



INTERIOR DESIGN / ROBERT RIONDA, PEEPLES RIONDA INTERIORS  
HOME BUILDER / JAN HANAK, NTJX, INC.

# OPEN AND OPEN-ENDED

IN AN ONGOING LABOR OF LOVE, ONE DESIGNER FASHIONS HIS OWN VERSATILE MIAMI BEACH LOFT AS A TEMPLE OF ART AND A CASUAL PLACE TO ENTERTAIN.

WRITTEN BY BRIAN LIBBY / PHOTOGRAPHY BY TROY CAMPBELL



Designer and homeowner Robert Rionda used a 20<sup>th</sup>-century French settee from Jerry Pair to create a sitting room feel in his dining area; Omni Upholstery re-covered it in Holly Hunt's Great Plains gray velvet. Also gathered at the Knoll table are two Louis XVI chairs, circa 1785, that were re-dressed in a striped Hermès fabric, and an ornate French neo-Renaissance chair, also from Jerry Pair. The charcoal-and-pigment painting at left, by Ahmed Gomez, was acquired through 108 Gallery; next to it hangs an architectural piece by Emilio Sanchez.



The living area features BDDW's Lake credenza, topped with a rare vintage AV Mazzega blue glass table lamp from Van den Akker Antiques in New York; the credenza is flanked by antique Georgian chairs reupholstered with striped Fortuny fabric. The serigraph of Marilyn Monroe is by Yvaral, the large painting in the center is by Nunzio Paci, and to the right is an oil by Alfredo Pérez.

Designer Robert Rionda's apartment in Miami Beach represented both a homecoming and an opportunity to experiment. Able to embrace whims and passions without the usual constraint of client deadlines, Rionda has created over time an open-plan loft teeming with a mix of vintage midcentury, contemporary and antique furniture in a home filled wall to wall with his extensive art collection. "When I design for myself, I am open to different styles and directions as the project progresses," Rionda says. "I made this fun and gave myself a break and tried different things." His original concept, a kind of beachy look, isn't at all what he ended up doing. "If pieces looked great, I kept them. If not, I switched them," Rionda says. "I had no expectations about how things were going to work. I wanted a layered home, and sometimes that takes time: putting pieces together and finding others down the road to make it more interesting. It's ongoing and it never ends, and I love that." Rionda was born in Connecticut to Cuban-immigrant parents and moved to Miami with them at a young age. He soon went off to experience adventures in school and career around the country, eventually settling in New York practicing law. But interior design called to him, and he

began taking on projects in New York while commuting to Miami to help his late mother, who was also a designer, with hers. Over time, his client base developed even further in Miami and Latin America, and he began to miss the warm environs and vibrant culture of South Florida—so purchasing a residence here was a natural next step. Rionda remembered that while visiting family several years prior, he had seen a building by acclaimed architect Chad Oppenheim called Montclair Lofts that, at the time, was under construction near the beach: a hybrid of an old original Art Deco structure wrapped on three sides with a taller U-shaped new building. "It seemed very different, so when I started to think about dividing my time with South Beach, this was the first place I looked," he recalls. And the location was as eye-catching as the architecture. "Coming from New York, I wanted to be near the beach but also able to walk out of my door and not get in my car to go out to eat," he adds. As soon as Rionda walks back through the door, though, he is greeted by an art gallery feel. The designer is a regular visitor to the annual Art Basel Miami Beach art fair, and scarcely a square foot of wall space in the entire loft is without paintings, drawings and photographs with an emphasis on Cuban and Latin American artists. Working with builder Jan Hanak to



A rug from ABC Carpet & Home anchors a B&B Italia Charles sofa and a midcentury-inspired chair from Twentieth in Los Angeles in the living room. Karl Springer's coffee tables are from Bourgeois Bohème, also in Los Angeles, and the silver round side table is a 1920s French antique found at Deco Dreams. Sergio Payares' painting is from 108 Gallery. Bleached-wood flooring by Endurance Floor Company runs underfoot.



renovate and help make the loft his own, Rionda even added a half-wall at the entrance to hide a view of the kitchen and create more display space. He then painted all the walls a pristine white and bleached the heretofore-dark-stained oak floors (rather than painting them, to leave their grain visible). "In both Miami and New York, I don't have any walls left, but I'll keep rearranging and filling them," he says. "I have never sold a piece of art I've collected. It's just about loving something."

