MILLENNIUM

MAGAZINE ™

Lifestyle & Entertainment

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KEY WEST HITS THE SPOT

By Lauren Clarke-Bennett
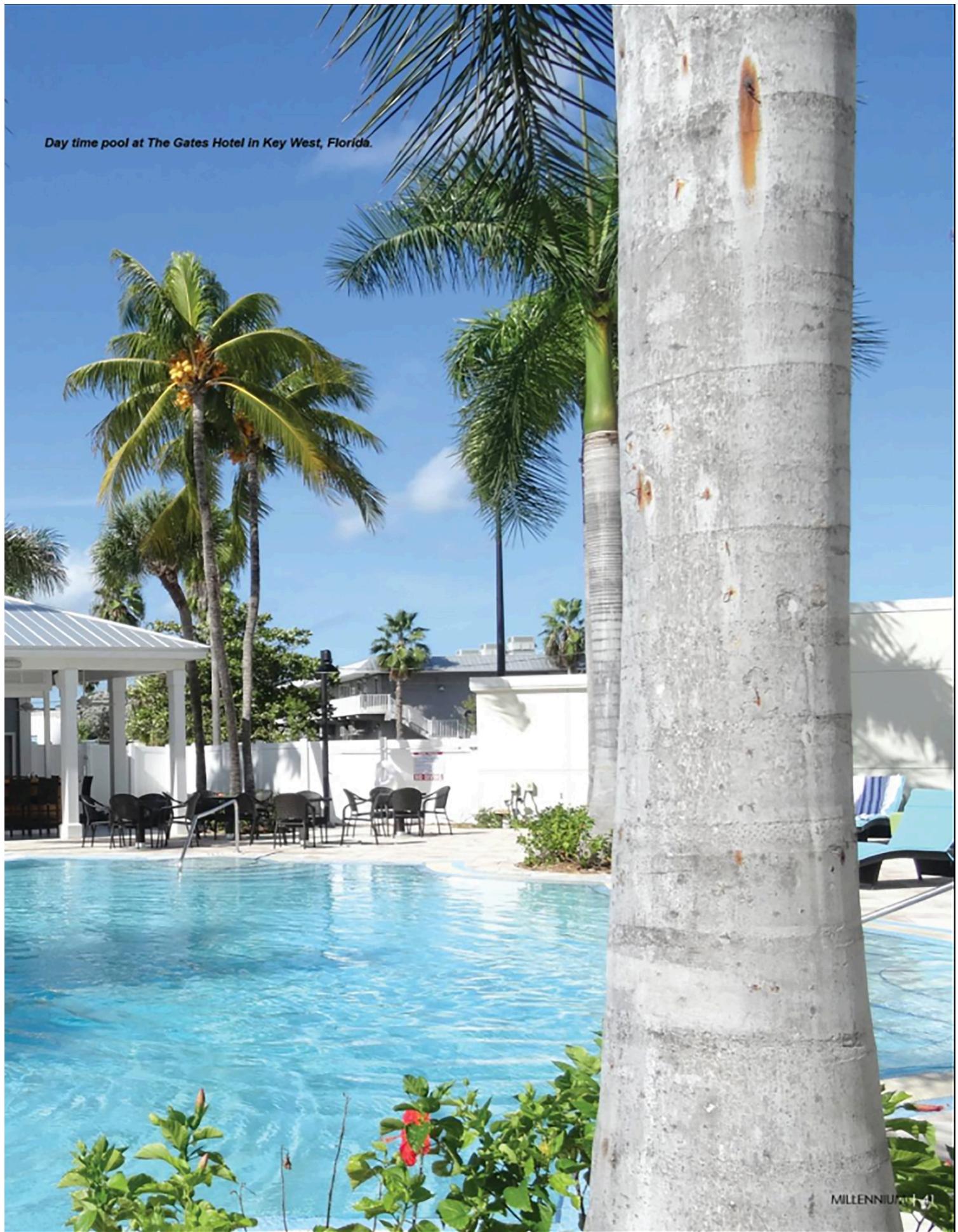
A favorite getaway for the thrill seeking at heart, Key West, Florida can arouse one's passion with the lure of deep-sea fishing, enlightening historical sites, winning water sports, glorious sunsets, awesome entertainment, epic shopping, dining and partying.

Laying some 130 miles south of Miami and the southernmost city in the Continental US, the perfect spot to call home-base is the Gates Hotel located at the beginning of Key West. Newly renovated and located close enough to the bustling downtown area, yet far enough to allow for complete relaxation The Gates Hotel offers comforts like seating by their luxe salt water pool or their upper deck lounge with a killer view of the sea. Perfectly priced for savvy travelers this sophisticated property with their chic rooms, fab food truck and fully equipped gym is all you'll need to take a respite after a full day's excursion or for a hang-out day by the pool. And while you're enjoying the property check out De La Gallery, an important design element of The Gates were a collection of stunning imagery by award-winning photographer Jorge de la Torriente of De La Gallery in Key West is on display.

