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48



South Beach Spirit

Texan interior designer *Lauren Rottet* revives an old Miami classic by embracing local rituals and opening up ocean views.

During its started seven-decade history, Miami's Royal Palm hotel has experienced an impressive evolution. Not long after opening in 1939, the beachfront property served as a makeshift military facility for U.S. Army officers and trainees during World War II. It transitioned into a glam hotspot in the 1950s and '60s, gradually fell into disrepair in the '80s, and experienced a rebirth through a reconstruction at the turn of the century. But the Art Deco icon, now three separate buildings, lacked personality, polish, and amenities befitting its stature—until its recent, two-year-long renovation under the James brand by Houston-based Rottet Studio.

To capture the spirit of the site, principal Lauren Rottet and her team first turned their attention to denizens of the stormy Florida city. "We watched the way people strolled along Collins Street, looking at the buildings and each other," she says. The designers observed morning routines—leisurely breakfasts, exercise regimens—and saw the transformations when guests changed from bathing suits to after-hours garb. "I imagined Virginia Woolf meeting Jean-Michel Basquiat, returning to the James, and continuing to talk the night away about art and poetry."

Cultural mash-ups of this sort became the blueprint for her warm, seaside take on modern design. Mediterranean pastels complement soft white walls and rich wood accents, while some features of the original Royal Palm were preserved and reused (the first reception desk is now part of the coffee bar). Rottet also made representing the city's burgeoning creative scene a high priority. "We reached out to local gallery owners and art schools," she says. "We actually have an original painting in every room." Each of the 399 guest rooms, all of which include private walk-out balconies, now also has a clever feature to capitalize on the prime waterfront locale. "We realized that if we placed mirrors strategically, all rooms would actually have an ocean view—granted a reflected one, but still a peek at the ocean." —JORDAN KUSHINS



49

