



CLOCKWISE FROM FAR LEFT: Alan and Nathan Lieberman; the Perfect Manhattan cocktail at Joe's Stone Crab; Joe's old-school atmosphere makes it a Lieberman favorite on the Beach.

FATHER-SON SITDOWN

When: A bluebird sky Tuesday.

Where: Joe's Stone Crab

Time: A late lunch between meetings.



family ties

IN HONOR OF FATHER'S DAY, WE LUNCH WITH ONE OF OUR TOWN'S MOST DYNAMIC FATHER-AND-SON TEAMS, ALAN AND NATHAN LIEBERMAN, AS THEY TALK SHOP AND THE PLEASURES OF AN UNFUSSY MEAL. BY KRIS CONESA

“Like father, like son” is not quite the right adage for Alan and Nathan Lieberman. Alan, the patriarch, is a no-nonsense hotelier and real estate mogul who carries himself with a demeanor that could only be described as intense, while Nathan is a young, brash, irrepressible, and charismatic personality, always to be found with a smile on his face. What they do share, aside from genetics and a last name, is a love of polo, good food, and a business acumen that has propelled their company, the South Beach Group, to dynastic proportions. Through their successes, they have amassed a considerable fortune, with assets running the gamut from the Taco Beach Shack to a nationally televised reality show, *The Catalina*, based on the goings-on at the hotel of the same name, and, of course, multiple boutique hotels like the Whitelaw Hotel, Metropole South Beach, and their newest venture, the Riviera South Beach.

Despite their differences and a generational gap spanning two decades, there can be no denying that their dynamic works. They are a South Beach success story. Nathan, the heir to the dynasty, brokered his first deal to buy a hotel at the age of 20, and is a people person with a talent for effectively communicating to his father what works and what doesn't on South Beach.

His father, in turn, has a creative process that comes especially alive with interior design. He takes pride in being personally hands-on with the design of all of their hotels, and his fanaticism for the Art Deco style and the Dorothy Draper era (referring to the renowned interior decorator) is evident in everything he does.

They share a business relationship, to be sure, but there's also a familiar dynamic that is hard to hide. When Nathan showed up a little late for an

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BELOW: Joe's famous stone crab claws; RIGHT: Son and father bonding over a good meal.



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interview and a bite at Joe's Stone Crab, Dad raised an eyebrow. Yet when they spoke about each other and their working relationship, it was clear that a tender familial bond and mutual respect underlie it all.

"Of course, there are challenging elements to running a business with any family member," says the elder Lieberman. "It can be difficult to isolate personal issues when running a business, and sometimes I find myself being a little harsh on him, but I am of the mind-set that being cruel to be kind is something everyone needs a dose of once in a while. We share and enjoy the same successes, and we are there for each other through any struggles."

When it comes to their love of bonding over a good meal, however, there is rarely any disagreement. They've seen a lot of hot spots come and go but lean toward a time-tested landmark. "We never fail to enjoy Joe's Stone Crab," says Alan. "I still like the old-school experience with professionally trained waiters, who pride themselves on attention to detail. I also appreciate a restaurant in which you can hear yourself speak and hear the words being spoken by the person sitting next to you. A restaurant without a DJ seems to be a rarity these days."

Nathan, for his part, has always had a soft spot for Joe's. "My wife went into labor here. So for me this place has always held a special place in my heart," he says. "My wife, friends, and I often go to Joe's for some quiet time over our meal, and when we want to talk business or have an undisturbed conversation. There's a noticeable difference between the newer restaurants on Miami Beach, known for their 'entertainment' appeal, and Joe's, as the most traditional—and oldest—restaurant on Miami Beach, that really shows how much of a landmark it's truly become."

Sitting at Joe's, which celebrated its 100th anniversary this past year, Nathan admits to enjoying the occasional tequila and does have an affinity for a good red wine, "anything good" being his preference. His father, by contrast, is not a big drinker at all. In fact, it's hard to imagine two

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—ALAN LIEBERMAN

more different people, but somehow they make it work.

"I turn to Nathan as a sounding board. He definitely has a tendency to open my eyes to things I would have normally overlooked," says Alan about his son. Nathan adds with a grin, "If it were up to him, he'd only sell salads, burgers, and fries at all our restaurants."

Burgers and fries, however, just won't cut it for the younger Lieberman, who always injects a bit of ethnic flair into his restaurants. Moreno's Cuban, his newest concept, for example, is the latest installment by the South Beach Group, situated in the newly opened Riviera South Beach at 2000 Liberty Avenue. The restaurant will offer traditional Cuban cuisine with a modern twist. It's an amalgamation of the classics and the nouveau, a description that would be just as apt when applied to this father-and-son powerhouse. **OD**

FLAVOR PROFILE

Favorite dishes: Nathan likes the fried chicken, stone crabs, conch fritters, sautéed spinach, and Key lime pie. Alan loves "anything" at Joe's, but especially crab claws, Manhattan clam chowder, spinach, and homemade apple pie.

Alan on privacy: "Joe's has a mature reputation of hosting high-profile lawyers, doctors, athletes, and members of the Hollywood community, due to the fact that these people want to enjoy their meal without distractions or disturbances. Joe's is not a see-and-be-seen environment but more of a place to be left alone to enjoy your meal. I like that."