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## Private social clubs in Palm Beach County offer a place for business and fun



### 'Palm Beaching:' How changes are shaping Palm Beach County

'Palm Beaching:' From Boca Raton to West Palm Beach, from Wellington to Jupiter, how changes are shaping Palm Beach County

The COVID-19 pandemic fueled a historic migration of wealth to Palm Beach County. That influx of money is transforming the style, landscape, and fortunes of our area, with some communities more and more resembling the tony town of Palm Beach. The migration will bring changes and challenges. This is one part of a Palm Beach Post multi-part series titled The Palm Beaching Project. [Go here for more stories in the series.](#)

*This story originally published in early 2024.*

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When [West Palm Beach](#) business executives or [wealthy residents](#) want to gather with friends and family, where can they find a posh place to visit with like-minded people? Soon, they could be convening at private [members-only clubs](#) planned for downtown.

# The Palm Beach Post



## 'Palm Beaching!' How changes are shaping Palm Beach County

From Boca Raton to West Palm Beach, from Wellington to Jupiter, how changes are shaping Palm Beach County.

The way people socialize and network with each other is yet another ripple effect of the migration of wealth to greater Palm Beach County since the pandemic. In this case, it's the rise of the private club, long a staple of networking and consorting in Palm Beach's winter season.

Hospitality operators are creating several upscale private clubs where members can receive preferred treatment without having to compete with the public for dinner reservations. The goal is to replicate the attention paid to members of posh private clubs in major cities around the globe, such as the SoHo House in New York, London, and Miami.

One private club planned for West Palm Beach will be at [Nora, the \\$1 billion dining, entertainment and lifestyle district](#) being built north of the downtown. Nora, named because it is bounded by North Railroad Avenue on the west, stretches from Seventh Street north to Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard.

Nora developer Ned Grace said a private club will be a key part of the district.

"This is a place where I can have a breakfast meeting in a private space or a lunch meeting," Grace said. "This is a place where I can go work in the afternoon or enjoy curated programming."

Grace plans to build the club in a 1925 warehouse at 925 N. Railroad Ave. The building is in the heart of the Nora district.

The ground floor will have a public restaurant, and the top two floors will be a members-only club. Grace said the large, 30,000-square-foot club will provide a variety of daily and nightly uses for business and pleasure.

"We think business will be transacted here. Fun will be had here," Grace said. "It's not like any club that exists today."

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## Nora district taking shape on first phase of construction near downtown West Palm Beach

Construction and renovations are underway at Nora, the \$1 billion dining, business and residential district north of downtown of West Palm Beach

### An in-town private golf club in West Palm, at Palm Beach-level prices

West Palm Beach, established in 1894, once was mostly a residential enclave for workers toiling in Palm Beach. The city's fortunes changed with the land rush of the 1920s and continued to zig-zag during the next 100 years from real estate booms and busts, with no permanent elements to create a buffer against change.

Conditions began to shift about six years ago when tweaks to federal tax laws, construction of new condominium complexes, and the COVID-triggered pandemic migration of people and their incomes led to a more permanent economy and residential base.

New residents to West Palm Beach were pleasantly surprised by what they found: A good restaurant scene, new luxury office buildings and plenty of cultural offerings.

**Palm Beaching:** [An influx of wealth, CEOs and financial firms is changing the shape and style of West Palm](#)

Word got out. Suddenly, people who could live in Palm Beach were choosing to live in West Palm Beach, leading to the transformation of the city's profile into a luxury hotspot and the nickname, "Palm Beach West."

Now even the Ritz-Carlton wants to be in West Palm Beach and hopes to brand a new luxury condominium set to rise along the Intracoastal Waterway.

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With the rise of West Palm Beach's fortunes, business leaders say they believe the futures of Palm Beach and West Palm Beach are linked.

"I certainly feel the ability of West Palm Beach and Palm Beach to continue to grow together, instead of apart, is going to be fundamental to the future success of both places," said Robert Frisbie Jr., managing partner of the Frisbie Group, a longtime Palm Beach family that recently expanded its holdings from the island into West Palm Beach.

## **Will Palm Beach residents cross the bridges to belong to a club in West Palm Beach?**



The Belgrove hotel, set to open later this year in West Palm Beach. *Provided By The Belgrove*

Perhaps no other project exemplifies the evolution of West Palm Beach than the changes taking place at a golf course and unfinished hotel west of the downtown.

On a road off Congress Avenue just east of Interstate 95 at Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard, the former Banyan Cay Golf Club is being turned into the ultra-luxury Dutchman's Pipe club.

Dutchman's Pipe operators say they are targeting ultra-wealthy people in or near Palm Beach who once wouldn't dream of stepping foot over the bridges to West Palm Beach but now see the city as a viable nearby playground.

Club operators also want to attract the millionaires snapping up single-family homes in and around downtown West Palm Beach or buying into the modern condos being built along the waterfront.

