

MODERN Milieu

A Key Biscayne home
reflects a design-
savvy duo's take on
global chic.

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An antique French armchair from James' grandfather rests on a Gene Meyer rug. The wood wall piece is a Dogon door from Mali.



Creative drive: some people have it; some have it in spades. With two new furniture lines debuting in multiple cities and a complete renovation of their Key Biscayne home behind them, James and Miriam Duncan clearly fall into the latter category. "We bought the house two years ago and I spent the first six months gutting it and renovating it," says James. "I did the bulk of the work myself, including the sheetrock and the cement floors."

Walls were moved, the kitchen was doubled in size and a flowing floor plan was the result. Soothing earth tones replaced an acerbic mix of lime green and yellow that had

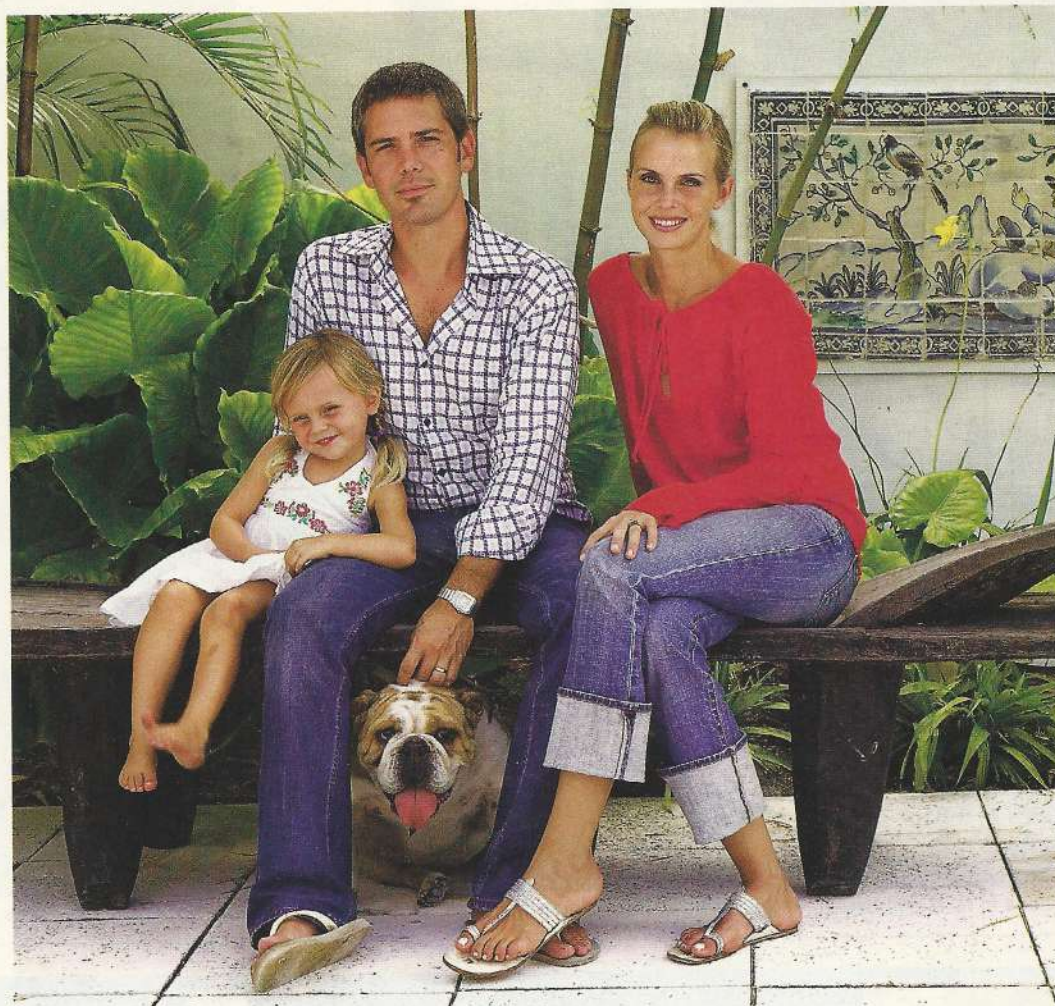
Above, clockwise from top; A shell mirror hangs above a parchment console, both from the James Duncan Collection available at NiBa. A silk pillow from NiBa Home and a rug by Gene Meyer. Lacquer tusk table from the James Duncan Collection.

