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South Florida



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SOUTH BY MIDEAST
Moorish-style arches and tiling turn a walk through this 25,000-square-foot home into a transporting, exotic experience.



MODERN marvel

STAR ISLAND

Cutting-edge technology is cleverly concealed within an Old World-inspired manse.

By Riki Altman-Yee
Interiors by Perla Lichi Design

While Opa-locka is said to have the largest collection of Moorish revival architecture in the Western hemisphere, one particular home on Star Island hides arguably South Florida's most interesting Moorish interpretation inside. "The estate features an eclectic fusion of styles all tied together by the architecture," explains Perla Lichi, an internationally renowned designer with offices in Coral Springs and Dubai, and a portfolio packed with clients from South Africa to California.

Though the home's exteriors are decidedly more Mediterranean than Moorish, with low-pitched, terra cotta tile-covered roofs, and arcades with balconies instead of minarets and domes, inside are reflections of the many materials and styles most associated with Morocco, including lancet and ogee arches and decorative tile work throughout. The owners of the massive property, which incorporates a 25,000-square-foot main house, a 4,000-square-foot guest house with two bedrooms and a full kitchen, and a

PHOTOS BY JOE POMICINO

VAST RETREAT

The commanding Star Island property, with interiors by Perla Lichi, includes a 4,000-square-foot guest house.

5,000-square-foot gym with a racquetball court and massage room, are commercial and residential real estate developers who have been part of Miami's boom since the early 1960s. "The clients are multicultural people. They have traveled the world," Lichi explains.

The designer met the couple long before construction crews broke ground on their island estate, and she introduced them to the president and owner of R&M Systems Group, Raul Gonzalez, who was charged with automating the entire property. He recalls the owners wanted access to every square foot at the touch of a finger. "It's a fully integrated home with a single interface," he explains, "from every light fixture and thermostat to the music and home theater to the security cameras." For a property that requires 22 air-conditioning units and photo beams to protect its boat dock, connecting every aspect was no small feat. Additionally, since the entire build took a full five years, Gonzalez had to regularly update the hardware components to support the latest technological advancements. He says nearly \$2.5 million was invested in the electrical wiring and lighting alone, with the home theater (boasting acoustically treated walls and theater seating) costing about \$500,000.

The trickiest part of ensuring this new build possessed a convincingly European-evocative environment was, in the infamous words of Oscar Wilde, "to reveal art and conceal the artist," meaning all the technology had to be virtually invisible to the eye. To that end, Gonzalez employed components with sleek design throughout the entire house, such as a state-of-the-art audio system from Niles Audio and a smart-home control system by Elan. Meanwhile, Lichi ensured speaker grills were camouflaged with paint, air-conditioning vents were tucked away in coffered ceilings and large electronic components were hidden behind custom cabinets.

Lichi had already created so many visually dazzling spaces that the homeowners and their guests would hardly waste time looking for evidence of tech, however. The glistening dining room, for example,









CULTURAL KUDOS
 A foyer features a bold Moorish moment. Opposite page: Mediterranean-style arcades provide numerous opportunities for entertaining.

not only has a handpainted coffered ceiling, but also three Venetian glass chandeliers and a massive table that can comfortably seat 30 or be split into three. Even the powder room is a study in craftsmanship and detail, with inlaid blue marble tiles, carved solid-wood cabinetry and a stained-glass window with ruby-red accents. A lavish great room is given a heavy dose of drama with an inlaid wood table, textured velvet sofa and stained mahogany build-out for displaying books, photos and small artifacts. Lichi, who is no stranger to lavish environments, says she “inspired [her clients] with materials.” Such examples include imported

handmade tiles from Morocco and infused silks, linens, damask and embroidered textiles. Whatever Lichi could not source, she designed and produced, including the property’s massive wooden doors, handforged iron railings and many of the furnishings.

While it’s true the designer found or created many of the furnishings and finishes herself, the couple’s sculptures and paintings also dictated elements of the overall design. Their impressive collection takes up two large gallery spaces in the main house, one of which has its own wet bar and adjoins the 4,000-square-foot master bedroom. There is also a pub, piano room



ELEGANT ENTERTAINING

The majestic dining room can seat 30 at an inlaid wood table set beneath a handpainted coffered ceiling and a trio of Venetian glass chandeliers. Opposite page: The systems throughout the home can be controlled from the outdoor kitchen's in-wall touch panel. The grill and hood are by Viking.



"IT'S A FULLY INTEGRATED HOME WITH A SINGLE INTERFACE, FROM EVERY LIGHT FIXTURE ... TO THE SECURITY CAMERAS." —RAUL GONZALEZ

and wine cellar upstairs; the couple has the choice to entertain under any number of expansive outdoor arcades, amid solid-iron seating and surrounded by tropical landscaping and protected under painted ceilings or wooden rafters. Even impromptu barbecues become fanciful affairs when company gathers on the rooftop deck for alfresco gastronomy and unmatched views of Star Island, the Port of Miami and Miami Beach. ("They could live on the second floor for a month and never have to leave," Gonzalez says.)

Yet Lichi contends the heart of the home, where the owners and their guests most often congregate, is the vast central atrium, where a gurgling fountain provides serenity and a huge skylight bathes seating enclaves with brilliance. Even on days Mother Nature seems determined to set the scene with blindingly bright, hot light or gloomy gray skies, the property's owners retain the upper hand: They enclosed the entire space in glass so they can control the temperature, lighting and sound from that intuitive—and eminently handy—keypad. ■





DESIGN DETAILS

TYPE
Single-family home

LOCATION
Star Island

INTERIOR DESIGN
Perla Lichi Design
perlalichi.com

ARCHITECT/BUILDER
Accolade
accolade.cc

LANDSCAPE DESIGN
Geomantic Designs
geomanticdesigns.com

AUTOMATION
R&M Systems Group
rmsysgroup.com

RESOURCES

Belt
Iron railings and gates
beltforge.com

Ceramic Matrix
Decorative tile and stone
ceramicmatrix.com

Elan
Smart home control system
elanhomesystems.com

Kravet
Various fabrics
kravet.com

Niles Audio
In-ceiling speakers
nilesaudio.com

Perla Lichi Gallery
Dining room table and buffets, family room TV build-out, CNC wall panels, powder bath windows, padded headboard wall
perlalichi.com

WIRED WONDER

The electronically sophisticated great room features custom mahogany cabinetry, an inlaid wood table and a textured velvet sofa.