



Interview with Jonathan Plutzik

Kathy Hersh: We have Jonathan Plutzik, the Chairman of the Betsy Hotel. We're recording in the library of The Betsy Hotel on July 13th, 2019. My name is Kathy Hersh. I'd really like to start out, Jonathan, talking about The Betsy Hotel and its mission and the uniqueness of the place. Can you explain that to us?

Jonathan Plutzik: Sure. We came down to help a friend, actually, in 2004, with a property that he was looking at at 29th and Collins, the historic Royal Polo Hotel across from what is now the addition. It's now a Hilton Garden Inn. We got a bit involved, but while we were down here, we saw this structure, the Betsy Ross Hotel sitting where it sits on iconic Ocean Drive. Colonial by architecture. We can chat more about that. We were just enamored by it. It was, sadly, or fortunately, in bankruptcy at the time. We went into bankruptcy court and bought it. We ran it for a little while as we conceived our plans, and we asked ourselves what if we built a luxury hotel that was built around what we ultimately call PACE, philanthropy, arts, culture, and education.

We reached that conclusion, frankly, because we sat on the front porch, and we saw what and who walked by. The stereotype of Miami Beach, whatever that stereotype is, just young people, just old people, people not wearing enough, superficial people, only sun and sand and fun, actually, when you sat on the front porch, and I'm a believer in the Peter Drucker school of management, which says you learn a lot by walking around, so called management by walking around, if you just sit there and see who goes by, you learn a tremendous amount about who's actually here and whether the stuff you're reading is actually telling you the truth.

What we saw sitting out front was this incredibly diverse crowd, and I mean diverse in every way you could measure diversity. All the traditional ones, and then a bunch of others less traditional. It was people that looked interesting and interested and young and old and affluent and not, and they were clearly here, it seemed to us, not just to go to clubs or pursue superficial things. That was our judgment.

I fortunately come from a family of writers and musicians by background. That's kind of what was important in our home, so this kind of fit like hand in glove. What if we built this hotel, built around



that, and not just did it kind of in a superficial or offhanded way, but what if we really stopped and thought about how we could integrate it into everything that we do within reason. So, we proceeded.

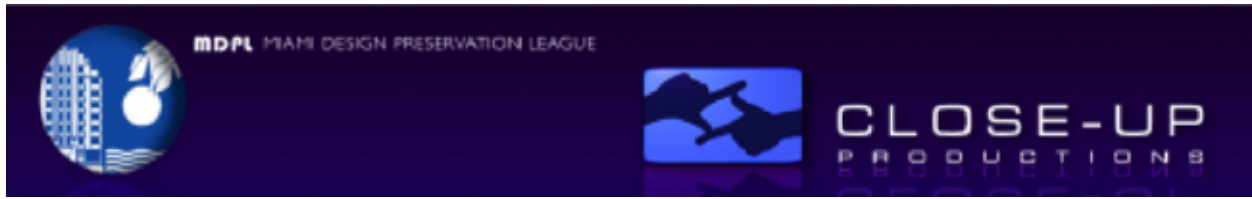
We knew we had to build something that was luxurious in orientation and service oriented in commitment, but what if we married that by ultimately deciding to build a library. Or, what if we, in fact, put libraries in every room, as we have? What if we had music seven nights a week, as we do? On a night like tonight- in the day, we're sitting here today, we'll have live music in our lobby, and we'll probably have 150 people listening to zarzuela, interesting form of opera, fun, on the other side of our building, in our gallery.

Miami Beach, it's July. What are 150 people doing listening to opera? Actually, if you present these interesting options to people and you communicate it enough, there are an astonishing number of people interested in doing things beyond the predictably superficial. That's been our mission. I don't want to be pretentious about it. It shouldn't be uptight. Last night, we had opera, actually, as we often do, pop up opera, it's sometimes called popera, in our main lobby for about 45 minutes. The regular pianist stopped, and we had three young musicians associated with a music festival which I'm happy to talk to you about singing opera in the lobby for 45 minutes. Although we promoted it a tiny bit, mostly, a surprise to our guests. That's just fun, stimulating.

Even if you're not a lover of opera, you can take 45 minutes of it and probably be enriched by it, and if you love opera, you're really thrilled, because you didn't expect this or pay for this, and here it is in front of you, and is this really Miami Beach?

Well, in fact, it is Miami Beach. While I'm giving you a long-winded answer, our interest in this cultural orientation of course connected deeply to what we think was happening in Miami Beach already. All these cultural institutions, some were already here. Some were in development, but so much has happened since Art Basel arrived 17 plus years ago. I don't want to give Art Basel all the credit for stimulating the community that was already here, but if we look at those last 17 plus years- the 18th is this December, if I'm not mistaken- astonishing things have happened here in the last 18 years.

Interviewer: What are some of those astonishing things aside from Art Basel?



Plutzik:

In most cities, if you went to New York or Boston or Philadelphia, you would find institutions that were built 50 and 75 and 100 years ago. Our New World Center, the home of the New World Symphony, which is a 10-minute walk from here, was built less than 10 years ago. We have one of the great concert halls in the world, I believe. The New World Symphony's been around 35 years under Michael Tilson Thomas' direction, but Mr. [phonetic] [06:21] Arrison and then others supported the building of this building, astonishingly, in Miami Beach.

FIU created the Miami Beach Urban Studios, which is right at Lincoln Road and Washington Avenue, a great facility run by John Stuart with diverse programming and important educational mission in, again, the last few years, but the BASS Museum and the Wolfsonian Museum. Less than five years ago, the city gave the Colony Theater back to legitimate theater, and Miami New Drama resides there under the direction of Michel Hausmann, and what they're doing there is extraordinary and serious and innovative, and the Jewish Museum and the Holocaust Museum and the Miami City Ballet. These are all things that are a 10-minute walk from here.

Then, I usually add, claiming probably a little bit unfairly, that because the Arts Center and the Perez is just across the water, that it's kind of almost part of Miami Beach, too. You almost don't have to leave Miami Beach to get to it. Those are institutions that have been built in the last- well, the Arts Center maybe 12 years or so, but just barely 10 years. Perez, shorter. The Frost Museum right next door to it, five years. To think that all these things that I've described, or at least many of them, have all happened in that 18 year period since Art Basel arrived, I can't imagine it's happened in any other city in America. If you're a serious person, and you're coming to Miami Beach, you have choices that are quite extraordinary.

