



MICHAEL GERMANA

The fabulous gathering at The Strand.

The Strand: Status and slippage

The Strand

671 Washington Ave.
Miami Beach
532-2340

Hours: Dinner 5 p.m. to 3 a.m., daily.
Business dining potential: The Strand probably has the franchise on humiliation. Rush right over. Even if there's a sea of empty tables, not one of them is for you. But here's an advantage: Humble pie has no calories.

FRANKLY, The Strand couldn't care less about executives, executive dining or much else. It doesn't have to. It's our sunnyland version of the Manhattan ritzaurant, places like Mortimer's and Indochine and Odeon.

Similarities abound. They all serve as metaphorical gas lamps of status, flickering suggestively as they warn some away and beckon others. For the last couple of years, they have served as the hub and nugget, the grainy heart, of the social lives of their two cities. And both raise fickle fingers to those who think that a mere six-figure income or a telex number on a gold-embossed business card means, in

the short run, precisely anything.

Of course, Miami Beach being Miami Beach, our gas lamp flickers a little more flashily. At The Strand, unlike, say, Mortimer's, you won't find Brooke, Jackie or Happy dickering over the reservations for Table 1-B. You won't eat old-WASP baby-food dishes like chicken croquettes. And you won't get away all that cheaply on the check.

Nowhere, however, will you rub up quite so closely to that new Beach style of artistry-in-excess which is invigorating the little spit-of-land-off-to-our-geographical right. Here you'll see the new High Beach at play: leading local ladies in pink wigs color-coordinated with their ensembles; French families in matching nouveau-Nerd black glasses; the savage world of Dade gallerati, owners and artists and their constant companions, fluttering from table to table in moth-like dashes.

Here the crowd at the color-me-stylish bar resembles the glitzy crush at a fashion magazine anniversary party. All the famous local faces are there, plus a few national and international high-fliers, Eurocrats, and a clutch of UM billionaire babies with fake IDs.

Not that there aren't signs of a slippage

in charm, signs that indicate that the fabulous may be about to move on to the next watering hole. Already an occasional man-made fabric is seated among the fashion-tastic. Already certain tables are filled with the outre souls who gobble up shrimp cocktails at the farm-hand hour of 5 p.m. Already a muted round-robin of complaints about the wrinkle-revealing lighting and "Waiting for Godot"-like service is starting to spin through the circles that never order anything but the justly praised Cobb salad (\$6.50).

And the food? Oh. The food. Don't expect rose petals sprinkled on marinated Moroccan lamb. The food, like a good Chanel suit, basically stays the same, much as the Bold Ones would wish. It's their home cookin' and they want it to have a certain comforting consistency.

Occasionally a touch of fancy intrudes: a braised leek here, a bit of andouille sausage there. Generally, however, it's meat, salad, fish and pasta, with a hamburger-chicken-salad-sandwich embroidery. For a bit of the bistro effect you can order items like a hamburger with fries for (\$4.50) — some of the prices seem far too low for people who are willing to spend \$60 for a haircut. Although

most dishes stay around \$15, sandwiches, salads and appetizers are as reasonable in price as they are limited in selection. Almost as limited as the wine list, which, like many of the clientele of the restaurant, goes strictly by the look: some well-chosen Chardonnays and Sauvignons, a few rosé and champagne selections. The possibilities are less than endless.

For those who like a regular dose of this kind of high life, the menu changes daily. Certain standards, however, like the chocolate cake, serve as steadfast reminders that The Strand is prepared to fuel the burning fires of glamour late into the night — or at least until 3 a.m., when the doors close and the pink wigs are removed.

The Strand seems acceptable whenever I'm hungry for a tableau of all that is of-the-instant in this area of the country. And for-the-moment. As with the best of the young, like James Dean and Mozart, I'm worried that all this glamour can't last, that the place will die some sudden, mystifying death, wrecking on the trendy shoals and turning into a warehouse.

It's happened before. Especially on the Beach.