

Lenny Kravitz tries his hand at hotel design in South Beach

By Barbara De Lollis, USA TODAY

Rocker Lenny Kravitz joins famed hotel designer Philippe Starck to develop a vision for the much-awaited SLS hotel in Miami's South Beach at 17th and Collins Avenue.

SLS is the brainchild of Sam Nazarian, who started as an Los Angeles nightclub operator but with his company "sbe" has been shaking up L.A.'s restaurant and hotel scene. (I'll tell you more about his hotel ambitions when I return from vacation next week.)

The Miami location will mark the second SLS when it opens next March, following the SLS hotel that opened during the recession at the L.A.-Beverly Hills border. Nazarian plans to open a third at some point in Las Vegas on the site of the just-shuttered Sahara.

The inclusion of Kravitz in the South Beach hotel's look gives us an idea of the vibe that Nazarian likes to create at his hotels. He already assembled a list of heavy hitters for the first SLS, who are also involved in the South Beach location:

- Starck, who helped create the boutique hotel concept in the mid 1980s with Ian Schrager
- José Andrés, the chef behind the L.A. SLS hotel's popular Bazaar restaurant with a growing national reputation
- Katsuya Uechi, the sushi chef behind the company's growing Katsuya restaurant chain.

Kravitz's seven-year-old firm Kravitz Design Inc. is tasked with creating an exclusive bungalow and penthouse suite, which could be a hit with the sports teams and athletes, celebrities and others who consider South Beach their playground.

"Lenny is a weapon of massive construction. He is an explosion of all talents, an unlimited boiling bucket of culture, a daily firework, a tireless explorer," Starck says of his friend in sbe's press release.

Kravitz is not just a South Beach vacationer. He's a Miami native who stayed loyal to his hometown after his musical career took off. His firm, by the way, helped invent the concept for the Delano's revamped Florida Room lounge.

The SLS hotel - located across from the Delano, the Schrager-Starck creation that helped put South Beach on the map - will open with the original 132 rooms, plus 10 new luxury bungalow suites near the pool. This property will have a white-on-white palate with color accents from carpeting, stone or artwork.

If the L.A. SLS is any indication, expect whimsical decor and dark lighting that some will embrace and others will shun. The look isn't for everyone, which isn't a bad thing if you ask hoteliers who like to target specific, design-loving customers. (Starwood CEO Frits van Paasschen says this all the time about Starwood's trendy, chic W chain.)



The SLS South Beach, in fact, will likely go head to head with the W South Beach for some individual customers, since it's a much smaller hotel. At the W South Beach, the smallest of its 408 black-and-white-themed rooms can go for \$800 a night during peak winter season.

Another sign that the SLS will target the W crowd: A couple of months ago, sbe plucked W South Beach GM (general manager) Albert Mertz to run the SLS South Beach. Mertz had joined the W after running the Raleigh Hotel, which was part of Andre Balazs' luxury hotel group, and also had experience working with the luxury Mandarin Oriental and Ritz-Carlton chains.