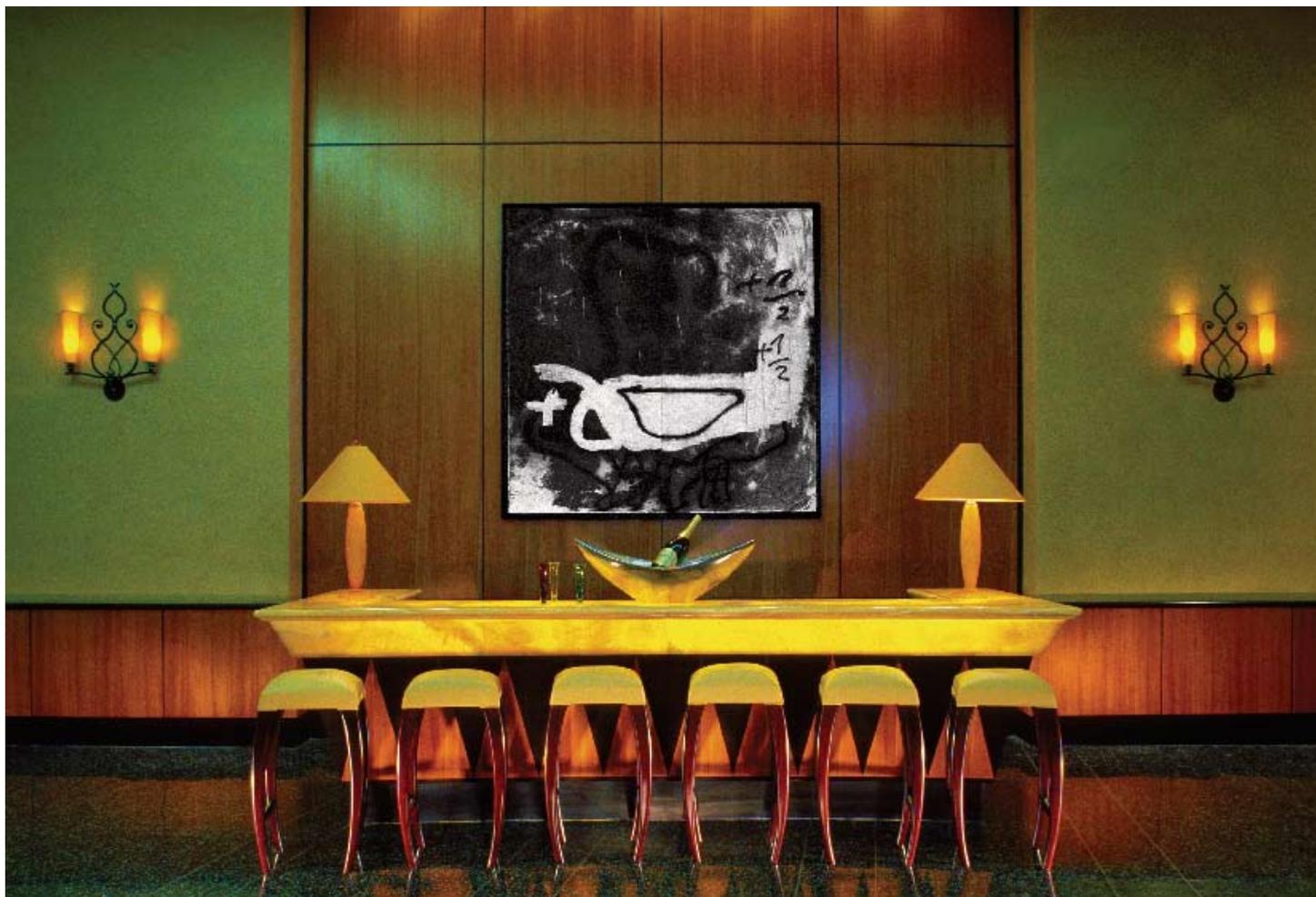


Post-Modern Palace

A Morris Lapidus hotel melds contemporary art with mid-century modern architecture.

BY CATHLEEN MCCARTHY



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WHEN ALFREDO AND DIANA Lowenstein bought the DiLido Hotel in South Beach, Miami, in 1971, it was rundown and dated. They didn't realize they had landed a treasure of architectural history. Morris Lapidus, who designed the DiLido in 1953, was criticized by followers of the stark International Style then in favor. In the 1970s, Robert Venturi pronounced the architect's extravagant style the beginning of Post-modernism. His buildings are now regarded

as an integral part of mid-century Miami Beach.

Lapidus's resorts were magnets for the rich and famous from the beginning. He is famous for designing the Fontainebleau and other pleasure palaces of South Beach in the 1950s and '60s. But several less-known hotels in the area served as a laboratory for his so-called "architecture of joy." The DiLido, the last hotel Lapidus designed as an associate architect, was one of those.



Alfredo Lowenstein is chairman of the Lionstone Group, a family-run empire with real estate holdings throughout South Florida and the Caribbean. Lionstone covered most of the \$200 million, five-year renovation of the DiLido. “During the reconstruction, we realized the hotel had fantastic features representing the Modern era and the Lapidus legacy,” says Diana Lowenstein, who helped oversee the renovation of the architect’s trademark sweeping stairways, dramatic lighting, oversized columns, bold murals and graphics.

