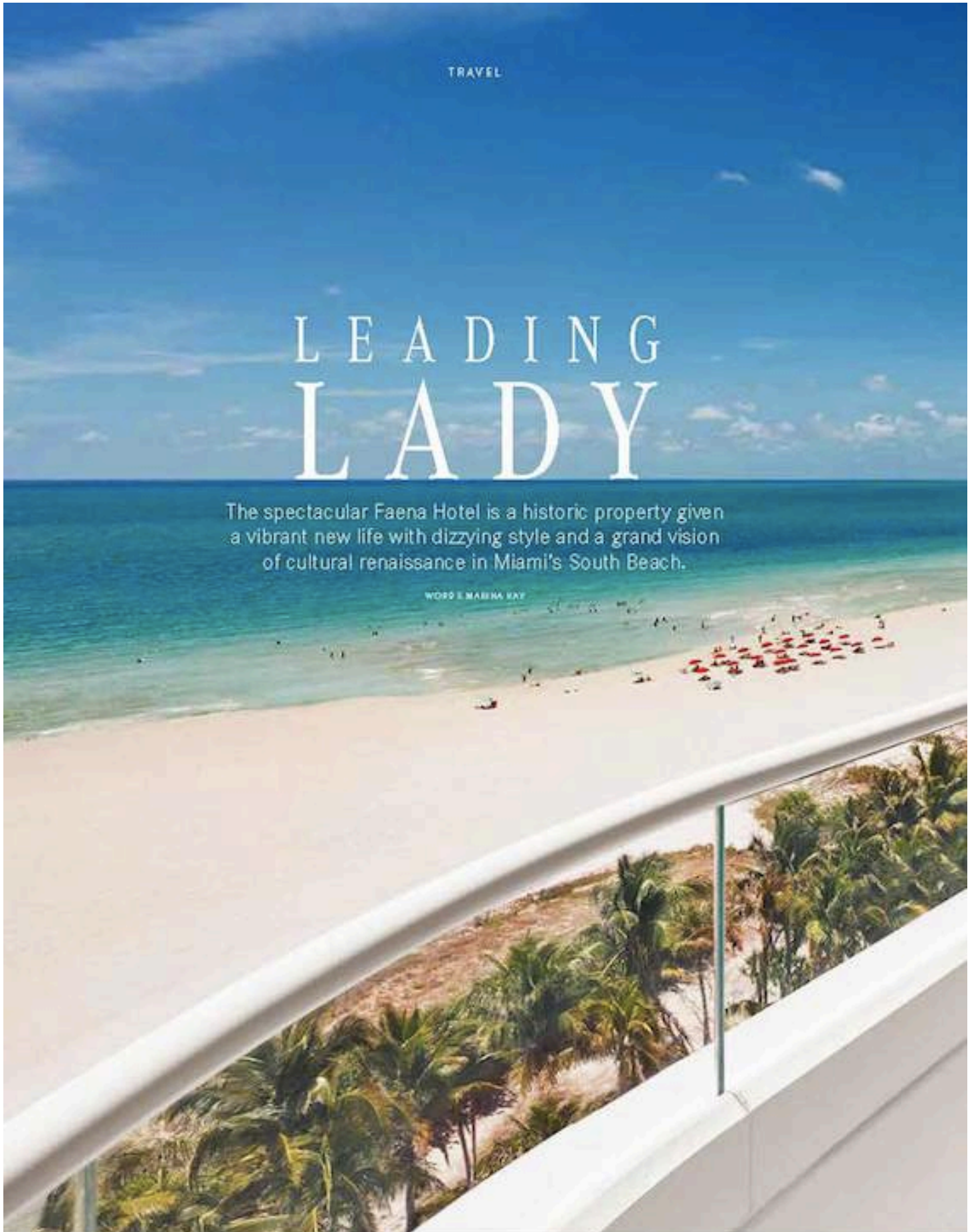


TRAVEL

LEADING LADY

The spectacular Faena Hotel is a historic property given a vibrant new life with dizzying style and a grand vision of cultural renaissance in Miami's South Beach.

WORD & MARINA RAY







From the outside, Faena Hotel conjures all the charm of a glamorous past: Art Deco design, geometric outlines, an elegant porte-cochère oftentimes sporting a Maybach. Instead of succumbing to the usual South Beach minimalist style, this interior layers high-gloss appeal inspired by old-school glamour and big-budget film productions such as *Moulin Rouge!*, *The Great Gatsby*, even *Romeo + Juliet*. Picture wild tropical murals, massive gold pillars and gilded art. Add a dash of Buenos Aires, lots and lots of red, and you'll end up with one of the most talked-about properties in the world.

Before its reimagining, Faena Hotel existed as the Saxony, built in 1947 by George Sax and designed by Roy F. France. It was considered the first luxury hotel of its time, offering air-conditioning, sweeping ocean views and lavish rooms. The so-called "Queen of Collins Avenue" hosted Hollywood's elite, including Marilyn Monroe, Dean Martin and Frank Sinatra, who sang to sold-out audiences. However, when Las Vegas lured performers with the promise of higher pay, Miami Beach languished, and over the decades, started to look more *Miami*

Wice than American Riviera. But in December 2015, the once-neglected hotel icon was finally resurrected at a fantastical reopening.