I'm going to give you two more examples which are a little bit Betsy-centric, but are really community oriented. Just this past January, we moved two arts festivals into the Betsy. One is O, Miami, which was started brilliantly by Scott Cunningham, originally funded by the Knight Foundation and Alberto Ibarguen, and then about a year and half ago, we engaged in a conversation with a request for the Knight Foundation about becoming the home to O, Miami, and last fall, the Knight Foundation gave them a big, I don't want to say going away gift, because it'll be a continuing

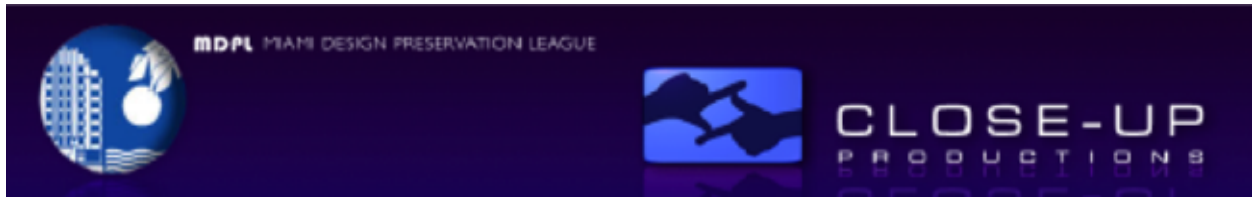


relationship, but among their arts gifts was a million and a quarter dollar gift to O, Miami to move to the Beach. In fact, their offices are resident to the Betsy. We've been there host hotel for, I don't know, maybe six or eight years. Now, they're here on the Beach, in the Betsy, by the way, spreading their poetry word all over Miami Dade County. Their mission hasn't changed, which is to touch every citizen in Dade County with poetry during National Poetry Month, but they're doing it here on the Beach.

Also, this January, the Miami Classical Music Festival has moved into the Betsy. Founded five years ago by another brilliant musical entrepreneur, Michael Rossi. Michael had this idea, a young conductor associated with the Kennedy Center, had this idea, Miami needed a summer music festival. That's the great thing about entrepreneurs. They needed a Miami summer music festival. I should insert the word classical. He began building, first at FIU for a year, then three years at Barry, and now resident of the Betsy, resident in Miami Beach. A festival that's built upon students from around the world.

This year, 25 countries are represented. These are young conservatory students and beyond, meaning some of the best young artists in the world. We have nearly 300 of them staying in Miami Beach this June and July. They're going to be doing 75-ish concerts in Miami Beach, opera, piano, orchestra, and chamber music. This past July 4th, just a few days ago, for the first time in the park, we had a full orchestra, 60 people, with the fireworks. There are crowd estimates under way, but somewhere, I'm going to say, between three and five thousand people showed up to listen to this full orchestra with opera. They're doing their events, and I'm really grateful for the support of our fellow members of the community here, the Miami Beach Women's Club, Temple Emanu-El is hosting them for opera, the superintendent of schools has given the high school, where they teach every day, because these master teachers come in to teach these students. They're popping up on Lincoln Road, etc., etc.

Sort of the cherry on top of this description I'm giving you is just this year we've had two major festivals, one poetry related and one music related, move to Miami Beach, and the embrace that the community has given these two festivals, and City Hall has given them, is reflective of this substantial interest, this powerful interest in building the cultural story of Miami Beach.



Interviewer: I'm sitting here thinking about how Miami Beach's demographic changed after World War II because of all the training of the soldiers that took place here, and they thought okay, now let's go live there, that perhaps with this cultural influx of all these young people, we'll find a future here of young musicians where they can thrive and the arts can thrive and is already thriving.

Plutzik: I've been telling a story just the last two days. I won't reveal her name, because it would be unfair, but we had a friend who was staying here, actually working on a TV project, and she came down for a week or two with her family, a prominent author and publisher from New York. We had a drink the last day or two. We know each other quite well. She opened her mouth, and the first thing she said is, "I want to move here. I want to move to Miami Beach." Now, this is a New Yorker, New Yorker, New Yorker with all the stereotypical words attached to whatever that means, sophisticated, immersed in the New York scene, but she was just taken by what's happening here. I'm not saying she will, but just the fact that she felt that.

We have a big writer's program at the hotel called the Betsy Writers Room, and the Betsywritersroom.com is the website. We've had now nearly 850 artists stay in the hotel. Probably 800 of them have been writers. We just set out to set aside a room. We don't sell it to the public. We only put writers in there or other artists of various kinds, composers, fashion people, photographers, etc. It's been fascinating. We, again, are deeply committed to diversity. When we say diversity, again, traditional measures, sexual orientation, gender, race, ethnicity, but for us, it also includes like where they are in their career. We'll have Pulitzer Prize winning authors and we'll also have people who have not published their first thing but have evidence of their skill some other way. There's a screening. They need to be talented people, but it's not determined by did they win the big award yet.

Having those 850 people in town- by the way, we leave them alone. We're deeply committed to supporting artists and letting them do their work, but we do obligate them to do one community-facing event, because we don't want them to be in hiding here.

Actually sitting in this library, the usual place is 5 o'clock Thursdays in the library, wine and cheese, and the writer talks about his or her work, does a little reading, chats with whatever community members show up, and it's community meaning hotel guests and



people in the neighborhood. One of the things that we are so interested in seeing is how these people who come from all over the world, many of whom have never been to Miami Beach- if you say to people, the Keys, it's oh, yeah, yeah, Hemmingway. That's where writers go. You say Miami Beach, not much of writers go to Miami Beach. That's what's in peoples' heads, but we have a really rich writing community in Miami Beach and of course in greater Miami. We have these great educational institutions, great writers, great poets, etc. It's great fun to see how creative these people become.

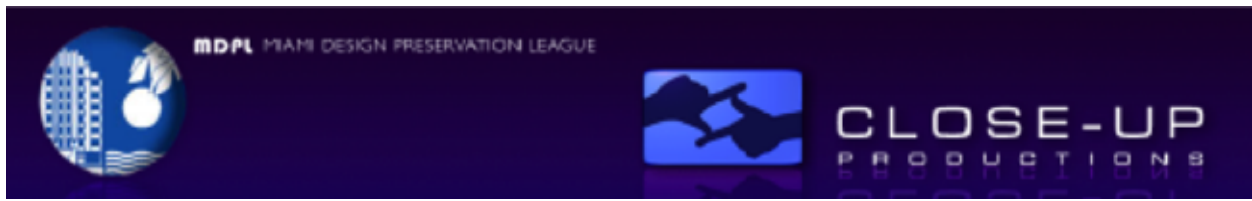
Interviewer: Can you give us a specific example of somebody that might be known or a Pulitzer Prize winner?

Plutzik: I'll say an interesting one, which is... one is Oskar Eustis. Now, Oscar is the Artistic Director of the Public Theater in New York. Oskar is one of the most prominent theatrical people in the world. He was here a few years back because Tarell McCraney, one of our great native sons who's Chairman of the Yale Playwriting Department, but of course won the Oscar for Moonlight.

