

PALLADIAN-INSPIRED PERFECTION

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Ramon Pacheco and Associates, ARCHITECTURE

Marc Firestone, INTERIOR DESIGN CONSULTANT / Ken Gomberg, Kenner Construction, BUILDER

Susan Hall, Hall Bell Aqür, LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE

*I*f the great 16th century architect, Andrea Palladio, were alive today, he would definitely approve of the Gomberg house. Although the home is vintage 2003, it bears the principles of Palladio's Classicism: "proportions, symmetry, and the image of the temple front."

"We used the Palladian concept in a minimalistic, contemporary way," explains Ramon Pacheco, architect of

the bayfront Coconut Grove home. His description is on the money. Yet this is a home that expresses its character with lustrous Australian Jara wood, earthy limestone, rare Jerusalem stone, abundant millwork and rich detailing. Ten-foot-high ceilings introduce a welcome human scale. Comfort is evident in every room.

And the home is intrinsically tied to the outdoors, ideal



Keith Lane, of Signature Tree & Palm, helped locate and install specimens for the landscaping. The 40-foot-tall gumbo limbo tree now placed in front was found in a privately owned open field.

for Florida both visually and functionally. One of the many goals owner Gene Gomberg sought was to maximize views - and with good reason. The site steps down to a breathtaking panorama of one of Biscayne Bay's widest points, just before it joins the ocean.

"Gene wanted the major living spaces to look at the water," Pacheco states. "It was not an easy project. I was dealing with a 70-foot-wide lot, depth of 200 feet."

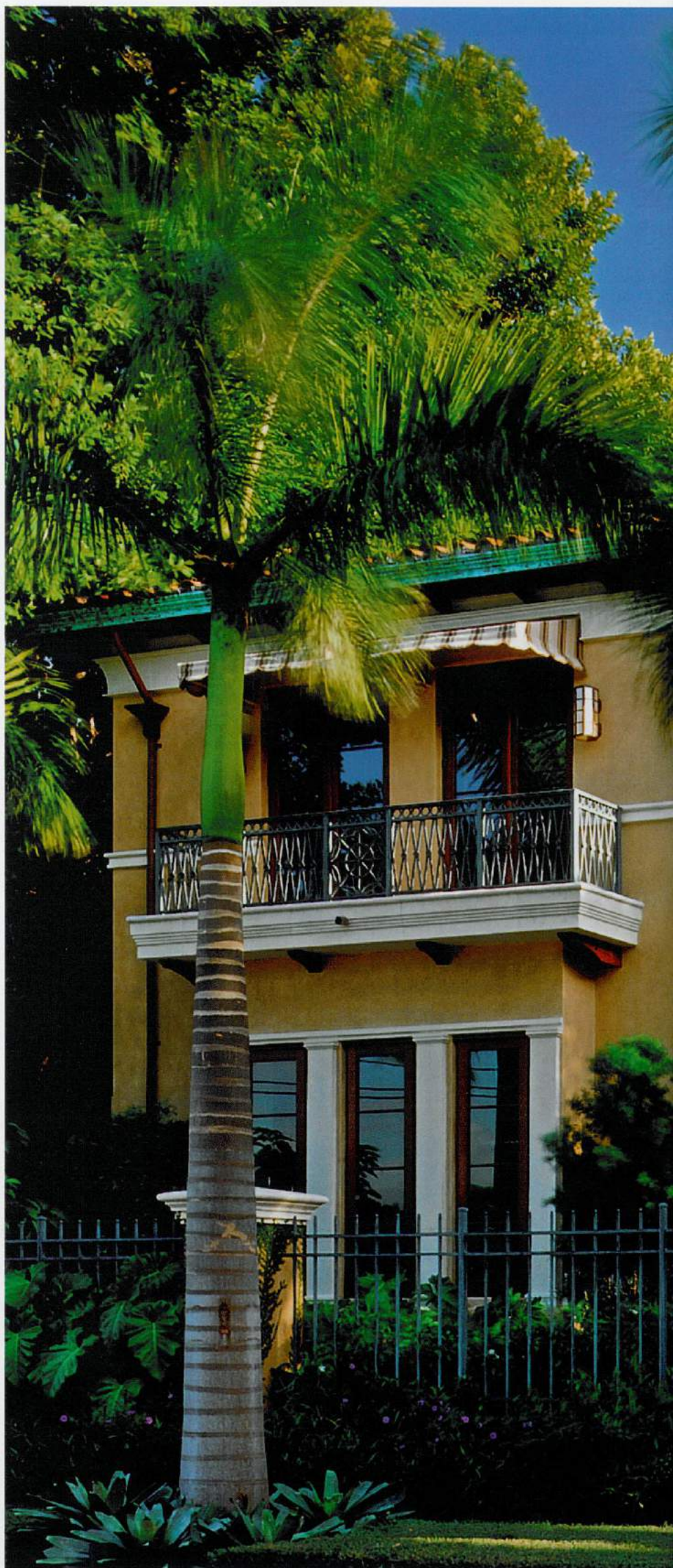
But Pacheco came through. From the main rooms downstairs to the master suite and gym on the second level, he married the views to the inside. Tall French doors along the back perimeter of the home were the vehicle. Downstairs, the doors begin at the beautifully appointed kitchen and continue along the perfectly proportioned family and living rooms. Then majestically, they open to an adjacent outdoor terrace with gentle breezes.

