

HOME & DESIGN

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The combination of the 11-foot ceilings and the Murano glass chandelier with modern furnishings creates a sense of cool grandeur in the living room. Leather woven chairs by Flexform and Devil's Eye and Three Legs hand-carved wooden stools by Pol's Potten are all from Luminare. "Ocean Drive" diptych by Beth O'Donnell, and the clear glass bubble ball are from NibaHome. Fur pillows and the black wood and parchment side tables are from Urban Art, while the table lamps, which illuminate both at the top and base, are by FontanaArte.



subtle luxury, timeless *design*

BLENDING ELEMENTS OF CLASSICAL, TROPICAL AND NEW URBAN DESIGN
WITH THE HIGHEST-QUALITY WORKMANSHIP AND MATERIALS,
DEVELOPER **FERNANDO MENOYO** AND HIS LEAD ARCHITECTS BUILT
ALMERIA ROW TOWNHOUSES
FOR LASTING COMFORT AND ALL-OUT LUXURY

Text by Marlene Sholod | Photography by Claudia Uribe Touri

“When you build something, there is a big social responsibility. We wanted to create something of lasting value... something with a sense of community.”

— Fernando Menoyo



A virtual visitor to Almeria Row's website is not confronted by bikini-clad models, bold headlines or techno music. Instead, exquisite architectural renderings of the property and a lilting jazz tune communicate a feeling of timeless elegance. An actual visit to one of the townhouses has a similar effect. Nestled in the historic Biltmore section of Coral Gables on a mahogany treelined street, five of the 10 planned two-story townhouses have recently been completed, yet seem as though they have been there forever. This illusion is fostered by the classical design of the properties, as well as by the seasoned look of the coral stone from which they are constructed.

Although the property is a short walk to Miracle Mile's bustling business district, the only sound on the street is that of leaves rustling in the breeze. Cars are not parked in front of Almeria Row; instead, each townhouse has its own two-car

garage accessed by an "alley" in back of the property. This pedestrian-friendly aesthetic is an important principle of new urbanism and contributes to the general impression of serenity and order.

Unlike their more suburban counterparts, the Almeria Row townhouses are not set back from the street. This gives them a more urban feel while allowing for maximum use of land. Their classic Georgian porticos, supported by stately columns and capped with small balconies, define a small "stoop." This stoop, rather than the traditional townhouse interior vestibule, provides the transition between outdoor and indoor space. There are other significant updates to the townhouses, which were inspired by the 20th-century brownstones of New York and Boston, and the "terrace homes" of London.

For architect Maria de la Guardia, "The biggest

accomplishment of the design is the sheer amount and the quality of light." A drawback of traditional townhouses is their dark, often "stuffy," interiors. In response to contemporary design sensibilities and the need to be energy-efficient, de la Guardia and her partner, architect Teofilo Victoria, offered some creative solutions. Having people enter the residence into the living and dining rooms instead of a vestibule opens up the front of the main residence. A circular skylight above the open spiral stairwell draws light into the center. A private courtyard separating the guest quarters from the main residence opens the place up to both to light and air.

Ideal north/south positioning of the townhouse, with tree shade in front and a roof overhang in the rear, exposes the residence to indirect (not "hot") sunlight. Eleven-foot ceilings and 4-foot-by-9-foot C.G.I. windows with transoms, custom-made by R & S Windows, allow for a refreshing flow of air

Above: The spiral staircase is the graceful classic element of the home. Opposite page: The flow-through from the dining room to the kitchen and back courtyard shows evidence of stunning natural light in the home. Colombian artist Jesus Maria Zamora's landscape sets a tranquil tone. Wire tree ornament and porcelain Cloud vase and bowl are from Urban Art, Carthusia (black) Dyptique candle, Brancusi and Mattsson books and the striped pareo are from Tomas Maier. MDF Italia white console and Philip Stark floor lamp add a minimal touch. Lower left: A view of the courtyard and guest rooms.

throughout the residence; cross-ventilation and ceiling fans are often enough to cool the home. Even the louvered cabinets of the kitchen and bathrooms, and of the transoms at the top of closet doors, "breathe." Separate air conditioning units for the first and second floors of the main residence, and for the guest rooms, make the 3,500-plus-square-foot (including courtyard) four bedroom, four-and-a-half-bath residences more energy-efficient.