When the hotel was taken over by Ritz-Carlton in the 1990s, the Lowensteins retained primary ownership, and Mrs. Lowenstein announced her desire to handle the art. “I love that building,” she says. “I had a dream of making the whole project work together—the architecture, the décor and the art.”

She met with some trepidation. “I was the owner’s wife,” she says. But she was also the proprietor of the gallery Diana Lowenstein Fine Arts, a highlight of the Miami art scene, and one of few American gallerists invited to take part in Art Basel in Switzerland. “This was a really exciting and a scary situation because I’m not a curator. I’m a collector and a gallerist,” she says. “My husband and I have been collecting art since we were very young and still living in Argentina. I go by instinct.”





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Lowenstein spent more than two years researching postwar art and design, particularly in Miami, examining what artists were doing and what people were living with in their homes and offices when the DiLido was built. “It was a moment of change,” she says. “There was the introduction of geometry and abstraction and everything related to the study of plants, the big murals of Diego Rivera and Brancusi’s morphological figures, also a rediscovery of the primitive arts.”

Rather than using reproductions or prints from that era, Lowenstein turned to contemporary artists working in similar themes. She asked four young artists from her native Argentina, including Tullio de Sagastizabal and Juan Lecuona, to submit 10 works each, to be hung in guest rooms, hallways and suites. She also chose or commissioned works by several European artists.

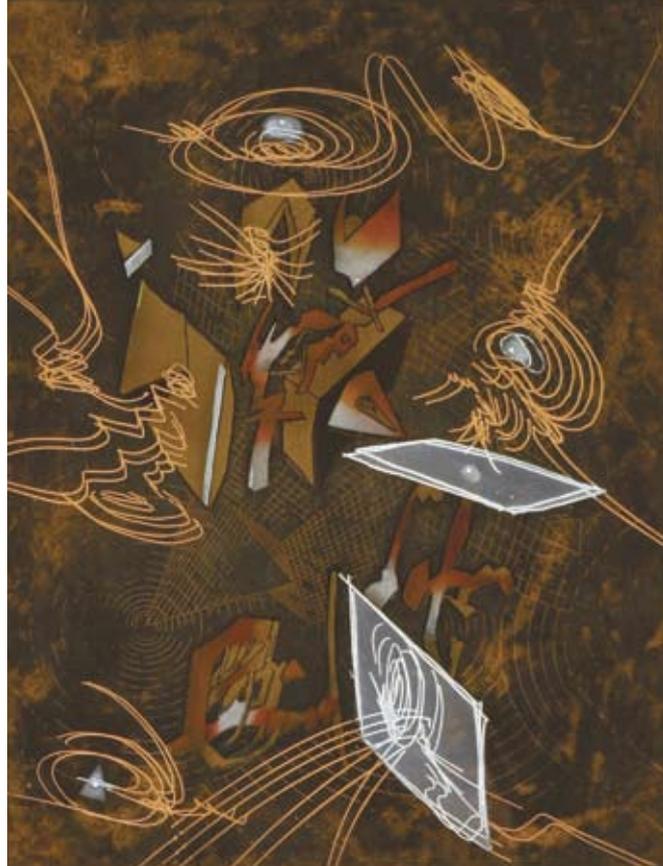
The only exception to the contemporary art in the hotel are three etchings by Joan

Miró. “Miró covers all periods with his art,” she says. “You can see in his work primitivism and abstraction and figuration, even things from the future. The great artists have the ability to be timeless, and he was one of the greatest artists of the century.”

Forty pieces worth about \$2 million were installed on permanent loan in 2002. Throughout the hotel, now called “The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach,” the art is as bold and colorful as its surroundings but



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somehow complements and balances the dramatic interiors—many of which are works of art themselves. Highlights include pieces by French-based Argentine Roberto Sebastián Matta, a Brancusi-inspired sculpture by Polish artist Xawery Wolsky and a large black-and-white etching by Antoni Tàpies above the backlit onyx lobby bar.

Twenty-two painted photographs of Amazon flora by Dario Basso form a mural on the curved wall of the Lapidus Lounge. “You know how difficult it is to hang art on a curved surface? But when the wall was complete, those 22 pieces fit exactly, like they were meant for that space,” says Lowenstein. “I didn’t miss one and I didn’t need to ask for another. Many things happened that way.”

Lowenstein has turned down many offers to buy the hotel’s art, and guests often visit her gallery looking for similar works. Working with her daughter, Flavia, she has since organized collections for the St. Regis

in Costa Rica and the Seville, another Art Moderne hotel owned by the Lowensteins, which is being converted to a Ritz Residence. She lets Flavia work with the decorators now. “Sometimes it’s very difficult to convince an interior designer that art is art and *that* piece belongs to *that* wall as part of an overall concept,” she says. “Interior designers always want colors to match or not to match. I don’t work that way. I believe art should be accepted as it is.”

Using the work of young, mostly Latin artists has proven a powerful way to reinvigorate Miami’s exotic, mid-century architecture. “Architects had more freedom in Miami and were inspired by so many things in the area,” Lowenstein says. “The Deco here is such a happy Deco and the Modern is not so somber as it is in buildings in New York. I think people get inspired here. And that’s fantastic, no?” ☒

The Ritz-Carlton, South Beach, Miami Beach, Fla. 786.276.4000 ritzcarlton.com.