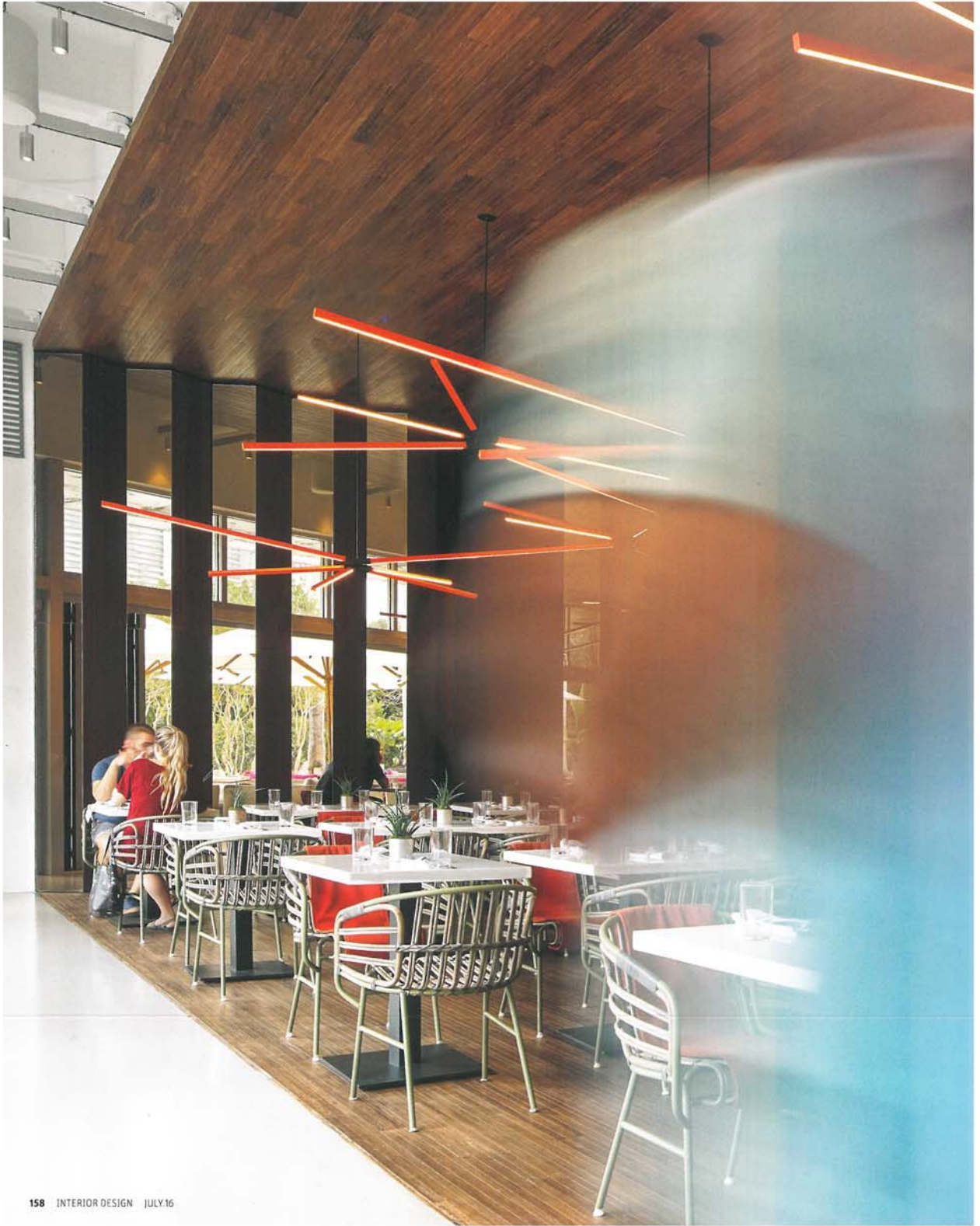


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2016

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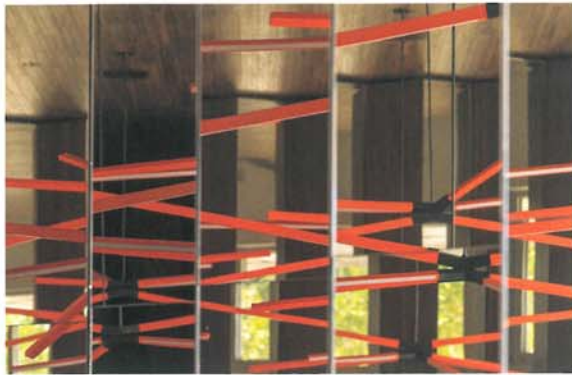


that's what
friends

text: eale conen
photography: michael stavaridis

are for

Plant Food + Wine, a Miami restaurant by Rene Gonzalez, is another unforgettable space for a longtime client



Previous spread: Rene Gonzalez Architect wrapped the main dining area at Miami's Plant Food + Wine in bamboo plywood.