"WE NEEDED TO MARRY OUR
ANTIQUES AND OIL PAINTINGS
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MIRIAM DUNCAN



At the end of the pool sits a sculptural
chaise by a Japanese artist. Opposite
page: Olivia, James and Miriam and their
bulldog sit on an African bed from Mal



dominated the house before, and cement composite floors with a milky sheen replaced tired parquet.

The Duncans chose Key Biscayne because they wanted to live in a neighborhood where their children, Olivia and Tristan, could safely play outdoors with friends. But finding a cozy home was a challenge given the proliferation of palatial dwellings on the island. "We wanted something fairly small," explains James; "something contemporary, but with a relaxed feel."

Because Miriam lived in Morocco until she was a teen, she imagined interiors that would be subtly exotic and highly textural. "We envisioned a 50s beach bungalow," she explains, "but we needed to marry our antiques and oil paintings with a casual aesthetic to fit our lifestyle." To achieve this, they adroitly combined their treasures with a smattering of gems from their own furniture collections within the buoyant backdrop they created.

The fact that they have made the eclecticism seem perfectly natural is likely a result of lifelong sensory training. James was born in New York, but his family moved continually when he was growing up. As an only child, he was included when design decisions were made for each new home. "My parents were very interested in design," he explains. "They appreciated and collected fine furniture and art. I think you naturally absorb certain sensibilities as a child if you are exposed to them on a continual basis." Miriam's mother assisted the chief architect to the King of Morocco. "I was surrounded by what most people consider to be exotic beauty from a young age," she explains. "Thanks to my mother's work, my life was filled with creative people who were passionate about design."

James' professional entrée to interior design came when longtime friend Thom Filicia of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* fame hired him as a senior project manager for his Manhattan-based design firm Thom

Filicia, Inc. "I designed custom furniture for clients when I worked for Thom," says James, "and I felt that a true creative spirit was missing from the furniture industry, even in the custom work I was seeing." A seed was planted.

During this time, he and Miriam, who was a fashion model, were traveling in many of the same social circles in New York City, but they didn't meet until both were vacationing in Ibiza, Spain, several years later. "I had left New York and was living in England at the time," says James. "I talked Miriam into moving there, but the climate wasn't a good fit for her so we bought an apartment in Paris and spent as much time there as we could."

While the couple strolled from café to gallery to café, the idea for their business was born, and they agreed that the key ingredient would be an inspired playfulness. "We realized that the classic and traditional forms of the French antiques we were seeing could easily be modernized," remarks James. "We have kept the proportions exactly as they should be for our 18th-Century line, but we've removed much of the ornamentation and used aluminum leaf finishes and vinyls, which you wouldn't typically imagine on high-end furniture of that era."

Their second line of furniture within The James Duncan Collection is sleek and modern with a few funky surprises, like Thomas Boog's sculpturally gnarled Racine console and chair. "I've always been inspired by 20th-century modern," explains James. "But you'll see influences from a variety of cultures in this line, which I suppose isn't a big surprise since I've lived in Sri Lanka, France, India, Italy and England." Not only does this duo's worldliness assert itself in the furniture they produce, it infuses the place they call home with charm. "In our furniture lines, we've taken a non-traditional approach to classic furniture because we wanted to create pieces that were timeless but also fresh and fun," explains Miriam. "We designed our home with the same goal in mind." ■