

Tropic

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HOMECOMING: ARCHITECT CHARLES TREISTER RETURNS TO RESIDENTIAL DESIGN WITH THIS COCONUT GROVE BEAUTY

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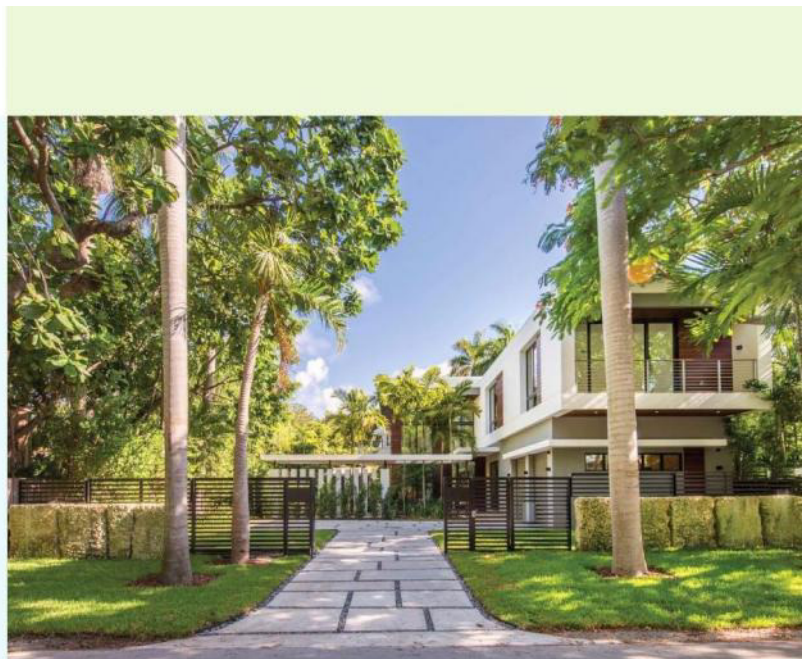
Architect Charles Treister, hard at work on commercial projects including solar energy facilities in the Northeast and Caribbean, has returned to his true love, designing the single family home. It's clear, from the flexible, 5,700 square foot house he designed for a coveted Coconut Grove neighborhood, that the design of individual homes is indeed his passion. Complete with home automation that allows the owners to control everything from lighting, music, air conditioning or fire pit from a touch screen pad, this home was beautifully conceptualized. From the entry lined with oolitic limestone slabs to a pool area that is really an entire house turned inside out, we were amazed. We spoke to Treister recently about the home, currently on the market with Riley Smith of EWM Realty.

Tropic: You took a break from designing single family homes for a while to focus on other projects. What were some of those and what was it that eventually lured you back to single family design?

Charles Treister: In my early career, I worked on both residential and commercial projects, with a specialty in the design and development of single family. About 15 years ago I began focusing more on developing and designing larger multifamily, mixed-use projects, and I also got involved in the solar energy space. While I enjoyed working at a larger scale and being involved in something I feel is environmentally important, I really enjoyed being able to design and craft something on a much smaller, more intimate scale: something that I can more easily achieve in a single-family home.

If you had to put it in words, what's the special attraction of Coconut Grove and what draws you to design residential for this neighborhood in particular?

The Grove is a very cool mixture of natural beauty, history and a great location. The natural beauty has to do with the tremendous tree canopy and vegetation that you see everywhere. The history of the Grove



you can find in the quaint little streets that don't quite line up – many with magical names, like Royal Palm. And the Grove's location is unique: situated on Biscayne Bay just south of downtown makes it a very beautiful and convenient place to live.

What does Tropical Modern mean to Charles Treister both as an architect and as a local resident?

Having been born and raised in Coconut Grove in a Tropical Modern courtyard house designed by my father, Kenneth Treister, I've experienced firsthand how Tropical Modern design can enhance the experience of living in tropical South Florida. Tropical Modern, to me, means taking the clean geometries and light-filled spaces of modern design and infusing within it a warmth and softness from more natural materials such as wood, concrete, and textured fabrics. Tropical Modern is also very much about the outdoor spaces, incorporating shading elements and outdoor rooms into the overall ensemble and utilizing trees, plants and water elements to create a harmonious environment that flows between inside and out.