The Blind Pig is The Gates signature gourmet food truck with the slogan, "Small Bites Done Right", serving a tapas-style selection of regional Cuban, Bahamian, Caribbean and Floridian flavors—also known as "conch fusion." With delectable dishes served in kitsch paper plates with plastic cutlery, guests may begin the day with delectable dishes that include, "Bootlegger-Brioche", French Toast perfectly crisped with a soft center lathered in blueberry maple syrup and The "Goats" Guard omelet filled with a delicious medley of herbs, goat cheese and roasted tomato confit completed by a side of Applewood bacon. With their breakfast you'll have

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Day time pool at The Gates Hotel in Key West, Florida.

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plenty of fuel for any activities planned for the day or if you're just hanging by the pool for the day their lunch/dinner menu is second to none. The fare features mouthwatering specials like Rock Shrimp Ceviche, the freshest of the fresh Mahi Mahi Tacos and mainstays that include "Flapper in a Wrapper"; a grilled chicken wrapped in a whole wheat tortilla, with wild berry mint vinaigrette. Arugula, crushed apples and herb feta cheese alongside hand cut fries and Parmesan cheese, part of the I.R.S. (Irresistible Snacks) menu).

In the evening relax by the gates outdoor bar "Rum Row" where you can enjoy one of their special cocktails made with their signature spirit; The Gates Hotel Rum made by Key West First Legal Rum Distillery and if you desire, try your hand at a cigar rolling class and sample a locally handcrafted Rodriguez cigar, sold at The Gates for guests to enjoy in the on-property Cigar Garden. If still hungry explore more of The Blind Pig's terrific menu that also includes, hand muddled guacamole, w/assorted flatbreads & tortilla's and for those of you who enjoy sweet meats, "The Blind Pig", a smoky pulled pork, aged cheddar on pretzel bread with a cider barbecue glaze and sweet onions is a must. So Yummy are the meals that you'll find it hard to leave the property to explore other dining options around the island.

One of the island's highlights is the Key West First Legal Rum Distillery which was opened in 2013 by Paul Menta who has partnered with The Gates to feature the hotel's own rum in not only Rum Row's signature cocktails but their too tasty welcome cocktail, The Mary Pickford. Exclusive tours of the distillery with tastings are available as part of your travel pleasure and pleasurable it is! Upon arriving you are greeted by a tasting aficionado in my case, the lovely Rebecca who informed me that

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The Blind Pig food truck at The Gates in Key West.

"WHAT AMERICA NEEDS NOW IS GOOD EATS!"

FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT | 1933

(OR SOMETHING LIKE THAT...)

