



A Fish Called Avalon is still going strong on Ocean Drive. / Photo courtesy of A Fish Called Avalon

A Fish Called Avalon Has Seen Three Decades of Change on Ocean Drive

JULIANA ACCIOLY | JANUARY 10, 2020 | 9:30AM

In the early '90s, South Beach was one of the most hedonistic, glamorous destinations. It was a hot spot where celebrities and supermodels congregated on sandy beaches and where the likes of Gianni Versace sipped coffee on Ocean Drive.

One of the few restaurants still standing from those decadent days is [A Fish Called Avalon](#).

Serving a menu of fresh, locally sourced seafood with Caribbean influences, the restaurant debuted inside the Avalon Hotel on Ocean Drive in 1989.

"Back then, we proprietors were running things our way," says Tom Glassie, who owns both the hotel and the restaurant. "The Ocean Drive Association managed the street with care. The late Tony Goldman was the chair of the association and one of the most influential leaders in the area. He owned several properties and was a driving force in the city."

As years passed, the stretch of Ocean Drive from Fifth to 15th Street gradually became a tropical version of Times Square, filled with overpriced tourist traps. Glassie says restaurants and shops began opening to make quick money rather than attract longtime patrons. "A lot of the people who set up shop had no stake in customer and service experience," he says. Soon other neighborhoods started competing with Ocean Drive for local and tourist dollars, and Miami visitors began seeking beach experiences farther north or opting for Brickell as a tourist destination.



Macadamia-crusted snapper / Photo courtesy of A Fish Called Avalon

Glassie says Ocean Drive is poised for a renaissance. He cites the extension of the Miami Beach Boardwalk – which originally spanned Mid-Beach from 23rd to 46th Streets and now offers pedestrians a paved walkway south to Fifth Street – as one of the developments helping to attract locals to South Beach.

"The new mayor [Dan Gelber] means business, and the city is focused on bringing the standards and qualities of Ocean Drive back. We're gradually going back to those days of holding everyone responsible for delivering high-quality service and not just overcharging because they are on a famous street. There are more families on low-traffic nights and South of Fifth residents."

Glassie has never lost faith in Ocean Drive. Last year, he gave his hotel and restaurant a \$3 million face-lift – a renovation that included a refresh of the exterior, which appeared in Will Smith's latest film, *Bad Boys for Life*. Parked out front, a 1955 Oldsmobile convertible – bought at an auction by Glassie's father, Don – remains a testament to the street's heyday, when it served as a backdrop for countless fashion shoots, movies, and TV shows, including *Scarface* and *Miami Vice*.



Bigeye tuna tartare / Photo courtesy of A Fish Called Avalon

Glassie's longtime faith in Ocean Drive was recently rewarded when the City of Miami Beach declared December 11 "A Fish Called Avalon Day" in honor of the establishment's 30th anniversary.

The restaurant, a sleek 150-seater with white tablecloths and a lively sidewalk patio, still turns out dishes such as bang bang shrimp marinated in a turmeric-curry spice mix (\$18) and macadamia-crusted snapper with spinach risotto and raspberry Beaujolais beurre blanc (\$37). For dessert, diners can try chef Kal Abdalla's pecan-crusted key lime pie (\$14), which won first prize at the American Pie Council's 25th-annual National Pie Championship in 2019.

Classie hopes the restaurant's renovation and topnotch service will lure locals to Ocean Drive. "The safety and culture of the Drive are improving and things are evolving," he says. "I think that when new hotels open on the street, the energy will change even more and the area will feel more diverse and more like it once was. We will have more events and concerts at Lummus Park; locals will rediscover the street. I believe in my heart that things will get a lot better."

A Fish Called Avalon. *700 Ocean Dr., Miami Beach; 305-532-1727; afishcalledavalon.com.*

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