

'Ocean Drive' Remembers Miami's Most Influential Figures in Honor of its 23rd Anniversary

By Jon Warech | January 1, 2016 | [Culture](#)

Ocean Drive launched in 1993; here, a look at how South Beach has changed in the two decades since and the people who made the city what it is today.



Cindy Crawford and Sylvester Stallone.

South Beach is a celebrity, talked about in social circles around the world, scrutinized for every decision, and photographed ad nauseam. The city has been the star of hit TV shows and major motion pictures, landed on the cover of international magazines from *Time* to *Vogue* and made comeback after comeback after comeback.

If South Beach is Julia Roberts, 1993 is her *Pretty Woman*. It was the year that the neighborhood—always beautiful and packed with potential—became a global icon. People from all over the world flocked to her, wanted to be seen in her presence and bask in her greatness. “You’d compare it to Aspen in the late 70s or St. Bart’s in the 80s,” says Alfred Spellman, the co-founder of [Rakontur](#) who recently moderated a [World Red Eye Culture Exchanges Speaker Series](#) on the birth of South Beach. “There are these cities that

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magazine labeled Miami Beach "SoHo in the Sun," and *Travel + Leisure* called it "the hippest hangout on earth."



Gloria Estefan.

"Miami started to get really important press," says Michael Capponi, a nightclub promoter at the time. "Word was getting out that Miami was where all the beautiful people were and it brought in a whole new demographic."

Models, movie stars, professional party chasers all flocked to South Beach in search of the fairy tale, and by 1993 a star was born. In a pre-cell phone and Instagram era, celebrity sightings and one of kind moments existed only in the moment—live and in person. Those moments were more often than not, increasingly in the 305.

"You knew something special was taking place at that time in South Beach," says Brian Antoni, author of *South Beach*, a novel based on that era. "The way that I felt the energy, someone like Versace felt the energy and Madonna felt the energy. You don't actually know it when it's happening, but you feel it. It comes from your gut. Back then it was all about Mickey Rourke, Sylvester Stallone, Madonna and Gloria Estefan. They were all the big shots." Mickey Rourke put the finishing touches on his Mickey's restaurant in South Beach.

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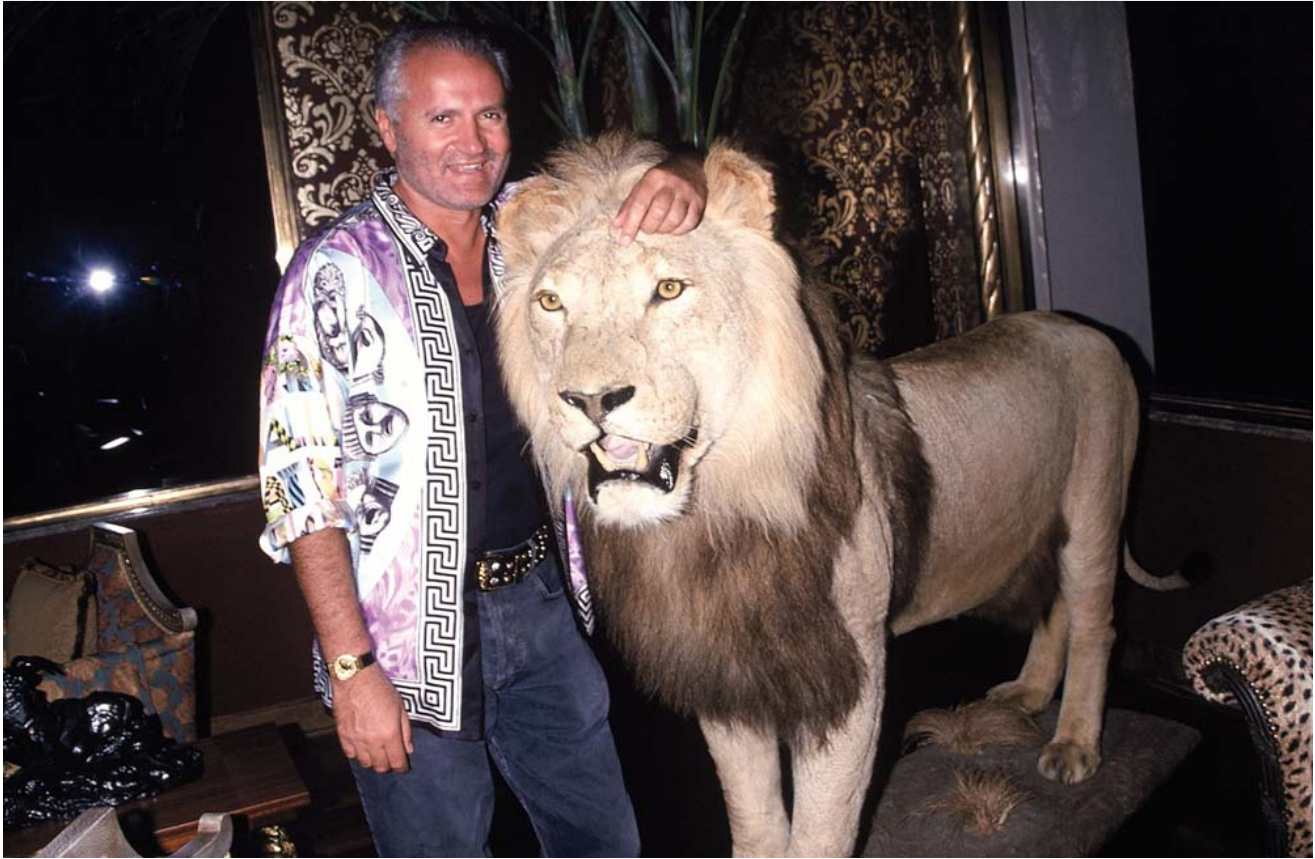
Mickey Rourke.

