

# SUMMER at the SHORE

Your old favorites are here, but much in Atlantic City this summer is brand-new

by Frank Legato

**D**on't worry. The taffy's still here. So are the rolling chairs, the Boardwalk shops and the beaches.

This summer, though, you're likely to see things in Atlantic City you've never seen before.

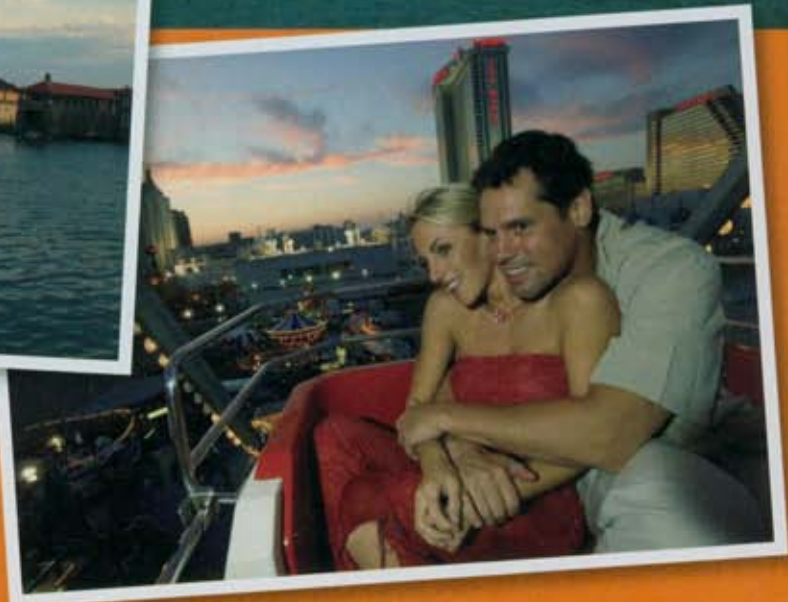
While the casino era in Atlantic City celebrated its 30th birthday on May 26, this summer marks a time of renewal in the seaside resort. There are new hotel rooms at existing casino resorts. There are totally new hotels—nongaming hotels—that you're definitely going to want to check out.

And the Boardwalk? The venerable Wooden Way has never looked better. If you haven't walked the boards in Atlantic City for a while, you'll notice a decidedly more upscale appearance, thanks to a state and local effort that replaced the old façades on many formerly shabby storefronts with a consistent, classy stucco look. (Bally's Atlantic City replaced its façade with the same design style.) The multi-colored, lighted fountain at Brighton Park, in front of the Claridge, has been restored to its original glory as part of the same public project.

Also getting a new look is the Dennis, the lovely Victorian-era hotel that is part of the Bally's complex. Bally's bought the row of tacky souvenir shops and second-floor buffet eatery that sat in front of the Dennis. At press time, crews were busy demolishing the strip of shops to reveal the original grand courtyard of the hotel, which once again will match the old postcards with its original view from the Boardwalk.

Restoration of a few historic views, though, is only the beginning of the debuts you'll find this summer at the shore. The really big news this summer involves hotels—and water, water everywhere.





The Water Club's pool area emphasizes high-end, sophisticated luxury



## THE WATER CLUB

This month marks the unveiling of the much-anticipated Water Club at Borgata, a hotel which, while next to the Marina District casino that revolutionized Atlantic City in 2003, is not a casino-hotel. It is, rather, something Atlantic City has not seen for decades—a completely new, ground-up, stand-alone luxury hotel.

Picture the quality of a Four Seasons or THEHotel at Mandalay Bay, only with a uniquely Atlantic City twist—five swimming pools and a state-of-the-art spa, all within the footprint of the hotel.

The Water Club will be “an exclusive extension of the sophisticated, international style that already defines Borgata,” says Drew Schlesinger, the new hotel’s vice president and general manager. “This is not a hotel for gamers, but for people who want a great weekend or a great night at a resort.”