We were involved because he had written an adaptation of Shakespeare's Antony and Cleopatra set in Haiti, and he had brought it to the Gable Stage, and they said great, great, great, love to support it, but you got to go find some more money, support from somebody else. Tarell being an extraordinary person did. He got the support of the Public Theater in New York and the Royal Shakespeare Company in Stratford and then proceeded to mount this play. It was performed in New York at the Public. It was performed at Stratford in the UK, and it was performed here at the Colony Theater.

We had just bought the second building, and we haven't yet gotten to a discussion of our complex here, but we had just bought the Carlton. It had not yet been renovated, and it wasn't quite as expensive as the Betsy yet to stay in, so we were in a position to offer it to the company, which were mostly Royal Shakespeare Company actors, to stay for six weeks to get ready to perform this play, this adaptation.

I had a drink with Oskar Eustis at the bar. He had never been to Miami Beach before. His first comment to me- and again, I want to underscore one of the most important theatrical people in maybe the world, he was here along with his counterpart at the Stratford



and the head of the Gable Stage to come to the opening of Tarell's play.

Interviewer: You're talking Stratford, England, not Stratford, Canada.

Plutzik: Stratford, England. Royal Shakespeare Company. The home turf. Ground zero of Shakespeare. These were the guys. By the way, wonderful play with this Haitian influence. A combination of Royal Shakespeare actors and some local actors as well. They were very talented. I sat and had a drink with Oskar, and we were sitting at the bar, and he's saying there are books of poetry in my bookcase in my room. What's with that? Just had a feeling sitting in our lobby, and I'm claiming this not for the Betsy, I'm claiming it for Miami Beach, peering out the window at those palm trees and the beautiful sunshine and the ocean breezes, and he was feeling some of what so many of our now 850 artists feel when they get here, those that don't know it and are here for a week.

Now, some of them hide in the room. I say hide meaning do most of their productive work in the room, but you'll see a lot of them on the front porch stimulated by the people walking by and those ocean breezes and the palm trees and all that, or sitting in our dining room and observing what's going on. I've talked to writers about that. Many want to hide, and many others actually want to work in public as long as the public noise is just kind of a low level din rather than someone doing a conference call next to them on their phone. That wouldn't work very well.

Interviewer: Or next door to the Clevelander.

Plutzik: I have deep respect for the Clevelander in a different way, but yes, right next door to the Clevelander. They can find solace and quiet, and we're lucky here at the Betsy because we have created- one of our things, one of our ideas is to create places where you can hide. Again, this library we're sitting in. People go on vacation, and on vacation, they have to get away. The vacation itself is just the first step. I say they have to get away with their partner or from their partner depending on how the vacation's going, or with their family or from their family, and I mean that kind of in a positive way. You just need to go find quiet sometimes.

It's quiet, again, sometimes with your partner, to have a chat without the din of all the other stuff, and so we have a lot of little



places like that, and our writers, I think, revel in that, and so do our guests generally. It's part of what we're selling, and it's a part of Miami Beach, again, not just Betsy-center play, but there's so many places here in Miami Beach to hide once you know where they are, and that runs counter to how we stereotype Miami Beach. We stereotype it as being just this constant din of noise when in fact, yeah, there are places where that occurs, and you can go find it, and I can tell you where they are, but there are actually a lot of beautiful places to be by yourself with your partner or from your partner, all that stuff.

Miami Beach, I think we have a lot of work to do, by the way, to project that story much better than we have. We're not telling that story sufficiently. Those list of cultural institutions I spoke about earlier, we don't talk about them, enough of us, in the same breath. I referenced opera tonight, and we're worried if we'll have enough room to seat all the people who are coming in the middle of July. I always take those pictures, and I try to send them to some folks around town and say no, no, it's Miami Beach. There's a great yearning for stuff. Watching the July 4th concert, which I wish all of us who hang out in Miami Beach could have been at, and I had the good fortune of being there to see thousands of people show up, not one of them from my perspective leave, opera, 60 piece orchestra, of course, fireworks toward the end. It was Miami Beach magical, and we all sit there hoping that- because it was the first year we did that with the Miami Classical Music Festival. We're hoping it's the first of many of that sort.

Interviewer:

One of the things that I've heard people talk about, and we did an interview with Judy Drucker before she died, and her fame of bringing Pavarotti to the Beach, she stepped into a void and probably helped create the stage, but its ownership of people who actually live here who aren't philanthropically inclined to give their money back to New York where they came from or whatever, but to fund and support stuff right here in Miami. Do you see that as a big factor, like the Knight Foundation, for example?

Plutzik:

A hundred percent. Actually, one of the things that I often talk about, which is, I think, one of the big and important transitions going on in the nature of our community is that there are a lot of people who, from New York and Boston and Toronto and Philadelphia and Washington and other place, who not so long ago simply thought of Miami Beach as the place they went for a little bit in the winter. The transition thing, which I've seen in my interaction with people, is this



is their other home now. I'm generalizing to make the point, but they're actually so much more interested and connected to Miami Beach than they were 10 years ago. I'm talking about a particular category of people that I think you're referencing. They're just more deeply interested in what it means to be here 30, 40, 50, 60 percent of the time. Yes, some of it driven by tax changes, but I think, frankly, whether it's age- by the way, it's what happens when you get here.

We have some very dear friends who live across the street and also live in Virginia Beach who are here for the week. They're usually here in the winter, but they came down for a week. They're inner lobby, they're lovers of music, so they come and listen to our jazz every night. This is clearly their other home, and they feel as connected to it and want to talk about it and support it and figure out how to make it better and do all the things you do in your community that a lot of those people not so long ago, five years ago, six years ago, 10 years ago, only thought of this as a- again, I'm not talking about the people who are already permanent residents here, but these people who just thought of it as a place where you came, you had some nice dinners, and maybe saw a concert or went dancing or did whatever you did, went to the beach, but it was really you sort of touched down and you left. Now the roots are much, much deeper.

You referenced the Knight Foundation, which I need to spend a moment on. Obviously, the resources they have are extraordinary, but more important than the resources in many respects is the creativity that they've used to deploy those resources and, certainly in the recent generation of Alberto Ibargüen's leadership, Victoria Rogers now is VP of the Arts, Ben [phonetic] [24:52] Schull before her, the creativity again, even though it's a big institution, the kind of unstructured willingness to sort of look at big and little ideas is really powerful.

I reference the O, Miami, the poetry festival, and that's a great example. Alberto Ibargüen loves poetry and loved Scott's idea. O, Miami often talks about itself, and I'm Vice Chairman of that Board, so I hang out there some, which is now here. He says it's not a poetry festival. It's actually a festival about Miami that has poetry, which is actually a lovely way to think about it. This is really about Miami, and we do Miami by infusing it with poetry. The Knight Foundation, Alberto saw Scott's- and Scott had no record as



anything other than being a smart young person- saw this little idea that Scott had. Scott has built their support and not others, one of the most important poetry festivals in the country, period.

