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Scandal at Setai Miami Beach: General manager defamed, harassed resident following affair, lawsuit alleges

Alex Furrer, who oversees the luxury condo-hotel's operations, admitted to having sexual encounters with the woman in her suite during working hours

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Alex Furrer, Setai Miami Beach and owners Joe, Ralph and Avi Nakash. (Miami Beach Chamber of Commerce, iStock, Setai)

After getting caught having a sexual affair with a female resident, the general manager of the Setai Miami Beach mounted a vicious defamation and harassment campaign against the woman to pressure her into moving out of the luxury condo-hotel, according to recently filed lawsuits.

Alex Furrer, who has headed the Setai's hotel operations since 2015, admitted to engaging in the inappropriate relationship, including sending sexually explicit messages from his work-issued phone and having sexual encounters with Sarah Lazow

(<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2021/05/07/setai-miami-beach-bans-unwelcome-hotel-guest-from-using-amenities-lawsuit/>), according to court filings and his own court deposition. One of their trysts involved a paid dominatrix and rope, court documents show.

Lazow filed a defamation suit against Furrer in Miami-Dade Circuit Court on Aug. 8, seeking \$1 million in damages. Among other allegations, she claims Furrer engaged in acts prohibited in the Setai's employee handbook. *The Real Deal* obtained a copy of the handbook and other documentation, including screenshots of employee WhatsApp group chats and screenshots of texts sent by Furrer, that appear to bolster Lazow's employee handbook

claims. His alleged misconduct is the type that would warrant disciplinary action, including termination, according to the handbook.

Furrer did not respond to requests for comment. Lazow, her attorneys and Allan Reiss, the lawyer for ownership entity Setai Hotel Acquisitions, declined comment.

Instead of firing Furrer, the principals of the Setai Miami Beach

(<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2021/07/20/setai-miami-beach-owners-and-condo-association-sue-city-over-bulgari-hotel-height-increase/>) “embarked on a sexist and illegal mission to cover up Alex Furrer’s despicable and illegal conduct” and “they have adopted his ill-advised path of concealment and manipulation,” according to a separate counterclaim Lazow filed against the condo-hotel’s ownership entity on Aug.15.

The Nakash family (<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2014/12/23/nakash-family-buys-south-beachs-setai-hotel-for-90m/>), founders of the Jordache Jeans brand and owners of several high-profile South Beach properties such as the Versace Mansion, bought the Setai’s hotel components, including two restaurants and the Dempsey Vanderbilt Hotel at 2001 Collins Avenue, for nearly \$90 million in 2014. Avi, Joe and Ralph Nakash also own eight residences in the Setai’s 164-unit condominium at 101 20th Street, which has also been a favored hangout for the Kardashian (<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2016/07/06/what-do-you-get-for-30k-plus-in-rent-per-month-in-south-beach/>) family.

In an ongoing separate lawsuit filed in March, Setai’s owners are seeking to have Lazow permanently banned from using the luxury resort’s amenities by alleging she is a disturbance to hotel guests and employees. She is leasing an upper-floor condo from a private owner. On July 20, Miami-Dade Circuit Judge Beatrice Butchko granted a temporary injunction barring Lazow from the two restaurants, but she is allowed to use the valet service and go to the gym, the pool and the property’s beach area.

In a recent court filing, Setai lawyer Reiss asserts his client’s case is about a property owner’s rights to control access and use of its premises, and that it has nothing to do with the dispute between Furrer and Lazow. The Aug. 13 document, called a memorandum of law, accused Lazow of engaging in conduct “driven by a malicious quest for vengeance against Furrer.”

In the defamation lawsuit, Lazow alleges Furrer and the Nakashes kicked her out on Jan. 12, 2020 and sued her to collect an unpaid portion of her hotel bill that they falsely claimed she refused to pay. It was done to cover up Furrer’s girlfriend assaulting Lazow after finding out

about the affair, as well as his “outrageous conduct he had been engaging in during his working hours,” the complaint states.

The liaison began shortly after Lazow arrived at the Setai

(<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2021/04/02/electrical-fire-short-circuits-condo-rentals-at-the-setai-miami-beach-14-floors-still-without-power/>) on Oct. 23, 2020, about eight months after a previous stay when she first met Furrer, according to the defamation complaint. Furrer, a 43-year-old man who was 14 years older than Lazow when they met, has a girlfriend he has been with since 2016 while still being married to his wife, according to his April 13 deposition. He filed for divorce in August of last year, court records show.

During the first 10 days of her second stay, Furrer and Lazow regularly exchanged text messages that became “more and more flirtatious as time went on,” her lawsuit states. On Nov. 2, 2020, Furrer sent texts stating that “I can’t afford to mess around,” the Setai’s “walls have eyes and ears,” the lawsuit states. The following day, Furrer had his first sexual encounter with Lazow at the Setai’s Ocean Grill restaurant.

Over the next two months, Furrer and Lazow had sex on hotel grounds during regular business hours, frequently meeting in her room, Lazow’s lawsuit states. He also allegedly sent her images of his genitals. Their dominatrix date “was paid with a cash advance against [Lazow’s] bill – authorized by [Furrer],” according to the complaint.

The fling started falling apart on Dec. 9, 2020 when Furrer allegedly falsely assured her that the Setai (<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2019/04/26/the-owner-of-americas-most-expensive-home-just-sold-a-unit-in-south-beach/>) would conduct a full investigation into two housekeepers Lazow accused of stealing \$7,500 in personal property during the course of her stay, her lawsuit states. Around the same time, Furrer wanted Lazow to settle a hotel bill of more than \$100,000, but she disputed about \$27,000 in charges she claims involved taxes and credits the general manager had promised to waive, according to the complaint.

