

February 8, 2024

The allure of the private club: Why exclusive cliques are coming to West Palm Beach



Major high rise construction and real estate development in downtown West Palm Beach

New office towers in downtown West Palm Beach, or already completed ones, such as 360 Rosemary, have lured about 100 firms since 2019 to Palm Beach County. Greg Lovett, *Palm Beach Post*

To hear Andrea Martucci tell it, the Bellini Rooftop Club by the famed Cipriani family will be exclusive, but not excessive, when it opens in 2026 in the heart of West Palm Beach.

Membership in the club will be pricey, costing a few thousand dollars. But it won't cost in the six figures, the way the latest new club in nearby Palm Beach does.

Bellini Rooftop Club isn't going to be a place for just *anyone*, however.

Membership will be a slow and "vigorous" process, said Martucci, vice president of Mr. C's Hotels, the company branding a new hotel and condo tower where the club will be located.

"It will be fairly affordable," Martucci said of the club, "but almost impossible to become a member."

Naturally, everyone will want to join. Or so Martucci hopes.

The Palm Beach Post



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. (Credit: Binyan Studios) *Binyan Studios*

Migration of wealth to West Palm Beach creates market for private clubs

West Palm Beach, once the plain sister city to ritzy Palm Beach across the bridges, is becoming a favored destination in its own right for [high-end businesses](#) and wealthy residents. They, in turn, are attracting [luxury real estate developers](#), [upscale eateries](#) and a spate of boutique businesses catering to the rich.

With the city's rising status, private club operators see fertile ground for an amenity that will glam up the environs even more — and meet demand for the preferred treatment that some residents are used to enjoying up north.

One private club, the Cove Club, already opened last December along North Flagler Drive in the new [Icon Marina Village](#) apartment complex.

Another is slated to be built at the \$1 billion [Nora](#) dining and entertainment district, now under construction just north of the downtown.



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

The Palm Beach Post

The third, Bellini Rooftop Club, will open when the Mr. C Hotel & Residences is completed in a couple of years.

While the club model has been around for a long time, in recent years it's "made more sense in a market like this," said Ned Grace, a real estate developer involved in both the Cove Club and Nora.

That's because private clubs are a natural evolution for a city that is growing in sophistication, added Jay Parker, chief executive officer of brokerage for Douglas Elliman's Florida region.

"The allure of private clubs has become a very important part of the fabric of our luxury offerings," Parker said.

Club operators say West Palm Beach is ripe for membership groups

Some 30 years ago, dining clubs such as the now-defunct [Governors Club](#) or Executive Club were the only place business diners could get a formal meal in downtown West Palm Beach, especially for lunch.

Today, there are plenty of choices for lunch and dinner in the central business district, some more luxurious than others.

But with the city now an increasingly growing business and residential destination, Grace said there's a need for a place where people can gather in private spaces.



Take a visual tour of the best new outdoor dining in Palm Beach County

New outdoor dining options near West Palm include a restaurant with twinkly patio, a tiki bar, Mexican-inspired spots and a waterfront seafood market.

Of course, there are plenty of golf and country clubs in suburban residential enclaves. There also are established private clubs on neighboring Palm Beach.

The Palm Beach Post

But if these bastions of wealth and privilege were difficult to get into before, the glut of new, rich residents makes them nearly impossible to access now.

In addition, there are more affluent people in general living in and around West Palm Beach.

During the past few years and especially since the pandemic, as transplants from the Northeast and West ran out of homes to buy on Palm Beach, [they began buying property in West Palm Beach](#), spending millions of dollars on waterfront homes along the Intracoastal Waterway or in the ultra-luxury condominium towers rising along Flagler Drive.

Despite the exclusivity of their homes, these new West Palm Beach residents have no urban "supper club" to call their own, club aficionados say.

Some tart observers say private clubs merely are a way for the rich or stodgy to stay in their bubble.

But Grace said clubs help make a big community smaller for like-minded people.