THE BLIND PIG
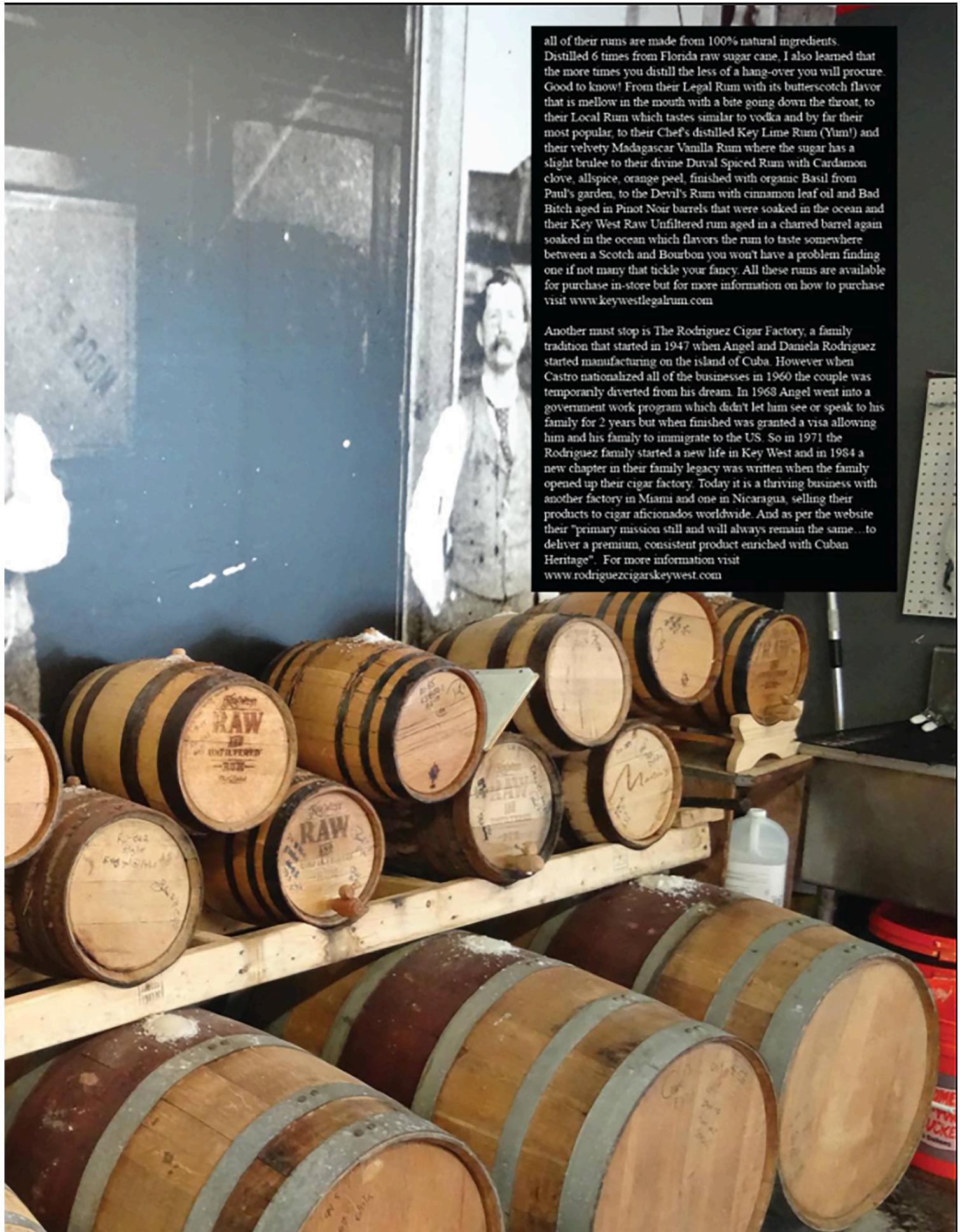
105 SIMONTON

JACK'S SALOON

This was the original location of Jack's Saloon. Finest Brands of Wine, Liquors & Cigars.

It was the Corner bar on Simonton & Front Street owned by Jack Williams. Dates back to 1900.

Taste history at the modern day, Key West First Legal Rum Distillery!
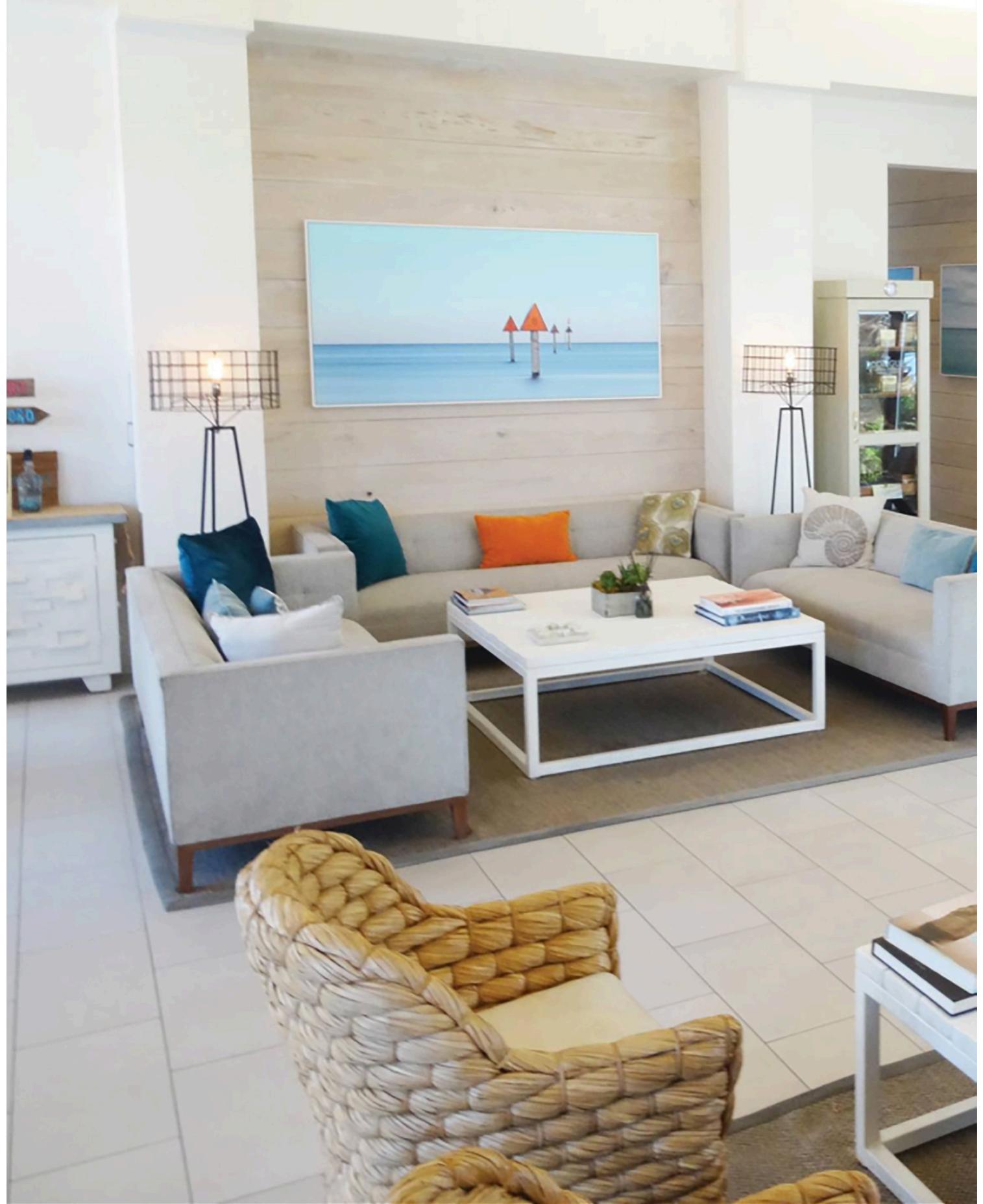
Rum barrels at the Key West Legal Rum Distillery.

