

# MOD SQUAD!

Meet the men and women who make Miami a global design hot spot

By Saxon Henry

The powerhouses driving Miami's rep as a design destination—from the duo that does the Clintons' interiors to a visionary that championed the Campana Brothers way back when—give up the goods about rising to the top and dish about the people, places and things that make them tick.

## Simona Cincetta

For someone who spent the first 10 years of her life in classical environments like Italy, France and Egypt, Simona Cincetta knows her way around cutting-edge contemporary design.

"I was in charge of ordering furniture and designing interiors for one of the most important design stores in Italy—attending furniture fairs to order products and keeping up with what was hot in design," says the Comme de Garçons-clad designer, who arrived in Miami via Udine, Italy. *CONTINUED...*



In the living room of Cincetta's Coconut Grove home, a glass chair by the Campana Brothers sits atop a rug of her own design. Paintings by the American artist Anthony Liggett round out the modern space.



In her dining room, Ciancetta placed a chandelier from the Magdalena series designed by Bruno Rainaldi for Terzani, Rainaldi's Henna dining room table and vintage French chairs.



In this client's townhouse at Epic in Downtown, Ciancetta shows her skill at intermingling contemporary furnishings with edgy style. The Freeplay chair by Studio Sigla for Muzzi reads organic against Bruno Rainaldi's Struktura bookshelf and a Muzzi by Marra Giardini rug.

**MAD PATTERN**  
Ciancetta is inspired by many things Moroso, especially the Italian design firm's fabrics.



Ron Arad's Misfits seating is among Ciancetta's favorites.



Ciancetta designed DJ Tiesto's digs at Aqua on Allison Island. The living room is outfitted with a Highlands sofa by Patricia Urquiola for Moroso and a statuesque La La floorlamp by Helen Kontouris for Kundalini.



...CONTINUED in 1996. "America wasn't as evolved in terms of design then, so people were flying to Italy in their private jets and ordering things from us."

Following stints managing projects in Japan and London, Ciancetta accompanied her mentor, product designer Bruno Rainaldi, on a U.S. tour to take stock of America's design doings. "We fell in love with Miami, and we decided we wanted to bring a fresh new attitude to town," she says. The pair chose Coral Gables as the location for their design gallery, Dilmos, which they opened in 1997—to an underwhelming response. "People looked at the things in the shop as if they'd seen a UFO. We had important limited editions, and people would come in and laugh at them!"

These limited editions included early works by the now-celebrated Campana Brothers and furniture by the landmark Italian brand Edra. Design District pioneer Craig Robins understood the vision behind Dilmos and the significance of its inventory, and he convinced the duo to relocate to the neighborhood. By then, Ciancetta was a frequent collaborator with Rainaldi and architect Aldo Andreoli on full-scale design projects. Ciancetta's husband, marketing whiz Juan Pablo Nardi, suggested that the time was right to found a design firm, so in 2000, the four headed to Milan to launch Crea, which means "to create" in Italian. Then, "when Craig brought Art Basel Miami Beach to town, that was the explosion," Ciancetta says.

In 2004, the team brought Crea to Miami. Since then, they've designed everything from a private airport in Telluride, Colorado, to 50-story condominium complexes in Panama. "In a way, we unconsciously became Crea through ten years of working together," says Ciancetta, 42. "Pablo saw the talent we had and said it was time to make it official."

Of the many inspirations she brings to her work, Ciancetta cites a lifelong love of fabrics, which she inherited from her mother; the intellectual approach to product design evident in the work of Ingo Maurer and Ron Arad; and the contrarian design philosophies of Alessandro Mendini and Ettore Sottsass. "Just like there is more than one kind of fashion house—institutions like Prada and Gucci versus avant-garde houses like Martin Margiela—there is much more than 'nice' Italian design," she explains, placing Mendini and Sottsass squarely in the latter camp. "Mendini and Sottsass were taking existing icons and looking at them in different ways: A house did not have to be divided into functional spaces like dining rooms and living rooms. Their contradictions to traditional design were refreshing to me."

Ciancetta's frequent fashion references betray an intellectualized passion for that field, too. "There's an architecture to all of it. I don't draw such a hard distinction between the two disciplines," she says of its relationship to design. While in Milan recently, she attended both a Margiela exhibition and a collaboration between British designer Paul Smith and edgy furniture company Moroso. Insofar as her appreciation for art, form is not Ciancetta's primary interest: "Not he is great who can alter matter, but he who can alter my state of mind," she says, quoting Ralph Waldo Emerson. "All designers I admire do this."



#### BRIGHT YOUNG THINGS

The Atonium light fixture by Hopf & Wortmann for Kundalini illuminates DJ Tiesto's dining room. Tord Boontje's Oval table and O Nest chairs, both for Moroso, bring a light and dark interplay to the space.

"I have a very elastic way of thinking," Ciancetta says. "I'm always trying to figure out where I can go next!"



**ENTRY LEVEL**  
Ciancetta applied a mural of Tiesto performing to sliding panels that open to the billiard room. When closed, the mural is the first thing seen upon entering the townhouse.



