

# Martini lunches thriving south of border

International business consultant Carlos Castellon volunteered to be the subject of an On the Road Again column. But he didn't get to pick today's theme: heavy drinking.



DOUG HANKS

dhanks@MiamiHerald.com

What can we do? Of all the anecdotes, advice, tips and cautionary tales Castellon offered in our interview, we couldn't get past our fixation with

the problems whiskey caused him during Latin American business trips.

Castellon is a partner at the Jordan Castellon Ricardo accounting firm in Coral Gables, advising foreign executives how to do business in the United States. In his first meeting in Caracas, a contact there bought him a drink during lunch.

"I told him I don't like to drink during lunch time," Castellon recalled. "He told me, 'That's your first mistake.'"

The three-martini lunch may have gone the way of oversized Filofax organizers and digital pagers among U.S. business traditions. But Castellon often finds the regimen alive, well and unwelcome in his Latin American travels.

"We went to lunch with some Spaniards. For four hours, it was just drinking," he said of that first Venezuelan business trip. A big problem: the custom of bringing a full bottle — usually Jack Daniels or Johnnie Walker Black — to the table for self-service pours.

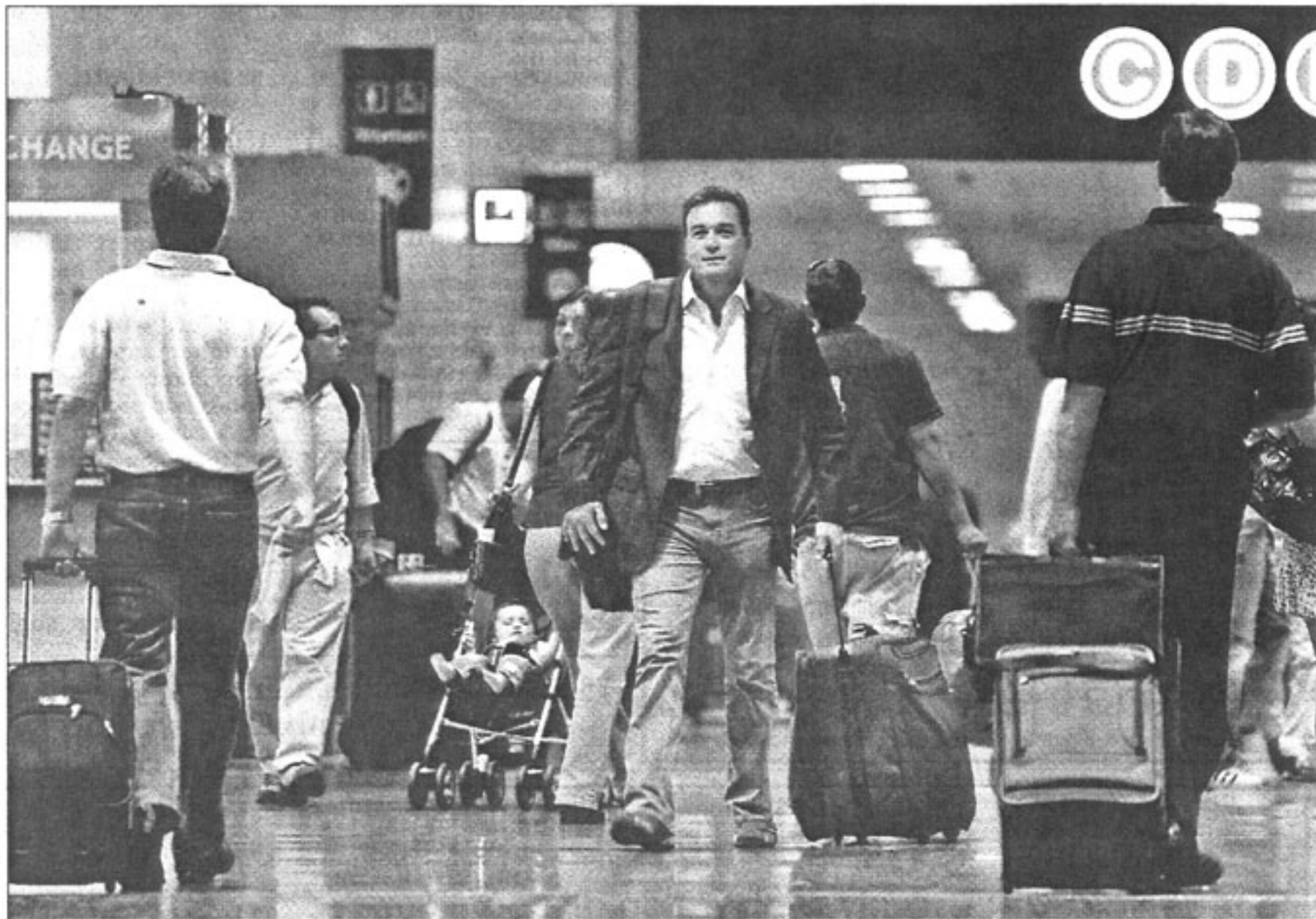
In another Venezuelan swing, Castellon met a client for dinner at a restaurant where the owner insisted they try some specialty rums. Castellon emerged from that session with most of his senses intact, but he had lined up another meeting that evening.

