

HOME & DESIGN

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BARBARA P. FERNANDEZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

INTRICATE WORK: Alejandro Vigilante paints a patterned kitchen ceiling.

ARTIST

It's a back-breaking job for Michelangelo of Miami

By SAXON HENRY
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Alejandro Vigilante has been trying to lose the nickname "The Michelangelo of Miami" for nearly a decade, but his clients won't have it. Inspired by his position as he reclines on scaffolding and paints decorative motifs on their ceilings, they draw the parallel as naturally as he draws the designs he executes.

A native of Argentina, Vigilante came to America in 1995 to exhibit his paintings in Art Miami. Noticed for the vibrant

color choices he makes in his fine art, he was soon advising some of Miami's elite, selecting charismatic hues for the rooms in their upscale residences. While color consulting with Patricia Frost, who was building a home on Star Island with her husband Dr. Phillip Frost, Vigilante was asked to paint a Palladian-inspired design on a portico ceiling.

"After that, I was hooked," says the colorist/artist/designer. "I've done

•TURN TO VIGILANTE, 14H

INSIDE



GUEST BEDS

Improvements in sleeper sofas, bedrolls and heated inflatables offer something for everyone, 6H.

PETS

Cat howled because of tumor pain; breeders are creating 'designer dogs,' 49-50H.

GARDENS

The ponytail plant often is incorrectly dubbed a palm, 29H.



HOME

A s tur



TERRI JACKSON
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WITH A T demons

Artist has an eye for color and a ste

•VIGILANTE, FROM 1H

almost every decorative treatment imaginable during the past 10 years, but for some reason, I still love designing and painting ceilings the most."

Commissions quickly followed the Frost project: Emilio Estefan tapped Vigilante to paint murals for the Cardozo Hotel; he was hired to execute decorative finishes in a restaurant at Club Med in Port St. Lucie; interior designer Marlene Liriano, principal of the Miami firm Perkins + Will, chose him to add patinas and gold leaf to the walls in Manuel Medina's Gables Estates home.

"He is highly creative and he brings excellent ideas to the design process," Liriano says, explaining why she chose him. "And his use of color and materials is unique."

His loftiest job to date took place in Armando Codina's Gables Estates home. Besides the beautiful work he accomplished, Vigilante's painting of the vaulted ceiling remains memorable to the developer for a quirky reason: the artist's fear of heights.

"Even though he was afraid when he climbed the scaffolding every day, once he was on his back, the artist in him took over and he executed the ceiling magnificently," Codina says.

In his own defense, Vigilante explains, "You have to realize that the scaffolding was two stories high: that was definitely my most nerve-racking experience to date."

As Vigilante continued to push himself to new heights in his work, he moved to Manhattan to pursue an important opportunity at Tiffany & Co. On the walls in Tiffany's second-floor jewelry salon, he was hired to apply gold leafing and strié (creating a cross-hatching effect and the feel of fine linen by running the brush down the walls, then



ALEJANDRO VIGILANTE



ABOUT THE ARTIST

Company: Vigilante Art and Design, 917-385-8143 or www.vigilanteart.com

Personal: Born in Buenos Aires, Argentina.

Education: Studied fine arts at the Prilidiano Pueyrredon in Buenos Aires.

Design philosophy: Even if you are a master at rendering, if you don't understand color, your designs will suffer. It is the master colorist who provokes revelation.

Inspired by: Initially, my father, Juan Vigilante, who was also an artist. Now, surfaces: they are no different than canvases to me.

across). That was in 2001, and after treating some of New York's hippest homes, trendiest restaurants and most notable businesses to his artistic talents, he moved back to



ARTIST AT WORK: Clockwise from top left: Alejandro Vigilante; the artist's studio; a sample of his patterned work; and a view from the ceiling.

Miami late last year, though he continues to work in New York, Buenos Aires and points beyond.

The 41-year-old designer's latest feat is transforming what Tia Pedraza calls a "plain vanilla" kitchen, which she inherited when she and husband Raul bought their

Coral Gables home, into a warm and vibrant Tuscan *cucina*. To achieve an "Old World" feel, Vigilante made an unusual choice: powdered paint. Among other things, it is his knowledge of out-of-the-ordinary materials and an uncanny sense of color that allow him to charge upward

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ALEJANDRO VIGILANTE



PHOTOS BY BARBARA P. FERNANDEZ/FOR THE MIAMI HERALD

ARTIST AT WORK: Clockwise, from top left, a paneled ceiling created by Alejandro Vigilante; the artist, at Tia Pedraza's Coral Gables home, holds a sample of his pattern after it is waxed; he works on his back inches from the ceiling.

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of \$400 per square foot for his ceilings.

"Finding the right materials can be challenging when a client wants something unique," he says. "And the work is physically exhausting. To recline and paint freehand all day takes an intense amount of energy and con-

centration."

With the ceiling nearing completion, Pedraza couldn't be happier.

"I'm so grateful for what he is doing," she says. "To see him lying upside down and being so focused on the delicate work for hours at a time means so much to me."