I always tell the story, I went to a public hearing discussion that the Knight Foundation held a few years back about one of the challenge grant programs, and there are all these young, social entrepreneurs gathered in a bar somewhere downtown, and they were asking questions of Matt [phonetic] [26:22] Hagman, who has now left O, Miami. Ran for congress, one of the great citizens of greater Miami.

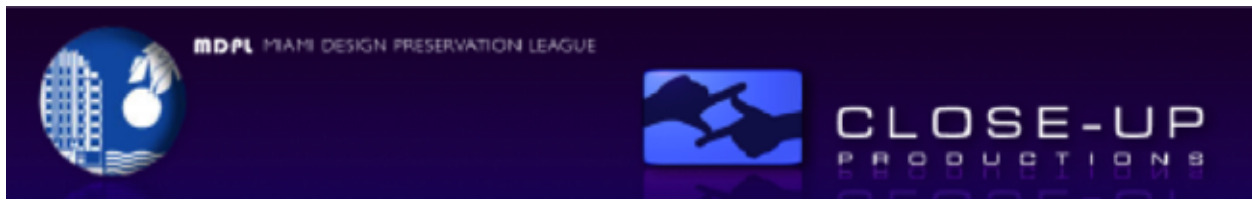
They were asking questions, can we put in an application for X? Whatever you want. Can it be this big? Whatever you want. Can it be this big? Whatever you want. We only have one rule. You have to make your application, it's got to be either 125 words or less, or 150 words or less, and that was powerful because you didn't need to be a big organization with a grant writer to put your idea down on paper.

Now, maybe to get to the next stage, you would have to do some more work, but they were basically throwing the doors open and saying if you're a creative person with a creative idea, we're not going to put any impediments in your way.

They were giving away five million dollars, I think, for that particular challenge grant, and people were saying can it be 150 dollars, and they said yes. Can it be 10 thousand? Yes. Can it be five million? Yes. I'm using that to illustrate the power of the Knight Foundation, clearly in the arts in particular, they've understood, Alberto Iburgüen's understood, his team has understood what it means to support the arts and what arts mean to changing a community. This grant that O, Miami just got at year end, challenge grant to support, in effect O, Miami 2.0 as it moved into the Betsy and began to think about its future in a slightly different way with the same mission, O, Miami was part of, I think, a 37 and a half million dollar package of arts grants. Incredible.

Interviewer: How has O, Miami's basing itself here affected the Betsy?

Plutzik: Well, clearly, we're affected because they're physically here a lot, which means they hold meetings here. Of course, prior to their arrival, we already had had 800 writers in residence. Because we've been working with O, Miami for a long time, some of those writers in residence were collaboratively chosen with O, Miami



because, again, we've been the hotel for the festival since the beginning, every April already, we were the place where all the poets came, many of them to stay during that very rich national poetry month, intense period for O, Miami, where they put on a myriad of programs all over Miami Dade County.

Interviewer: Did they put on programs here at the hotel?

Plutzik: Oh, yeah. We're bursting at the seams with things poetic.

Interviewer: There were poets walking around spouting poetry in the lobby? Or-

Plutzik: We certainly had readings going on here. We have two pieces of public art that we installed when we expanded into this building, which I can talk some more about, but one of them is, we call it The Orb. It's a egg-like shaped connection. It's the bridge between the two buildings that we have, the Elmer Dixon Building and the Henry Hohouser Building, and we project on that orb, that round thing. I'm going to give you a cute example of the kind of things that O, Miami does, because they're really, really creative, like really, really creative. They want to touch everybody in Dade County with poetry in surprising ways.

This year, among the fun things they did was they created fake fruit stickers. You know when you buy an apple in a grocery store, or an orange, it has a sticker on it. They created fake ones with poetry- by the way, to FDA standards, so you could- and then went into the stores and replaced some of the stickers with their poetry stickers. Then, they do social media around it, and it gets people to- our big, round egg, our orb, which looks like, in some ways, a big piece of fruit, we projected during National Poetry Month those images of those stickers, so it looked like we had a big apple, only a huge one, between the two buildings, and the consequence of that is people, our connector, our orb, our bridge, has become a destination for tourists and residents day and night to come and take a picture under it, to experience it. There's something about it that-

Interviewer: It's different.

Plutzik: It's different. It stimulates people. It's what public art's supposed to do. The most famous picture on Instagram- I learned this recently from one of my children, who is, of course, younger than I am, and



smarter, the number one Instagram image ever posted was a image of an egg. There's something about the shape of the egg, not unlike the orb, just the purity of- and even just a round ball, people just want to stare at it. At night, we illuminate it, and during holidays, we project on it, often poetry, other forms of art, etc. Again, more narrowly on your question, yeah, during National Poetry Month, there's a lot going on here. Many of the poets are staying here, and we're doing events of various kinds here. Of course, again, the mission of O, Miami is to touch everyone in Miami Dade County with poetry, so it's happening all over the place, often very creatively.

This year, the Miami Beach Botanical Gardens, I don't think it's the first year, but it's the first year I went, they did poetry in pajamas for young kids. I went with our two dogs who live on property, our two golden retrievers, who had their pajamas on also. There were like 400 children in the Botanical Garden of Miami Beach in their pajamas at two o'clock in the afternoon, and this was a reading that the kids did, meaning no parents got up to read. You had literally six and seven and 10 and 12-year-olds reading poetry in their pajamas in the Miami Beach Botanical Garden. That's an example of sort of fun engagement to make poetry accessible.

Then, of course, obviously, the very distinguished poets showing up doing more serious things. By the way, and I don't want to speak for O, Miami, but O, Miami is very serious about its mission but doesn't take itself too seriously. There's more of the unusual than there is of someone standing at a lectern just reading poetry.

Interviewer: Poetry can be fun.

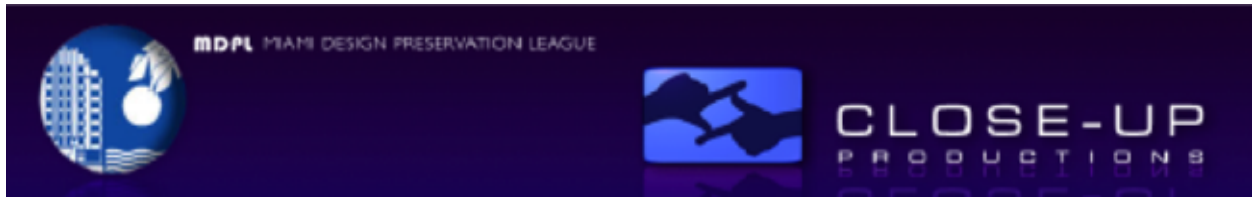
Plutzik: Poetry can be fun.

Interviewer: Let's talk about the renovation of the building. We've done an interview with the architect, Alan Shulman, who's very proud of what's been accomplished here. Tell us, if you can, in a few words, basically what you did in terms of connecting two buildings.