Top: The dining area's panels of bronzed mirror reflect custom chandeliers in painted maple and blackened steel. **Bottom:** Chairs by LucidiPevere pull up to custom tables topped in marble.

Opposite: Walnut stools line up along the bar.

What better scenario

for an architect to meet a client? Rene Gonzalez and Karla Dascal bonded over design when, fortuitously, she visited the Museum of Contemporary Art, North Miami, at the precise moment Gonzalez was leading a tour of an exhibition that he had designed and curated. "It was everything from product design to fashion to cars," he recalls. This was in 2000.

"She's a patron who loves, appreciates, and values design," he continues. She's also savvy. Way before an industrial wasteland in Miami transformed into the trendy Wynwood Arts District, she purchased a warehouse on an acre plot as the headquarters for her floral and events business, Karla Conceptual Event Experiences, which is known for high-style arrangements and boldface customers. Naturally, she entrusted the renovation to Gonzalez, by this time a close friend—their shared Cuban heritage cementing the relationship. Now we're in 2003.

Fast-forward another decade. Dascal, always in tune with the zeitgeist, envisioned expanding her operation to encompass current interests in food, wellness, and education, branding everything as an ensemble called the Sacred Space Miami. A restaurant would be the anchor, but that's not nearly all. The property, including the gardens, was slated to become a premier venue for weddings, luxury brand events, corporate retreats, a proprietary movement program called Prayerdance, you name it. And there would be a boutique selling movement apparel, housewares, art, books, jewelry, and aromatherapy and homeopathy elixirs.

Could Gonzalez design the restaurant component in what had been the Karla office's storage area? And could his commission extend to collaborating with a landscaping consultant for an indoor-outdoor venue that takes advantage of the subtropical climate? You bet. So he and Dascal flew to Los Angeles, where they wined, dined, and met with renowned vegan chef Matthew Kenney of Plant Food + Wine. He signed on as a partner to open the restaurant's second location at the Sacred Space Miami, furthermore integrating his school, Matthew Kenney Culinary.

Gonzalez says he focused on "a seamless interface between indoor and outdoor." Here's how he made the connection. Figuratively, it comes ➤







Top: The dining area seats 55. **Bottom:** Flooring transitions to epoxy for the bar, prep kitchen, and culinary school. **Opposite:** A 26-year-old talipot palm was transplanted to shade the reflecting pool, lined in glass mosaic tile and lit by color-changing LEDs.

courtesy of the ambiguity created by the gardens' reflections in the bronzed mirror strips on the accordion-pleated sidewalls. On a more literal level, the front wall disappears entirely when its glass panels fold away.

Another challenge he faced was how to accommodate both casual and formal. A group of coworkers toting laptops, for a lunchtime meeting, or a solo guest reading a magazine—all should feel right at home. "At the same time," he says, "people should feel like getting dressed up to come on a Saturday night." Consider, therefore, the delicate

balance struck by the warm and welcoming bamboo plywood, which lines the main dining area, and the drama of the spiky chandeliers. "They're painted the red-dish color of the Cuban mammeé fruit," he adds.

He shifted into neutral for the zones beyond the main dining area. Flawless polished white marble, for example, tops the bar, fronted in more bamboo plywood. From here, pale gray epoxy flooring sweeps back through the open prep

kitchen, a "clinical white environment," he notes, that's visible through a scrim of woven gold vinyl. Last comes the culinary school.

Walk in the opposite direction, and you find yourself on an ipe dining deck that overlooks a gold-tiled reflecting pool, a guava grove, a meditation garden, and an outdoor lounge. "Each is its own 'room,' different from the others," he says. Look up instead, and be awed by a 40-foot-high palm. He transported it here from his father's property in Fort Lauderdale, where the tree grew from a seed planted decades ago. Talk about sacred.

