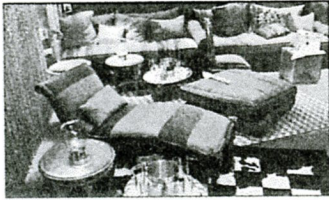
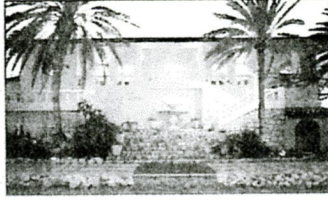


People



By Andrew Hiltner for USA TODAY

Skybar: The place to lounge in style.



Jumby Bay Estate House: Very nice, in Antigua.



By Greg Gora

Playpen Suite: A little naughty at The Palms.

Stars check in to create hotel buzz

Hot spots have few reservations about catering to celebs

By Kitty Bean Yancey
USA TODAY

MIAMI BEACH — At 11:30 p.m., the crowd celebrating the opening of The Shore Club's Skybar reaches critical mass.

Models decoratively sip Champagne in the \$7,000-a-night-and-up, oceanfront Beach House, where Lenny Kravitz hosted a New Year's Eve party and Janet Jackson retreated for quality R&R.

Outside the bungalow's privacy fence, other revelers are lounging on giant white daybeds by one of the hotel's infinity-edged pools, where Leonardo DiCaprio and Tobey Maguire once entertained sunbathers with diving antics.

But the real action is in Skybar's jam-packed Red Room, where security guys with earpieces talk urgently into their sleeves, South Beach socialites adorn the pillow-strewn banquettes and photographers circle actor Luke Wilson, of *Legally Blonde* and *Charlie's Angels* fame.

Though not in the mood to meet the press, he's a star in the evening's script, which is all about pumping up the 1½-year-old Shore Club's profile now that it's under the management of PR-savvy boutique-hotelier Ian Schragger.

Hip hangouts like Skybar (a hedonistic lounge concept that also helped elevate Schragger's Mondrian hotel in L.A.), cutting-edge décor and buzz created by celebrity sightings are helping The Shore Club and other recently opened hotels become hot spots. Among newcomers:

► **W San Diego.** Was celebrity central during the Super Bowl, hosting Brittany Murphy, Don Cheadle and Fran Drescher, to name a few. Its blue-and-white rooms and rooftop Beach Bar strewn with sand won raves. "I think the hotel has amazing potential," says Drescher. "It has the earmarks of the trendy, happening hotel of San Diego."

► **Esperanza Resort in Cabo San Lucas, Mexico.** Has been host to Brooke Shields, Paul McCartney and supermodel Gisele Bündchen. The former Beatle and wife Heather had a couples massage; he delighted guests by joining the mariachi band to sing *Hey Jude*.

► **Opus Hotel in Vancouver.** The strikingly decorated modern boutique hotel has become a favorite with celebs making films or appearances there. Anna Paquin, R.E.M. and Alan Cumming have bedded down in the converted warehouse in the lively Yaletown district.

► **Downtown LA Standard.** Maguire, Heath Ledger, Lisa Marie Presley, Nicolas Cage and Jack and Kelly Osbourne have been lured to its rooftop bar, which has maroon Astroturf. "It's the most kick-back place ever," says Jack.

► **The Palms Casino Resort in Las Vegas.** Party people including Britney Spears, Fred Durst, Mario Lopez, Mike Tyson, Shaquille O'Neal and Wesley Snipes have made its Ghost bar and Rain disco hot beds. DiCaprio and pals romped in the suite that was the setting for MTV's *Real World* last season.

► **The St. Regis Monarch Beach Resort & Spa in Dana Point, Calif.** Looks like a Mediterranean fantasy and has hosted Elizabeth Taylor. Local resident Evan Marriott (aka Joe Millionaire) hangs out in the bar with friends.

