

# At Versailles: The celebrated and the sincere

## Versailles

3555 SW 8th St., Miami  
444-0240, 444-9660, 444-7614  
Hours: Monday through  
Thursday, 8 a.m. to 2 a.m.;  
Friday and Saturday, 8 a.m.  
to 3:30 a.m.; Sunday, 9 a.m.  
to 4:30 p.m.

**Business lunch potential:**  
Great for high style but in-  
expensive lunches.

It was Warhol's favorite Miami restaurant, and who could blame him? Versailles has as much cheap atmosphere as a cheeseball circus big top, vanlike waitresses with names like "Obsidia," a cattle-call counter that doles out more Cuban coffee per day than a Castro government works project, and a so-what seating concept that plops the celebrated next to the sincere.

It's Versailles and it just doesn't care — it's been hot longer than Louis Vuitton luggage. You can take your La Lechonera, your La Carretta, even your Islas de Canarias and Malaga. At any hour of any day, just try to park anywhere near the front door.

Versailles offers ample evidence of what Cubans can do when they get hold of a decent restaurant theme, one equal to all their native exuberance. What



MICHAEL GERMANA

At Versailles, the eternally chic restaurant with the circus big top atmosphere.

the Sun King would have thought sitting down to dine in the restaurant's Mirror Room can only be conjectured, but its ceaseless reflections and Hollywood-premiere lighting could not possibly have put him off his rice and beans.

Versailles is the architectural equivalent of polyester, and it somehow works, inspiring a glitter-and-be-gay energy that suits Laurinda Spear's mother just as well as it does the family

out for a festive feed.

All this atmosphere and good food, too. Despite the glam visuals, the management of Versailles is out to feed you. And they've got it down exactly, with a kitchen so practiced at turning out succulent Cuban specialties that it should have been Desilu's studio commissary.

If, on occasion, there are too many slumming Porsche drivers pulled up to the table next to you, ignore them and concen-

trate on the sweet potato stuffed with ropa vieja, or the fragrant, tender shrimp in garlic sauce, the filling palomilla steak, or the hearty Cuban-style pot roast.

None of the dishes served here is particularly light, but generally the mood to overeat will overtake you somewhere after the first beer (or half-way through the first pitcher of the too-sweet sangria), and from then on, its downhill to the flan.

You think you're special? The

banquet and shower selections on the back of the king-sized plastic menu (over 200 items) show you the joint is just as adept at turning out these meals on a per-hundreds basis as it is person-to-person with a hot tamale croquette.

As you might imagine, prices don't count in a restaurant where the place mats turn into spitballs under your water glass. So don't worry if your party of four suddenly balloons and you're footing the bill. You can afford to be a big spender at Versailles, and, if your guests are from out of town, they'll be so dizzy from all the ethnicity they won't notice that the check is under \$50.

The desserts are homemade — all 27 of them — and if you can't breathe after the corn pudding custard, it's a gorgeous kind of agony.

Whenever Versailles drifts towards the concept of cuisine, as in its ho-hum wine list or panache-less paella, it's real point gets lost in shuffle. Somehow going gourmet doesn't feel right in a restaurant with three telephone numbers and no reservations.

So relax. So what if you feel you may soon fit into Divine's old wardrobe? The women beside you bulging out of her white, multitiered wedding cake of a dress isn't worried. Why should you be?