

BUSINESS

TOURISM

UPSCALE IN DOWN TIMES

LUXURY W HOTELS, WHICH HAS A FORT LAUDERDALE SITE, NOW WILL OPEN ONE IN MIAMI BEACH

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South Florida's hottest place for nightlife got yet another bar Wednesday. Actually, make that six.

The new watering holes come as part of upscale chain W Hotels' new \$500 million South Beach venture, which boasts beach views in every room, condos running as high as \$8 million, and yes, half a dozen bars. "There's going to be a lot of drinking going on here," laughed Vanessa Poskanzer, spokeswoman for David Edelstein, W South Beach developer.

Part of conglomerate Starwood Hotels and Resorts Worldwide, W Hotels enters the crowded Miami Beach luxury market as the hospitality industry is reeling from the recession. Although Miami Beach hotels have fared better than those in some other sections of South Florida, May room occupancy rates still dropped 11.5 percent from last year, according to the Greater Miami Convention and Visitors Bureau.

W Hotels officials said the South Beach location has sold out for weekends in July, fueled in part by a \$382-per-night opening offer and a 20 percent summer discount for staycationing South Florida residents.

Rooms start at \$359 a night for the Wonderful suite and grow pricier — and more superlative — from there. At the upper end, a cool \$7,000 to \$12,000 a night will score you a night at the Extreme WOW suite.

Even the cheapest prices dwarf the Beach's average daily room rate of \$162.67, according to the visitors bureau's most recent figures.

The oceanfront property was funded as a condo-hotel, with all 408 units offered to individual



PHOTOS BY PATRICK FARRELL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

LUXURIOUS INTERIOR: The 'living room' near the lobby of the hotel/condo at W South Beach.



A DISTINCTIVE LOOK: At left, a photo of Beyoncé by Danny Clynych adorns a hallway on the 18th floor. Above, the exterior of the oceanfront building.

* TURN TO W SOUTH BEACH, 2C

TOURISM

W Hotels to open 2nd S. Fla. spot

• W SOUTH BEACH, FROM 1C

owners. Poskanzer said that buyers have put down deposits on 325 — or 80 percent — of the units but she offered no projections of how many of those sales would close. She added that the closings have been “going very well” with six or eight contracts finalized per week.

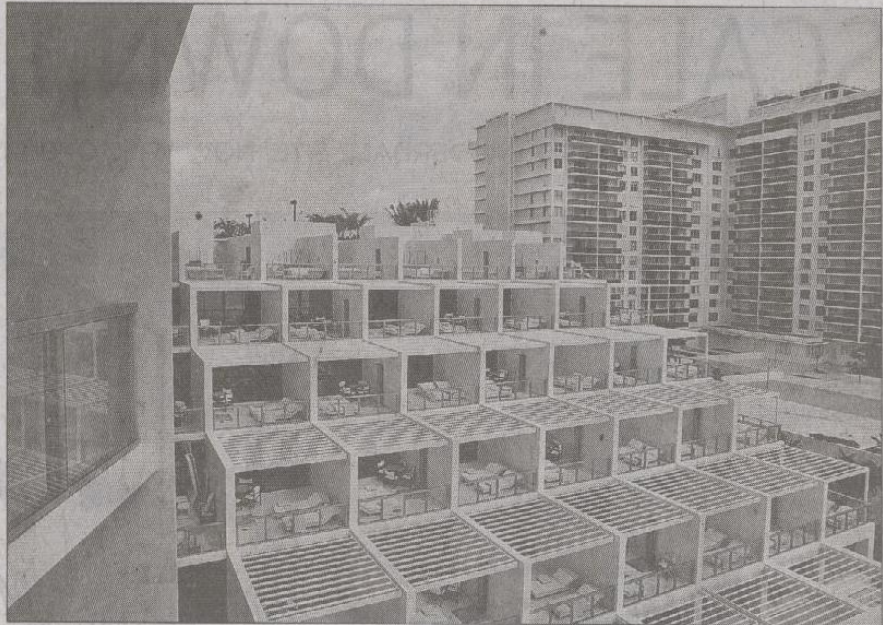
Buyers in South Florida have been walking away from condo contracts in recent months as plummeting real estate values has made such investments less attractive.

Poskanzer said that buyers opted to keep 96 of them out of the hotel rental pool. That would leave 312 rooms available for guests.

Sales and Marketing Director Meire Ramos said that so far condo purchasers have been mostly male, attributing the gender imbalance to an abundance of fitness facilities, including a basketball court dubbed Swoosh and tennis courts named Swing. Other of the hotel’s ubiquitous one-syllable monickers include SWEAT, the fitness center, and WET, its two pools.

Among the hotel’s more unusual features are two Andy Warhol originals flanking the reception desk, blown-up original photo portraits of musicians on every floor (the 18th floor features Beyoncé Knowles), and room doors that resemble bank vaults because, according to Ramos, “when you open the door, you unveil the treasure of South Beach.”

Construction began on the hotel in January 2007, nearly a year before the recession started. But with multiyear construction, the hotel finds itself opening in a dramatically different economic climate.

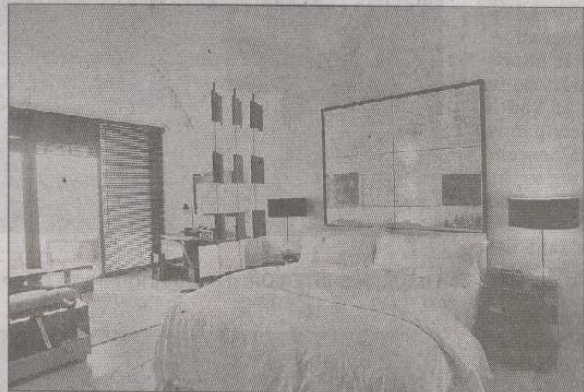


STACKED LIKE STAIRS: ‘Mega Suites’ at W South Beach. There are beach views in every room at the new \$500 million venture at 2201 Collins Ave.

W Hotels, which opened a location in Fort Lauderdale earlier this year, now comes to Miami Beach.

“It’s probably horrible timing, and they probably wouldn’t have done it if they had known,” said hotel consultant Scott Brush. “Two or three years ago, nobody was predicting a worldwide economic recession, so you’ve just got to make the best of it.”

Even with the downturn, South Beach’s mix of business and leisure travelers as well as the W brand’s national following will aid the new hotel, said hotel industry analyst Scott Berman of PriceWaterHouse



PHOTOS BY PATRICK FARRELL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

PRICEY: Room prices start at \$359 a night for the Wonderful suite — and go upward from there.

Coopers.

But in an ironic sign of the economic times, one of the luxury hotel’s more sought-after amenities appealed not to the wealthy but to the unemployed.

The new hotel’s staff

positions drew 12,000 applicants, which, with only 400 spots available, meant an acceptance rate of only 3.33 percent. Poskanzer, the spokeswoman, said the hotel conducted 2,000 interviews before making its picks.