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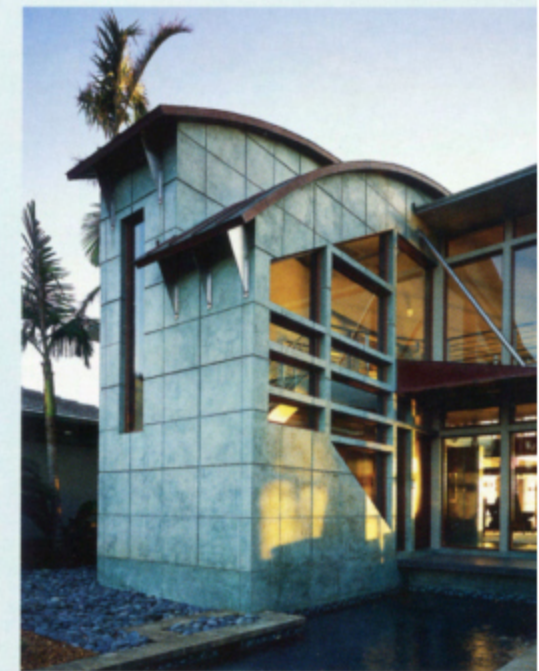
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Inner Sanctum



BY JORGE S. ARANGO

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIM SARGENT



A Palm Beach house is a temple of light, water and meticulous craftsmanship

THE GREAT EUROPEAN cathedrals of the Middle Ages had cross-shaped footprints—the nave comprising one axis, the transept another—that mirrored the form of Christianity's most potent symbol and thereby venerated the glory of God.

Mitchell O'Neil, the architect who designed this house in North Palm Beach, says that he was inspired by Frank Lloyd Wright's Orientalist-infused architecture rather than any particular Gothic style. Yet, in a sense, the cruciform plan he ended up with conveys a similar feeling of reverence, except that this "cathedral" glorifies music, water and light.

Previous spread, left: Water is the central theme of this Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired Palm Beach house. At the back of the home is an 85-foot-long infinity-edge pool, which was built to appear as though it were emptying into Lake Worth. Right: The 40-foot-long reflecting pool leads to the front entrance.

Like those medieval cathedrals, the layout embodies an awareness of the allure of pageantry. The dramatic proportions of those countless naves were perfectly cut out for grand entrances. In similar fashion, O'Neil says, "physically, the long, narrow character of the site afforded us an opportunity to have this strong sense of procession." So guests enter the property and approach the front door alongside a 40-foot reflecting pool, which continues at the rear of the house as an 85-foot-long swimming pool, its infinity edge disappearing into Lake Worth. Royal palms lining the entry function as a kind of nave and drive home the idea of procession. And the entry is bisected by an axis created by two perpendicularly placed reflecting pools that are visible from various rooms in the house.

Inside, the crisscrossing axes divide the floor into quadrants, each distinguished by varied floor treatments. The floors throughout are highly polished concrete, most of them tinted with a subtle turquoise. But

the dining area is stained a tobacco brown to differentiate it within the semi-open plan of the house. In the living room, interior designer H. Allen Holmes defined the space with a custom carpet that echoes the recurring grid motif.

The owner, an independent investor whose family made its fortune in the furniture business, had commissioned the project as a base camp during a period when he, his wife and two sons were sailing around the Pacific, living for spells wherever they weighed anchor before moving on—New Zealand this month, Tahiti the next. Curved balconies and steel railings resemble the elegant streamlining found on a ship. The family's nautical avocation also influenced a design imperative for O'Neil: water is visible from virtually every point in the house. He achieved this by deploying floor-to-ceiling glass in most rooms. Where the lake is not in view, one of the pools is.

Another of the client's consuming passions was music. He plays classical guitar, his wife had played





This page: The living room was designed to evoke whimsy, with furniture that highlights the family's love of color. The protruding maple box is the back of a storage wall for the second-floor home office. Chairs and sofa are from Cassina. Tables and rug were custom designed by Holmes.