Entering the loft via the dining area, Rionda enjoys the eclectic mix that is evident at once. Here, a gathering of piercingly blue photos of jellyfish by Brazilian artist Renato Freitas looks down at a classic midcentury Saarinen dining table paired with Louis XVI chairs and a 1920s banquette. They all sit beneath 1940s French factory lights that Rionda acquired through *Bourgeois Bohème* in Los Angeles.

Just a few feet away is the living area, anchored by a classic B&B Italia sofa that Rionda uses with both modern and traditional projects. It's joined by a winged chair that was inspired by a midcentury design, two goatskin coffee tables, and antique clawfoot Georgian chairs that belonged to his mother (updated with new striped upholstery). Over the sofa is a Sergio Payares painting so large that it had to

be removed from its frame, rolled up and remounted in the loft. "A piece this large is a commitment," he says, "but there are so many colors in it and interpretations."

Rionda's bedroom is completely open to the rest of the loft, but the designer created a sense of place with a grass-cloth accent wall in gray (the only non-white surface aside from the bathroom) and a four-poster bed. The space is a gallery unto itself, with works by Yosvany Teijeiro, Palma Blank-Rosenblum, Sonia Delaunay and Humberto Vento. As a nod to the entertaining he enjoys, at the foot of the bed is a Moroccan settee dating to the 1800s and re-covered in turquoise Fortuny fabric. The adjacent office almost feels like a furniture gallery, with a handsome Lucite desk and a stainless-steel Philippe Starck chair that was originally designed for the Chinese restaurant Kong in Paris.

When Rionda has guests over, every corner of the loft is open to them. "I have had large parties here, with 100 or even 150 people. It doesn't feel like people are wandering into your bedroom. It's just one open space," he says. "I enjoy designing for more quaint or partitioned rooms, but here I like to look around and appreciate all at once the finds I've collected and curated over time." ■

Alfredo Custom Furniture updated the kitchen with gray cabinetry and a refinished cabinet from Rionda's childhood home for the island, which is topped with travertine from Miami Stone District. Tiles from Innovative Surfaces give the backsplash eye-catching patterning. Vintage ceramics are by Edmund Weyhe, and the Bosch refrigerator is from Ferguson.



The office area features a Lucite desk from Gustavo Olivieri, a chandelier from Palm Beach Antique & Design Center, and Philippe Starck's Kong chair for Emeco. Luis Gisbert's photograph from Moran Bondaroff in Los Angeles adds color, while the gray cabinets from Arravanti appear as minimalist sculpture. A Louis XV-style chair by John Hutton and Kevin Cherry's stool from Niba Home, wearing J. Robert Scott leather, lend additional seating.



**Above:** Rionda worked with Built By Owner to renovate the bathroom. Waterworks' moody Grove Brickworks tile enveloping the shower, honed Ocean Black travertine from Opustone cladding the vanity wall, and a black marble countertop, also from Opustone, imbue a sense of coziness that contrasts the rest of the bright, wide-open loft. The faucet and sink are also by Waterworks, as are the tub and shower fixtures.

**Right:** The designer gave his bedroom definition with a four-post Christian Liaigre bed, flanked by Jiun Ho's Kambuja lamps for Boyd Lighting, from Jerry Pair, atop vintage James Mont nightstands from Cain Modern in West Hollywood, California. The 19<sup>th</sup>-century Moroccan settee from HillCrest Collections acts as additional seating while entertaining. Yosvary Teijeiro's ink on paper, acquired through Miami's Independent Thinkers, pops against a Phillip Jeffries wallcovering.