“The design uses 40 different types of stone, 60 different woods, exotic surfaces, and tons of foliage. You just can’t imagine the finishes they’ve used here, or the special design. This is my sixth opening—the last two were in New York with Kimpton

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—Drew Schlesinger

vice president and general manager, The Water Club

“This is not a tower,” adds Michael Facenda, the Borgata’s director of marketing services. “It is the second hotel at Borgata. If the Borgata was not here, this could operate as a stand-alone hotel. It is not in this immediate market today. The Water Club is situated nicely as a signature hotel by Borgata, but offering a take-me-higher proposition.”

When you exit the Atlantic City/Brigantine connector highway at Renaissance Pointe, you will now have a choice besides the Borgata. The Water Club has its own valet entrance. Inside, you will find a property that has been crafted using the finest materials and the most meticulous attention to detail you’ve ever seen.

“No one is expecting what we’re offering,” says Schlesinger.

Hotels, a great company. I opened another hotel in New York, and one in Hollywood. This is the first time I’ve been this excited.”

In all, the Water Club includes 800 premium rooms and suites, five pools in unique environments, three residences inspired by chic city lofts, a two-story, 36,000-square-foot spa, 18,000 square feet of meeting space, and six new high-end retail shops, situated in an upscale mall separating the new hotel from the Borgata.

This is a finely crafted luxury boutique hotel, but it is different than any other hotel in town. Just off the lobby are two indoor swimming pools in amazing rooms with 50-foot ceilings. Over one of the pools is a dark wood trellis containing a device that simu-

lates a misty rain. At one side is a huge bar of Argentine marble.

Outside are two separate heated pools—complete with a sandy beach and private cabanas, offering a completely different summertime feel (though the pools reportedly will be open year-round). However, perhaps the most unique feature of the Water Club is the fifth pool, which is next to the spa—on the 32nd floor. “What kind of company would give up that kind of real estate for a pool?” marvels Schlesinger.

The answer is a company seeking to make a statement with its new property. The upper-floor swim is a 40-foot lap pool, accented by teakwood tables and another lounge, all adjacent to the Spa in the Sky, a remarkable two floors including 16 treatment rooms—Experience Rooms is the official name—offering mud treatments, exfoliation and special pampering such as the “Dry Float Soft Pack” system, a process on a special table that circulates water beneath a thin membrane to create the sensation of floating on air and an “oxygen infusion machine” that pushes oxygen into the skin. (“It’s like getting Botox without a chemical,” says Schlesinger.)

The hotel rooms and service are no less special. Even in the 750 so-called “standard” rooms, you’ll find great ocean and bay views along with luxury touches like 40-inch flat-screen TVs, aromatherapy bath amenities, 400-thread-count sheets and—get this—room service by celebrity chef Geoffrey Zakarian of Manhattan’s Town and Country restaurants and Bravo TV’s “Top Chef” show. He is behind all room service at the new hotel.

Then there are the suites—20 one-bedroom and 15 two-bedroom suites, including four corner suites equipped with a media-rich mini-theater. They are serviced by a separate bank of elevators. The largest are the “Residence Suites”—each around 5,000 square feet in two stories, with 22-foot ceilings in the living room and dining room, a fireplace, a butler pantry, and a bathroom as large as the bedrooms in the standard rooms. One of them has a pool table, another a grand piano. “The Jacuzzi fits you and seven of your closest friends!” says Schlesinger.

If you’re a big enough player to rate the top suite, great. However, even if you’re not, the Water Club is a hotel experience you’re not going to want to miss this summer.

## THE CHELSEA

The Water Club is unique and even unprecedented in Atlantic City—and it’s the first ground-up, non-gaming boutique hotel to open in Atlantic City since the 1960s. However, it’s not the only boutique hotel opening this month.

Right next door to the Tropicana on the Boardwalk is the Chelsea Hotel, slated for a soft opening this month with a formal ribbon-cutting in July. The Chelsea is the creation of Curtis Bashaw, the prominent Cape May hotelier who, as head of New Jersey’s Casino Reinvestment Development Authority for several years, became one of the top promoters not only of Atlantic City, but of the Jersey Shore in general.