Opposite: De Sede sectional sofas in the family room are composed of articulated sections that can be adjusted to make the sofas straight or curved. Between the Knoll Womb chairs is Martin Bratrud's Bongo table. The drum-shaped Congo cocktail tables are by Brueton.

piano, one son still plays piano, and the other had dabbled with the saxophone. It goes without saying that the audio system in the house had to be state-of-the-art. But Holmes extended the musical references in visual ways, too, choosing several furnishings that hinted at an instrumental theme. A few occasional tables in the family room have drum shapes (not coincidentally, the cocktail tables are called Congo and a side table is called Bongo). At night, Artemide's *Metamorfosi* mood lighting creates a perpetually

evolving visual symphony in the living room. The system uses parabolic reflectors to project light from halogen lamps that are capped with multicolored dichroic filters. A programmable microprocessor can create more than 50 light environments, moving almost imperceptibly from, say, the copper sunset glow of the Sahara to a South Pacific twilight blue.

"They were adventurous clients, and they wanted to experiment with details and finishes," Holmes observes gratefully. The master bath perfectly exemplifies

This page: The dining room features a George Nakashima table, its top made from an 11-foot vertical slice of an African bubinga tree. Leather Cab chairs are by Cassina. A mid-century Maprik house lintel from Papua New Guinea hangs in the wall cutout.

Opposite, above: Walls around the living room are turquoise-tinted concrete scored with a grid pattern.

Opposite, below: The high-tech kitchen is made of beech, with granite countertops and a stainless steel tower that holds appliances by Dacor and Sub-Zero.



the clients' spirit. Walls are all mahogany, and a pearwood sink sits between two cabinets designed to look, says Holmes, "as if they are almost grasping and holding it." The floors and tub surround are all a mottled gray Halquist stone, and the tub itself is marble. Echoing the idea of the exterior pools—where water appears to slice clear through the house—the tub juts through the wall. Even the medicine cabinets have all the bells and whistles: defoggers, dimmable fluorescent

lights and gasket frames. This is not the private sanctuary of a design-challenged person.

The Japanese kitchen, meticulously crafted of quarter-sawn beech, is also fully loaded: a Thermador five-burner rangetop, two Sub-Zero freezer drawers, a 36-inch-wide Sub-Zero refrigerator, Dacor electric-convection convertible ovens, a Miele dishwasher and a 900-bottle wine cellar. And since the husband races cars, Holmes and O'Neil outfitted a five-car garage



with floors covered in racetrack checkerboard, and a bright red lift so the client could tinker with his Porsches (see "Getting a Lift," page 128).

Still, says O'Neil of his clients, "they didn't want a pretentious house. They wanted a more human scale." This jibed nicely with O'Neil's philosophy: "My theory is to build smaller. Take the same amount of money you would put into a 20,000-square-foot house and put it into a 10,000-square-foot house." That way, he concludes, you can concentrate on the details.

So although the home has a modern sort of restraint, the luxury quotient is unquestionably high. The attention to detail extends to the outside, where landscape architect Jeff Blakely repeated "both weeping and angular characteristics" of the architecture in a kind of "serial imagery."

And those finishing touches, says Holmes—the dance-floor sheen on the concrete floors, the canted counters in the powder room, the rectangular cutout in the dining room that houses the Maprik lintel carving from Papua New Guinea—were the most dif-



This page: Railings on the second floor follow a graceful, boatlike curve. The painting, *Eurus* by Brian Rutenberg (1990), is flooded with light from a narrow hidden skylight cut into the ceiling above the canvas.

Far right, top: The granite countertop pierces the corrugated steel partition that conceals the bathroom.

Far right, bottom: The peaked maplewood ceiling in the master bedroom is recessed and inconspicuous from the outside. Above the sofa hangs an Alexander Calder lithograph. In the corner is a Foscarini Murano glass lamp.



difficult aspects of the project. "You look at it and it seems simple," he explains. "But the simpler finishes are the hardest to achieve, and it's difficult to find people who can execute them well. They have to be perfect, or every flaw will show."

You could say that flaws are akin to sins. And, as in the hallowed vaults of Chartres, there is no room for that sort of transgression here.

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