

# A SOVEREIGN HOUSE IN CORAL GABLES

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*T*he moniker “City Beautiful” speaks volumes about Coral Gables. Abundant Mediterranean Revival houses softened by leafy tropical shade trees project a lovely congruity, while landmarks such as the historic Biltmore Hotel and the Venetian Pool contribute an ongoing allure. One lesser known landmark is the eight-mile long Coral Gables Waterway. It slices west from Biscayne Bay, streams along to the University of Miami campus, and ultimately undulates to the Biltmore Golf Course.

The site of an existing Coral Gables home with the flowing Waterway in the back was a beauty. It also enjoyed a rare Miami-Dade County elevation of almost 20 feet above sea level. When the new owner purchased it, he realized that he could not fully integrate the Waterway view with the interior. After deciding to raze the house and build a-new, he quickly set out to select an architect.

To ensure the right choice, the homeowner used a brilliant







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strategy. He researched the City of Coral Gables' archives to learn which practicing architect's plans were most often accepted without changes by the City. "Sixty to seventy percent of the houses accepted the first time were Ramon Pachecos'," the owner notes. He immediately retained Pacheco as his architect.

The requirements for the new house were specific. It was to be traditional with the influence of French overhangs from a concrete roof. There was to be an infinity pool but the pool was not to be seen from the house. Instead, it was to visually meld into the sloping landscape. The house was to "speak" without any decorations. It would provide ample places to display a prominent art collection. This equated to wide galleries but no halls. When the owner summed it up, he said he wanted "a sov-

ereign house." The appropriate dictionary definition of "sovereign" is "being above all others in character, importance, excellence." The owner recollects saying, "This is my dream - if Ramon can get what I want." The architect came through early on. "When Ramon gave me the initial plans, he had hit the nail on the head. "The front elevation was perfect," and the few changes required were minimal.

From that point on, the cohesive team of owner, architect, and builder Joe Mendiola forged ahead to fulfill the "sovereign" description. "The house has a very high presence of verticality and stateliness," Mendiola comments. "The elevation on a ridge of coral rock protects boats from wind and flooding. It's a very unique area; the Waterway is such a peaceful place to be."







A bronze statue titled "Eva" is by artist Tom Corbin. An abstracted figure by Argentinean artist Carlos Reales hangs to the left of the dining room arch, while "Justice" by Eleonar Puente is on the right.

The strong, handsome house reflects peacefulness, reinforced by a classical Palladian effect at the entry. "I love the symmetrical, Palladio approach - the ideal proportions," Pacheco enthuses.

The classical sensibility is expressed by the symmetrical articulation of Macedonian stone columns at the entry, along with understated concrete moldings and a flat grey cement tile roof.

An aura of peacefulness coalesces from the outside of the home to the inside, where upon entering, an axis streams front to back. It visually travels to and then beyond the Waterway, terminating with a Poinciana tree, which seasonally offers bril-

liant red blossoms. Inside, a serene essence distinguishes the dramatic foyer, which is the genesis of the limestone flooring found throughout most of the house.

A brushed nickel stairway travels upward from a rounded, two-step landing and leads to gallery space above. Pacheco says, "I like to introduce an undulating shape to contrast with the angles."

The "welcoming committee" near the landing is a "family" of Indonesian carvings formed from a single tree trunk. It introduces the home's dynamic art. Perched on the nearby wall are antique ivory phoenix birds from Beijing.





"One of the challenges I had was the amount of art," Pacheco says. "There was so much that needed to have walls but at the same time we wanted a lot of natural light."

Nonetheless, Pacheco exacted walls that easily handled the owner's impressive collection. At the same time, abundant light and views were achieved along the entire back wall through striking, large French doors. They are framed in wenge wood, the same wood that emerges as a theme throughout the entire house.

It strongly appears in the cabinetry of the open gourmet kitchen (the owner loves to cook) and

serves as a beautiful backdrop for the Fantasia granite. Venetian plaster was applied in the kitchen "to bring in the warmth of the walls." The wenge wood repeats in the nearby but separate breakfast room leading to the outdoor living room. Like the kitchen, it boasts a cove ceiling and Venetian plaster.

In the living room, the wenge wood echoes its strong statement in a two-sided fireplace, one side facing the spacious sitting area and the other a small "receiving" room.

"I wanted to design a little waiting area," Pacheco notes. "I did the big space on one side of the fire-

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Art comes in play in a different way in the upbeat family room. With planked wood floors, burnt orange upholstered seating, and a table that was transformed from a chair stop an elephant in the Far East, the room is infinitely comfortable.











**In the family room Hector & Hector, who built the kitchen and millwork throughout the house, deftly integrated fragile, carved wood panels from an antique Beijing teahouse into new cabinetry housing hidden, audio visual equipment.**

place and the small space on the other." The small, inviting area holds two graceful Holly Hunt chairs flanking a diminutive Swedish Biedermeier table from the 1930s.

Everywhere in the house except the dining room, the natural-toned palette emphasizes both the wenge wood and, more importantly, the art. In the living room, for example, an artistic eye-catcher is a 1923 royal blue Rene Lalique vase, courtly on the French art deco cocktail table.

Art next appears in a bronze statue titled "Eva" by artist Tom Corbin. An abstracted figure by Argentinean artist Carlos Reales hangs to the left

of the dining room arch, while an oil-on-canvas titled "Justice" by Eleonar Puente is displayed on the right.

In a totally different approach, the dining room features an entire mahogany art wall, again in a wenge finish. Hanging in bold contrast to the elegant Baccarat chandelier is "El Eco de la Manzana," Claudio Espejo's exciting triptych.

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showstopper, however, is intricately carved cabinetry that was transfigured from the fragile wall of a Beijing teahouse.

A different approach is apparent in the library/media room, which totally blacks out for viewing. A wall of shelves makes way for books along with small collected treasures.

Ceilings range from 11 to 12 feet in keeping with the home's classicism. "It's a very comfortable height," Pacheco says. "You don't feel like you're in a cathedral, and a tall person doesn't feel that he has to lower his head."

Once upstairs where the gallery begins, the flooring transitions with inserts of Brazilian ebony in the limestone. Hanging at the top of the stairs on the left is the powerful "Lost Angels" by New Orleans artist Mike Klune. Hanging at the end of







the gallery is Colombian artist Tata Navia's "Los Niños Esperando por Mama." And a large stand-out is artist Angeles Gonzalez Zuelgaray's "Los Iluminados," a colorful and unusual interpretation of penguins. Pacheco recalls the owner saying to him, "I'm going to be the best client you ever had because I'm not picky." In fact, he wasn't picky. More accurately, he was the consummate perfectionist, cognizant of every detail and unwilling to compromise quality and beauty in any way.

An example is when Joe Mendiola installed the white carrera marble in the master bath. "We bookmatched every single slab to come together with the veining," he remarks.

Three days before the existing house was demolished, Pacheco says the owner had a "Tumba la





Casa," or demolish the house in Spanish, complete with construction-themed t-shirts and hard hats for the guests. Shortly after the new 8,000-square-foot house was completed, he threw another party. What they experienced this time was a stately-house with an exceptional art collection. It was the owner's dream fulfilling sovereign house. ▲

## RESOURCES

### **Windows & Doors**

*MQ Windows*  
1855 Griffin Rd. A-271  
Dania, FL 33004  
954 929 8500

### **Cabinetry & Millwork**

*Hector & Hector*  
6790 NW 84th Ave.  
Miami, FL 33166  
305 629 8864

### **Builder**

*Jomed Construction Corp.*  
4812 SW 74th Ct.  
Miami, FL 33155-4448  
305 666 3334