Also heating up the see-and-be-seen scene are two revamped Caribbean resorts. The venerable Sandy Lane in Barbados reopened its doors in 2001 after an overhaul to welcome Jerry Seinfeld and



By Andrew Hiltner for USA TODAY

Toast of the town: Peter Chase, consultant for the Skybar in The Shore Club, pours some bubbly for Nikki DeSasso, left, Heather Knapp and Amanda Fisher at the launch of the Miami bar last month.



By Paul Fenton, The Palms

Celebrity: Wesley Snipes at the first anniversary of The Palms Casino Resort.

Schiffer and Cindy Crawford.

On Antigua, the renovated Jumby Bay sizzled over the holidays. Guests at the private-island resort included Miramax Films powerhouse Harvey Weinstein and rocker Rod Stewart.

Rule 1: Build buzz

How do hotels and resorts become marquee names in a hurry? Create buzz.

Stars usually need hype to make it to the top, and so do the places they stay.

The Shore Club's relaunch and Skybar opening, for instance, involved a half-dozen publicists and a firm that lassos big names for openings and parties. It's a use-proposition in the nicest sense. Stars gain free publicity for a hotel; in return

dining, even first-class air tickets.

Stars also can spread the word within the celebrity community. A stay at newcomer Esperanza, for instance, was included in the official gift baskets given to Oscar presenters last year.

And the presence — or anticipated presence — of luminaries lures everyday people. (On a recent day at Schragger's Delano in Miami Beach, where Jennifer Lopez has been a regular, a few rubbernecking tourists made a couple of slow passes through the lobby and pool area.)

"Looking at celebrities — people love that," says George Maloof, president of The Palms. "They might not remember what they did on their vacation. But they'll always remember who they saw."

Other folk just love the vibe and energy of a VIP-magnet lodging.

"I'm not a star-gazer person. But I love to sit back and watch the buzz, the posing, the this and that," says Dan Davidson, a Miami biotech entrepreneur who turned out for the Shore Club bash.

"Service is over-the-top important ... 'anything you want and we don't say no,'" says Gary Mansour, whose Beverly Hills-based Mansour Travel Co. books trips for top Hollywood talent. "So is a mind-set of security and privacy."

Staffers at The Palms, for instance, are forbidden to ask for autographs or to talk

of them I handle myself."

At The Shore Club, "management knows how to deal with that kind of clientele. It's making them feel comfortable and not making a big deal over the fact that they're famous," echoes Ric Pipino, a stylist with a salon there and experience with well-known personalities. (His estranged wife is supermodel Heidi Klum.)

"This whole hotel is a VIP area," says Ben Pundole, who oversees The Shore Club's Skybar with partner Peter Chase. "Some like to be tucked away. Some like to be in the middle of it. We give them whatever they want."

If Janet Jackson wants a separate bungalow for her dog and its trainer, consider it done. If Naomi Campbell craves the same terraced Shore Club suite that Bill Clinton raved about at a New York event they attended, she's got it.

And if Skybar guest Wilson won't say some nice words about it to the press, as expected, nobody's going to force him. Staffers keep interlopers away and shuttle VIPs in and out via a back door. Quick escapes are necessities, say hoteliers.

The young and hip also cherish cool décor — Shore Club rooms boast Mexican sandstone floors and white-upholstered furnishings from Italy. The Palms just unveiled "Bachelor Playpen Suites" with stripper's poles and disco lighting. Opus bedrooms are equipped with handheld oxygen dispensers.

But never, ever underestimate the importance of hot nightlife.

"I wanted to create the ultimate party place," says Maloof. At The Palms, stars can unwind undisturbed in private skyboxes overlooking the Rain nightclub.

The Shore Club Jacuzzi can get so steamy that management has had to suggest that amorous couples, er, get a room.

The opium-den ambience of the Red Room is in keeping with Schragger's dictum that the hotel should be "an adult sandbox ... sexy, sensuous," says Skybar consultant Chase.

Tucked away in a corner, Wilson and a table of pals party on. Tonight and any night he cares to show his famous face, The Shore Club is his sandbox.

Pampering gets top billing

Truly happening hotels deliver more than sizzle by successfully catering to guests who are household names.

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