The affair finally blew up on Jan. 8, 2021 when Furrer’s girlfriend, Handy Nicole Castillo, who by then suspected her boyfriend was cheating on her, threw a drink at Lazow, the lawsuit states. Court records also show Lazow obtained a temporary restraining order against Castillo for repeated violence.

Emails from Lazow and one of her attorneys, attached to her complaint, show she attempted to pay her bill with the hotel’s accounting department, but received no responses. On Jan. 12, she was forcibly removed from the Setai and the ownership entity sued her for the unpaid

balance. Her lawsuit also noted that her credit card was on file and that it had been used to pay a \$14,000 charge on Nov. 14, 2020.

She paid the \$100,000 based on assurances from a Setai representative who spoke to Joe Nakash (<https://therealdeal.com/miami/2021/02/03/nakash-family-sells-w-south-beach-units-to-rfr-tricap/>) and said that Nakash relayed, “when the bill is paid, there will be peace,” according to the court filing. She returned in February after leasing the privately owned unit she currently occupies, after finding out she was blackballed from three other hotels in Miami Beach.

During his April 13 deposition, Furrer admitted to having a “short affair” with Lazow, including the rendezvous with the dominatrix. He accused Lazow of sharing their intimate photos and texts with his girlfriend and four Setai residents, according to the transcript.

“Ms. Lazow knew how to prolong this relationship against my will,” Furrer said. “She threatened that if I didn’t continue the affair, she would create chaos in my life. I got trapped for a few weeks.”

However, Furrer admitted that he voluntarily went into Lazow’s suite on repeated occasions to have sex with her. The Setai’s employee handbook prohibits staff, including managers, from visiting guest rooms and residential floors even at the invitation of a guest or resident unless it is in the scope of their work assignments. Unauthorized fraternization with guests and unauthorized presence in guest rooms is a violation of the Setai’s standards of conduct that can result in disciplinary action, including termination, the handbook states.

Employees are also barred from engaging in dishonest, immoral and indecent behavior that publicly embarrasses the Setai; discrimination against guests and co-workers; and using Setai equipment to send and receive sexually explicit and obscene comments and material.

Despite his alleged misconduct, Furrer is still on the job. According to Lazow’s complaint, he has “falsely and maliciously told others at the hotel and others within the hotel industry that [Lazow] is a predator, a drug addict, bipolar, is improperly over-prescribed medication and extorted [Furrer] into having sex with her to obtain a free stay at the hotel.” The untrue claims have damaged Lazow’s reputation and caused her great emotional damage, her lawsuit states.

Over the past six months, Furrer had Lazow’s Range Rover towed from the parking space assigned to her lease, refused her access to the gym and hired private security guards to

closely follow her around from the moment she steps out of her unit, according to her lawsuit.

Her complaint cites Setai employee WhatsApp chats that show staff being instructed to look the other way when they see Lazow and not to serve her or any of her guests. Workers have also been ordered to refuse service to residents seen hanging out with Lazow, the lawsuit alleges.

Following Judge Butchko's ruling, Furrer sent an email to other Setai managers on July 12, which was also attached to her lawsuit, with the subject heading: "Sarah Lazow, new rules as of today!" In the body of the email he wrote that she is not allowed in any of the restaurants and bars, she is not allowed to have food and beverage services at the pool and beach area and she is not allowed to receive any spa services.

One of the court exhibits is an Aug. 11 declaration by former Ocean Grill restaurant manager Eliecer Bendana, who attested that he was employed at the hotel from March through July 29. During that time, Bendana said he received emails from Furrer updating employees on Lazow's court case and regular restrictions he wanted enforced on her.

"I never witnessed Ms. Lazow doing anything disruptive or inappropriate, nor did I hear of any incidents that weren't related to her issues with Alex Furrer," Bendana said. "I have never worked for an establishment that forced me to mistreat a customer."

On Aug. 8, Furrer obtained a temporary restraining order against Lazow that bars her from coming within 500 feet of him. A hearing to make it permanent is scheduled for Aug. 25. In his petition, Furrer said he was "sexually intimate" with Lazow and that she has sent him more than 500 threatening and harassing texts for eight months, most recently on July 27. He alleged she threatened to distribute nude photos of him.

The petition includes a five-page printout of dozens of WhatsApp messages she sent him. A majority were sent on Jan. 9, the day after Furrer's girlfriend allegedly poured the drink on Lazow. The remainder were sent between Jan. 11 and March 4, the day Furrer allegedly blocked her number, according to the printout.

A Setai employee who spoke on the condition of anonymity said he observed Furrer waiting in the lobby for Lazow to come down from her unit and called the cops. Furrer was also within 20 feet of Lazow when Miami Beach police officers served her with the restraining order, the employee said. Cops have gone to the Setai three times this month in response to Lazow allegedly violating the restraining order. "He's the one who filed the restraining

order, so why is he looking for her?” The employee said. “He’s trying to ruin this person’s life.”

The employee said managers have relayed that anyone caught speaking to Lazow could be terminated. “One of the managers came up to me after I said ‘hi’ to her one day that I am not allowed to speak to her,” the employee said. “Multiple managers have threatened that I could get fired. I’ve seen [Furrer] laughing with other managers and employees about her like it’s something comical.”

The employee added that it’s common knowledge at the Setai that Furrer had an inappropriate relationship with Lazow. “Any other employee would have been fired,” the employee said. “Somehow, he isn’t. It makes zero sense.”

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