Plutzik: Sure.

Interviewer: That's really fascinating. Were you the first to do that on the Beach?

Plutzik: We were the first to connect two buildings, an Ocean Drive-fronted building and a Collins Avenue Building. The Dream Hotel, which is



on Collins connected north/south to Collins Avenue-facing buildings. The Tides had announced their plans to do it, but we actually completed our before they did. They are now connected as well, The Tides on Ocean Drive, which is closed and under construction, with the renovation and construction of what they now call Tides Village behind.

Interviewer: This was an answer to not going vertical, right?

Plutzik: Correct, which wouldn't be permitted. Also, it's a way to further stimulate, engage, elevate these communities. People talk about Ocean Drive kind of in isolation, and one of the great things that's happening at the moment, and I've been lucky to be a participant in these conversations, we're talking about how to connect Lincoln Road and Espanola Way and Ocean Drive in very pedestrian-accessible ways. They should be unified, not separate. We're actually quite far along. In some respects, 80 percent of what needs to be done is already done, and now it's the final 20 percent of connecting these things.

The Collins Avenue, Ocean Drive thing is an important, I think, community stimulation opportunity. We are able to do it because we are not only on Collins and Ocean, but we're also on 14th Place, which is an alleyway, half of which is pedestrian only, and half of which is vehicular, too, but we built a restaurant on that alley. One of the discussion points about Miami Beach is what we do with all these alleys. I don't know if it's true, but someone told me one day we have seven miles of alleys. I don't know if that's true, but I believe it is in Miami Beach.

Of course, because we're running out of places to do things and we have some really interesting alleys, and other cities around the world have done much better than we have utilizing their alleys, and we're on a T-junction, 14th Place and what is called Ocean Court, the alley that runs behind the buildings between Ocean and Collins, Ocean Court terminates at 14th Place, so we have an opportunity and have taken advantage of it to create energy there that you couldn't create otherwise. We built the restaurant, we've lit it correctly, we're in conversations about lighting more of it. We just were with the city yesterday talking about the best way to do that. The city is very excited about all that stuff.

The connection of the two streets is a- not only these two streets,



Ocean Drive and Collins, but making all of our connections of our major sites, if I can call them that, as pedestrian-friendly as possible is a really powerful thing.

Interviewer: There's a lot of walkup business, then, for the restaurant in the alley.

Plutzik: Absolutely. Actually, there's a lot of walkup business... one of the interesting things to understand is how much walkup business there is on Ocean Drive and Collins, how many people leave their hotel and, frankly, even people leaving their condominiums. They know the place very well. They say let's walk down Ocean Drive. I'm not sure where we're going to eat. It's not unusual for us to end up with two or three times the diners at dinner than we had reservations for, or more, because people just show up, they look at the menu, and they see if they can get a table. That spontaneity very much exists on Ocean Drive already.

Interviewer: Is that spontaneity part of the excitement of this whole area?

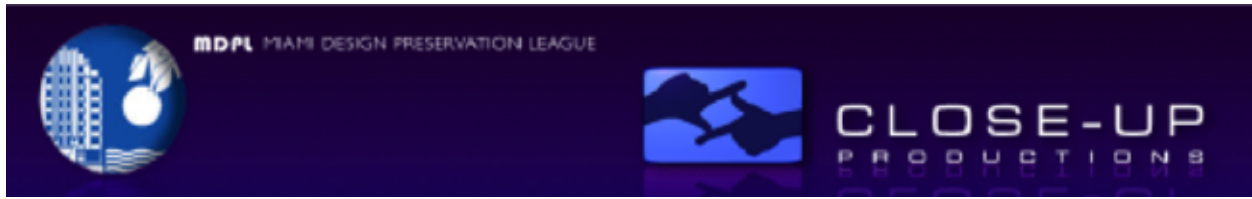
Plutzik: Absolutely. The energy. The Super Bowl is coming up February 2nd, 2020. We know, history tell us, that the football game is going to be played over there someplace, some stadium. By the way, when the football game gets played, a bunch of people run over there who have tickets and watch it, and everyone else will go back to their respective places and watch it on TV, but ground zero for Super Bowl is Ocean Drive. This is where all the big networks are building their facilities.

Interviewer: For the Super Bowl.

Plutzik: For the Super Bowl. This is where everybody wants to be.

Interviewer: This is the party place, the celebration place for that event, they're thinking.

Plutzik: Exactly. It's back to the reason I'm answering the question that way, because you asked about the energy and the stimulation. Again, I want to go back to the very first question I answered about what we saw that caused us to do the arts and culture thing. When we use the word party, I want to be careful. There's clearly partying going on here, and in certain sections, it's more party-oriented than others, but actually- and we saw it Memorial Day weekend the last two years, where we had the Air and Sea Show. I'd never been to



an Air and Sea Show myself. The last three years, I think this is the third year. It's an extraordinary thing, but it's extraordinary, [inaudible] [39:00] it's extraordinary, but extraordinary about who it attracts. All of a sudden, because of the Air and Sea Show, you saw families and you saw a diversity that was really expanded.

By the way, for Super Bowl, we have some very good restaurants on Ocean Drive and we have some maybe a little bit less good restaurants on Ocean Drive, and we have some more party-oriented places, and we have more family-oriented places. There's a tremendous amount of renovation that's going on, frankly, in anticipation of Super Bowl and more, but really, the central point I'm making is yeah, yeah, the game's going to be over there, but they're going to come back over here.

Interviewer: Celebration, I think, maybe is the word.

Plutzik: The celebration. By the way, the pre-celebration, the post-celebration, but also trying to- why do people gather here for the fireworks? People want to gather, fireworks, July 4th, that's a very demographically diverse crowd, young people, old people, etc. People like to be in a place where there's human energy. You know you're going to find it on Ocean Drive. The responsibility we have is make sure we create and maintain an environment that's safe and inviting and ethical and embracing and clean and all that stuff, but our role in being the central address for Miami Beach is not diminishing. It's increasing.

I've been sharing with people, a big European travel research company recently did a survey, literally in the last 30 days, I'm happy to share it with you, the 10 most important places to go in Greater Miami. Ten most important places to go in Greater Miami. Number one, Ocean Drive. Number two, the Art Deco District. That's the same thing. Number four, Lummus Park Beach. It's right here. Number six, the Beach Walk, which I think refers to both the boardwalk and the rest of it. Here's this company advising tourists around the world we're the 10 most important places in Greater Miami to go. Four of the top six are outside our front door here in Ocean Drive.

