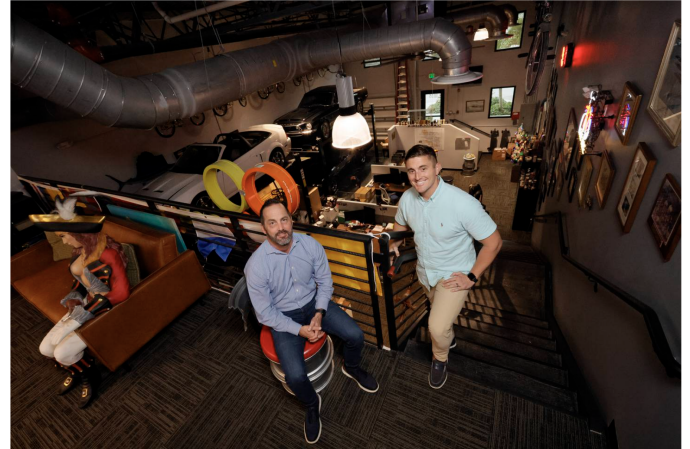


Two-story tiki restaurant Hula Kai coming to Fort Lauderdale's 17th Street



An artist rendering of the new Hula Kai, a two-story tiki restaurant and cocktail bar, which is expected to debut by the end of 2023 on Fort Lauderdale's 17th Street. Hula Kai will have a ground-floor and rooftop bar and serve pan-Asian cuisine, including crispy duck and crab rangoon. (Architectural Alliance / Co)



Old School Hospitality COO Frank Zaffere, left, and CEO James Flanigan, right, are shown in their man cave-styled loft offices in Fort Lauderdale. The pair, along with Flanigan's father, Paul, are planning three ambitious food and drink projects over the next few years, including the Hula Kai, a tiki restaurant and bar in Fort Lauderdale. (Amy Beth Bennett/South Florida Sun Sentinel)

If the honchos behind the Quarterdeck pub chain have their way, Fort Lauderdale's 17th Street will soon become a port of call for tropical cocktails and chocolate, anchored by a rum-soaked centerpiece: a two-story tiki restaurant called Hula Kai.

Don't confuse it with the Mai Kai, that [still-under-construction Polynesian haven](#) on North Federal Highway. With all due respect to the 66-year-old icon, the Hula Kai wants to be a distinctly modern bastion for tikiholics, dedicated to the aesthetic without veering too much into the kitsch, says James Flanigan, the new CEO of Old School Hospitality.

"Right now, South Florida doesn't have a legit modern tiki bar, and our bar scene is crying out for one," Flanigan tells the Sun Sentinel in an interview this week.

The Hula Kai, at 1075 SE 17th St., will be a sprawling 5,000-square-foot lounge with a ground floor and mezzanine under 24-foot-high ceilings. Adorned in wavy lines and tall glass windows, the restaurant-bar will face a lush courtyard patio of palm trees framed in tiki-totem pillars.

A third-level rooftop bar and ground-level bar will sling classic tiki cocktail preparations like Jet Pilots, Rum Runners and Mai Tais served in statuesque ceramic mugs speared with bendy straws.

The menu, still being finalized, will combine Polynesian and pan-Asian cuisine, including crispy duck, spring rolls, crab rangoon, bang bang shrimp, octopus dumplings and spare ribs. A station with two large woks will turn out several versions of pulled pork and beef fried rice.

The Hula Kai project is the brainchild of Flanigan, 37, who was appointed the head of Old School Hospitality in August. The restaurant group, which Flanigan runs with his father Paul and business partner Frank Zaffere, oversees five Quarterdecks in Broward County along with [Whiskey Neat, a classy brown-liquor lounge](#) that opened next door to the Quarterdeck on Southeast 17th Street in 2019. (James Flanigan's uncle Jimmy runs the local Flanigan's chain, which is unaffiliated with Old School.)

Hula Kai is inspired by several modern tiki bars the Flanigans have visited over the years, including Chicago's Three Dots and a Dash, Tonga Room in San Francisco and Latitude 22 in New Orleans, Paul Flanigan adds.

To pull off Hula Kai, Flanigan bought a boxy, low-slung building — once occupied by vegan eatery Green Bar & Kitchen — for roughly \$1 million in 2021, [according to property records](#). That building will be demolished by spring 2023 and replaced by Hula Kai, with an anticipated debut by the end of 2023, Flanigan says.

That project still needs a sign-off from Fort Lauderdale's Building Services department, but once Hula Kai is finished, it will join Quarterdeck and Whiskey Neat in the Lauderdale Harbor plaza, just west of the Southport Shopping Center.

The Flanigans have ambitious plans for that strip mall, bordered by Quarterdeck to the north, [Waxy's Irish Pub to the south](#), Harbordale Elementary to the west and Winn-Dixie to the east, Paul Flanigan adds. Their idea: to buy out some owners in the plaza, knock down the buildings and transform it into a sophisticated dining-bar destination.

James Flanigan says his group is already in preliminary talks with a gourmet chocolatier to take over one of the storefronts, although no lease is signed yet.

Suburban expansion

Until Flanigan can knock down the building where Hula Kai will rise, he's fixated on two other Old School Hospitality projects. The first is a second location of Whiskey Neat, a 2,500-square-foot outpost that will be attached to the existing Quarterdeck in Plantation, across the street from the Sawgrass Mills Mall.

Whiskey Neat, at 12310 W. Sunrise Blvd., will open in March 2023 with a multicolored liquor wall stocked with hundreds of rare whiskeys. Like its flagship, the bar seizes on the revival of brown spirits and craft cocktails surging in popularity among millennial and older drinkers, Flanigan says.

The full menu from next-door Quarterdeck will be available to Whiskey Neat drinkers. A kitchen pass and hallway will connect Quarterdeck and Whiskey Neat — although customers must enter the bar through a separate entrance.

“I think of Whiskey Neat as a sidebar that does well enough on its own but is even more profitable when it’s attached to a Quarterdeck, like an appendage,” Flanigan says. “In Fort Lauderdale we’ve got great bars like Roxanne’s and No Man’s Land, but there’s no good craft-cocktail bar out west. And I know we can capture a lot of customers from Sawgrass and FLA Live Arena.”

Zaffere, Old School’s director of operations, says if the bar prospers in Plantation, Whiskey Neat has the potential to fit inside other live-work-shopping complexes in the future, like the [soon-to-be-reincarnated FAT Village](#) in Fort Lauderdale.

“Putting it in Plantation is a proof of concept for us,” Zaffere says. “Our peers who are doing big development projects are going to wonder, ‘OK, Whiskey Neat works great in the suburbs. Where else could it work?’ I’m really excited about that.”



The Quarterdeck restaurant at the Dania Beach Pier will soon feature shipping-container kiosks for a quick meal. (Michael Laughlin / Sun Sentinel)

Beach-side kiosks

Old School’s second project is a trio of 160-square-foot shipping-container kiosks that will take shape near the Dania Beach Pier, next door to another Quarterdeck restaurant. The project, dubbed The Shore, will open in summer 2023 and serve easy-to-cook, portable foods including pizza and hot dogs, along with sundries such as beach towels, beach chairs and sunscreen.

The shipping containers will be wood-paneled and emblazoned with the City of Dania Beach logo, and painted blue and yellow to resemble nearby lifeguard stations dotting the beach. The kiosks will be mounted on skids, so they can be moved in the event of a hurricane, Flanigan says.

“People who are hungry and covered in sand don’t necessarily want to walk into Quarterdeck and wait to be seated,” he says. “This is a great way to do some takeaway business on the beach.”