Because this outdoor room is defined in three parts by colonnades, the sit-down bar and television were situated on one end - the summer kitchen on the other, and handsome, oversized seating in the center.

Immediately beyond, the Palladian caveat of symmetry is reflected with a freestanding Jerusalem stone fireplace. It mirrors an arched Jerusalem stone fountain directly across the pool. Additional seating near the fireplace is perfect for al fresco dining.

All of the outdoor living spaces focus toward the stunning, blue-tiled, above-deck pool. "We used a random blue, non-order pattern with three different colors of ceramic tile," notes landscape architect Susan Hall, who designed all the landscape and hardscape on the outside. "I think the pool makes the whole backyard gel," Hall comments.

Indeed, it appears almost ethereal in its relationship to the bay. Adding to that aura is Israeli artist Tolla's "Sky High" sculpture, a figure poised gracefully while balancing another one high upon a double pole. Finally at the terminus of the tiered landscaping is the completely finished dock of durable Ipe.









For the front exterior, one of the main architectural requirements was a side entry, three-car garage. Despite challenging site limitations, this was achieved along with a motor court paved in handcrafted brick from Colombia. Four royal palms outside the front gate are the reception committee, while foxtail palms flanking the front door are like the doormen. Architectural detailing, so integral to the home, is reinforced on the front elevation with Jerusalem stone-adorned balconies and window framing. True to one of Palladian's major caveats, columns on the front porch create "the image of the temple front."

In the nearby garden, "Unlocking Spiritual Mysteries," another sculpture by Tolla, appears to grow out of an arcing fountain. The sculpture is one of the artist's three that adds to the Gomberg's large and lively collection.





The understated dining table and chairs allow the large niche with its decorative mirror and bold mahogany ceiling detail to be the main events. Millwork and cabinetry throughout are from Viking Cabinets, Inc.



Because the art collection was a major consideration, a variety of niches were strategically laid out early on. Of note are two particularly tall ones flanking the living room fireplace. They house a masterful collection of colorful, museum-quality glass vessels by noted Tampa artist Duncan McClellan.

This home is the third Gomberg has built for himself in what has seemingly become his avocation. Gomberg is CEO of the Continental Group, a company he originally founded, which manages and maintains some 400 major residential real estate properties. His interest in building houses was spawned when he began his career in property management 30 years ago. He says when he began working with developers he became excited with new ideas. Prior to building this 8,000 square foot home,





Nothing was overlooked in the gourmet kitchen, which utilizes Miele, Wolf and SubZero appliances, enjoys a built-in, commercial-style cappuccino maker, and sports highly detailed mahogany millwork. Here and throughout the house, marble and granite countertops are from Keys Granite.

Gomberg built his second home next door. His brother Ken was the contractor and Ramon Pacheco the architect. The team grew with this home by the addition of Ray Tepper for project manager, Bernie Gomberg as “super” and landscape architect Susan Hall. “The team was spectacular,” Pacheco comments. “Whatever Gene wanted, we were able to do.”

That was propitious, for Gomberg’s modus operandi was unorthodox, to put it mildly. A wealth of features was designed during construction, often drawn on a wall. Or crayoned on a piece of paper, like the “plan” of the fountain in back. Many of the features resulted from team brainstorming.

Without pride of authorship, Gomberg encouraged the team’s input and that of his friend of 35 years, retired designer Marc Firestone. The

exquisite fireplace design, for example, was a late-night collaboration between the team. “We were literally here until one and two in the morning, laying tiles to get a pattern we wanted or trying out a piece of crown molding,” Gomberg relates.

Gomberg acknowledges that the house wasn’t done with a typical set of interior plans. Yet he says, “There’s probably not an original idea in this entire house.”