People living in metropolitan cities appreciate the familiarity of membership clubs such as New York's Soho House or Casa Cipriani, said Alicia Cervera Lamadrid, of Cervera Real Estate in West Palm Beach.

As more people make Florida their permanent residence, they are eager to create a "discerning community" they can belong to here, akin to the environment they had when they lived in cities such as New York, Chicago, Boston and Los Angeles, Parker said.

In addition, Palm Beach residents who once only crossed into West Palm Beach to go to the airport now seem more comfortable playing in the county seat.

They're even venturing beyond Palm Beach's fine restaurants to dine at eateries in West Palm Beach's [reinvigorated Dixie Highway business district](#).

The Palm Beach Post



The Cove Club is a newly-opened private membership club in West Palm Beach. Cove Club

During the winter season, however, demand for restaurant reservations exceeds the supply.

"People want access, and during season, access is at a premium," Grace said. "It's hard to get reservations and if you get reservations, it's really crowded and service levels can vary."

And a premium bar experience in West Palm Beach?

Nonexistent, according to real estate investor Thomas Morrison, who said there is "no place to go" in West Palm Beach for a good cocktail in a sophisticated space.

Morrison, who is building the Mr. C's condo hotel tower and Bellini Rooftop Club, sees his club as a solution to a city needing an "elevated experience" for an evening out.

Would you cross a bridge for swank dinner service?

The success of the newest club on Palm Beach, a chic spot called the Carriage House, is proof that new clubs can work, operators say.

The Carriage House opened in 2022 on South County Road in landmarked buildings by architects Addison Mizner and Maurice Fatio.

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

The Palm Beach Post



The Carriage House, an English-style social club, at South County Road and Phipps Plaza in Palm Beach. [DAMON HIGGINS/The Palm Beach Daily News]

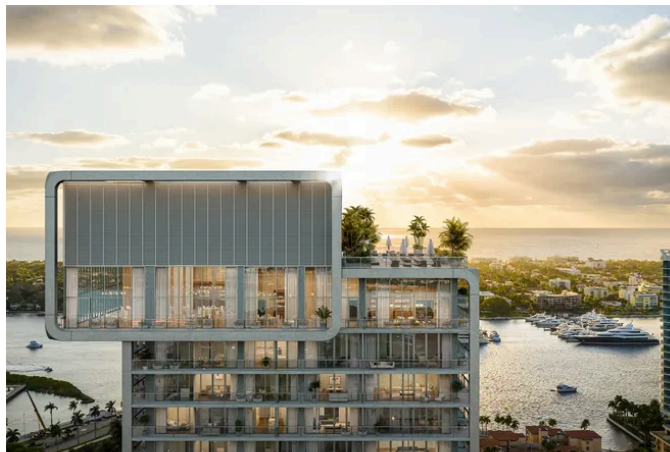
Celebrities sightings are frequent. Photographs are not because photos are strictly forbidden in the property.

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 rise [at 320 Lakeview Ave.](#), in the heart of downtown.

"It's going to be an affordable version of the Carriage House," Morrison said of Bellini Rooftop Club. "It's something new and branded, and it's never been done before in West Palm Beach."

Membership fees will range around \$6,000, Morrison said.

Mr. C 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.



A rendering of Mr. C Hotel & Residences planned for downtown West Palm Beach. Binyan Studios

The Palm Beach Post

Sales of condominiums in the Mr. C project recently began, and buyers receive a free one-year membership in Bellini Rooftop Club when they purchase a unit. Parker said the Mr. C tower is appealing because it blends private ownership and club membership with public amenities featured in the sought-after Mr. C hotel.

While a Mr. C's hotel in Coconut Grove, a trendy community within Miami, doesn't have a private club, even residents of Palm Beach County [drive to the property's Bellini restaurant](#) for its renowned menu and club-like environment.

The Coconut Grove property's popularity is a reason why the Cipriani family decided to create a "ground-up space" for a separate club in Palm Beach County, Martucci said.

