



# MIAMI RHAPSODY

ARCHITECT JOE SERRINS DIDN'T HAVE TO LOOK FAR FOR INSPIRATION WHEN DESIGNING A GRAND DUPLEX HIGH ABOVE FLORIDA'S MOST GLITTERING CITY: HE FOUND IT IN THE SAND AND SURF JUST OUTSIDE THE FRONT DOOR

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**ONE OF THE STRANGEST**—and, regrettably, most common—paradoxes of design is the muddled thinking that follows: You want a fabulous home. You do your research, you ask around, and, finally, you find exactly the right architect. Then, as soon as he or she signs on, you second-guess every decision, drawing out the process and enveloping the project in an atmosphere of distrust and fear.

But every now and then that rare enlightened client comes along who thinks, What do I know about architecture? Why not hire someone whose vision I love, and just let go? It was Joe Serrins's good fortune to discover two such clients. Hani El-Naffy, an executive with Del Monte, and his wife, Danielle, had recently bought a grand duplex in a Miami high-rise. The couple had already moved several times around the globe, from their native Lebanon to France to Chile, with Danielle undertaking the soup-to-nuts decoration of their homes (they still have a house in Beirut and a pied-à-terre in Paris). This time, however, with their three daughters away at school, they wanted something different—a glamorous, sophisticated pleasure dome where they could live and entertain—and Serrins was given carte blanche.

"I had total free rein," says Serrins. "I bought the plates, the silverware—I even picked out their bathrobes. It was a big responsibility. And Hani refused to come to the site, which made me very nervous at times."

Part two of the carte blanche directive: Except for discussing details about her bedroom closet, Serrins could not consult Danielle about the project. "I didn't meet her until about two months before the place was done," he recalls. Suffice to say, the architect was more than a bit apprehensive when the time came for her walk-through. "I thought, It's going to be a bummer if she doesn't like it, because at this point there's basically nothing that can be done."

Luckily, his worries were quickly put to rest. "I love it," says Danielle, who tends to be more disposed toward traditional, antiques-filled





In the dining room, linen-upholstered vintage armchairs by Borsoni and an acrylic side chair by Plexi-Craft, one of a pair, surround a walnut-and-bronze table by Serrins; the chandeliers are made of vintage Venini cast-glass flowers. The circa-1950 Italian café table is from the End of History, and the curtains are of string fabric by Nuno. See Resources.



interiors than the whitewashed, Modernist aesthetic Serrins conjured. "It's completely different from everything we've had. With the antiques, I always felt the atmosphere was very heavy. This feels so light and open. It's very chic, and not vulgar in the least."

Indeed, the place is spectacular enough to swing even the staunchest traditionalist. Inspired by the glam location—a circular apartment 40 stories above Miami, with wraparound views of the city, the ocean, and Biscayne Bay—Serrins went to work, creating a setting that would embrace the kind of luxury the El-Naffys had in mind yet convey a laid-back elegance that was right for both the space and the area, where the formality of international travelers often clashes with the casual, tropical feeling. "I had this idea of high heels in the sand," he says.

Taking his cue from the world on the other side of the double-height windows—that is, a vista of blue and tan—Serrins's first move (and one of Hani's only bits of input) was to pave the entire first floor with imported buff-colored marble. "My first thought was terrazzo, because it's so Miami," says the architect, "but Hani had bad associations with it." It was a good idea, giving the apartment European polish and anchoring it in an Italian tradition of Modernism.

Serrins also paid homage to the ocean's hues with the staircase, a laser-cut brushed-stainless-steel wonder whose treads are all slabs of blue glass, with the blue gradually fading from the top step, where it's nearly midnight, to almost clear at the bottom. And on the broad terraces, also clad in marble, he outdid himself, fashioning large geometric forms from cast stone that evoke the jetties found along the coast and that, depending on which way they're tipped, serve as either seating or planters. The heaviness not only protects them (and the slid-





Clockwise from left: The guest room's bedcovers are of a Rogers & Goffigon cotton; the bedding is by Frette, and the sheepskin pillows and rug are from ABC Carpet & Home. The powder room walls are sheathed in glass tile; the faucet is by Lefroy Brooks. A Robert Matisse artwork hangs above a Burmesse teak trunk bench from ABC Carpet & Home in the gallery; the wall covering is a photo mural reproduced on silk. Facing page: The paintings in the master bedroom are by Ross Bleckner, the redwood headboard is a Serrins design, and the silk rug is from Dolma. See Resources.

ing glass doors) in high winds but also lends an interesting feeling of sculptural permanence to their arrangement.

But it's Serrins's vision in white that forms the overarching theme here: from the sheer curtains and columns tiled in white glass in the living and dining rooms to the breakfast area's café tables, banquettes, stools, and cabinetry. And in the master bedroom, walls of white marble are held in place with fine bronze brackets that look like faint decorative stripes, while the bed is a brilliant clash of natural and acrylic, a cross-cut redwood headboard joined to a Lucite platform.

His pièce de résistance, however, may be the smallest room in the house, again due in part to Hani's insistence. "He said, 'I really want you to give me an amazing powder room,'" Serrins remembers. The architect delivered, commissioning a natural-edged walnut-root slab as a counter, with a hole cut out for a porcelain sink, and tiling the walls in a geometric pattern of purple and white. Then, within the design he inserted squares of reflective glass tiles that act as a mirror.

The apartment is a testament to both Serrins's talent and the El-Naffys' courage in allowing him the freedom to do his stuff. "This wasn't my taste," says Danielle, "but it is now." In other words, if you want something done right, get someone else to do it. ■

