



D.B. TIPMORE

AT LARGE

## Passing time by the Raleigh pool

**W**E'RE standing under the stars with a group of gorgeous people by the gorgeous pool of South Beach's gorgeous Raleigh Hotel, and you know what? We're thinking of you.

And how much in need you are of a new attitude about South Beach. Because, rest assured, your current attitude is already passé. The South Beach many of you feel so secure in being "over" — the Leonalike restaurants and club-kid nightlife, the sissy boys and fashionheads — *that* South Beach is already "over" itself, a blur of old headlines and dated enthusiasms.

Yes! Already! Gone! Kaput! To be replaced by something glossier, yet somehow familiar, something past and yet future-ish — well, we'll tell you about it in a minute.

Don't think this constant rollover of image doesn't fit the SoBe pattern. In few other spots on Earth does time seem to affect space so ruthlessly, the *there's there* disappearing with each coat of paint. One minute it's the '50s South Beach of the low-rent, "Hole in

the Head" getaway, Frank Sinatra and little Eddie Hodges serenading each other about "High Hopes" on the porch of the Cardozo Hotel. The next, it's an unsacred burial ground for the aging. Then it's a killing field of Mariel refugees, then a sweet-natured magnet for the poor and artistic. Then comes Gay Ghetto, then Limo-and-Leather Land ...

And so on. On South Beach, 1994, this constant morphing is fueled by what amounts to a real estate perestroika. The colors and shapes of the skyline change daily, ever newer, ever brighter, ever taller — even within the shakily preserved Deco District. Buildings suddenly disappear. Buildings suddenly reappear, made over in a contemporary "interpretation" of their original image. The landscape changes daily — new palms, new plantings. Even the residents change daily, moving vans carting the elderly off to less valuable warehouses, the poor off to wherever the poor can afford to go. The out-of-date — that is, last year's palm trees, last year's storefronts, last year's interpretation of beauty and truth — remains visible only as the most faded pentimento, as if the square mile of city blocks was some sort of Magna Doodle, erasable with the turn of a knob.

That old march of time. And where better to see it than at the Raleigh pool, especially tonight? Tonight we're celebrating two people you've probably never heard of: Lawrence M. Dixon and Richard B. Dixon, sons of Raleigh Hotel architect L. Murray Dixon and generous bequeathers of their father's original Raleigh photos and drawings to Miami Beach's Bass Museum.

Look closely at the photo of the pool. Feel time's swift feet? Gone are the well-muled women Dixon designed for, dealing canasta and tending to their Pall Malls. Gone are their husbands kibbitzing on the chaises while stealing glances at the pretty blonde attendant watching the children. Gone, too, are the later, shabby tour groups from Venezuela, Argentina, Israel, Puerto Rico who, at various times, have sweated in the Raleigh's outdoor weight "room" and then ordered Diet Cokes from the bar by the pool.

Vamoose! Instead, these days on South Beach, the Raleigh pool attracts celebrities. You won't see them tonight

— even though Sharon Stone is rumored to be staying in the penthouse — but their presence is here, felt as strongly as the breeze off the ocean. Under the Majul palms, whose seedlings were brought in from Palm Springs, have reclined the likes of Robert de Niro. Cindy Crawford, Sandra Bernhard, k.d. lang, Naomi Campbell have lapped the pool, shaped like a huge lyre floating straight for the Atlantic. So has George Stephanopoulos. Both Barry Diller *and* the Viacom honchos have huddled over the portable phones on the patio. New Yorker editor Heinrich Hertzberg was a visitor here. Ditto the Kleins — Calvin and Kelly. And, unforgettably and recently, Claus von Bulow.

And usually, lying on chaise lounges as close to these celebrities as possible, lies another group of visitors. These people have little time for canasta. They couldn't care less for roughhousing in the sand with the kids or in the preservation of Art Deco or in drag queens or even in the cheap thrill of landing that perfect thrift shop bargain at Merle's Closet, an activity for which the most recent South Beach was famous.

Not that these people aren't hungry to *purchase*. The air on the Beach is now fervid with buying, as if the place were a product fashioned by manufacturers and offered for sale.

*As if?* South Beach, 1994, is nothing else but a "lifestyle" product, its experiences negotiable, its virtues ready for auction. To live on the Beach, in fact, is to engage in behavioral junk-bonding.

"The kind of life you can live only

on South Beach!" says a TV ad for a rehabbed Collins Avenue condominium. "You're in for only \$44,900!" That this sum buys you around 700 square feet with a window overlooking an alley is a fact that goes unmentioned, but, for these people, the new people of South Beach, the people around the Raleigh pool, price is not an object.

Remember 1986? 1987? The first time the Dow closed above 2,000? R.J. Reynolds' purchase of Nabisco for \$4.9 billion? Yuppies?

The 1980s, in other words. On South Beach, sitting around the Raleigh pool, it has all come back. The recession never arrived, and those same dream buyers — the ones with money to burn, the ones that buy what the rest of the world only dreams about — are still around. Nancy Reagan's \$209,508 set of White House china is nicely scaled to the taste of that woman — there, near the cabana — and her \$200 Ralph Lauren swimsuit and \$350 Oliver Peoples sunglasses. Or with the model over there, the one wearing the same \$85 white men's cotton briefs displayed under glass at Versace's boutique on Eighth Street as though they were Fabergé eggs.

You can buy all these things on South Beach, 1994 — often in stores which were only last month crack dens or bad beauty shops. And so, in the same instant, in the same purchase, time goes forward and time goes backward, the year 2000 meets the year 1987 meets the year 1994, making the Beach what theoretical physicists are now calling a "wormhole," a tear in space-time that permits travel between two or more points.

Our own little wormhole! And its center very well may be — at least temporarily, tonight — the Raleigh Hotel pool. Feel the times crashing

together? 1940, when Dixon first created the pool? 1989, when Raleigh owner/developer Kenneth Zarilli restored it? 1994, now? The 1980s?

It's enough to make some SoBe locals dizzy, or at least crabby; some lament, stridently if lamely, about too much "progress," the "wrong kind" of people. Too bad. They'll never make it here, on South Beach, 1994. They'll be relegated to memories, like the canasta-playing ladies and the aging

Jews and the Mariel refugees — and, come casinos, come convention center hotels, perhaps like all these glamorous people by the Raleigh pool.

"God!" a South Beach celebrity columnist was heard to exclaim recently while tanning herself on a chaise by the deep end. "What am I going to do if this place is taken over by hordes of blackjack players in polyester?"

Try on some dacron, dear. Or prepare to disappear. It's the South Beach way.