

NIGHTSTALKER AWARD

ABAYA, NEW YORK

Abaya is a post-mod NY lounge with a twist – an easily located, beating heart. It's no wonder that they host a weekly called "Got Soul." The intimate Houston Street spot sports funky décor, including a customized red leather couch, and an atmosphere that makes you want to shake it and then come back for more. "People love the place," says Steve Daye, one of Abaya's independent promoters. "The street name is out there and we have a weekly contingent. It has a good vibe and aura." Management concurs: "Our lineup is strong, and we take pride in keeping with the times," says Frank Petitto, co-owner and manager. "We keep everything current and change with the crowd's tastes." And it's their commitment to customer service that really helps set their parties apart. Everyone from the respectful security guards in the front, to the efficient yet warm bartstaff help keep the love alive. —LG



FUNKY BUDDHA LOUNGE, CHICAGO

Open since 1996, the Funky Buddha is a lounge that doubles as an upscale dance club. With antique light fixtures, chandeliers, murals, a dimly lit bar, steel cocktail tables and an assortment of candles and lights, it's a favorite of Chicago's lounge lizards and music fiends alike. Divided into two small rooms — one with an array of comfy couches and chairs for lounging, and another with a mid-sized dancefloor — Buddha allows patrons to relax with friends in an environment of sophisticated privacy, or blend in with the crowd dancing away with Chicago's leading DJs, both of which they do with willing loyalty. And the party schedule features different genres of music every night, so the crowd is spoiled with a wide range of beats, from hip-hop to bhangra, funk to African, and soul to house. —LG

NERVE, MIAMI

Don't call it a reincarnation, but there hasn't been a place like Nerve on South Beach since dearly departed Groovejet. And that, according to manager James Butler, is part of the idea. "We've tried to portray that whole underground scene, and make people feel comfortable the minute they walk through the door," he says. "If you don't do that, you haven't done your job." Judging from the packed house at Nerve every night it's open — including the 900 regulars at Sunday party Refresh — people are responding to the hominess. But don't get too comfy just yet — at 6,000 square feet, Nerve might be the size of a typical lounge, but it lives up to its name with club-sized sound (yes, that's a Phazon), an ever-morphing interior design (a new Pulsar LED system was just installed), and visits from the world's biggest DJ talents. But in the crowded and struggling SoBe market, how does an

upstart like Nerve compete? "There's no secret," confesses Butler. "It's just that old grassroots style of promoting. You use all the resources that are available — your staff, the hotels, e-mail blasts, people who know people." And we're guessing that attitude-free door has plenty to do with it too. —KLM



Dan Vidal

THE END UP, SAN FRANCISCO

The title "venerable nightlife institution" is thrown around too often in this business, but San Francisco after hours club The End Up is really the type of place that deserves the distinction. Around since 1973, The End Up has served three generations of queer clubbers, starting in the rock years, moving through disco, house, and back. Located on Folsom Street in the famed South of Market district, The End Up has been a prime spot in the unfolding crisis of clubbing — from the AIDS epidemic to the war on nightlife — and has come out mature, and respected member of the clubbing community, both gay and straight. Noted for their dance 'til tomorrow's sunset ethic, Sunday afternoon come down party, and upgraded, heated deck and patio area, the End Up is in it for the long haul to serve a crowd as diverse as SF can make it. —DC

