

Now Vending | The Luxury Automat

DESIGN | BY SHONQUIS MORENO | MARCH 2, 2009 3:22 PM

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Photo courtesy of Morgans Hotel Group The Semi-Automat automat serves as the hotel gift shop at Miami's Mondrian South Beach.

The automat — that '50s-era icon of American ingenuity known for vending rubbery sandwiches from glass compartments — is back, and this time it's boutique. Exhibit A: The most opulent and cheeky element of the Mondrian South Beach, a Marcel Wanders-designed hotel that opened in Miami in December, is a vending machine that now anchors the lobby. The Semi-Automat was designed not by Wanders but by Ito Partnership for the Morgans Hotel Group, to conquer the cliché of the gift shop.

The Semi takes plastic instead of pocket change and is stocked with delectables (though nothing edible) curated by the Morgans creative director Kim Walker. Walker didn't shrink from being naughty (24-karat gold handcuffs from Kiki de Montparnasse, a spa package called the "Masochist"), retro (Atari Classics for Playstation), tastefully sybaritic (a Rolls Royce Silver Shadow or 2000 Bentley Azure convertible — rental only), do-goodish (the Can of Gold, for \$200, is a design-art "vase" whose proceeds go to charity) or obscurely hip (14-karat gold Retainer Necklace by the Brooklyn designer Kiel Mead). Best sellers include anti-recession T-shirts (\$28) and Fred Flair heart sunglasses (\$18), along with — who would have guessed? — marabou feather vests (\$400).

Update | This post was updated to credit Ito Partnership for the design of the Semi-Automat machine.

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