

**BUILDING  
GLASS HOUSES**  
A Miami architect who specializes  
in spaces of glass and mirrors  
M5



# MANSION

*'The space within becomes the reality  
of the building' —Frank Lloyd Wright*

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## MANSION



Clockwise from top left: Terra Group; Anissa Kader for The Wall Street Journal; Luis Torres

### THE GURU THE MAN WHO BUILDS GLASS HOUSES

Architect Rene Gonzalez designs  
spaces that soak in the scenery of Miami,  
inspired by water and light



**LOOKING UP** Architect Rene Gonzalez, above, designed the luxury condo building Glass, shown in a rendering, left, with a 'dissipating' look. One of his best-known projects was a home in Indian Creek, Fla., below left, that sold last year for a record \$47 million.

BY CANDACE JACKSON

**ARCHITECT RENE** Gonzalez doesn't go far for design inspiration. He just looks outside.

Consider one of Mr. Gonzalez's best-known projects: a 30,000-square-foot home in Indian Creek, Fla., that last year became, at \$47 million, the most expensive home ever sold in Miami-Dade County.

The contemporary glass-and-limestone home was inspired, Mr. Gonzalez says, by "how the light moves from east to west throughout that property," and blends elements of the outdoors and indoors. Small pavilions are bisected by waterways and koi ponds. An interior courtyard features landscaped walls; glass walls along the backside of the home overlook Biscayne Bay. The home soaks in Miami's scenery.

Mr. Gonzalez's latest project is Glass, an 18-story Miami Beach condominium building with just 10 luxury residences. Expected to be completed in 2015, it will have a three-story penthouse with a full-floor master suite, priced at \$35 million. (Typical units in the building average about \$9 million.) Nestled in Miami Beach's South of Fifth neighborhood, next to South Beach, typical apartments will have 3,500 square feet of indoor living space wrapped



by 2,000 square feet of terrace overlooking the ocean.

The building's name isn't a coincidence. Creative use of glass is integral to Mr. Gonzalez's architecture.

The building's exterior "skin" will be fritted glass, which has an opaque, patterned ceramic composite infused into it, mixing transparency and privacy. "Imagine," reads a sales brochure, "living in a cube of water." Mr. Gonzalez says that the design is inspired by the ocean and sky, with a look that will lighten from the more solid base to the penthouse. "I'm looking for materials with an ethereal quality that

tend to dissipate or reflect the environment."

Glass's developer is Terra Group, a company known for its luxury towers and gated communities. David Martin, owner and president of Terra Group, says he'd followed Mr. Gonzalez's career for years and was impressed by homes he'd designed for wealthy clients in the Miami area, the Hamptons and the Middle East. "Some artists are great designers but they don't understand how people live," he says.

Mr. Gonzalez, 49, founded his Miami firm in 1997 after working as a project designer with Richard Meier

& Partners on the Getty Museum in Los Angeles. The firm has a staff of 10, and handles projects ranging from residential gardens to museums, including the CIFO Art Space in downtown Miami, a redesigned warehouse that has a facade of mosaic tiles arranged to look like a bamboo forest.

Glass is Mr. Gonzalez's first condominium project. Born in Cuba and raised in Miami, he studied architecture at the University of California, Los Angeles and began his career in L.A. The publicity surrounding the Indian Creek home has helped raise his profile in the architecture world.

Mr. Gonzalez says he is interested in how homes reflect and interact with their environments, making glass and reflective surfaces his favorite materials. In one apartment he designed in South Beach, he used reflective latex panels on the ceiling to reflect the view outside, giving the room the impression of being surrounded by the outside scenery.

His influences include Mr. Meier, who he says connects his buildings in creative ways with surrounding landscapes; and John Lautner, a Southern California architect known for his space-age looking homes and buildings.

The idea for Glass came about in an early sketch on paper of a series of lines that dissipated as they rose.

The first five floors of the building will house the pool, lobby and common amenities, and are meant to relate to the beach outside. The rest of the building is designed to appear to fade into the sky, with glass that is less opaque on the higher floors. A similar theme will continue inside, where the units' foyers will have ceilings with programmable lighting systems that shift from a more light-diffused urban star-scape on the lower levels to a more open starry sky higher up. An interlacing stone pattern in the lobby will become increasingly intricate as it meets the elevators, subtly referencing a cresting wave.

Construction is slated to start next month on Glass, and Mr. Gonzalez says he will work with buyers to customize their interiors. Seven of the 10 units are in contract. Buyers so far have come largely from the finance and tech industries in London, New York, San Francisco and Miami (some already have homes in Miami Beach).

As with the Indian Creek home, Mr. Gonzalez says the trick with Glass was to balance sculptural, high-concept, artistic design with the needs and tastes of an unknown buyer. "You have to strike a balance between it being very special but not having too much character and being too esoteric," he says.