Tell us a bit about some of the street-facing exterior features like the coral rock wall and the parking court and drive.

My design is all about setting up patterns and geometries with different materials. The Colitic limestone slabs at the front wall facing the street have a brute simplicity and wonderful large scale and texture, and they serve as an homage to the traditional historical coral rock walls that one finds in many of the older homes in the Grove. I contrasted the solidity of the Colitic slabs with the simple, clean, horizontal geometry of the dark bronze aluminum fence that flows above and between the slabs. The driveway and motor court are a semi-random pattern of poured-in-place concrete slabs, which begin to start a dialogue with the rectangular geometry of the house facade. The precision and hardness of the gray natural concrete is then contrasted with the soft green carpet of the surrounding lawns and the black Mexican beach pebbles, which are used in the space between the concrete slabs.

The inside of the house has an airy, only-in-South-Florida character to it that is hard to describe, all underscored by creative room dividers and floating ceiling panels that hide lighting elements.





Tropical architecture is all about having a seamless flow from inside to outside spaces. In the interior spaces, I also like to have an airy feel, which I believe comes from allowing one space to flow into another. Instead of defining rooms with solid walls, I have used screens and partial walls which allow a flow and transparency between spaces. I also like to float ceiling panels above certain spaces as a way of defining a space, even though it may flow horizontally into adjacent rooms. By highlighting the floating aspect of it with indirect cove lighting, the floating elements tend to make the spaces appear larger than they really are, and give the interior space an outdoor feel. The floating ceiling panel in the dining room accentuates this space, even as it flows into the adjacent living and family rooms.

Can you explain the reasoning behind the progression from single-story to double-height spaces?

Residential architecture is, at its base level, about providing shelter, a sense of protection and enclosure from the elements. But one of the elements of modern design that is so appealing to many people is the way that, with glass openings and clean flowing spaces, one can be both enclosed inside while still feeling the light and openness of the outside. I always try to set up a progression of heights within a home so that the sense of the closure and openness can be highlighted and accentuated. Since the bedrooms need to provide the greatest sense of enclosure, those ceilings are set the lowest height, nine feet. In the public areas such as the kitchen and family room, I increased that height to 12 feet to provide a greater sense of openness. In the living room I went to 23 feet to serve as the spatial anchor to the composition and give the viewer the most open and "outside" feeling space inside the house. This height allows a person to look up and really appreciate the beautiful tree canopy of the garden and the sky beyond.

Upstairs we were impressed by the master suite, especially the indoor/outdoor quality of the master bath.

The challenge of the master bath was to allow an open, airy quality while still keeping the essential privacy a bathroom demands. To accomplish this, I used full-height fixed glass panels that open on to a small private balcony. The balcony is defined by a custom, metal louver screen wall, with angled louvers allowing in natural light and ventilation while blocking any view into the bath. The screen is set at a height of 5 1/2 feet, allowing a view up into the trees from the inside.

The exterior balconies and the underside of the overhanging roofline are not the typical stucco, but rather sheathed in wood.

I've always been drawn to the warmth and richness that natural materials – such as wood, stone and concrete – can impart in a design. So even though the main structure here is concrete block and stucco, I've tried to use the natural palette of materials on many surfaces to imbue this natural "Zen-like" quality. For example, the main flooring in the house both inside and outside is an Italian porcelain tile, in a white-washed oak wood finish. The soft color of this "wood" tile becomes a perfect backdrop to the green hue of the plants and trees outside.

On the exterior, I've used lpe wood siding and dark gray painted stucco to accentuate certain important design elements. The white painted stucco walls and horizontal overhangs serve to frame and heighten these wooden elements. I've also used natural cedar boards for the exterior soffits of the house.

You've done an excellent job in staging this home. Was it a collaboration?

The furniture in the house was provided by Saccaro USA, a distributor of a large Brazilian Mid-Century Modern furniture company. I worked together with Katia Silva, a designer and one of the principals of the firm, in selecting the furniture that was used in the house. The paintings in the house were done by my late brother, Alan Trister, and the photographs are my own. I love this furniture line for its unique

soft, sensual and modern feel style. The pieces utilize a great deal of natural woods, different forms of wicker, soft linen and cotton fabrics, all a perfect complement with the Tropical Modern aesthetic of the home. ■

