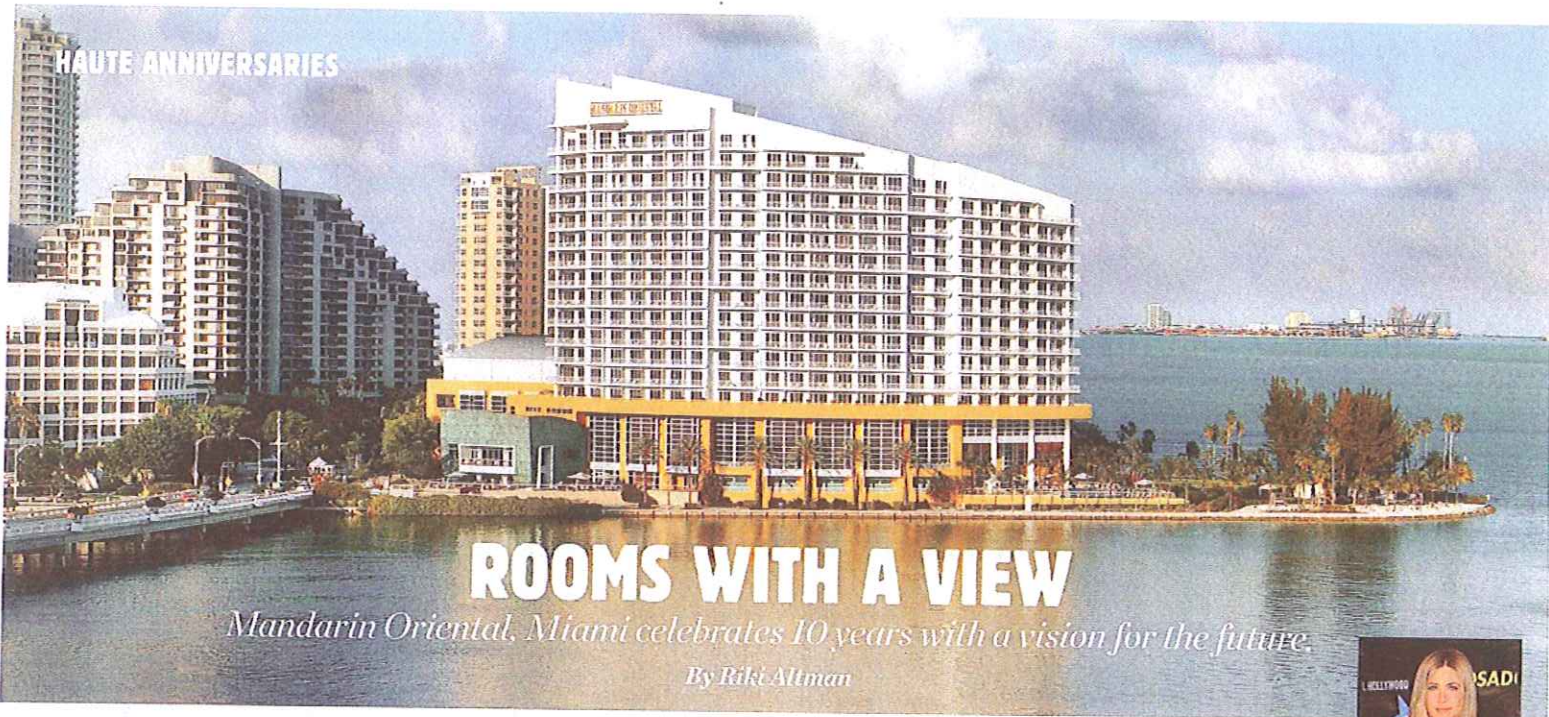


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ROOMS WITH A VIEW

Mandarin Oriental, Miami celebrates 10 years with a vision for the future.

By Riki Altman

Now that Miami's financial district is dotted with more hotel rooms than palm fronds, it's hard to believe that 11 years ago, Jorge Gonzalez—Mandarin Oriental, Miami's general manager—wondered if the luxury concept would ever make it. But as the property nears the end of a \$25 million renovation, incorporating everything from floor-to-ceiling upgrades in each room to new beach cabanas, a fresh look for the spa and futuristic, *Jetsons*-like computer technologies, the hotel can celebrate in style.

"I remember sitting in the pre-opening office thinking, What am I doing opening a hotel in downtown Miami?" recalls Gonzalez, who also serves as the company's regional executive VP. "Who were we going to be?" At that time the

brand had just two properties in America, both of which were fairly new, and only two luxury hotels existed in the area at all. But our city was the next destination that group chief executive Edouard Ettedgui targeted in his search for business-minded, recognizable, international cities. "Miami had lots to offer," Gonzalez remembers. "It was a fun destination, glamorous."

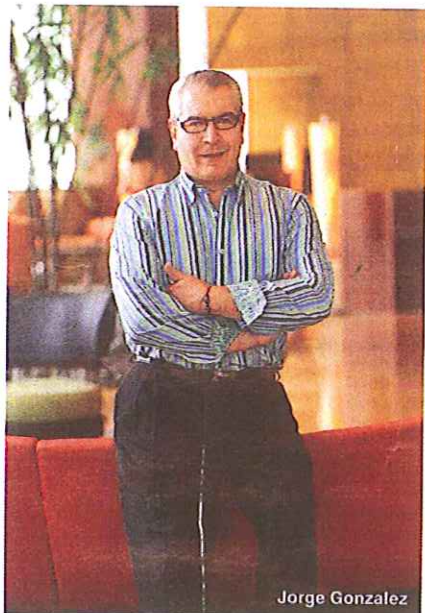
Even without a proper beach—sand was added a few years later—word began to spread about the cutting-edge, minimalist, tropical Zen property with an Asian/Latin flair. Miami proper officially became Miami Beach's competition.

The Mandarin Oriental, Miami welcomed its first overnight guests in November of 2000, and a grand-opening soirée was held the following March to coincide with the property's first Voices for Children gala event (they've adopted the charity as a pet foundation and have hosted events annually for it since). Early guests included the King and Queen of Spain, along with various dignitaries and athletes in town for what was then the Lipton International Players Championships (now the Sony Ericsson Open).

Regular celebrity sightings ensued, first with Luciano Pavarotti, who christened the presidential suite on a visit coinciding with his last performance at the American Airlines Arena. Gonzalez remembers other memorable star-studded moments: the Dalai Lama joking with hotel guests, Jennifer Aniston requesting that the Shanghai Tang boutique stay open for after-hours private shopping, Colin Farrell unexpectedly answering an unmanned guest services phone ("Mandarin Oriental, Miami, how can I help you?"). Countless luminaries have come to frequent the hotel because they know they can walk through the lobby and avoid harassment.

Azul, the adjoining, multiple-award-winning

Colin Farrell, Jennifer Aniston and the Black Eyed Peas have all been guests at the Mandarin Oriental, Miami.



Jorge Gonzalez

restaurant helmed by Michelle Bernstein until 2005 and Clay Conley thereafter, has become a celebrity in its own right, with a long list of accolades from major epicurean publications.

To celebrate the hotel's decade of extravagance, an invitation-only event will be held on November 20 incorporating both American and Asian top-tier entertainment.

As of press time, company representatives were still combing through their VIP lists to determine who exactly will be invited. Gonzalez estimates that fewer than 350 Mandarin Oriental, Miami "fans" will be asked to participate in the festivities. "It's not going to be a typical sit-down meal with speeches," he promises. "Those lucky enough to be there will have a sensational evening." 00

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