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Welcome to the Jungle



SoBe's Setai Hotel simultaneously hosted two uber-exclusive New Year's Eve soirees featuring Academy Award-winner Jennifer Hudson.

With a myriad of New Year's Eve bashes being hosted all over Miami Beach and the popularity of its event last year- celebrity hosts then included Jessica Alba and Hilary and Haylie Duff-The Setai hotel understood the importance of delivering an over-the-top experience for guests who were shelling out as much as \$10,000 per ticket. New York-based event designer [Michael Stern](#) jumped on the chance to top the previous party, creating a jungle-themed paradise for both the Lagoon Dinner Dance and the Beyond Paradise Party. From the more than 50 costumed performers to the LED-lit tiki torches, guests truly got a big bang for their buck.

"The Setai's architectural integrity, lush foliage, and East-meets-West ambience was a great starting point for me," said Stern. "With all the property already had to offer, it was almost as if less was more when it came to design."

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At the Lagoon Dinner Dance, 16 interactive dancers from Designs by Sean kept guests' energy high all night long. *Stephen Covello*

With help from local event design company [Designs by Sean](#), Stern and his team created two separate atmospheres, each incorporating nature and the supernatural. The Lagoon Dinner Dance was unique in that it broke age barriers and allowed guests of all ages to celebrate the holiday together, Stern said, while the Beyond Paradise Party was there for the 20- and 30-something set to celebrate well into the morning hours.

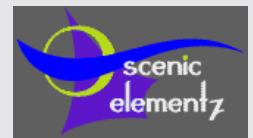
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The festivities began as guests entered on a red carpet through a palm-tree-lined promenade toward the cocktail reception, where they were treated to the evening's signature Peacock-tail, made with Veuve Clicquot Champagne and Marquis Platinum Vitality Drink. From there, the 500 ticket holders were led through an Asian candlelit tunnel to the Lagoon Dinner Dance. Setai executive chef Jonathan Wright prepared a five-course meal including dishes such as crispy Peking duck salad, miso caramelized black cod, and roasted wagyu tenderloin with Maine lobster ravioli and baby turnips.

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As dinner concluded, another 500-plus guests were welcomed to the Beyond Paradise Party at the opposite end of the hotel. Rather than cover the courtyard's pool, Stern decided to empty it, allowing for sunken living room seating for the party. Using the stationary trees in the pool, [New Century Dance Company](#) placed their costumed birds of paradise and serpent performers throughout the space.

As midnight approached, actress and singer Jennifer Hudson took the stage to perform her No. 1 hit "And I Am Telling You I'm Not Going," from the movie Dreamgirls, finishing with a countdown to 2008. Simultaneously, across the property, performance artist Wunmi and DJ [Sky Nellor](#) counted down for the Beyond Paradise group, who partied well into the morning hours of 2008.

—Brittany Peitsmeyer

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