"And we think West Palm Beach has all the ingredients to replicate the success in Coconut Grove," he added.

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.

Although Bellini Rooftop Club will be atop the Mr. C's tower in West Palm Beach, make no mistake: Club operators want to attract the Palm Beach crowd "as well as selected crowds in West Palm Beach," Martucci said.

A slice of the Florida lifestyle just north of downtown West Palm Beach

Meanwhile, along the Intracoastal Waterway, the party already has started at the Cove Club, at 4444 N. Flagler Drive, part of the Icon Marina Village apartment complex.



Icon Marina Village in West Palm Beach
The waterfront Icon Marina Village is the first rental development on West Palm Beach's waterfront in decades.

Nicholas Coniglio operates the club. He is co-owner of such hotspots as E.R. Bradley's Saloon and 123 Datura Bar & Grill in West Palm Beach, and co-founder of Cucina in Palm Beach.

So Coniglio knows a little something about creating the right vibe for guests.

The Palm Beach Post

A driving force behind the Cove Club was a desire to create a waterfront dining experience in a city that has no waterfront restaurants. Having to motor the boat north to Jupiter or south to Lantana to a dockside restaurant isn't ideal, Coniglio said.

But Coniglio said he also wanted to serve the city's growing population by creating an in-town space for the tropical lifestyle that everyone came to Florida to enjoy.

In addition to food and beverage services, the Cove Club also has a private sandy beach along the Intracoastal with daybeds, lounge chairs and a dock. Day parties, sunset gatherings, dinner, drinks and activities all are on the menu.

Membership costs about \$15,000 a year, Coniglio said, a figure he said is a fraction of the price of clubs on nearby Palm Beach.

"We had the vision to bring a taste of Miami up to the Northwood area," Coniglio said. "This is not your traditional club. We want to have a youthful vibe. Come by boat and dock and have a fun day."

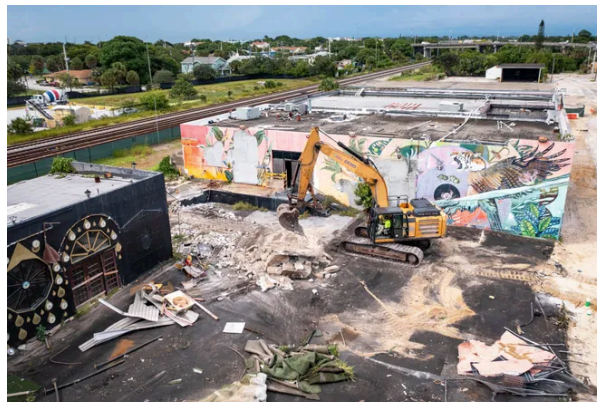
Arturo Peña is senior vice president of Related Group of Miami, which built the Icon Marina Village apartment complex. Peña said the waterfront lifestyle social club is a free amenity for rental residents at the apartment during their lease period.

The club's membership roster is capped at 200 for now, but the club still has room for new members who apply by filling out an application on the [club's website](#).

The new Nora neighborhood and plans for a club

Closer to downtown, Grace plans to build a private social club at the \$1 billion Nora dining, office and entertainment district in West Palm Beach.

Grace was mum on club details for now, but he said the membership fee likely will cost in the \$5,000 range, which he called a more "mainstream" price than the fee charged by other private clubs.



Construction and renovations are underway for the upcoming Nora district, the \$1 billion dining, business and residential district north of downtown. GREG LOVETT/THE PALM BEACH POST

The Palm Beach Post

The \$1 billion Nora project soon will be the city's newest entertainment district. The project is attracting a host of top eateries, many of them from [New York](#). Boutique gyms, creative office space, a chic hotel and even apartments also are planned for dozens of acres along North Railroad Avenue stretching from Seventh Street north to Palm Beach Lakes Boulevard.

As Grace and partners work to create a new city district, the club will serve as a common gathering spot.

In short, "it will be a neighborhood clubhouse," Grace said.