Reimagining the district

For all its majesty, the Faena Hotel is the cornerstone of a larger billion-dollar development, Faena District. Named for visionary Argentine fashion designer turned property developer Alan Faena, this mixed-use area aims to spearhead a cultural renaissance. Officially designated a Miami Beach district in 2014, it stretches four blocks along Collins Avenue, from 32nd to 36th streets, in once-rundown Mid-Beach. Attaching his name to a project of such scale and prominence isn't a first for the Argentine entrepreneur: in 2000, he and Russian philanthropist and billionaire owner of Warner Music Group Len Blavatnik partnered on rejuvenating a decrepit part of Buenos Aires - the industrial docklands of Puerto Madero. The area has become one of the most vibrant residential and cultural parts of the city and the duo hopes to emulate that success in this version of utopia, or "Futopia," north of South Beach. S

(clockwise) In the 1950s the Saxony, today reimagined as the Faena Hotel, hosted Hollywood greats. Now its creatively palatial interiors, along with highly attentive staff, make guests feel like royalty.





A POTENT ATTENTION GRABBER

It takes a special car to raise eyebrows in Miami, America's party town where conspicuous wealth and luxury abound. In this sub-tropical climate it's got to be open-topped; and with a shiny sports car to be found in just about every driveway, it's the fat bass burble of an AMG-fettled V8 that turns heads.

With its low-slung chassis and Panamericana grille, the two-seat Mercedes-AMG GT C Roadster has the extrovert style but can also back it up, with 410kW and 680Nm emanating from a twin-turbocharged 4.0-litre V8 engine. Riding on AMG RIDE CONTROL sports suspension with adaptive damping means that whether you're rolling down Collins Avenue, crossing the iconic Seven Mile Bridge to Key West or cruising up the coast on the A1A, you're as comfortable as you are conspicuous. And should tropical heat turn to tropical downpour, the triple-layer fabric roof deploys in just 11 seconds at speeds up to 50km/h. The AMG GT C Roadster is also ideally suited to conditions in Australia, where it will go on sale later in 2017.

Faena Hotel's opening and inauguration of the namesake development was timed to coincide with Art Basel, the US's premier art fair. Designed by the world's creative minds, the development includes Faena House, Foster + Partners-designed apartments with 42 residences spread across 18 storeys (the penthouse sold for a record AU\$78.4 million in 2015). Then there's Casa Faena, a bohemian guesthouse inspired by 1900s Spain; Faena Bazaar, a retail space renovated by Rem Koolhaas's OMA; Faena Forum, a spectacular domed exhibition and event space topped by an oculus, also designed by OMA; and Faena Art, a non-profit arts organisation headed by Ximena Caminos, Alan Faena's wife. And don't forget the automated high-tech parking garage, Faena Park.


Hotel Hollywood glamour

As for the hotel, redeveloping a historical property with grand ambitions is no simple task. That is why at the Cannes premiere of *The Great Gatsby* a few years ago, Faena tapped Australian film director and producer Baz Luhrmann and his wife, four-time Oscar-winning costume

designer Catherine Martin, to oversee the creation of his vision.

Faena says he is a "walker of his thoughts" - that inner narrative now realised looks like a pastiche of Deco styles knitted with Luhrmann's cinematic touch, from the cockatoo wallpaper on the suite's oversize balconies to the design of the cabaret-style 150-seat Faena Theater, home to an original cabaret show called *C'est Rouge!*.

The hotel also features a substantial collection of world-class art: Damien Hirst's 24-carat-gilded, 10,000 year-old woolly mammoth skeleton - *Gone But Not Forgotten* (2014) - is displayed by the outdoor pool, just steps from the bar and the beach. Luckily it's boxed in glass strong enough to withstand a hurricane. Luhrmann described Faena's vision for Miami as brave and unique. But what impression does the Argentine visionary hope to make? "I think 100 years from now, people will walk by Collins Avenue and see the big minds of Miami Beach of the past," he says. "We walk around the Fontainebleau [Hotel], we walk around all these incredible buildings, and see how they created a land of fantasy ... we went back to that mentality."

Faena may be dreaming of the future, but, for now, his focus is on Miami Beach. 



(left, top to bottom) The hotel is home to Damien Hirst's work *Gone But Not Forgotten* (2014); while film director Baz Luhrmann brought a cinematic quality to the interiors. (opposite) Red hot in Miami.



Hot spots & new openings

Miami's South Beach revival means if it's hot, it's happening here:

1

MUSEUM

The Bass Museum of Art is set to reopen in 2017 after an expansion by architect Arata Isozaki. The first exhibitions after its relaunch are said to include mixed-media artist Ugo Rondinone.

THEBASS.ORG

2

CABARET

C'est Rouge!, the old-world, new-age live cabaret show choreographed by Blanca Li, performs weekly at Faena Theatre. Afterward, a select crowd gathers at the intimate Saxony Bar for cocktails.

FAENA.COM

3

DINING

The Sarsaparilla Club, an Asian-inspired dining spot headed by chefs Janine Booth, an Australian, and Jeff McInnis, is located within the Shelborne, an Art Deco hotel emblematic of Miami's signature style.

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