The white interior of the residence feels modern, and mirrors its cool exterior while providing a blank canvas for decorating. Flooring is contemporary-looking white oak, six-inch plank, quarter sawn with a satin³ finish to provide a traditional touch. Just past the stairwell is the open kitchen (with separate pantry) and living area. Double glass doors open out to the courtyard, creating a generous indoor/outdoor entertainment area. With its simple cabinetry, marble countertops from Coverings Etc., and white stainless-steel trimmed appliances, custom-ordered from Viking, the kitchen is at once elegant and unobtrusive.

The private, traditional Cartagena-style courtyard, landscaped by Douglas Duany, is an oasis of relaxation with its guava trees and bamboo. Bamboo grows to 20 feet and, together with the two-story "common wall" between the townhouses, provides both privacy and sound insulation. A small dipping pool and coral stone bench beneath a wall fountain contribute to the tropical Zen vibe. Beyond the courtyard, atop the garage, are the guest rooms, mirror images, each with its own bathroom.

Upstairs in the main building, the master bedroom has a British Colonial 17-foot-high tongue and groove wood ceiling. You can step out onto the little balcony, coffee in hand, to catch a breath of fresh air and admire the treetop view. All bedrooms have windowed bathrooms with glass partitions for natural light; the master bath has double rain showers and sinks. The Calcutta gold marble countertops from Coverings Etc. are honed to match the coral stone floors and custom-designed natural teak mirrors.

This attention to detail for both form and function is apparent throughout the residence: the vintage look of the air conditioning vents; the Moorish arabesque design of the powder room alcove; the Palladian window in the common exterior wall; audio speakers installed in ceilings and at seating level; custom-made Coralina planters in the courtyard; and real copper roof gutters. Closets have solid doors and cable-free cabinetry. A closet off the stairwell is elevator-ready to accommodate changing lifestyle needs. The banister of the circular staircase was designed by the architects and handcrafted. Developer Fernando Menoyo was always looking "within the context for native or native-like materials." The Coralina coral stone for the townhouse's façade is imported from Santo Domingo and denser than keystone. From concept through construction, Almeria Row has been a rare collaboration and a labor of love. Menoyo explains, "When you build something, there is a big social responsibility. We wanted to create something of lasting value... something with a sense of community." His choice of building materials, architectural elements and



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— Maria de la Guardia, architect



This page: Light pours in. The greatest features of the master bedroom are the abundance of natural light and the height of the ceiling. Scandinavian white leather chair and cubist iron and parchment side table are from Urban Art. Black sculpture is two stacked John Pawson iron and bronze brown candle holders from Luminaire. Black Morning Glory Vase and black female torso statue are from NibaHome, and the books and Nymphenburg Volute bowl are from Tomas Maier. Side tables and bed are by British Khaki, and the Moroccan pillow is from Arabesques, while the white sheets and Boudoir pillows are Yves Delorme from Threadcount. Opposite page: In the master bath, sinks are by Toto and the bath fixtures are from the Purist line by Kohler. Red lacquer tray and guest towels are from Threadcount, and the beauty products are from Tomas Maier.

The courtyard at sunset. Moroccan pillows from Arabesques.

The joy of cooking takes place in this kitchen. Marble countertops are by Coverings Etc. and installed by Stone Brokers, and the appliances are by Viking. Black Colombian pottery available at Glottman. Food styling by Faridj Ait.



density reflects his environmental concerns. Maria de la Guardia, impressed with Menoyo's commitment to undying quality, says, "People pay attention to their own home design, but it is unusual to pay this much attention to a commercial venture. Fernando made everyone — the design and the contracting teams — raise their standards."

Another positive collaboration was that of city, owner and architect, who all worked together for two years to change Coral Gables' zoning code to create an alternative, more sustainable residential model. The fee simple townhouses uniquely couple the virtues of city living with land or lot ownership. They offer the solace and control of living in a private house with the security and easy upkeep of a condominium. Ironically, the townhouse model is actually recovered from George E. Merrick's original master plan for Coral Gables — a plan that

included the French townhouses of Mott B. Schmidt. Almeria Row's success in combining the best of both worlds, old with new design as well as luxury with sustainable living, has been already internationally recognized. The development received the 2008 Palladio Award, co-sponsored by *Traditional Building* and *Period Homes* magazines, and the Charter Award from The Congress of New Urbanism. 🌿