# The Palm Beach Post

"If you live in Palm Beach island or West Palm Beach, minutes from your home you have a brand-new golf experience," said Alex Witkoff, co-chief executive of the Witkoff Group of New York, one of the property's new owners.



## A visual tour of what makes West Palm Beach a great city

A visual tour of some of the great things about West Palm: the Kravis Center, Palm Beach Zoo, SunFest, and the Ballpark of the Palm Beaches and more.

Initiation fees for Dutchman's Pipe reflect the new demographic.

While the Banyan Cay club previously charged a \$30,000 initiation fee, Dutchman's Pipe fee is between \$300,000 to \$325,000.

Witkoff and partners said they plan to elevate an unfinished 150-room hotel and adjoining golf course to a rarified level of luxury, akin to the exclusive Breakers Palm Beach resort and club, where club initiation fees reportedly also cost hundreds of thousands of dollars. By year end, guests will be able to book rooms at [The Belgrove](#), a luxury hotel that will be part of the Marriott Autograph Hotel collection.

Witkoff and partners know something about exclusive private resorts and clubs.

They are behind South Florida's newest luxury golf club, the Shell Bay Club in Hallandale Beach, formerly the Diplomat Golf Resort & Spa.

**More private clubs are on the way**

# The Palm Beach Post



The Related Group's Icon Marina Village in northern West Palm Beach on the shore of the Lake Worth Lagoon. The two towers have 399 rental apartments ranging in price from about \$2,200 to more than \$10,000 per month. *Arturo Peña*



Rendering of the Bellini Rooftop Club, a private social club slated for the top of the Mr. C Hotel & Residences coming to West Palm Beach. *Binyan Studios*

# The Palm Beach Post

In downtown West Palm Beach, Nora may be the largest club planned, but it isn't the only one built or coming to the city.

Grace already operates the Cove Club, a beachy club that opened along the Intracoastal Waterway last December in the new [Icon Marina Village](#) apartment complex.

In addition, at least two other clubs are on the way.

Bellini Rooftop Club will open in the heart of downtown West Palm Beach when the Mr. C Hotel & Residences is completed in a couple of years, [at 320 Lakeview Ave.](#)

And the shuttered Hotel Biba at 320 Belvedere Rd. just east of Dixie Highway could be transformed into a members-only club, Biba Social, that will provide access to a renovated hotel. Biba Social currently is seeking members, according to the Biba Social website and real estate sources.

The property's owner, Elizabeth Rad, is the manager of Palm Beach-based Corrado Properties, which owns and develops boutique luxury hotels and resorts including the Sorrel River Ranch Resort and Spa in Moab, Utah. Rad did not respond to an email seeking comment.

## **Proof that new private clubs can work**

The members-only club is a feature of major U.S. cities and residential club communities throughout Florida, which offer tennis, golf or social memberships.

But in downtown West Palm Beach, the in-town club concept harkens back to when there were no elegant places to dine downtown unless at a private business club, such as the now-defunct Governors Club atop the Phillips Point office complex.



Charles Contessa, manager of the Governors Club, stands in the dining room. The club is on the top floor of Phillips Point's East tower. photo by Scott Wiseman. 5/18/01 ORG XMIT: ORG XMIT: MER0708061122051360 Scott Wiseman, *The Palm Beach Post*

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While the club model has been around for a long time, in recent years it's "made more sense in a market like this," Nora's Grace said.

Of course, Palm Beach has its own private club world, which is not only too pricey for most but also difficult to access without the right connections.

But the success of the newest club in Palm Beach, a chic spot called the [Carriage House](#), is proof that new clubs can work, operators say.

In Palm Beach, the Carriage House opened in 2022 on South County Road in landmarked buildings by architects Addison Mizner and Maurice Fatio.



Carriage House, an English-style social club, is expected to open by the end of the year at South County Road and Phipps Plaza, December 21, 2021. It will offer bars, dining spaces, and reading and game rooms for its members. *DAMON HIGGINS/THE PALM BEACH DAILY NEWS*

Membership, which started at \$250,000, now reportedly costs in the \$400,000s. Members have access to private gathering, drinking and dining spaces set amid gem-colored interiors of tile, stone and textiles.

Real estate investor Thomas Morrison said the Carriage Club's buzz inspired him to include plans for a private club atop the Mr. C Hotel & Residences he plans to build in West Palm Beach. The 25-story tower will feature 146 luxury condominium units ranging from \$1.5 million to \$6 million, with the mid-range price expected to be about \$4 million. In addition, the tower will feature a 110-room hotel.

Atop the tower will sit the Bellini Rooftop Club by the famed Cipriani family.

"It's something new and branded, and it's never been done before in West Palm Beach," Morrison said of Bellini Rooftop Club.

Live music, entertainment and other programming will be among the perks for members, as well as access to the hotel's fitness facilities and its resort pool.



# The Palm Beach Post

In a recent interview, Andrea Martucci, vice president of Mr. C's Hotels, stressed that the food throughout the hotel and club will be the same quality as that found in other Cipriani-led properties, including the Mr. C's Bellini restaurant in Coconut Grove.