

NESTLED INTO ITS PALM-STUDDED PROPERTY, THE HOME  
RESPECTS ITS TROPICAL ENVIRONMENT



# ■ TROPICAL PUNCH ■

WRITTEN BY **SAXON HENRY**  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY **DAN FORER**

FOR EARLY EXPLORERS AND GADABOUTS, THE CARIBBEAN AND ITS DIMPLING OF ISLANDS PRESENTED AN INTOXICATING MIX OF BALMY BREEZES, LUSH SUNLIGHT AND VERDANT BEAUTY. As the world's elite flocked to the region, the Anglo-Caribbean architecture they demanded was inspired by the climate and the ability to live both inside and out most of the year. That meant windows and doors that aligned for natural cross-ventilation, deep overhangs that shaded interiors, and finely crafted wooden shutters that allowed for protection from intense midday sun.

**ARCHITECT** Cesar Molina, Cesar Molina & Associates

**INTERIOR DESIGNER** Marlene Murrah

**HOME BUILDER** Dorlom Construction

**BEDROOMS** 9 **BATHROOMS** 9 **SQUARE FEET** 25,818



#### STUDIED SYMMETRY

The columns flanking the entry to the living room frame a Chinese sofa table that boldly contrasts the crisp white linen upholstery and natural hemp drapery.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 221

This luxuriant response to the tropics was exactly the tone that architect Cesar Molina, of Coral Gables-based Cesar Molina & Associates, and interior designer Marlene Murrah set for their clients when they teamed up to design this over 25,000-square-foot plantation-style home with a West Indies twist in Gables Estates. "The main residence is anchored by seven smaller pavilions—a mix of garages, a guest house, the staff house, a pool pavilion and a boat house," says Molina. "Each echoes the style of the main residence with large verandas and terraces that open to the home's tropical setting."

Both the architect and designer subscribe to the "less is more" dictum, and it shows. "We used simple materials on the exterior and brought them inside so that the home reads like a tranquil backdrop," remarks Molina.



**CUISINE INSPIRATION**

The island countertop was cut from a solid slab of Spanish blue limestone to forego any seams. "It took 12 men to place it," says Murrah. "I'll never do that again!"



**CREATIVE COCOON**

The library, swathed in mahogany, was created to be the husband's cocoon. The art, several paintings of which are his, celebrate his love of the great impressionists.



#### STYLE SELECTION

With an antiqued bronze finish and a shield waxed-paper shade, this wall sconce brings light, and art, to any space. *Sirenas Wall Sconce*, \$2,700; [jeandemerry.com](http://jeandemerry.com)

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 222

"Because Marlene understands the simplicity of things, yet brings a level of sophistication that people appreciate at a very subtle level, the interiors are beautifully serene."

Murrah envisioned a stately home in the tradition of the great estate houses on early southern plantations, but in a refined West Indies vernacular that melds deep-toned woodwork with pale walls. "I was thinking about a home that was generations old, which had evolved over the years into a setting for a well-traveled family with sophisticated tastes," she explains. The mahogany woodwork was milled in the Dominican Republic and shipped to South Florida, quite a feat given that the home has 190 doors that open to the verandas, statuesque interior columns and an undulant stairway that seems to float its way to the second floor.

THE DESIGNER ENVISIONED  
A STATELY HOME **IN A REFINED**  
WEST INDIES VERNACULAR



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 227

The clients have been avid art collectors for many years, so Murrah canvassed a substantive collection to choose pieces for each spot before the home was even built. "I see art as the jewelry of a room—that perfect pair of earrings," says Murrah. "The home is a beautiful dress that wouldn't be as stunning without the right accessories."

The pair shares a deep affection for the clients, which made the project flow smoothly. "The care that went into the design of the house is a reflection of my love for my clients," says Murrah. "The decisions came so easily, it was almost as if I was working for myself." Among these decisions, which were made slowly and deliberately as Murrah worked hand-in-hand with the wife during a devoted five-year design odyssey,

**STYLE SELECTION**

Decorative iron and brass detailing enhance the Empire styling of this occasional table. *Empire Center Table, \$1,495; [furnitureclassicsltd.com](http://furnitureclassicsltd.com)*





**CARIBBEAN DREAMS**

This bedroom in the guest house reflects the home's Caribbean Colonial style. The bed, custom designed and made of ebony, is fitted with fine Italian Frette linens.



#### EXOTIC PORTAL

The sheer size of the pavers and the statuesque arches that curve their way along the home's exterior proclaim the majestic presence of the architecture.



CONTINUED FROM PAGE 231

were choosing soft upholstery for comfort, which coolly contrasts warm island-inspired furnishings, and waxing the woodwork to a lustrous gleam that whispers refinement.

"My style is very similar to the clients'—relaxed and not in any way prissy," says Murrah. "They were determined not to have anything showy, preferring quiet elegance over ostentation." Molina believes one of the reasons the home looks so perfect in its setting is his deep affinity for the tropics. "I appreciate the Caribbean, and my firm has many projects in the islands," he says. "Maybe it even has something to do with my genetics, as my family is Cuban, or maybe it's simply the passion that the tropics and the ocean inspire in me!" **L**