Bashaw, who runs the Congress Hotel in Cape May, bought the two buildings that formerly housed the Holiday Inn and Teplitsky’s, a kosher hotel that eventually was transformed into a Howard Johnson’s. He has spent the past two years gutting and refitting the two hotels into a new destination for the Boardwalk.

The Chelsea’s design is a retro-chic 1950s look, with terrazzo floors and stainless steel ceilings. “It’s a classic, timeless feel I’m sure is reminiscent of Hollywood’s glamour period,” says Bashaw. “It’s something Atlantic City has not seen before—or at least not for a long time.” The 331 rooms will be divided into two classes, Chelsea Luxe and Chelsea Lite. All include flat-screen LCD TVs and other modern amenities.

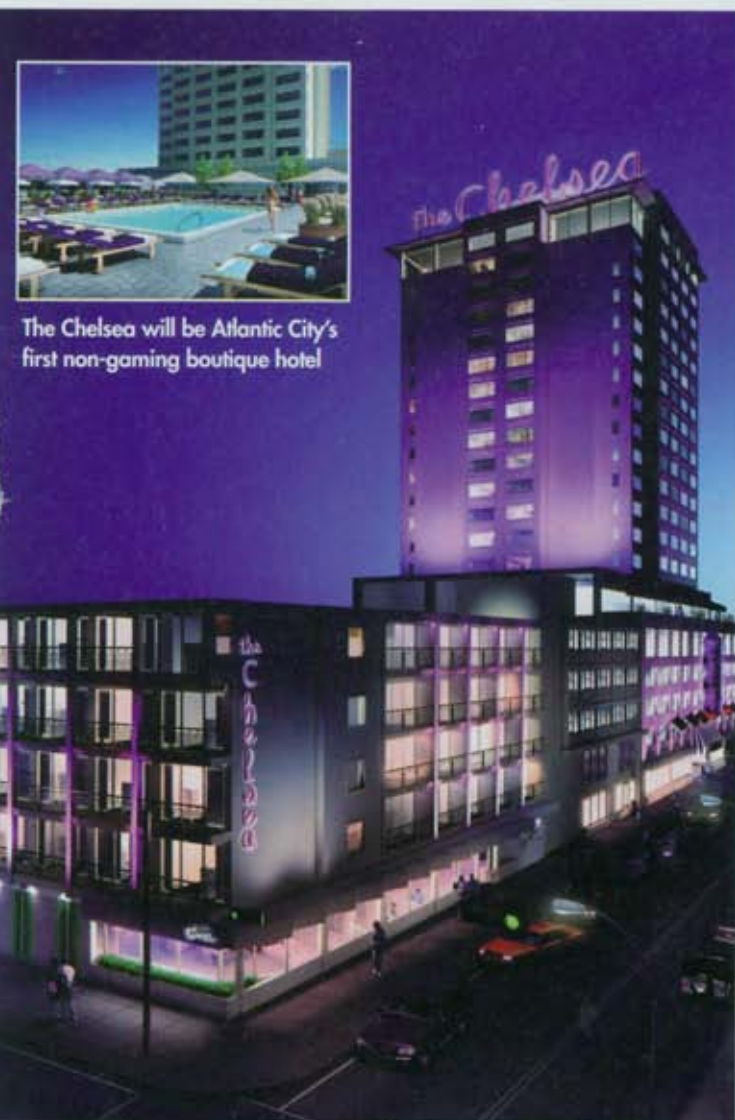
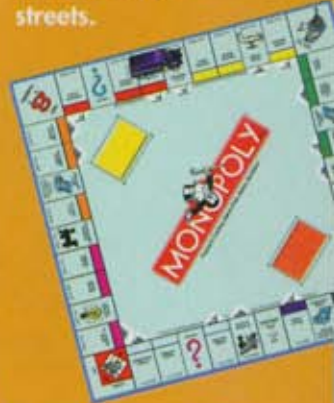
Like the Water Club, the rooms also feature room service by a celebrity chef—in this case, Stephen Starr. He also created the property’s two restaurants, Chelsea Prime for steaks and Teplitsky’s, a 24-hour diner giving a nod to the original occupant of the building.

