

Rodale's ScubaLab™ Test: 42 Brightest Lights

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SCUBA DIVING

The bulky behemoth is shooting an azimuth straight for me, its wide crystalline eyes sizing me up, its iridescent armor deflecting sunbeams, its dynamic fins guiding its hulking mass ever closer. On Florida's west coast, encounters with this feared beast are frighteningly common, even in broad daylight.

As the Cadillac DeVille cruises by, I glimpse its bumper sticker: RETIREMENT AIN'T FOR SISSIES. Yep, that's the Sarasota spirit—live fast, retire faster.

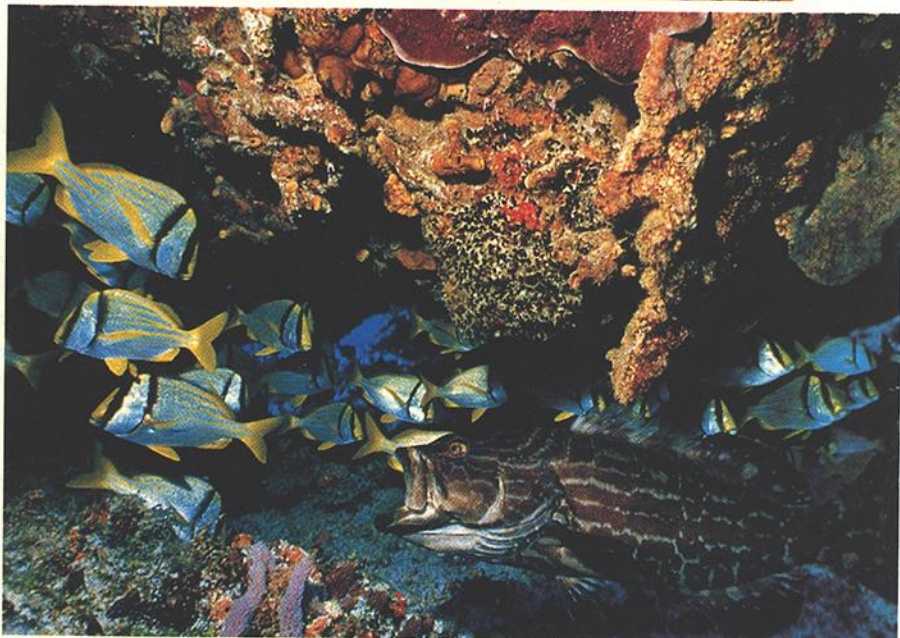
Sarasota is the beating heart of the Cadillac and Cardigan Coast, pumping its lifeblood through the Tamiami Trail and I-75 arteries to its vital organs: Venice, Bradenton, Naples, St. Petersburg, Tampa, Fort Meyers. Perched on the rim of the great Gulf bathtub, Sarasota is breezy banyan trees, tiled roofs plopped on stucco houses, swanky art galleries, white-sand beaches and laid-back retirement communities. And the names are pure Florida: Siesta Key, Lido Beach, Shark Piss Reef.



MAP ILLUSTRATION BY KAREN MINOT



PHOTOGRAPHY BY DALE SANDERS



BIG FISH, LIKE THIS LEMON SHARK (ABOVE), ARE FREQUENT VISITORS TO THE MANY WRECKS OFF FLORIDA'S WEST COAST; GROUPER, SPONGES AND PORKFISH (RIGHT) BRIGHTEN LIMESTONE LEDGES; A FANCIFUL TOWER MARKS SARASOTA'S RINGLING MUSEUM OF ART (TOP).