I'm only sharing that with you because this is the central address when people say South Beach, when they say Ocean Drive is a brand that's known around the world, people love it. That doesn't



mean we don't have issues that we're trying to address to make it better, but we wring our hands sometimes, woe, woe is me, and we should wring our hands because we've got to worry about making sure it gets better and better, cleaner and cleaner, safer and safer, but there's been half a billion dollars spent by private sector people in recent years to renovate the hotels of Ocean Drive. What we've spent. What the Estefans just reopened the Cardozo Hotel spent. The Tides is underway. Twelve Hundred Ocean is underway. The Celino is about to open in the former Park Central location. Twelve hundred used to be The Palace, and the Palace moved and is now in a renovated location thriving really fantastically, and more and more.

Of course, below Fifth Street, which we don't usually lump together entirely with what traditional Ocean Drive is, but of course, we have several of the highest grossing and most important restaurants in the country. You know who they are. They're Prime 112 and Joe's and [inaudible] [42:48] and Milos and all the great chefs in the world. This is our little neighborhood. Again, we're very much the crossroads of the world for Miami Beach and South Beach. We're ground zero. Kind of no matter what is happening in town, people are always asking how do we include Ocean Drive in that celebration?

I bumped into an Asian family about an hour ago. I was walking our dogs in Lummus Park, and the Asian couple walked up with- I don't know if they were all their kids, but about six young Asian kids, and I'm highlighting Asian because we entered into a conversation. They were petting the dogs, and I said where are you from? We're from Hong Kong. Oh, that's lovely. Yes, we're on a cruise. We have one day, we're not spending the night. The cruise has arrived. We're on our way to Toronto to spend the end of our holiday and then go back to Hong Kong. They're spending the only few hours they have in Miami on Ocean Drive. That's what happens.

Interviewer: Tell us about the ratings that you've received recently from Town and Country UK and- brag away.

Plutzik: Thank you, thank you. We've been very lucky. Look, we reside in one of the most interesting and innovative and competitive hotel markets in the world, one of the great tourist destinations, but also one of the great hotel markets, and according to Trip Advisor, there are probably 210-ish hotels in South Beach or in Miami Beach of all different shapes and sizes. Most of the 210 are not really relevant



to us, per se, because they're very small, serve a different market, etc., but we have some really important hotels here, as you know. Earlier this week, Travel Leisure annually announces their list of the best resort hotels in Miami, and for the third year in a row, we were named among the top two hotels. Three years ago, we were number one, the last two years, we've been number two to the Setai, so we're battling it out.

Then, yesterday, Town and Country UK issued their list of the best hotels in Miami, and we were named number one. Obviously, you can't win every time, but we're just thrilled, one, I think that there's a recognition of what's happening on Ocean Drive, because again, as people get concerned on how we get better and better on Ocean Drive, the idea that people around the world are prepared to say, as US News and World Report recently named us one of the top 10 small luxury hotels in the world. That was maybe two months ago.

The idea that Ocean Drive owns one of the top 10 small luxury hotels in the world, or that Town and Country says we're the number one hotel on Ocean Drive runs counter sometimes to what we think of as happening on Ocean Drive, which is more a party place, but, actually what's happening here, the condominiums that are across the street are very, very expensive, this is a place of sophistication, and we're really proud for Ocean Drive, obviously proud for ourselves. We're also proud that these places and the people that stay here have recognized that this thing we tried to do, this interest in marrying luxury and service with books and music and arts and culture, not just in a passing way, but in a deeply immersive way, was important. Actually, when you look today at the travel press in general, hotel press, what it feels like every article is written about is about experiential travel. That's what everyone's writing about.

Interestingly, if you go to- it's sometimes a dirty word in the hotel business, if you go to the Airbnb site, an Airbnb, you think of as- I think of what they were set up to sell beds. I just want a bed. Give me a bed someplace and I'll pay you X dollars. I'm going to show up at someone's apartment, I got a bed. By the way, they're not so present here because we have restrictions, etc. If you go to the Airbnb site today, what they lead with is yeah, you can say I want to book this dates, but their page is dedicated to what is called Airbnb Experiences. What they're selling, actually, is they know to get people, you actually have to say if you go to this place, you'll be



able to take a pizza making class, or you'll be able to listen to this music, or you'll be able to do a canoe trip.

This idea of immersing our Betsy experience in this arts and culture commitment- and not just what happens on property, but saying to people the Miami Music Festival is happening over here, or John Stuart at the Miami Beach Urban Studios is doing an extraordinary thing over there. Or, oh, by the way- which is something we haven't spoken about and part of our missing story as a community, is Miami Beach and Miami is one of the great educational locations in the world. We don't think of ourselves as an education town, but we have Miami Dade College and FIU, University of Miami, and Barry, and, and, and, and. We're the fourth or fifth biggest college town in America. Things happen when you have that many college students and that many faculty around. I think that is a critically important piece of what is making and will make the most successful cities of the future.

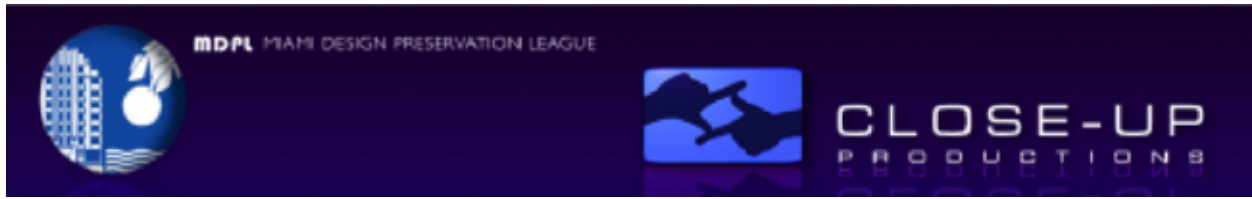
If you don't have that education element- Tom Friedman of the New York Times has written quite a bit about this issue. What are the elements to make the next great city, and one of them is you better have big institutions of higher learning. We're blessed. We've got them, and we have some extraordinary leadership in the public school sphere with Alberto Carvalho and the people who are running our universities, [inaudible] [49:29] Padron and the president of FIU and [inaudible] [49:35], all these people. I don't want to leave anyone out or take them in, but that's a piece of our puzzle that also we don't talk about quite enough. Again, I credit FIU- by the way, FIU, Miami Beach Urban Studios is at FIU, the Lawsonian's FIU, the Jewish Museum is FIU, so think about what that institution's doing in our little Miami Beach community which is so powerful.

Interviewer:

Let's talk a bit about the history of this place. Looking back, we've heard that one of the first black conventions, if you will, took place in this hotel. Tell us what you know about the past history of the Betsy.

Plutzik:

Sure. As we all know, Miami Beach was not a place of great receptivity to everyone in our community. It was exclusionary with respect to Jews. It was certainly exclusionary with respect to African Americans. History that none of us should be proud about. In the early 1950s, I believe it was 1952, there was a black ministers conference called to be held here in Miami Beach. I don't



know actually the exact location of where the convocation was, but I know that these black ministers had booked the Betsy as where they were going to stay with their spouses. When the announcement of that occurred, there was an uproar in the community that we shouldn't be letting people of color stay here.

