

# ROCKING AVENTURA

RETAIL MAVEN BROOKE SOFFER BRINGS TO SOUTH FLORIDA A HOST OF HIGH-END, GLOBAL BRANDS, INCLUDING PHILIPP PLEIN'S FIRST STATESIDE BOUTIQUE.

BY SUZANNE WEINSTOCK KLEIN

Brooke Soffer knew that the time was right for a blockbuster international partnership. After scouring the globe in search of high-end brands to usher into the Miami market, Soffer, head of retail at the Fontaine-

bleau Miami Beach, set her sights on bringing German designer Philipp Plein to South Florida. In the past four years, the rock 'n' roll-inspired, Swiss-based brand has opened 30 stores throughout Europe, Asia, and the

Middle East. Now, Soffer has brought Plein to the US, with his first eponymous stateside storefront right here at Aventura Mall, opening this December.

"The brand has been around for more than 20 years, and it took time to develop," says Plein, whose products are made in Italy. "It's like watching a child grow. The American market is tough—it's saturated with luxury goods—but our business has matured, and we're very proud that Miami will be our first US location."

The opening of Philipp Plein Miami is the natural evolution of a partnership between Plein and Soffer, as the multibrand boutique Ida and Harry at the Fontainebleau Miami Beach has been the area's exclusive Philipp Plein retailer for roughly three years. Despite being relatively unknown in the US at the outset of the relationship, the line not only held its own next to powerhouse brands like Herve Leger, Valentino, and Emilio Pucci, but also surged in popularity.

"Our clients at the Fontainebleau want things that really make a statement. That's what Philipp Plein is," says Soffer. Leather, crystals, studs, metallics, and a signature laughing skull are all hallmarks of the brand. She began selling only the women's line, but soon added men's and accessories as demand increased. "Some of it is a little outrageous and over-the-top, but that's what our customers are looking for," she says. "We sell tremendous volume of the line especially to international visitors. It's now the number-one brand people come to the store requesting, and they buy it in bulk."

Soffer knows more than a little about retail. After launching her career in Los Angeles at Guess, Barneys New York, and Room With a View, she moved to Miami to strike out on her own, ultimately building a mini empire of stores in Aventura Mall. When Turnberry

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With a keen eye for fashion and retail merchandising Brooke Soffer introduces big-name brands—including Philipp Plein—to Aventura.



## A STYLISH VIEW

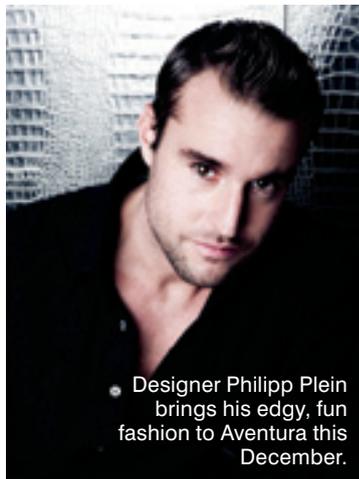
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Associates purchased the Fontainebleau in 2005, Soffer came on board to launch the resort's retail. And even though she no longer has public storefronts in Aventura, she still operates her home store, Lakeview Home Accessories, as a private showroom.

While Plein's US invasion began with the opening of a New York showroom in September, he wanted Aventura Mall to be the spot for his first store and for Soffer to be his business partner. With a keen sense of personal style and an astute talent for identifying brands that will do well in particular retail markets—especially in South Florida—Soffer recognized the potential success of unveiling Philipp Plein at Aventura. “Philipp knows Miami is a great market for his brand,” says Soffer. “I’ve been doing this for a long time, and I think it’s going to be a slam dunk. Philipp is a great person to work with and a lot of fun. I look forward to helping him build the brand in the States.”

“Miami is in the US, but it’s a gateway to South America,” says Plein. “It’s a very important market, and Aventura gives us great visibility as a new entry in the market.” One of the nation’s top five grossing malls, Aventura attracts 28 million visitors per year, with the average tourist spending more than twice the national average at its 300 stores.

Soffer believes in Philipp Plein's US potential so much that she signed on for far more than just the Miami opening. She holds the first right of refusal to be Plein's partner in



Designer Philipp Plein brings his edgy, fun fashion to Aventura this December.

all US locations other than New York and Los Angeles.

“Basically, I am the licensee for Philipp Plein in the United States. Philipp was so committed to opening the store in Miami. We thought it would be a natural partnership,” Soffer says of the arrangement, which she expects to evolve for future locations. Soffer notes that the Philipp Plein universe is so extensive that it would be impossible to carry everything in the 1,440-square-foot Aventura store, but a great selection of lines will be represented.

Philipp Plein Miami will be a continuation of the design identity that the brand has developed—a luxe, minimalist concept dominated by black and white marble. This leaves

little to distract from the brand's two now-iconic decorative elements—chandeliers featuring handblown Murano glass skull motifs and a three-foot-high skull covered in 40,000 Swarovski crystals worth \$250,000.

Expect more Philipp Plein locations to roll out quickly, as Plein is working on boutiques in New York and Los Angeles, and Soffer is eyeing Las Vegas as well as a possible second Miami location in the Design District.

But first, Miami holds a special place in Philipp Plein's heart. “Miami has a great nightlife and day life. It's a fun place,” says Plein. “The most important thing about fashion is to enjoy it, and we make clothes that make people happy to go out, celebrate, and have a good time.” ■



CLOCKWISE: The studded College jacket, the Queen bracelet, and the Cage clutch are all part of the collection available at Philipp Plein's Aventura store.

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