

Cocktails of the City

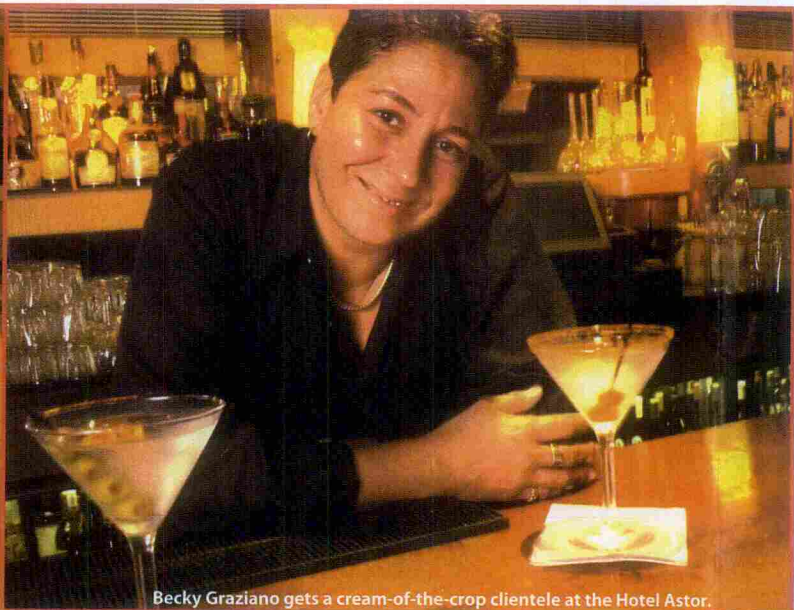
Meet South Beach's best hotel bartenders

By Eric Newill

Photographs by Seth Browarnik



Billy Belack mans the bar at the St. Augustine Hotel, catering to Miami's media and fashion elite.



Becky Graziano gets a cream-of-the-crop clientele at the Hotel Astor.

Although South Beach is famous for its throbbing, wildly packed clubs, a sleeker, less rampant, form of nightlife also has its share of habitués: the hotel bar. Cool and cunning, they can be the apogee of style, where overdressed *bons vivants* cavort with underdressed minxes, and dead-on repartee can actually be heard above the muted moans of Nina Simone. Here, meet three of the masters who make these places what they are:

white-jacketed barman at the Raleigh, Belack worked at New York fashion houses and night-club institutions Limelight and Palladium before heading to Miami. Now he administers to a nightly pack of merrymakers, hotel guests and assorted chic hangers-on. "Although the madness of Washington Avenue is only two blocks away, we're still hidden—we haven't been taken over yet."

Maybe not, but the bar's weekly Tangerine Lounge—a retro, groovy, slightly trippy happen-

Legacy of the Cocktail Revolution: "Everybody asks for up drinks. When people get in their 30s, they want stemmed glasses—it's some kind of sign of maturity."

Current favorite drink: "An Absolut Kurant kamikaze, which is triple sec, vodka and lime juice—or just beer."

Music man: "I play whatever I'm feeling, from Nina Simone to big band to techno—the music can dictate the mood of the room. But sometimes the room dictates the music."

**"Come on—you don't drink a Bud in Miami. Have a Key West Martini instead."
—Becky Graziano**

BILLY BELACK St. Augustine Hotel

Way down south on South Beach, there's a little lobby bar that, since its opening a year ago, has become a favorite with the fashion and media crowd. Undoubtedly the sense of seclusion attracts some, and the streamlined orange-hued design by Peter Page provides a theatrical setting worthy of the high and low antics that ensue, but many regulars come simply for the charm and skills of Billy Belack. A former

ing—does fill the space with a vibe as close to South Beach circa 1993 as one is likely to find. "It's off-the-hook," Belack says. "Imagine every type of personality all packed into the same room." On less frenzied nights, Belack amuses patrons with his famous "quizzlers," curious brainteasers that involve mind reading and personality divining. "Everybody knows each other here—we have quite a well-established mix of Miami's who's who."

BECKY GRAZIANO Hotel Astor

Though the lobby bar at the Hotel Astor is a bastion of relaxed swank, bartender Becky Graziano is a constant whirl of activity. Lighting cigarettes, shaking shakers and making with the jokes, she is the red-hot center of a cool scene, a master at introducing strangers and keeping both liquor and conversation flowing: "People who come in alone aren't alone for very long," she says.

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