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all of their rums are made from 100% natural ingredients. Distilled 6 times from Florida raw sugar cane, I also learned that the more times you distill the less of a hang-over you will procure. Good to know! From their Legal Rum with its butterscotch flavor that is mellow in the mouth with a bite going down the throat, to their Local Rum which tastes similar to vodka and by far their most popular, to their Chef's distilled Key Lime Rum (Yum!) and their velvety Madagascar Vanilla Rum where the sugar has a slight brulee to their divine Duval Spiced Rum with Cardamon clove, allspice, orange peel, finished with organic Basil from Paul's garden, to the Devil's Rum with cinnamon leaf oil and Bad Bitch aged in Pinot Noir barrels that were soaked in the ocean and their Key West Raw Unfiltered rum aged in a charred barrel again soaked in the ocean which flavors the rum to taste somewhere between a Scotch and Bourbon you won't have a problem finding one if not many that tickle your fancy. All these rums are available for purchase in-store but for more information on how to purchase visit www.keywestlegalrum.com

Another must stop is The Rodriguez Cigar Factory, a family tradition that started in 1947 when Angel and Daniela Rodriguez started manufacturing on the island of Cuba. However when Castro nationalized all of the businesses in 1960 the couple was temporarily diverted from his dream. In 1968 Angel went into a government work program which didn't let him see or speak to his family for 2 years but when finished was granted a visa allowing him and his family to immigrate to the US. So in 1971 the Rodriguez family started a new life in Key West and in 1984 a new chapter in their family legacy was written when the family opened up their cigar factory. Today it is a thriving business with another factory in Miami and one in Nicaragua, selling their products to cigar aficionados worldwide. And as per the website their "primary mission still and will always remain the same...to deliver a premium, consistent product enriched with Cuban Heritage". For more information visit www.rodriguezcigarskeywest.com

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Bedroom suite at The Gates Hotel in Key West, Florida.

To make sure you find out all there is to do on this tropical paradise The Gates' concierge is extremely helpful in not only clueing you in on the myriad of things to do in Key West and the surrounding area but they will make all of the arrangements. Starting in the near future there will be a hotel shuttle that'll take you down and around town but for now there is a city trolley or taxi unless you have your own set of wheels. Or for the athletically inclined, cycling is a great way to get around the island and the Martone Cycling Company has teamed up with The Gates to create custom-designed blue and white bikes exclusive to the hotel that feature built in baskets and their signature red chain.

From guiding you to the hop on hop off 'Conch Train' that gives you a first class tour of the Island and all of its history, museums, legends and lore that include Ernest Hemingway's home, Harry S, Truman's Little White House and the Key West Aquarium, the concierge can book you on fantastic cruises with glass bottoms to spy the fish laden coral or a sunset cruise with a smoking band where you may be lucky enough to see a 'green flash' phenomena, or a day trip by seaplane to the Dry Tortugas to snorkel or set you up for parasailing and jet skiing -- Enjoy, you have arrived in paradise! For more information visit www.gateshotelkeywest.com. M

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