"The first thing I told him was I had had a drink with another client. I hope you don't mind . . .," Castellon said. The man replied: "Not at all. I'm glad you like to enjoy yourself. Let's have another!"

Castellon's tip: While his Latin American counterparts drink their whiskey on the rocks, he waters his down. And he subtly rotates in a glass of water between each cocktail.

Castellon offered other bits of advice, beyond staying sober.

**Dry cleaners are great, but:** After one red-eye flight to Buenos Aires, Castellon found his hotel



WALTER MICHOT/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

**SOBRIETY TIP:** International business consultant Carlos Castellon heads for the LAN Airlines check-in on a recent Friday night for a departure to Argentina. When going out for business lunches and dinners in Latin America, he subtly rotates in a glass of water between each cocktail to keep focused on business.

rooms weren't ready. He had a presentation that morning, and his suit was rumpled.

"Took my suit into the steam room in the hotel gym to get the wrinkles out."

**Leave your bling at home:** "Try not to go flashy. Navy blue or black suit. I take my chains and my rings and all that stuff [off]. I just go with my regular Timex watch." Castellon's \$5,000 Cartier stays in Florida.

**Don't drive and you won't have to look over your shoulder:** He usually hires a chauffeur in Caracas, paying about \$40 for half a day. He doesn't have to worry about traffic and directions at the wheel of a rental car. And he's not as worried about things getting dicey. "They become your driver and your bodyguard."

**Take your dollars there:** Castellon changes his greenbacks in whichever country he's visiting, rather than paying slightly higher exchange rates

in Miami. "I try to use the local banks. The hotels usually don't give you a good rate either."

**A yogurt a day keeps the doctor away:** Every time Castellon had stomach issues on the road, he found yogurt did the trick. Now he eats a yogurt every day on business trips. "It's helped me tremendously."

## MIA TALKS BACK

I posted Miami International Airport's customer service e-mail in the last column (customerservice@miami-airport.com) and a number of readers copied me as they sent MIA their suggestions and complaints.

(There was a coding problem in the column and the entire address didn't have the special e-mail typography. So a number of readers wrote me to complain about a bum address. For the record: our fault, not MIA's.)

Each time, MIA executives wrote back and copied me. Obviously, it

helps if the press is involved in transactions like this. Still, Dickie Davis, head of customer service for MIA, said honchos there make a point of leaving no customer feedback unanswered.

So feel free to continue copying On the Road Again on all your MIA e-mails. And here's Fort Lauderdale-Hollywood International's e-mail, too: Contact FLL@broward.org.

## SOUTH TERMINAL DEBUT

Have you been in MIA's new \$1.1 billion South Terminal yet? It's the new Concourse J and part of a renovated H. Let me know what you think. If you want to illustrate your points with digital photos, all the better.

*On the Road Again* covers business travel for The Miami Herald. Send all tips, complaints, profile ideas and martini-lunch recommendations to dhanks@MiamiHerald.com.