Partying in South Beach became a profession. Erin Milon moved from New York City by way of Paris and bought The Strand, hosting the never-ending dinner party. "You came for happy hour and stayed until 2 or 3 in the morning," he says. "There was no VIP but everybody was somebody."

Chris Paciello, a kid from Staten Island, headed south and tried to mirror the wild parties he saw in the City with his new club Risk. "I built a shower on the bar so the girls could take showers topless," he says. "I built a room called the Opium Room. We had a drag queen that manned the ropes. Who knows what went on in that room. I used to just turn my head."

Risk played host to the popular Monday night soiree, Fat Black Pussycat, while Nicola Siervo's Bang packed the house Sunday nights with models and international socialites partying to live music until the sun came up. They were two huge nights that created a seven-day weekend in a city that literally never slept.

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Gianni Versace.

"People were going out every night and having fun with simple things, like dancing on a table," says the Italian-born Siervo. "Back in the day it was 100 percent resort. You either worked in fashion, nightlife or hospitality. There were no offices. There were no jobs here."

Money didn't define status, style did. "Miami Beach was one of the best-kept secrets among the fashion cognoscenti," says "Queen of the Night" Tara Solomon, a South Beach columnist for the *Miami Herald* at the time. "You saw a lot of top designers in the clubs, boutiques and thrift shops of Miami, looking for inspiration. The more wildly one dressed, the better."

There were a lot of different personalities back then, from drag performers "with over-the-top looks" to muscle men who cut "off the sleeves of their \$1,300 Versace silk shirts to show off their bulging biceps," according to Solomon, but they all came together to create the melting pot that was South Beach.

"It didn't matter if you had ripped jeans and sandals and a t-shirt," says Rick Delgado, who ran the door at Velvet in 1993. "That's how George Clooney would show up at Bar None. There was no dress code. It was all about character."

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Ingrid Casares and Donatella Versace.

Guys like Capponi went in search of that character. "I'd make fliers, cruise down Ocean Drive on a skateboard, selecting the best looking people and invite them to a private party," he says. "Then I'd send faxes to hotel concierges and modeling agencies."

In 1993 *Ocean Drive* magazine came in and turned those pretty faces into celebrities in their own right. "*Ocean Drive* magazine's success matched the trajectory of South Beach," says Glenn Albin, editor from 1995-2008. "The first thing I did was to publish an A-List. I'd known every single truly fabulous person from the late '80s—they were on the list, but so were all these new players in town, like the Milon brothers."

None of this happened overnight, of course, and many pioneers paved the way for this golden era of nightlife. Miami Beach native John Turchin, who owned Club Nu in the 80s, opened his doors when none of this even seemed possible. "When we opened in 1986 there wasn't a soul there and then all of a sudden 5,000 people showed up to party," he says. "Someone said to me at the time, 'how do you get people to come.' I told them, 'build a bar.'"

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Marky Mark and the Funky Bunch.

He did and others followed. Names like Debbie Ohanian, J.P. Parlavecchio, Ingrid Casares, Tommy Pooch, Mickey Rourke, Kenny Scharf, Manny Hernandez, Seth Browarnik, Susan Ainsworth, Carlos Betancourt, Lee Brian Schragar and Gary James all had a hand in creating the magic in their own way, and many more played a roll. "There should be a statue of Louis Canales in South Beach," says Albin. "Louis conceived the South Beach DNA; he set the theme of fabulous madness. He's the hero and visionary of South Beach, period. No one else comes close."

Together they and hundreds more created memories at the Mermaids on Ecstasy party at the Eden Roc, at the traveling Tea Dance parties, or even at Sylvester Stallone's house, where dozens of A-list stars celebrated the opening of Planet Hollywood. The people made South Beach a star. They gave South Beach that *Pretty Woman* moment. They dressed her up, gave her confidence and let *Time* magazine (who in 1981 called South Florida "Paradise Lost") and everyone else who left South Beach for dead know that they had made a big mistake. Big. Huge.

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