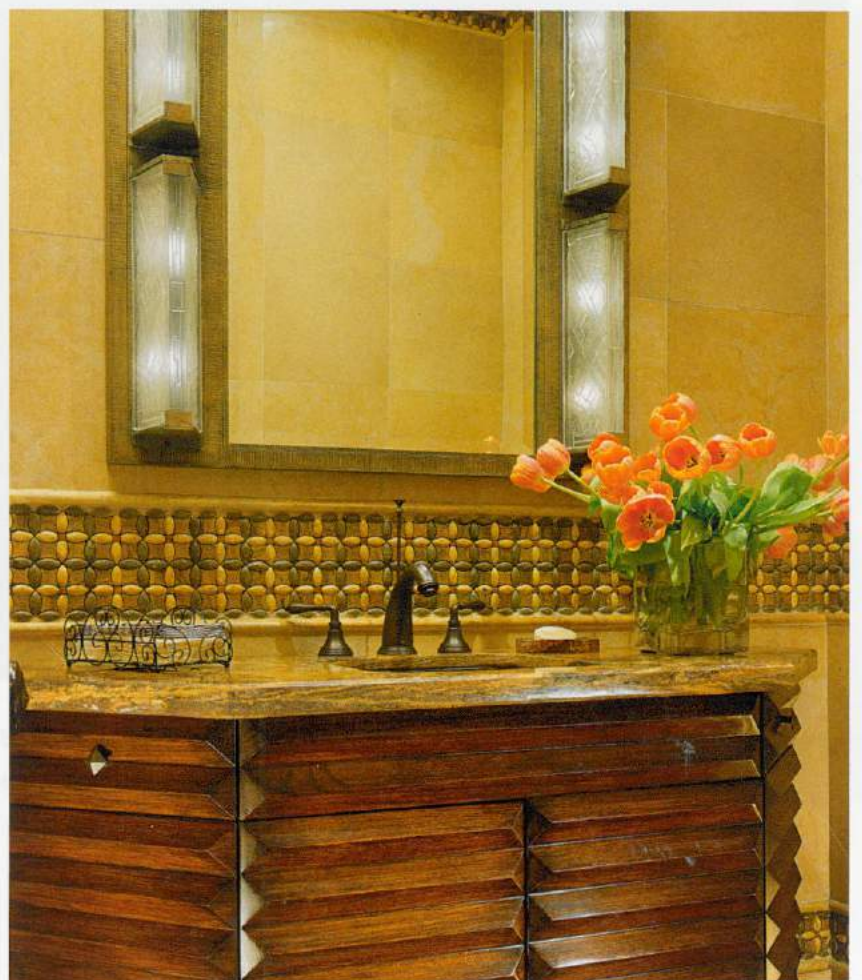
He cites tapered columns around each room inspired by a Brickell Avenue condo lobby. The gym ceiling echoing one in a Ritz Carlton “without the wood and crown moldings,” he asserts. Original lighting fixtures crafted in a wood prototype. Even a “borrowed” wood feature from a magazine at a Colorado ski lodge inspired Gomberg and Firestone’s wood de-



sign used on the stair railing. Art Ballard of Homestead conceived the metal component and fabricated the collaborative design of woven geometric wood and iron balusters.

Gomberg's brother, Ken, a custom builder of luxury homes, says, "The house was a work in progress." In essence, changes beyond the typical were ongoing during building while Ken Gomberg coordinated the subs and the bidding for each change. He continued to do so even as the kitchen was widened and the circulation changed - "after it had already been completed." He explains: "Gene's the kind of person who couldn't be happy unless it's exactly the way he wants it to be."

When Gomberg and Linda Alexander, an entertainment executive and now his wife, became a couple as the house came out of the





Because of the access limitations, the pool and back hardscape elements had to be constructed and large materials barged in before the house was built. Artist Tolla's comely "Sky High" at pool's end is the consummate transition to the bay.



ground. She, too, became an inherent member of the collaborative team. With her husband and Firestone, she contributed to the selection of new art and accessories and furnishings, most of which were Holly Hunt. "All of it was chosen for comfort," she notes. "We wanted to be able to feel comfortable wherever we were. Warmth, comfort and acoustics were essential ingredients for every room."

Yet there is no question that the home was Gene Gomberg's vision. His wife attests to the fact that his mind was on it all the time. He extrapolated features from just about every place the couple visited. To his credit, he was innovative enough to re-adapt the features to perfectly suit the house.

"Gene really did the design work in this house," Marc Firestone notes. "My job was only to see







that he didn't make mistakes. What's important is that he had fun, and was never scared."

Indeed, it was a joyous experience for Gomberg. He created a house he had envisioned for "blue jeans and tuxedos." He now says, "When I quit my real job, I'd like to build and furnish houses like this. Then when someone comes along and says, 'I love it,' I would walk away and go to the next one."

That may one day happen. Ken Gomberg says, "We could have built him a Cadillac or a Mercedes, but Gene's house is the ultimate - it's a Ferrari." ▲

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