

# HOME

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# POWER + LIGHT

*A Miami Beach Penthouse Is Poetry In Motion ...*

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THE ARCHITECT RENE GONZALEZ is both an artist and a craftsman, a master of materials and form. His work achieves its richness through restraint rather than excess. Thus the Miami Beach penthouse he designed for the philanthropist, patron and collector Ella Cisneros is simultaneously minimal and yet lush, which is not a contradiction at all.

beyond. Other rooms look across Miami Beach to the Atlantic Ocean. Ultimately, though, it is the furniture and architecture that steal the show. The two go hand-in-hand, almost seamless in their connection.

The space is at once embracing and open, warm and cool, intuitive and cerebral with the rhythm and meter of poetry. And though, like all

*Gonzalez has been gaining a national reputation for just that, for his innovative use of materials and his graceful manipulation of form and space.*

"I look for a certain quality of craft and rich materials," says Gonzalez. "Ultimately, that equates to luxury."

This particular penthouse apartment — it is 5,000 square feet — was conceived as a showplace for a portion of Cisneros' collection of Italian modernist furniture and photographs by Guido Albi Marini. The living room has a long, riveting view back out across Biscayne Bay, looking down the MacArthur Causeway to the Port of Miami and the ever-changing city skyline

of Gonzalez's work, it is fine-grained and carefully detailed, the thrust here is the grand gesture, the process of moving through space, about revelation and discovery.

"It comes from thinking about it all in architectural terms," says Gonzalez. "The spatial condition here is very fluid."

Start at the beginning. The entry is dark, even awe-provoking, a space that wraps itself around you, but at the same time frames the passage into the rooms beyond. Two pieces of furniture are the

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**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** The living room features furniture from B&B Italia and rugs that add texture to an otherwise sleek space. **THIS SPREAD:** Architect Rene Gonzalez custom designed the master bathroom in teak and marble.













focal point: a highly sculptural Chester bench by Amanda Levene, done for the London design firm of Established & Sons, and an organic table made in Columbia from a tree root that had been submerged in the Amazon for almost a century. The floors, walls and ceiling are crafted of teak and leather. At the point where wall meets ceiling, there is a millimeter's separation, a subtle move that makes the ceiling seem to float overhead.

helps to define the space. A built-in bench lines the teak wall at one end of the room, while at the other soffit lighting sheds a warm glow on Venetian plaster. The palette for walls, floors and furnishings is muted and pale. Only the wood is dark. The teak wall continues on throughout the apartment, starting and stopping.

"It changes as it threads its way through," says Gonzalez, "and at times it more or less disappears."

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"It's all in the detailing," says Gonzalez. "Just the tiniest space in between makes the entire difference."

Huge teak doors pivot to open or close off the primary living space.

The living room itself is vast and airy.

"It is meant to be a collector of light," says Gonzalez.

Floors are pale honed limestone, and there is a single column clad in white etched glass that

Though much of the furniture is Italian modernist, other pieces were custom-made. Nasir Kassamali, owner of Luminaire, designed the striking linear chandelier in the dining room; Gonzalez designed the living room credenza as well as the credenzas and shelving in the media room.

Gonzalez and Cisneros are not strangers in the designer-client relationship; he was the architect for the renovation of CIFO (the Cisneros

**OPPOSITE (from top):** A bedroom features the Dragongrass natural jute area rug and a "root table" from G&G Italian Design in Miami; Gonzalez designed the doors, credenzas and shelving for the family room. **THIS PAGE:** Pivoting doors divided the foyer from the rest of the apartment.





Luminaire's Nassir Kassamali designed the chandelier (crafted by Linear Bacci) to illuminate the Doge 306 table also from Luminaire and the parchment paper chairs from G&G Italian Design.





Fontanals Art Foundation), the museum and study center at NW 10th Street and North Miami Avenue where the two likewise worked closely to create a building that has already been much honored for its brilliant pictorial “rainforest” façade made of, literally, a million small tiles, and its highly flexible industrial-

And a sense of adventure: when Gonzalez determined that the teak he had chosen for the floors and walls would simply not work in certain places, he called Cisneros and asked “what about leather?” Soon the two found themselves in Naples, Italy, where together they selected a quite astounding piece of

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inspired interior space. (Her first museum venture was Miami Art Central, or MAC, which last year merged with the Miami Art Museum, where she is a trustee.) Gonzalez is also designing a gatehouse for Grove Estates, a Cisneros residential project just south of the Kampong in Coconut Grove.

“With Ella,” says Gonzalez, “the design process is a conversation. There’s a clarity about it all.”

leather (all from a single hide) for one wall and the entryway ceiling. It is an unexpected touch and seductively tactile.

Gonzalez has been gaining a national reputation for just that, for his innovative use of materials and his graceful manipulation of form and space. It is as much quest as craft. “Rather than work against the grain, I always take a problem and turn it into an opportunity.” **H**

The terraces of this penthouse afford long spectacular views across the city, the dramatic sky and the rapidly changing skyline.