By the way, I always say this to people. I read this, my first piece on this issue in Jet Magazine, which of course is the black press, and so I rely on it as being maybe more accurate and more comprehensive than what I would have read in the white press at the time, because they were covering it for the black community.

Interviewer: This was 1952?

Plutzik: I believe it was 52. If I'm wrong, it's 53, but I believe it's 52. Anyway, so bomb threats, threats of other kinds, and so the ministers announced that they would not stay here. I'm really proud by distant association, because I had nothing to do with it, that whoever was running the Betsy at the time made a public announcement that, frankly, if these people can't find an alternative place to stay, we would still welcome them here to the Betsy, to stay here, notwithstanding those threats. There is a story also out there in the ether that among the things that the management of the Betsy then asked for some help from the- how to put it politely? I guess the organized crime community to maybe have a few of their guys sitting in the lobby properly armed to protect the facilities.

By the way, the Betsy had, in what we now call the B Bar, one of our downstairs, discreet, out of the way places, apparently had at the time quite a large numbers running, bookmaking operation going on, because Miami Beach certainly had a rich history in the numbers game. Mr. Lansky was here and others. I guess we proudly did our part on the numbers side and, more proudly, we did our part in trying to do, again, long before me, make an important statement around who should be permitted to stay here.

We have hung an exhibit, actually, currently in the lobby. We have nine art galleries in the Betsy, and we use the word gallery loosely, because it's just places we hang art.

We think of ourselves more of a gallery than a hotel in terms of when we hang art, but in our LT restaurant, LT Steak and Seafood at the moment, we have a Muhammad Ali exhibit up, and although



there are some very well known large pieces, Muhammad Ali with the Beatles, Muhammad Ali knocking Sonny Liston out, these are iconic sports photos, we also have 20 images which were only shown to the public recently and now are hanging here found in the archives of the Louisville Courier Journal showing Muhammad Ali training in Miami Beach. It's him running on Washington Avenue, Fifth Street Gym, all that stuff. Again, as we know, the complete story tells us he could train here, but he couldn't stay here. Often, he'd run across the bridge to get here to train with the Dundees at Fifth Street Gym but then go back to Overtown as he did on the evening he won the heavyweight title fight for the first time from Sonny Liston.

Interviewer: He celebrated it at the Hampton House, which is what the play was about.

Plutzik: That's correct.

Interviewer: Of course, he was a poet, too.

Plutzik: Well, if I may, our other big piece of public art at the Betsy is something we call the poetry rail, which we also hung and is hanging in our 14th Place Alley. We have our orb there, which we project on, and we have kind of a swooping, permanent installation called the Poetry Rail. It's the work of 12 poets who influenced Miami literature over the last 100 years. We go from those long deceased, Langston Hughes, to more poetry present people, Richard Blanco, who I'm sure you know actually grew up in Miami and was the first openly gay poet to read at a presidential inauguration for Obama's second, good friend of ours.

Interviewer: Has he ever stayed here?

Plutzik: He has, indeed. We've got another event coming up with Richard. He's moved back to Miami. He's teaching again at FIU. We actually did a really powerful event with him not so long ago. We did a memorial for the Pulse Nightclub shooting out in our alley, where we projected on the orb images of the young men killed that night, and Richard was present, had written a special poem for that, which he read in the alley as these images were being-

Interviewer: That was on the anniversary?

Plutzik: That was on the anniversary, I think the first anniversary. I can't



think exactly when it was, a few years ago. We are actually flash. Let me come to Muhammad Ali and then I'm going to go to Richard Blanco. We put together this poetry rail. We pick these 12 poets, and trying to reflect diversity of time, age, place, and we were literally a day or two away from pressing the button to fabricate what it is a permanent exhibit. It's in metal, so you don't get like a second chance to do it, and whatever day of the week it was, Muhammad Ali died. My son called me up, who works with me here at the Betsy and said well, Dad, Muhammad Ali. Miami. Poet, boxer. We got to put him on the poetry rail. We added him at the 11th and a half hour.

The full quote of his, float like a butterfly, sting like a bee quote is there. By the way, in its entirety, it's off the charts, off the charts. Of course, his work- poetry is intimidating to some people, and so to have immersed- and I view him, by the way, as a really serious poet in so many ways, Muhammad Ali- but to intersperse him, which I think of as kind of a ode to the common man, he's one of us in a way who expressed himself in poetry, and of course, one of the most famous people in the world alive and since his passing- it's great that people can hunt for his piece in the poetry rail as they hunt for other writers as well.

Richard Blanco, not yet announced publicly, but we're very excited for Art Basel, our Art Basel exhibitions are going to include an [inaudible] [58:21] of Andy Sweet's work including some new stuff. We're working with Ed Christin on that. We're very excited about. In connection with that, on opening night, Richard Blanco is writing a poem for that opening, and we're also collaborating details to be finalized. We do a lot of work with the Amernet Quartet. If you know the Amernet, the Amernet is a quartet, these are four musicians on the faculty based at FIU, and they travel the world. I hate the term world-class, but I'm going to say world-class string quartet. They travel the world playing.

They're greater Miami's string quartet, and they concertize regularly here at the Betsy. They're great friends of ours. The two longest serving members of that are the cellist, Jason Calloway, and the violist, Michael Klotz. They're really extraordinary. We think that Jason, again, who's the cellist, and Richard and the work of Andy Sweet are going to be put together in an evening of poetry, originally composed music, and the photography. We're very excited about that.



Interviewer: This is opening night of Basel.

Plutzik: It'll be opening night of the- it's for Art Basel. It may not be the opening night of Basel. It'll be the opening night of the exhibition.

Interviewer: Of the exhibition.

Plutzik: Of our exhibition. That'll be in our Basel week-

Interviewer: Okay, during. During Art Basel.

Plutzik: Yeah, during Art Basel.

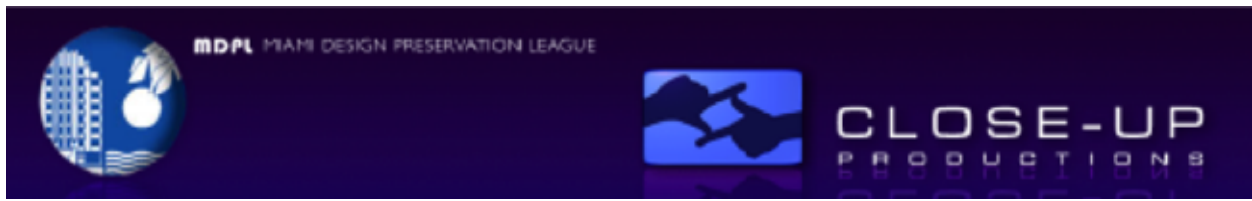
Interviewer: Let's get back to the history.

Plutzik: Yep, sorry.

