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THE 9th annual  
**AVANT  
GUARDIAN**  
ENVISIONING THE FUTURE  
OF FASHION PHOTOGRAPHY

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**URBAN OUTFITTERS**

DILLER SCOFIDIO + RENFRO *galvanize the west side of Manhattan with their plans for the High Line*

**SEASON PREMIERE**

JUAN CARLOS OBANDO *takes L.A. style beyond the red carpet and into fashion's front row*

**FREE FORM**

Fashion designer MARIA CORNEJO *cuts her line from a different cloth*

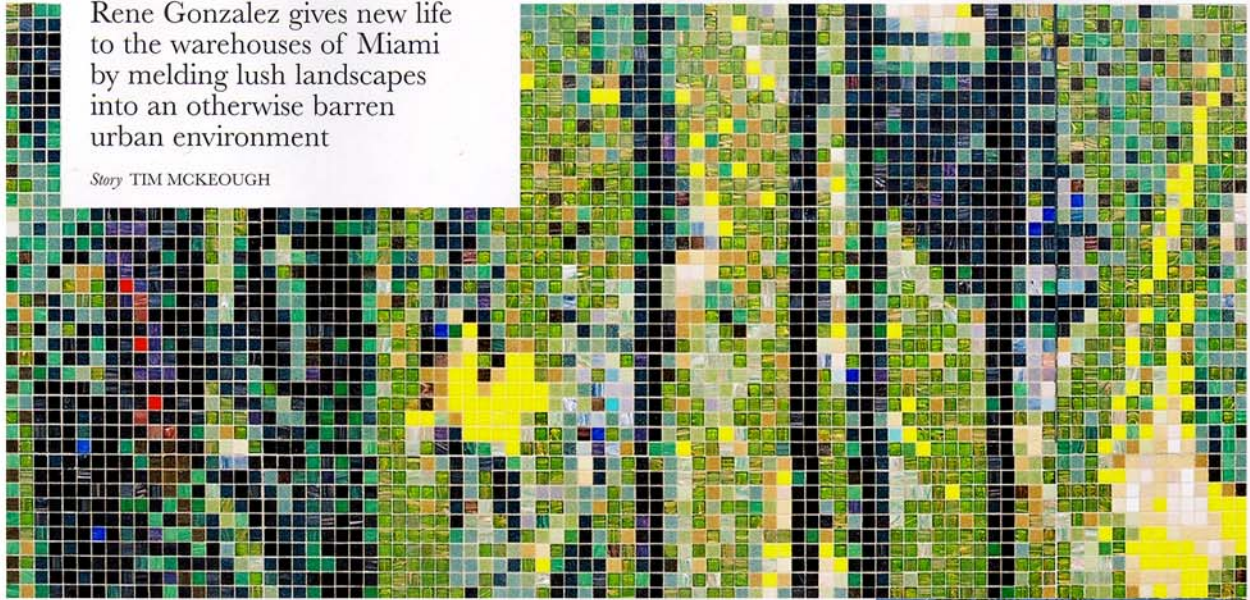
BALANCE: JESSICA  
R GETS A LEG UP



# Power Plants

Rene Gonzalez gives new life to the warehouses of Miami by melding lush landscapes into an otherwise barren urban environment

Story TIM MCKEOUGH



Dissolving the line between the inside and the outside of a building has been in the architectural repertoire for quite some time. Take, for instance, the post-war California Modernist movement, iconic architecture that blends the natural landscape with the physical structure of a building. This approach, though, becomes a powerful new tool when transposed into the tropical yet urban environs of Miami, as exemplified by two recent works from Florida-based architect Rene Gonzalez: a private museum and a remodeled office, both revamped warehouse spaces in once purely industrial areas of the city.

Born in Havana, Cuba and raised in South Florida, Gonzalez was inspired at an early age by buildings that blurred boundaries between the natural and the manmade. "I am very interested in how you detail threshold conditions," he says. For the Cisneros Fontanals Art Foundation (CIFO), a nonprofit dedicated to supporting contemporary Latin American artists, Gonzalez collaborated with Italian tile maker Bisazza to design a mural depicting dense layers of foliage. He first created a digital image and then converted it into a breathtaking 4,800-square-foot glass mosaic, which consists of more than one million different tiles in 100 varieties of colors and finishes. "The idea was to create a green space to counter-balance the austerity of the neighborhood," says Gonzalez. Located on the southern fringe of the Wynwood district, the adapted warehouse is a verdant reminder of the value of nature in a relatively derelict section of the city. Viewed from a distance, the mosaic's bamboo trunks are unmistakable; up close, they dissolve into wondrously abstract fields of color. >



ASPHALT JUNGLE: (Clockwise from top) Close-up of the over one million Bisazza tiles that architect Rene Gonzalez used to create a glass mosaic; an extruded concrete doorway leads into the CIFO building; view of the jungle facade from the paved bamboo garden



CONSTANT GARDEN: (Clockwise from left) The architect outfitted the Karla staff meeting room with La Marie chairs by Philippe Starck; a Ross Lovegrove chaise longue for BD Design gives the atrium garden organic movement; Gonzalez customized the table top in this gray matte conference room and used poured-resin floors to reflect the sunlight streaming through floor-to-ceiling windows  
*Photography* KEN HAYDEN

Inside the CIFO building, Gonzalez kept the exhibition space clean and simple to provide maximum flexibility for installations. With a cadre of art collectors among his clientele, he places a premium on establishing tremendous visual focus in his interiors, and counts artists Robert Irwin and Dan Flavin, masters of space and light, among his personal influences. "It's an ideal building for an experimental, dynamic and refreshing contemporary arts space," says CIFO director Cecilia Fajardo-Hill. "We hope it will become iconic, a landmark in this up-and-coming downtown area."

In his design for Karla Conceptual Event Experiences, Gonzalez sought to soften the hard edges of the warehouse with an atrium garden echoed by natural interior elements. He wanted to provide a neutral backdrop for the company's floral arrangements and special events by employing a chameleon-like concept. "The design almost needed to disappear," he says. "We wanted the space to feel very ethereal, very airy, and to be reflective in order to capture the light coming in from the garden – representing what Karla's work is about." Touches like a glossy epoxy floor help to mirror the movement of the exterior landscape, which consists of swaying clusters of bamboo and concrete slabs nestled in grass. Backlit translucent acrylic walls provide a contrasting artificial play of light, and a series of pieces from various artists and designers – like the peeling wallpaper of London's Tracy Kendall ("Topographic Design," Issue 60) – provide hints of texture. Pointing to a sculpture of oval lenses by Brooklyn artist Alyson Shotz, Gonzalez says, "If you look through it, back toward the garden, all you see is a kaleidoscope of green tones." A microcosmic view that is as abundant and alluring as the visions of Gonzalez himself. **TM**

