

## Unveiling a 1940s Beauty

A STROLL THROUGH the interiors of The Hibiscus House would likely give you the impression that the home has had a string of benevolent owners who have painstakingly cared for the art deco gem and its surroundings for the entire six decades it has been in existence. Nothing could be further from the truth.

"When we started, the place was a wreck," says Anna Suarez-Burgos, the interior designer who owns Anna Suarez-Burgos Design Studio in Miami. "The house had been abandoned for several years and everything was in terrible shape."

But beneath the dirt and gunk that was so dense in places the floors appeared to be paved with asphalt, the designer was in for a wonderful surprise: the terrazzo floors were (and are) the finest she'd ever seen. In fact, a playful design inlaid in mustard yellow, soft green and deep coral in the sun-room floor was the perfect starting point for the new interiors. "The craftsmen who created this floor were spectacularly talented," remarks the designer. "I based the color palette for the entire house around the design in the floor."

Being faithful to this design was but one of the "givens" in this 1945 Streamline Moderne-style house, which Dr. Paul S. George, a respected historian, lecturer and professor at Miami Dade College, attributes to architect L. Murray Dixon, though no municipal documents exist to verify. In his

history of The Hibiscus House, which he compiled in 2003, George states that the "period wrought-iron organic designs" of the grills ornamenting the "disk-like plaster cast" doorframes are quintessential Dixon. These were among the other obvious clues as to the direction the designer would take, as were the funky built-in bar and art deco fireplace made of concrete aggregate, which was in nine pieces on the living room floor when Maria Cristina Del-Valle purchased the home in 1999.

"The home was not habitable when we



first saw it: more than fifty percent of the windows were broken," explains Del-Valle. "But despite the chaos, it was love at first sight. I was struck by the home's undeniable strength and elegance, and Anna is a remarkable talent. I knew she would help me to do something wonderful with the interiors." Because the two had become

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**THIS PAGE:** Under years of grime, designer Anna Suarez-Burgos found spectacular terrazzo floors worthy of the best South Beach hotel. **OPPOSITE:** Cast plaster doorways were restored throughout the home. Note the curve of the terrazzo baseboard.















friends while serving as board members for an art museum years before, Del-Valle also knew that the designer would help her to create a home to showcase her ever-expanding art collection.

Though these were certainties, there was one surprise awaiting the homeowner during the collaboration. "The thing I loved about working with Anna was that she taught me to look at furniture the same way I look at art," she explains. "She asked me one day, 'Why don't you put the same emphasis on collecting furniture with pedigree?' To be honest, I'd never thought about it until that moment and it made perfect sense."

Del-Valle's tutorial is proving to be a broad one, as Suarez-Burgos is a master at mixing antiques and contemporary fur-

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niture. Mies van der Rohe's Barcelona chairs and Le Corbusier's LC2 Club chairs lounge comfortably in rooms that also include primitive carved tables and early 20th-century antiques. Though the architectural elements and eclectic mix of furnishings set the tone in the main living spaces, the kitchen and bathrooms are strikingly new. "We restored everything that we possibly could," says Suarez-Burgos, "but the kitchen and bathrooms were dire so they had to be gutted."



With her normal unpredictable flair, the designer created contemporary enclaves within the art deco tableau—choosing modern glass bowls for bathroom sinks and contemporary cabinetry for the kitchen, which overlooks the picturesque back lawn with its fifty-foot lap pool. Viewed from the moss-speckled slabs of natural keystone surrounding the pool, the home nestles into a colonnade of foxtail palms and profusion of hibiscus as if it has been surrounded by this lushness all along. This is but one more illusion, as Jose Ivan Lopez of Tropolis created the grounds since Del-Valle has

owned the property.

“The challenge this house presented is still intensely absorbing and attractive: the transformation continues,” remarks Del-Valle. “But The Hibiscus House has turned out to be a very grateful and welcoming Grande Dame, and Anna has led us to further respect her in detail and spirit.” A model of quiet elegance once again, the home stands a bit taller next to neighbors the likes of Villa Vizcaya, a mere stone’s throw away. “When you find a home that has so much period personality,” says Suarez-Burgos, “it’s important to honor its history.” ■

**PREVIOUS SPREAD:** Mario Bellini’s Le Bombole sofa for B&B Italia, 1974, serves as a visual bridge from the 1940s to the present.

**OPPOSITE:** The warm pink fireplace with its exquisite French Art Deco inspired keystone, is made of concrete aggregate, not unlike Cuban tile popular at the time.

**BELOW LEFT:** Keystone slabs surrounded by grass are a visual connection to the pool coping, also of square-cut keystone.

**BELOW RIGHT:** The front entrance of the mid-forties home introduces the visitor to the whimsical wrought ironwork, which reappears throughout the house.





# HOME

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EXPLORING THE NEW MIAMI  
11/05