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PROJECT TEAM

MONICA VAZQUEZ; ALEXANDRA PAGLIERY; SABAH CORSO; RENE GONZALEZ ARCHITECT. COLLABORATIVE INDEPENDENT: LANDSCAPING CONSULTANT. **U.S. STRUCTURES:** STRUCTURAL ENGINEER. **ROSS ENGINEERING:** CIVIL ENGINEER. **H. VIDAL & ASSOCIATES:** MEP. **CREATIVE HOME BY DESIGN:** WOODWORK. **SOLISKY:** UPHOLSTERY WORKSHOP. **BRODSOON CONSTRUCTION:** GENERAL CONTRACTOR.

PRODUCT SOURCES

FROM FRONT SMITH & FONG COMPANY: BAMBOO PLYWOOD (DINING AREA). **LUMINOUS GLASS DISTRIBUTORS:** CUSTOM MIRROR PANELS. **STICKBULB:** CUSTOM CHANDELIERS. **CASAMANIA:** CHAIRS. **KVADRAT:** CUSHION FABRIC. **ARTEFACTO:** STOOLS (BAR). **LITELAB CORPORATION:** TRACK LIGHTING. **EPMAR CORP.:** FLOORING (BAR, KITCHEN, SCHOOL). **KOVA TEXTILES:** SCRIM MATERIAL (KITCHEN). **PAOLA LENTI:** CHAIRS (POOL AREA). **BAMBRELLA:** UMBRELLAS. **URBAN STONWORKS:** PLANTERS. **AMERICAN GLASS MOSAICS:** TILE. **THROUGHOUT BENJAMIN MOORE & CO.:** PAINT. **TUSCANY STONE:** STONE SUPPLIER.







The Sacred Space Miami, with all its interwoven components, would not exist today were it not for the preternatural foresight exercised by Karla Dascal back in 2002. Growing her floral business, ahem, into a full-fledged events design and production company, Karla Conceptual Event Experiences, she purchased a 12,000-square-foot concrete warehouse in an industrial neighborhood known then as just Wynwood, no Arts District attached. What followed was Rene Gonzalez Architect's transformation of the property—making an indelible impression when the

in the beginning

completed project appeared in *Interior Design*. The project touched on Rene Gonzalez's many talents: interiors, architecture, and landscaping. To create a true sense of arrival, he replaced a parking lot with a lush courtyard composition demarcated by Cor-Ten steel forms flanking the entry. Inside, he addressed a program expanding from basic atelier to include a luminescent environment for client gatherings. "Little by little, the space took on a dual function," Gonzalez says. "The project transitioned as Karla did." The look is low-key glamour—clean, white, shimmery. Instead of opaque walls, backlit panels of etched acrylic enclose the conference room. Reflectivity from Venetian plaster and epoxy flooring adds to the light play. Due to the multifunctionality of the space, the furnishings remain sparse, little more than a couple of tables paired with white swivel chairs by Charles and Ray Eames or clear polycarbonate side chairs by Philippe Starck. Two long, wavy stainless-steel benches make the reception area read like an art gallery. And the mobile workstations for floral production are works of art in themselves. 🌿

FROM FRONT TO BARCELONA DESIGN: BENCH (EXTERIOR). **MODULAR INTERNATIONAL:** TORCHÈRES. **HERMAN MILLER:** CHAIRS (CONFERENCE ROOM). **LIGHTBLOCKS:** CUSTOM TABLETOP. **KARTELL:** CHAIRS (MEETING AREA). **ARTEMIDE:** LINEAR FIXTURE. **AARON'S WINDOW TREATMENTS:** CUSTOM WINDOW SHADES. **LUMINIS THROUGH SESCO LIGHTING:** PENDANT FIXTURES (ATELIER). **BBB ITALIA:** BENCHES (RECEPTION). **THROUGHOUT STONHARD GROUP:** FLOORING. **ALL WOOD CREATIONS:** ACRYLIC WORKSHOP.



KEN HAYDEN

ETC.



Opposite, from top: Rene Gonzalez Architect replaced a parking lot with landscaping at the entry to Miami's Karla Conceptual Event Experiences. In the conference room, chairs by Charles and Ray Eames surround a custom table with an acrylic top. Philippe Starck chairs meet collages by Raymond Saà in a meeting area. The floral atelier's custom mobile workstations are stainless steel and maple. This page: Alyson Shotz's sculpture of magnifying lenses hangs above a cypress root and Chris Hawker's benches in the reception area.