

# CONTEMPORARY FASHION

TROPICAL LUSHNESS MEETS AN ICONIC  
MODERNIST LOOK IN A CORAL GABLES ABODE.

WRITTEN BY MONIQUE MCINTOSH / PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRIS TAMBURELLO

ARCHITECTURE / RAFAEL PORTUONDO, JOSE LUIS GONZALEZ-PEROTTI,  
JORGE LANDA AND AMANDA DEL RIO, PORTUONDO-PEROTTI ARCHITECTS  
INTERIOR DESIGN / ROBERT RIONDA, ROBERT RIONDA INTERIORS  
HOME BUILDER / JOSE C. MENDIOLA JR., JOMED CONSTRUCTION  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE / JORGE SANCHEZ AND BRIAN VERTESCH,  
SMI LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE



From its historic Art Deco decadence to modern glass-and-steel skyscrapers, Miami has long been an oasis for creators reimagining the way people live. So moving to the Magic City felt like kismet for one New York transplant building his dream home along one of Coral Gables' winding canals. This provided a precious opportunity for the homeowner to dive deeper into his love of modernism, says designer Robert Rionda. "He wanted classic and timeless design, incorporating several periods—including Art Deco, midcentury modern and contemporary elements," Rionda says.

To integrate this eclectic mix of iconic eras, the designer reunited with a frequent collaborator, architect Rafael Portuondo, who worked with residential designers Jorge Landa and Amanda Del Rio. The architecture reflects the homeowner's fascination with Brazilian modernism, which merges tropical materials with streamlined forms—a design suitable for the property, surrounded by water and lush palm trees. "It's a more organic approach," Portuondo explains. The home plays with natural textures, like the local coral stone used on exterior pathways and, along the rectilinear façade, rough-hewn ipe mashrabiya sunscreens encircling the second level, disrupting the sleek concrete and floor-to-ceiling glass below. "When the sun rises, the light becomes diffused and beautiful inside," the architect says. Adds Rionda: "At night, the house shines like a Japanese lantern when the interior lights come through those screens."

Landscape designer Jorge Sanchez and landscape architect Brian Vertesch immersed the home in a verdant range of plantings, such as white Geiger trees in the entry courtyard, a cabbage palm grove at the drive and coconut palms by the pool's sand beach area. "We really wanted to emphasize the beauty of tropical and subtropical foliage, which is just made for contemporary architecture," Sanchez explains. The duo flanked the home's elevated glass walls

"IT'S ABOUT  
MAKING EVERY  
SPACE FEEL LIKE  
A DIFFERENT  
DESTINATION."

—ROBERT RIONDA

with tall, flowering specimens like heliconias to create a tree-house effect. "The variety we used grow to about 14 feet tall," Vertesch says.

Inside, the home's exploration of design periods needed to nurture the structure's warm approach to modernism, emphasized by the rich oak wall paneling used throughout. This was not the time for hard-edge, cold minimalism. Instead, the client wanted to carve out intimate areas to socialize or enjoy quiet moments of solitude with the view. "It's about making every space feel like a different destination, whether it's for eating, swimming or just lounging in the hammock," Rionda says. "He wanted it to have a bit of a resort feel."

To create this atmosphere, the designer favored tactile finishes like warm woods and metal patinas, which also brought harmony among a range of styles. This was especially true in the living area. Doubling as a work space for the homeowner, the room offers a survey of iconic pieces, including curvaceous Czech Art Deco armchairs, a rosewood-and-leather desk inspired by a Milo Baughman design and a midcentury bronze-and-pewter coffee table. This playful mixture of eras "sets the tone," Rionda explains. To illuminate the expansive rooms, he had particular fun with vintage lighting, including an iconic Italian sputnik pendant in the billiards room and a pair of 1960s brass table lamps in the dining area—a perfect example of quirky Palm Springs modernism.

Leaning toward a soothing, neutral palette of taupes, grays and creamy whites, the client also preferred "to play with textures instead of bold colors," Rionda says. As such, materials run the gamut: a white leather headboard wall in the master bedroom, woven dining chairs, a Lucite bench in the family area upholstered in Mongolian lamb. One exception is the outdoor terrace, where the homeowner encouraged the team to use various hues to integrate the space with the surrounding nature. "The client wanted to make sure the color of the pool reflected the water from the canals," explains general contractor Jose Mendiola. Rionda introduced other jolts of color primarily through curating the home's art collection, which focuses on the owner's love of contemporary paintings and traditional African folk art. The entrance hall and stairwell in particular became a micro gallery, featuring vivid pieces in the former and, in the latter, vintage Moroccan wedding veils the designer found on his 50<sup>th</sup> birthday trip to the country.

These serendipitous finds were all part of the treasure hunt spirit behind creating the home—a process the client was involved in every step of the way, from endless afternoons wandering through antique stores to passionate chats with the team about design history. "For him, this wasn't about securing an investment or trying to amass any particular collection," Rionda says. "This project was all about the discovery." ■



Colorful art and modern design define this Miami home by designer Robert Rionda. Case in point: the glass-encased foyer showcasing a collage portrait by Ana Trelles Portuondo and a geometric work by Marica Fasoli. The AKMD Thicket console and Stamford Modern convex bench speak to the homeowner's love of contemporary-inspired silhouettes.



The main living area became a thoughtful survey of 20<sup>th</sup>-century design, featuring Czech Art Deco armchairs by Jindřich Halabala, a Philip and Kelvin LaVerne bronze coffee table and a classic Platner armchair, first designed for Knoll in 1962. An A. Rudin sofa and striped Kelly Wearstler ottoman make striking contemporary additions.

Warm wood treads and exposed concrete create a stunning contrast for the floating staircase, which Rionda punctuated with colorful pieces like an Arturo Erbsman Chroma floor lamp and a vintage hanging Moroccan textile, which the designer discovered on a trip to Marrakesh.



A sunlit space connecting bedrooms is reimagined as a reflective and relaxing morning room for guests, filled with special finds like a 1950s Italian Ico Parisi writing table, a Rue Cambon office chair from CB2, a Kelly Wearstler Coquette table lamp, and Cameroonian harvest mask on the wall.



In the master bedroom, mashrabiya sunscreens open wide to canal views—a picturesque backdrop for the custom leather-and-walnut platform bed and mix of midcentury styles, from the 1960s Link Bench from RH to the 1950s Stilnovo blossom chandelier. The designer also paired Italian Murano glass lamps with walnut nightstands from Made Goods.

“AT NIGHT, THE HOUSE SHINES LIKE A JAPANESE LANTERN WHEN THE INTERIOR LIGHTS COME THROUGH THOSE SCREENS.”

—ROBERT RIONDA



Imagined as "masculine, luxurious and decadent," says Rionda, the master bath is encased in Opustone silver egeo marble, illuminated by Italian brass sconces sourced from Michel Contessa. The cast stone soaking tub and double shower are situated to bathe in natural light.