# Constantin Gorges

In a field that few people enter, well, by design, a professional pedigree like Constantin Gorges' is rarely seen. Gorges, who arrived in New York City from Germany at 19, studied at Parsons and then graduated from the Fashion Institute of Technology with a BFA in interior design. Though he describes his party-filled first years as "a bit *Bright Lights, Big City*-ish," his list of early employers reads like a who's who of interior design firms: Parish-Hadley Associates, Noel Jeffrey and Peter Marino, where he oversaw Giorgio Armani's boutique on Madison Avenue and Valentino Garavani's pied-à-terre in Manhattan.

Four years after Gorges opened his eponymous firm in New York, images of his space at the renowned Kips Bay Decorator Show House were published front-and-center in *The New York Times*' House & Home section. "This changed my career. At 34, I was one of the youngest designers to achieve this level of recognition," Gorges remarks.

Having conquered New York, Gorges spent two years in Palm Beach before moving to Miami in 2005. Here, a sophisticated cadre of clients keeps him busy. His current projects include a home on Indian Creek for a hip New York art-collecting couple; an 8,000-square-foot Coral Gables condominium for a prominent developer; and a residence, also in the Gables, for a pharmaceutical executive.

But, like his younger self, the now 43-year-old Gorges likes to leave room for fun. Every summer, he heads for the South of France. "I'm like a helicopter rotor that takes 10 minutes to stop spinning when the machine is off!" he says of transitioning out of his busy pace. "It takes me three days to land."



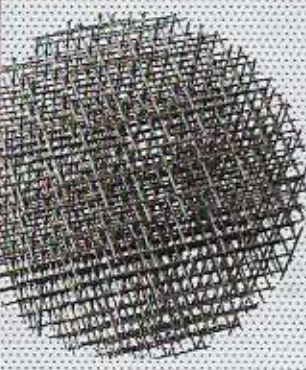
Constantin Gorges in his office at the Bath Club on Miami Beach.



Gorges includes bespoke furniture in almost every project. In his own living room at The Bath Club on Miami Beach, the coffee table is his design. He chose upholstery fabrics for a casual sophistication suited to the Beach.



This painting of Icarus was done by Gorges, who also designed the oak cabinet. The metal bowl is from Nilba.



**MIX AND MAX** Gorges says his talent for mixing items from different time periods is innate. An antique Asian cabinet and a contemporary sculpture from his home illustrate this aptitude.

"There's only one language in design, and I find that some designers don't understand this," says Gorges. "If they don't get it, their designs read as dishonest."



#### Top Shelf

Gorges maintains an extensive library of books from which he draws inspiration. From tomes illustrating luxury homes around the world and classical architecture to surveys of 15th-century Dutch painters and contemporary art, he keeps a variety of muses at his fingertips.

Gorges collaborated with New York artist Andrei Petrov on this painting in oil and gold leaf.





# Todd Davis Robert Brown

"Social networking" may be the activity du jour for generation Tweetdeck, but for designers Todd Davis and Robert Brown, mingling with the likes of Barbara Walters and Brooke Astor is anything but virtual. In the mid-1990s, the two regularly attended dinner parties at the home of their then next-door neighbor Susan Mary Alsop, a Washington, D.C. socialite whose guests ranged from movie stars to political insiders. "During dinners at her house, Rob and I would be seated next to Barbara Walters and Catherine Zeta-Jones one night, and the British ambassador the next," Davis says. "Whenever we were around Brooke Astor, she would continually flirt with Rob!"

Brown and Davis adeptly mixed business with pleasure, mining Georgetown's social landscape for clients for Brown Davis Interiors, the design firm they launched in 1994. The two had dabbled in design since early into their relationship. CONTINUED...

From left: Todd Davis and Robert Brown in the foyer of Villa Nirvana, their home along the Venetian Causeway, with an Yves Klein sculpture







Villa Nirvana is filled with objects and features the duo adores: ❶ The spiral staircase, a focal point at the home, was designed by architect Allan Shulman of Shulman + Associates. ❷ Brown bought the vintage Milo Baughman chairs in New York and covered them in curly lamb hide to echo the wild '70s period in which the chairs were designed. ❸ The Brand van Egmond chandelier, which the designers found in the Carriage House showroom in DCOTA, feels fanciful in the context of the Jason Martin painting in the background.



**CURVES AHEAD** This meldable plastic tabletop sculpture, which Brown found at M.A.D.E., was originally designed as a toy for autistic children. "We invite people to manipulate it," he says. "We're always surprised by how each shape looks more amazing than the one before!"



Art is an important element in any Brown Davis interior. This hallway in the Sunset II house includes a Kristof Wrobel sculpture and Sally Michel painting.

"Everyone wanted to tear this house down," says Davis of the Sunset II house, where the *Miami Vice* TV series was filmed. "We knew it had incredible potential."

Sunset II was the first Miami Beach property the duo treated to an extensive renovation.





