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– ARTISANS TALK ABOUT THE ART OF CREATION

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life in the
GREEN LANE

text JASON POMEROY
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right The Sunset Lounge left Poolside at Mondrian, South Beach, Miami.



Deco Elegance

MIAMI 8.12AM. SUNDAY

I escape from the wind driven cold of Toronto, to the tropical heat of Miami. Don't get me wrong – I love Toronto – it's a place that I retreat to hibernate; to gather my thoughts for my next design, book or venture, or to grab a slice of 'Mamma's pizza' and a piping hot cup of Tim Hortons coffee and an apple fritter. But years in Singapore have conditioned me to the tropics. Absorbing the warmth of Miami was therefore a welcome reprieve. Just over three hours away, and I'm revitalised by the sexiness of Miami – beautiful colours, curvilinear forms, distinctive accents – yes, I'm describing the architecture, but could be very much describing the beautiful people that exude a charm, charisma and warmth that is infectious. I'm here for my good friend Hannah's wedding, and am checked into the Mondrian on the famous South Beach.

We are warmly greeted and given an upgrade to a beautiful sea-facing suite. First impressions count, and the Marcel Wanders interior furnishings are light hearted, edgy additions to what is otherwise a modernist white walled building. Quirky abstractions and reinterpretations of Northern European traditional furniture (bespoke, acetylene torched, 'smoke chairs' that Enrique, the concierge, held court over inquisitive guests) and Delft porcelain (Miami themes richly depicted in the more traditionally characteristic

blue and white circular bordered ceramic tiles) is no small nod towards his Dutch background. This is coupled with oversized pieces of household elements (chair legs for columns, giant lamp shades for the porte cochere, furniture cabinet doors for entrance vestibule) that would challenge the deeply inebriated to feel they have been shrunk, and absorbed, into the world of Alice in Wonderland.

Miami is a melting pot of cultural influences. Cubans, Hispanics, Haitians, to name a few, have all left their indelible mark, and it makes me realise that the local propensity for abstraction and reinterpretation to make it their own must be in Miamian's blood.

But the power of brand is increasingly wielding its influence. BIG, Herzog and De Meuron, Yabu Pushelburg are just some of the architectural and interior design practices that are adding to the already colourful streetscape, but bear little resemblance to the local architecture. Instead, the imposition of what characterises these designers provides a point of contrast within the fabric of the city. Arguably, the mélange of different styles and cultural influences permits this new infusion, and adds to the flavour of the place. But another school of thought would be to ask why more traditional architectural flavours of Miami are not in themselves abstracted or reinterpreted.

Miami has undoubtedly a rich Latin American influence >

that is also born out of a Spanish colonial history. These influences are occasionally realised in both indoor and outdoor spaces, and the local socio-cultural practices. We can see this in the modernist architecture, elements of the colonnaded courtyard, stucco white washed facades and loggias (those outdoor rooms that permit casual interaction for the family and friends), which hark back to an earlier time. But it is the art deco architecture that has been adapted for the tropical climate that is etched into people's minds when they think of Miami, and one only needs to think of those classic episodes of Miami Vice to know what I'm describing.

High angled sun, strong coasterly winds, sudden rain showers, high temperatures and high levels of humidity, has tailored the sultry deco curves to embrace greater overhangs to counteract the sun and provide shade, operable louvered windows that permit cross ventilating winds, lighter surfaces that help deflect the heat, and storm water ledges that negate rain penetration. Higher ceilings with broad window openings, generous planted terraces and a greater usage

of ceiling fans than air conditioning provides a wonderful opportunity for its inhabitants to truly enjoy al fresco living in close proximity to sand, water and tropical greenery. Bal harbour, an upscale shopping environment, evokes such potential, by turning the energy consuming retail box model on its head. It's naturally ventilated, with an abundance of greenery and whirring ceiling fans – an architecture that is environmentally responsive to the tropical climate, and in the same instance sensitive to the cultural necessities of family togetherness through its outdoor veranda spaces.

In my mind's eye, this is how the design of interiors, architecture and even cities should be – a reinterpretative approach, based on past lessons learned, that is sensitive to the environment, cultural traditions, the grain of urban fabric, the social practices, the local economy, the local materials and its technologies. We can learn a lot from the past in order to act as starting points to design for the present. This way, we'll leave a positive legacy for the future. ◻

*BIG, Herzog and De Meuron, Yabu Pushelburg
are adding architectural and interior design
touches to the already colourful streetscape.*



left Guest rooms are immaculately appointed. right The bar at the Sunset Lounge is a study of sophistication.



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