

LUXURY LIVING

SUSAN LUCCI'S
NEW YORK ESTATE
SLOPESIDE IN ASPEN
FLORIDA'S BEST





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PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARLOS DOMENECH

We didn't buy an apartment," says a Puerto Rican attorney and art collector of his and his wife's part-time residence in Miami's Brickell Bay Club. "We bought a view with an apartment."

That statement says it all. In Miami, where water and city lights coalesce to form an urban panorama with a subtropical twist, views are everything—so much so that homes are literally built around them.

In the case of this condominium overlooking Biscayne Bay and the Miami skyline, the owners retained architect Rene Gonzalez and gave him one directive: Maximize the view. Never mind that the apartment's existing interiors were so choppy and compartmentalized that they not only impeded views, they also made spaces seem smaller than they were.

"Walls separated spaces," says Gonzalez, recounting his first impressions of the project. "There were panoramic views in two directions, yet there was a series of rooms that did not capitalize on those views."

The first order of business was to knock down walls and open the space up completely. "To further emphasize the views, we unified the spaces and created a flow between them, leaving one large space within which all public areas could function," says Gonzalez. "Now the living room, dining room, kitchen and entry lounge are all open to each other."

Thanks to the changes, the space is loftier and more dynamic. Says the architect, "We crossed views. From the dining room you get the view toward the city and the expressways beyond, which look particularly dramatic at night with their streaming lines. From the living room you see across to Biscayne Bay and Key Biscayne."

The owners were stunned at the difference. "Not in my wildest dreams did I think it could look like this," says the husband. "I've always dreamt of an apartment in front of the water, to remind me of the places I have been. Rene created such a place."

The absence of walls indeed revealed the panorama, but it was only the beginning. Gonzalez wanted the view

ASPIRATIONS

LOFTY

Cutting-edge architecture captures the sweeping views in this Miami condominium

A cherry-wood wall separates the living room and bedroom areas.
(opposite) A marble-and-steel bench covers the length of the glass walls in the living and dining areas.





to permeate every square inch of the apartment. To accomplish that, he used reflective and translucent surfaces that absorb light and mirror the colors of sky and water. For example, kitchen cabinets are custom-made with a high-gloss, white-lacquer finish. The massive, square columns that define spaces within the larger, open area are wrapped with blue etched glass that looks curiously liquid-like.

Gonzalez also employed a less-is-more approach: Spare furnishings and minimalist lines allow for maximum transparency and airflow. In the dining room, mesh-metal chairs are practically see-through. The dining table, with its glass top and open-cube base, "absorbs light and reverberates it around the room," says Gonzalez, adding, "Everything has a minimal quality to it. What you don't see becomes important."

His strategy is best exemplified by the perimeter bench. With its contemporary lines and low profile, the marble-and-stainless-steel bench looks like a piece of art, but has a distinct functionality. It traces the perimeter of the glass walls, providing a place for contemplation and extra seating for parties. It also unifies the public spaces. "It's the ribbon that ties it all together," notes Gonzalez.

The sculptural quality of the furnishings and architecture is no accident. For these clients, who are great collectors of art and are heavily involved in various arts organizations in the Americas, style is important. They wanted the space to blend with their collection of contemporary European, Caribbean and African art without competing with it.

To best showcase the art, Gonzalez kept the background neutral but warm, selecting finishes and materials that have a timeless quality. In the living room,





(top) High-gloss white cabinets reflect light in the kitchen; hip dining chairs from Luminaire, designed by Antonio Citterio, flank the breakfast table. (above) Intersecting planes add a 3-D effect in one of the baths.

a cherry-wood wall behind the sofa makes a warm counterpoint to the glass, steel and stone furnishings.

Gonzalez's dynamic compositions contribute to the artistic environment. Floating elements and intersecting planes, such as the vanity areas in the bathrooms, create a three-dimensional effect. Materials combine in unusual ways to underscore the relationship between textures. Case in point: a built-in structure of wenge wood and metallic-mesh fabric in the master bedroom.

Lighting was also important in terms of showcasing the art. Says Gonzalez, "The strategy I like to use for lighting art is to have it lit indirectly and have walls washed, versus lighting art with spots. It feels more like a natural setting, versus a museum-like environment."

In this project, none of the elements are mutually exclusive. Instead, the architecture, furnishings, lighting and materials are engaged in a carefully orchestrated dance that blurs the boundaries between art and sensibility.

"I see things as flowing," says Gonzalez. "The architecture starts with volumes and spaces, but also incorporates finishes and custom furniture. You have to look at projects in a holistic way."

However scientific and exacting the architect's approach, the end result is what matters. For the owners of this apartment, the final product has an esoteric quality that can only be described as a state of mind. "I can hardly explain the feeling I get when I sit down with a glass of wine and a good book," says the owner. "There is a positive energy in this place. It's a piece of heaven for my wife and me." ❖