Perhaps the biggest draw of the Chelsea, though, is up on the roof—a rooftop pool with an outdoor bar and hip nightspot called the Fifth Floor. There will be live music and DJs, in an easy-listening kind of atmosphere.

“People will be surprised by what they find here,” Bashaw says. “I don’t know the last time Atlantic City had a hotel that was a resort property in its own style. We’re reinventing that. We’re renting bikes the people can take out on the Boardwalk. We’re doing other things that have been overlooked in the casino-hotel industry.”

## FUN FACT

If the street names of **Monopoly** sound familiar, it’s because Charles Darrow developed the game of Monopoly in 1929 using the city’s streets.



The Chelsea will be Atlantic City's first non-gaming boutique hotel



The casino at Trump Plaza has undergone a complete renovation, featuring wide aisles, bright colors and trendy lighting

## TOWERING TRUMP

The other casinos in the midst of a transformation are the three Trump properties. Trump Entertainment Resorts has been working on a renewal of all three of its properties, one by one. The Trump casinos also are maintaining one of the best slot clubs in town, the recently consolidated Trump One Card.

"It's a feature we've never had before," says Mark Juliano, CEO of Trump Entertainment, "a unified player's card that lets you earn points at all three properties and redeem the points at all three." (The Trump One program, by the way, keeps the best feature of the former Trump clubs—same-day cashback.)

Marketing changes, including all the promotions featuring corporate vice president Ivanka Trump, are accompanied by physical changes at the three properties, which you can now move among on the new, free Trump Shuttle.

Last year, Trump Plaza revealed its new look—a complete renovation of its casino, followed by the addition of lounges like the Liquid Bar inside the Boardwalk entrance and Jezebel's Casino Lounge on the main floor. If you haven't been to the Plaza in a couple of years, you won't recognize the place. The casino aisles are wider, the colors are bright, the new bars are gorgeous, and every room has been renovated, including lavishly upgraded suites with fireplaces, Jacuzzi tubs and plasma TVs.

There is one other change you will find at the Plaza near the end of the summer. The East Casino, formerly the non-smoking casino, will be transformed into the city's first completely automated poker room.

According to Juliano, the casino has bought a dozen PokerPro automated poker tables. These are totally electronic versions of Texas hold 'em poker—large tables with 10 seats, each with an individual touch-screen betting station. A video screen in the middle executes the deal and the flop, and the video touch-screen actually lets you simulate bending the corners up to look at your cards.

PokerPro is exactly the same as live poker—players still compete with each other, but there is no dealer and the hands proceed around 50 percent faster. "We're really excited about it," Juliano says.

There's even more new up the Boardwalk at Trump Taj Mahal. The entire casino has been renovated, and all public areas have a beautiful new color scheme. "The entire feel of the casino has become more open and softer in color," Juliano says. "For me, the beautiful, vaulted, chandeliered ceilings have really become a focal point of the design." He adds that the games themselves have followed suit—50 percent of the slot floor is covered with brand-new machines, including a large contingent of the most popular new penny video slots.

Last year, the casino unveiled Spice Road, the second-floor restaurant promenade featuring, among other things, what Juliano says is the most popular burger outlet in town, aptly named Burger; the 24-hour Plate casual restaurant; and other popular new spots.

By Labor Day, the resort will open its newest attraction, the Tower at Trump Taj Mahal. It will feature 782 new guest rooms, including 74 suites—four of them with the same perks as the legendary Taj penthouse suites.

"The strongest feature of the new tower will be the rooms themselves," says Juliano. "They're very spacious. They have fabulous views, great, new modern bathrooms, and all-new technology, like high-speed Internet access, flat-screen TVs and iPod docks." ♠



The new Tower at Trump Taj has nearly 800 rooms and suites, featuring high-speed Internet access, flat screen TVs and iPod docks