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A Miami Beach Home Comes Into Its Own

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WHEN ERIC HOLLAND AND ALLEN CHEIFETZ were looking for a Miami Beach home in 1995, there was one house the realtor very nearly refused to show them. Holland, an interior designer who describes himself as a modernist, was surprised by just how strong a draw the older home's lines had for him. "Perhaps it was the pull of fallen grace," he said. "It did look rather like a crack house," said Cheifetz. But there were those original hand-painted 1924 tiles in shades of indigo that arched around the front door and an art deco fountain in the backyard made from the same tile, and they concluded "the house had good bones."

In any case, there was no turning back. And so began the purgatorial times that are known as renovation. The couple was faced with windows rusted open or shut and

The landscape — little more than dirt and grass 12 years ago — now resembles a Rousseau painting.

French doors boarded and broken. Several feet of dirt sat in the art deco fountain. There were hardwood floors, but to get to them, the electric green shag carpet and layers and layers of linoleum had to go. Landscaping was virtually non-existent, even the grass was dead. But that was more than a decade ago.

Today one walks into rooms that are deceptively simple. Nothing calls attention to itself, but slowly one becomes aware of certain details — the play of scale, the rhyme of edge and curve. These themes repeat throughout the house. Above a minimalist mantle, a large square wooden frame with a square mirror inside is in exact proportion to the fireplace beneath with its square-grate opening. Holland often frames the couple's art and mirrors in wood of the precise dimensions of the house's ample five-inch crown, base and window moldings.

The 1924 home's archways provide a counterpoint to what otherwise might be pure Mondrian. The fireplace wall, with its sober line, is the backdrop for a round table. The couch is modern, sleek and straight. A chair nearby, also modern and sleek, features a signature Philippe Starck curve.

The pool was built after Holland and Cheifetz moved in. The chaise cushions are upholstered in the same black-and-white striped fabric as the awnings. A black band added to solid green Pottery Barn umbrellas ties it all together.







ABOVE: Holland designed the parsons-style dining room table. The side chairs are Charles and Ray Eames from Herman Miller, while the two upholstered chairs at the ends are garage-sale finds that were refurbished and re-upholstered. **OPPOSITE:** In the kitchen, Holland designed built-ins to seem original and to provide shelf space for the couple's collection of identical coffee carafes.



The play of scale and the love of rhyming just don't stop. They're there in the miniature breakfast nook banquette, a tiny insert in front of a great window, which reflects its light on an opposing wall made spacious with white subway tile. A series of Holland's hand-painted small cubes-cum-wall sculptures play off a large black-and-white-checkerboard floor. In the dining room, foreshortened chunky shelves – built to rhyme once again with the house's crown-moldings – display the couple's collection of silver water pitchers.

While this couple is hardly given over to tchotchkes, they do have a collection of miniature buildings – many of them gifts from friends and iconic to the skylines of New York and Paris. But the mantle where they rest has its limits, and if one more is added, one must be taken away. These are house rules. Atop kitchen cabinets,

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Cheifetz began a sculpture-esque collection of a hundred or so identical carafes. The only random indulgence may be the miniature chairs that pop up unexpectedly here and there. There is a red Vitra chair, a white seat that Holland made as a kid for a puppet-show and a resin perch in a glistening all-white bathroom that amazingly feels downright cozy.

The landscape now resembles a Rousseau painting with small areas of fragile blooms. Around the pool, added six years after Holland and Cheifetz moved in, are several large umbrellas in a shade of green that seems to change with the light as much as the hedges and trees do, and lounge chairs with white and black stripes.

OPPOSITE (clockwise from top left): The original 1924 fountain in the back yard, the master bedroom with a custom headboard with fabric from Paul Smith for Maharam (lamp is Tolomeo by Artemide and pillow by Thomas Paul); a collection of iconic miniature buildings atop the mantle; a Saarinen womb chair in Cheifetz' office that is the perfect resting place for miniature greyhound, Max.

Holland, born and raised in Minnesota, now dreams in tropical vegetation. Every centerpiece in the home comes from the backyard, and windowsills are filled with glass vases and plants that contrast ever so slightly with what is just beyond the pane. He thinks of this as a form of recycling, a concept he uses broadly to take in the house and its furnishings as well.

The two men have had their victories at Miami's Douglas Gardens Thrift Shop. The low dining-room buffet with the 1950s workmanship was discovered there and refurbished with a stainless-steel top. The bureau in the master bedroom has a similar history. The two taupe chairs in the living room, an eBay purchase, were red and orange when they arrived via Greyhound bus. The French armoire in the living room came to the couple as part of a trade. An ornate key in the armoire's lock has a different history.

Although Cheifetz – a psychotherapist with an office where a front porch once was – was born in New York, his mother was the only member of her Parisian Jewish family to escape the Holocaust during World War II. Among the keepsakes she brought with her was this key, which had belonged to her family's gourmet food store. Another family heirloom – an ancient bit of cloth that might have been the makings of a shawl – sits on an upstairs table. Above the table are a series of original half-moon windows with their mullions perfectly intact. A hurricane home protection specialist suggested refiguring those windows, but Holland refuses.

"I'll risk it," he said. "Maybe the house and everything inside needs to be exposed – touchable." The house itself is painted gray, but it is a chameleon-like color. Depending on sunlight and storm, that gray can turn indigo, which in turn is the color of the front door. Indigo was the shade Holland found most interesting in the tiles that surround the door, and it became the color of the door itself – another reference, another rhyme. It was those tiles that drew Holland and Cheifetz to the house in the first place, so the homage to them is apt. Recycling may never have resulted in more disciplined and heart-felt elegance. ■