Interviewer: You mentioned the NOW convention that happened.

Plutzik: Yes. Another little piece that we're proud of here, it got some energy in the past year as we were talking about luring the Democratic convention to Miami again- we weren't successful, although we got the first debates, which was fun. The 1972 convention, that's the well-recalled both the Republican and Democratic conventions were in town. During the Democratic convention, I presume only- I haven't checked to see whether they were hanging around during the Republican convention at all, but Democratic convention, the National Organization of Women, which had only been founded a couple years earlier, and the National Women's Political Caucus, which I think was first meeting- or this was the first gathering in a significant way, certainly at a convention, was here at the Betsy during the Democratic Convention.

The iconic figures in the women's political movement, those early figures, and I am going to embarrass myself if I leave somebody out, but the important figures, the Bella Abzug's of the world and the Shirley Chisholms of the world, and others who I shouldn't forget, were gathered here. Of course, I smile, because the writeups of that refer to a time, frankly, in South Beach generally, but certainly at the Betsy, it didn't feel quite as clean and luxurious as it does today. I think dingy was a word attached to the Betsy references and probably bug-infested or something at the time. We're very proud of that history and actually hoping that we can-



and we'll find a way some day to memorialize that with an appropriate, permanent kind of national historic places plaque, because it deserves mention when we think about the arc of empowering women evolution. That was certainly, in that arc, a really powerful moment.

Interviewer: Well, human rights in general with the previous example in 54 of allowing black ministers and their spouses to stay here. By the way, dingy was a word applied to just about every hotel along the beach in those days in the 70s.

Plutzik: I guess being open was a badge of honor, because some couldn't manage to get open, but we're happy to have been physically present.

Interviewer: Architecturally, let's talk about the pool in the sky. That's one of the things that just amazes me about this place. Do people come just to see that?

Plutzik: It's hard to come and see it because of just the kind of security we like to have here. We, of course, don't want people just wandering into our building. I think one of the challenges, frankly, in the hotel business is to provide a secure environment for the people who belong here. Certainly, because we do a lot of events here, so we have guests who are staying here, and of course, we also have community events on property, both philanthropic and commercial, and so as a consequence, many people coming to visit the site in anticipation of that. Yes, people want to see that, and they're all, obviously, stunned by it.

Interviewer: Did you win any architectural awards for this?

Plutzik: The big award that the Miami Chamber of Commerce gives out for the architectural thing of the year, whatever that was, we got recognized for that.

Interviewer: What was it like working with Alan Shulman?

Plutzik: Alan's just a really smart, smart guy. I do want to tip my hat, before we get to Alan, if I may. We worked on the Betsy original renovation with another Miami Beach architect named Les Bailenson. Les was our architect for the Betsy part of this, and I want to make sure I tip my hat because he's passed away. He was ill and eventually had,



sadly, a short illness and left us.

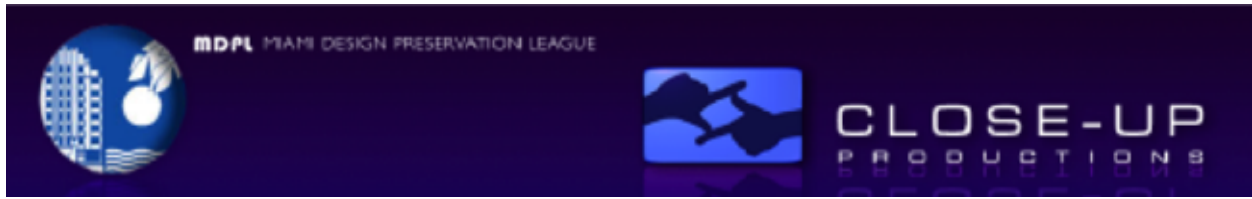
As we contemplated acquiring the Carlton and trying to do some interesting things and find somebody that we felt identified with our interests, Alan, historic preservationist, professor, professional architect, Miami Beach-centric, before I knew him as a human being, I knew the description of him. I felt very lucky to work with him and to see his creativity and to- we wanted to build, and I'm proud to say we see it in the faces of people who come visit, people who are in town trying to decide where to hold their weddings, they come and they visit five or six hotels, and they get to us at the beginning or the end, wherever, in the middle, and they see our little Betsy on Ocean Drive and they kind of think there must be 30 rooms back there and maybe a space or two.

Then one of us takes them on a walkaround of our 25,000 square feet of event and food and beverage space and 130 rooms and rooftop spaces and views and dramatic architectural spaces, because we don't have any ballrooms with folding doors. We don't have any air doors anywhere on premises, so every space is architecturally unique.

Andrew Harper, the big travel writer group named this room we're sitting in, the library, about a year ago or so as one of the 10 most beautiful private hotel guest spaces in the world. You always ask yourself how do you make that list, because all of a sudden, the list pops out and you're on that list. There must have been some travel writer who said you should check this space out.

A little bit of bragging, but the reason I mention it is more that this room makes a lot of people really happy, as an example. It's open 24 hours a day seven days a week. You need your room key to get in at night just as a matter of security. We don't want people walking around. I'm saying maybe it's the most popular space in the building, not because there are a lot of people in here. Usually, there are two or three people in here, but there's something about walking into the room that makes people happy. By the way, they shop for books. They shop- I use that term loosely, because they're not really busying them. They're picking a few to take back to their room to read.

Nothing gives us more pleasure than seeing somebody with three or four books in their arm and smiling, including their kids. We have a children's section here. Over here, we have our summer reading



list of books that we got through our partnership with Mitch Kaplan at Books and Books. I will say we pick the books. We take that stuff seriously, although we respect Mitch's opinion about everything. When we set out to do the book thing, one of the first meetings I had was with Mitch 15 years ago or whatever it was to talk about this idea that we had and what we wanted to go do. Of course, really welcomed his partnership, and he helped us populate all, now 130 rooms, with books, so everyone finds 15 or 18 or 20 books in their room, their library.

We had this funny idea that we were going to sell the books, and we came to realize pretty quickly that people, in a sweet way, kind of take them. They take them out and they read them, and they kind of put them in their suitcase and they take them home. A few people show up at the front desk and say I'm taking the book, is that okay. It's kind of an inside joke with us.

We're like happy. It's part of our little contribution to literacy or something, but the funny thing is, of course, when people take books, they often leave books behind. Our joke was that- the serious thing is that we occasionally have to go cleanse all of our libraries in the room because people assume that whatever books are in there, we put there. When we had 50 copies of 50 Shades of Grey, because everybody was leaving that book and taking something else, but it's fun.

The only book that's in every room is The Betsy, Harold Robbin's The Betsy, which is, kind of again, one of our don't take ourselves too seriously. That was the hardest book to collect. We bought lots of dogeared paperback versions of it and whatever copy we could get, we stuck in the room, and it's pretty racy. Pretty racy.