

FAMILIAL GRANDEUR

*T*he couple knew exactly what they wanted in a new home. Lots of bedrooms to accommodate their six daughters, a comfortable, functional environment and the highest quality materials and craftsmanship available. And when they engaged Ramon Pacheco to design the house, it was a genial collaboration that pleased all involved during the two-years it took to complete the project.

"I'm very picky," said the wife who studied architecture at the University of Miami for one year before marriage and babies commanded her full attention. "When we decided to build a home, I drove around town and looked at houses I liked. They happened to be Pacheco's. Then we finally met him at Emilio Estefan's 40th birthday party and learned that he had also designed Emilio and Gloria's home." Shortly after the party, the architect showed the couple still more homes he designed and the collaboration began.

The couple, who were living in Coral Gables at the time, had a large, tree-studded lot in Pinecrest which they bought one week before Hurricane Andrew roared into South Florida in August, 1992. The storm took out a lot of the trees but a coral rock house stood. The couple - who are in the restaurant business - thought that the rock house could become a cabana for a new house. Alas, the coral rock house could not be moved to the back of the property for its reincarnation as a cabana and it had to be demolished. However, several trees were saved and replanted, including a royal palm that had grown into the side of the rock structure. A grand date palm - Pacheco estimates it is about 70 years old - survived the hurricane to become a special feature in the garden which Vila & Son landscaped.

For the style of the new home, Pacheco suggested Mediterranean accented with Colonial details. He visualized a grand foyer serving as

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The elegant foyer anchors the house and serves as a mini-art museum for the couple's collection of lithographs of Cuban scenes done in the mid-19th Century.

the east-west axis of the house and a long gallery as the north-south axis. There would be romantic wrought iron balconies, floors of stone and cherry, solid mahogany doors and custom moldings everywhere. The homeowners wanted a big backyard with a pool, cabana, fountain and terraces "so the house is long (125 feet) and narrow," said Pacheco. Every room has a view of garden and water, whether the pool or one of the multiple fountains.

When Pacheco began designing the house, the couple had five daughters. The sixth came

along so the plan grew from five bedrooms to seven, including maid's quarters. The 9,000-square-foot house has seven baths plus two powder rooms. During the year it took to design the house, the wife frequently visited Pacheco's office to pore over the plans, exchange ideas and make suggestions.

"Each family lives differently," she said. "For example, he suggested putting the study room upstairs but I knew it had to be downstairs so I could supervise the girls' homework. And we needed two family rooms, one for adults, which





The living room is a restful space with its monochromatic color theme and comfortable furniture. The mahogany doors to the right lead to the billiard room.

was the billiard room, the other for the kids.” An elegant circular foyer welcomes their guests upon entering the house through double mahogany doors. Inevitably, the guests are drawn to the two-story ceiling. It has an oval recessed center, hand-painted by an artist who studied The Biltmore Hotel’s beamed ceilings for inspiration.

The serpentine stone staircase has a wrought iron railing topped with gleaming mahogany – one of the many custom features by designer Robert Zemnickis and his partner Iggy Olsson-Cuba of Nuhouse Inc., whom Pacheco invited to join the collaboration. “It’s great to work with a client who loves and appreciates architecture and design,” says Olsson-Cuba. “We

spent a lot of time on details - moldings, coffered ceilings, floors and cabinetry.”

The curving walls of the stairwell serve as a miniature art museum for the couple’s collection of 27 framed lithographs depicting the island of Cuba in the mid-19th Century. They are the work of the French artist Federico Mialhe (1810-1881) who went to Cuba in 1839 to paint pictures of Havana and the countryside. “I knew about his work and nearly died when I found a book of them at an antique show in Miami,” said the wife, whose six children range in age from five to nineteen.

While the foyer anchors the center of the house, a long gallery running from north to south evolved because of Pacheco’s dislike of





The couple's six daughters claim this family room as their own to watch TV and entertain friends. The white columned divider was designed by Robert Zernickis.





reaching a room by walking through another one. Each room on the first floor opens onto the gallery. “The gallery is divided by arches to break it up,” said the architect indicating the softly curved elements. “The fireplace in the billiard room anchors the gallery on one end, a large painting at the other.”

The billiard room is a comfortable, masculine space with three walls of windows and four important elements: a carved mahogany fireplace, a curving bar crafted in cherry, an oak entertainment unit – all designed by Zemnickis – and, of course, the billiard table. Adding to the masculinity of the room is a coffered mahogany ceiling and cherry flooring. When there are guests, the men are invited to smoke cigars; there’s a vent above the bar that draws the smoke out of the room. “Since the family is

in the restaurant business, the bar was very important,” said Zemnickis. “And we put a lot of detailing and effort in the (coffered) ceiling. This is a room used a lot, to watch TV, for family gatherings. It’s both elegant and comfortable.”

Situated between the foyer and billiard room, the living room is a formal space decorated in a monochromatic theme of ivory and taupe with pale green and apricot accents. A metal hand-painted coffee table by Dennis & Leen from Jerry Pair anchors the seating arrangement that includes an ample sofa by Dessin Fournir. A focal point in the room is a black lacquer baby grand piano that the husband gave his wife as a Valentine’s Day present this year. The living room walls are hung with the couple’s collection of paintings by Cuban masters of the 1920s through the 1950s.

The large garden contains a pool, cabana and two terraces for outdoor entertaining.

Landscaping by Vila & Son included relocating several existing trees on the property.





A stroll down the gallery leads one past the elevator vestibule and on to the formal dining room, which has one wall covered in hand-painted silk panels with an Oriental motif. The ceiling has an intricate pattern of moldings plus a crown molding that the plasterer installed upside down, changing the direction of the pattern.

Across the gallery from the dining room is the large kitchen with its wealth of antique oak cabinetry. A Garland commercial-size range allows the mother to grill an entire bacon-egg-pancake breakfast for her brood in one go. Adjacent to the kitchen is the breakfast room with a round table that seats eight. An antique white built-in buffet/hutch unit has twin wine coolers in drawers at the bottom.

This is truly a home the family of eight will never outgrow and a house that can accommodate small or large gatherings gracefully.

“They had 400 guests for his birthday and the house felt empty,” said Pacheco. ▲