...CONTINUED when, as recent college graduates, they began buying and renovating houses as a "hobby." Though the pastime quickly evolved into a full-time calling for both men—within four years of completing their first project, they'd cracked *Architectural Digest's* AD 100—it was their serendipitous move next door to Alsop that marked their professional turning point. "We were like sponges," Brown says of the company they kept, "truly soaking it all in."

From there, the duo was commissioned to design interiors for an array of bigwigs, including Bill and Hillary Clinton's homes in D.C. and Chappaqua, New York, and Hillary's senate office in D.C. When they renovated the British Embassy for Lady Catherine Meyer, they had the guilty pleasure of ripping out rooms by Laura Ashley and David Hicks. And when they revamped the Upper East Side residence of an heiress to the Campbell soup fortune, they had the unique experience of touring the Metropolitan Museum of Art with their client, as she pointed out which works were hers to reclaim once the renovation was complete.

Brown and Davis's first project in Miami was a home for developer Thomas Kramer in 1995. Beckoned to the balmy tropics, the pair eventually opted to set up shop in the city in 2003 and split their time between Miami and D.C. "We felt we were being pigeonholed into traditional styles, and that's only one dimension of who we are," Brown says of their work in the nation's capital. "As artists, Miami gave us the opportunity to be more playful when designing interiors, and we've reveled in that."

Their clients have, too. "There always comes time for experimentation and taking things to the next level. Even in the houses we're designing in the Northeast, we've added a Miami vibe in the mix," Davis explains. "If we'd stayed in Washington, there's no way we'd be designing spaces that are as interesting as they are now."

But mixing periods and styles isn't as easy as it might appear. "A room is like a symphony or a good painting, and the trick is always in the editing. It takes much more talent to intermingle elements that seem as if they were made to fit together but were not," Brown notes.

It also requires the now-honed fusion of vision that each half of the design team brings to the table. Brown, who grew up with British parents and steeped in tradition, confesses to enjoying the soft, pretty things that fill the shell of a space. In contrast, Davis—whose childhood was spent in a Southern California house designed by modernist Joseph Eichler—prefers the technical challenges of interior architecture. "We've been working together so long that there's been a melding of these strengths," Davis says of their partnership. "Now we've let a hint of the theatrical come into our work."

In hindsight, the designers can trace this knack for dramatic subtext back to those high-society dinners, which they say set the tone for the pivotal moments in their careers. "These people made up the smart set—they were always looking for other interesting people to connect with," Davis says. "We learned so much from them, and we gained invaluable relationships from those great, gossip dinners."

"One of the things we love about Miami is the variety of edgy shops, like Jalan Jalan, from which we can draw inspiration," Brown says.



Brown bought these hand-carved wood sculptures, which he arranged in a pack in the Sunset II house, for an installation at Base on Lincoln Road.



In a client's condominium, an ottoman covered in orange Edelman cowhide adds some spot-on color to the den. The Zebra rug provides a grounding contrast to the bespoke Brown Davis upholstery.



# Miriam Moore

Though Miriam Moore may not be the first person to be romanced by an Italian city, she can sound like the most devoted. "I will die in Florence," says the designer, dramatically professing her passion for the city's colors and textures. "I suppose it's paradoxical that my work is monochromatic, minimalist and pure."

Though she studied architecture, Moore was initially drawn to the fashion industry, opening luxe boutiques in Aspen, Colorado and Miami. But in her early 30s, Moore, now 47, returned to architecture and interior design. "My exposure to fashion helped me understand color," she remarks. "This has been important to my work as a designer."

Moore's projects for her high-profile clients are far-flung, currently ranging from Sag Harbor, New York to Miami's Fisher Island. She's even designing an ice skating rink for an Olympic hopeful who's been training since she was three years old. "I am fortunate to work with sophisticated, worldly clients who understand it's important to let go," she says. "Still, it's a tough profession considering the demands on a designer's time."

Though she's filled interiors with some of the priciest products in the world, Moore defines extravagance in simple terms. "Luxury to me is getting to do nothing—which rarely happens!"

In the master bedroom of her Coconut Grove home, Miriam Moore stands in front of Poltrona Frau's Chester sofa, designed by Renzo Frau in 1912. The charcoal on paper is by Barry Gross.







#### IN THE CLEAR

Moore likes clarity in interior spaces. In her dining room (above), settees designed by Balance Order Nature's Robert Martinez serve as banquettes for the glass-top table, while icicle-like sconces by Melograno Bio dangle overhead. The sleek vessel sink atop the powder room vanity (right) is also crafted from the material.



When Moore's godfather passed away, she inherited his Richard Mesa sculpture and immediately fell in love with the Chilean sculptor's work. Since then, she has collected five other buxom unglazed ceramic pieces.



1. Moore added warmth to this bedroom by painting the walls in Benjamin Moore's Elephant Gray. 2. She designed an acid-etched glass door to punctuate a client's long hallway-cum-gallery. 3. Moore designed the common areas at The Bath Club, where a lit niche holds a glass sculpture by Terje Lundaa.

In Moore's living room, a Dale Nally painting, *Trio #3*, is a focal point. The sofa and director's chair are Moore's designs in leather and faux crocodile.



"My mantra is, It's not about being perfect—it's about excellence," Moore says.