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*Ocean Reef*



# FROM NEW TO OLD IN MIAMI BEACH

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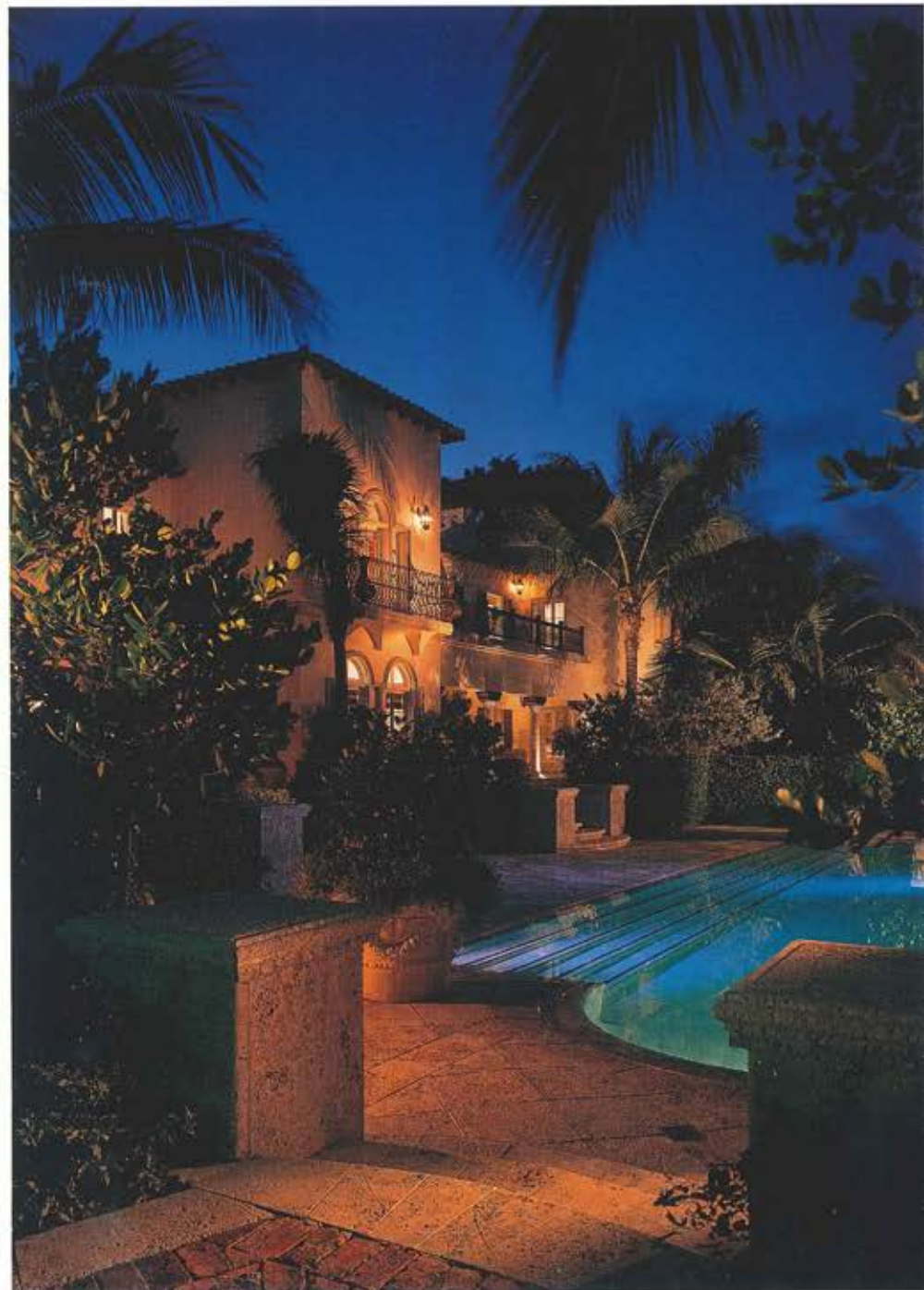
GENERAL CONTRACTOR



One of the most charming aspects of Miami Beach is its preponderance of old homes. For a city so young, it boasts a profusion of stately structures built in the 1920s and 30s. The architecture varies from Mediterranean Revival to Art Deco, with a smattering of everything from understated Country French to English manor. Interesting that even the earlier residents of this seven-mile-long island had an international sensibility.

What might well be the quintessential example of this period is a Mediterranean Revival home on Miami Beach's desirable North Bay Road. The curvy street is graced by large trees and other beautifully landscaped residences, most of which are also secreted behind decorative gates. On the west side is a wide expanse of Biscayne Bay, with striking views of downtown Miami.

At first glance, this 11,000 square foot home appears to be strictly Mizneresque. Exterior mahogany balustrades, cypress beams, arches with





This special waterfront seating area is an extension of the foyer, and reflects the successful mix of fabrics, styles and different time periods. A custom made bamboo curtain rod holds linen draperies that reveal arched casement windows from MQ Windows.

keystone surrounds, and a variegated barrel tile roof support the genre. But then, mahogany louvered shutters specifically refer to the plantation style. No doubt this is a bow to the sub-tropical setting, and one of the wonderful, quirky features that distinguish so many of the area's old homes. But this is *not* an old home. Surprisingly, it is a brand new structure, completed less than a year ago, yet it rivals homes six decades older.

When the original 1930s version was purchased by its new European owners, it was in deplorable condition from severe fire damage. Nevertheless, the owners intended to repair, restore and enlarge it because they wanted to live only in an old waterfront home in Miami Beach.

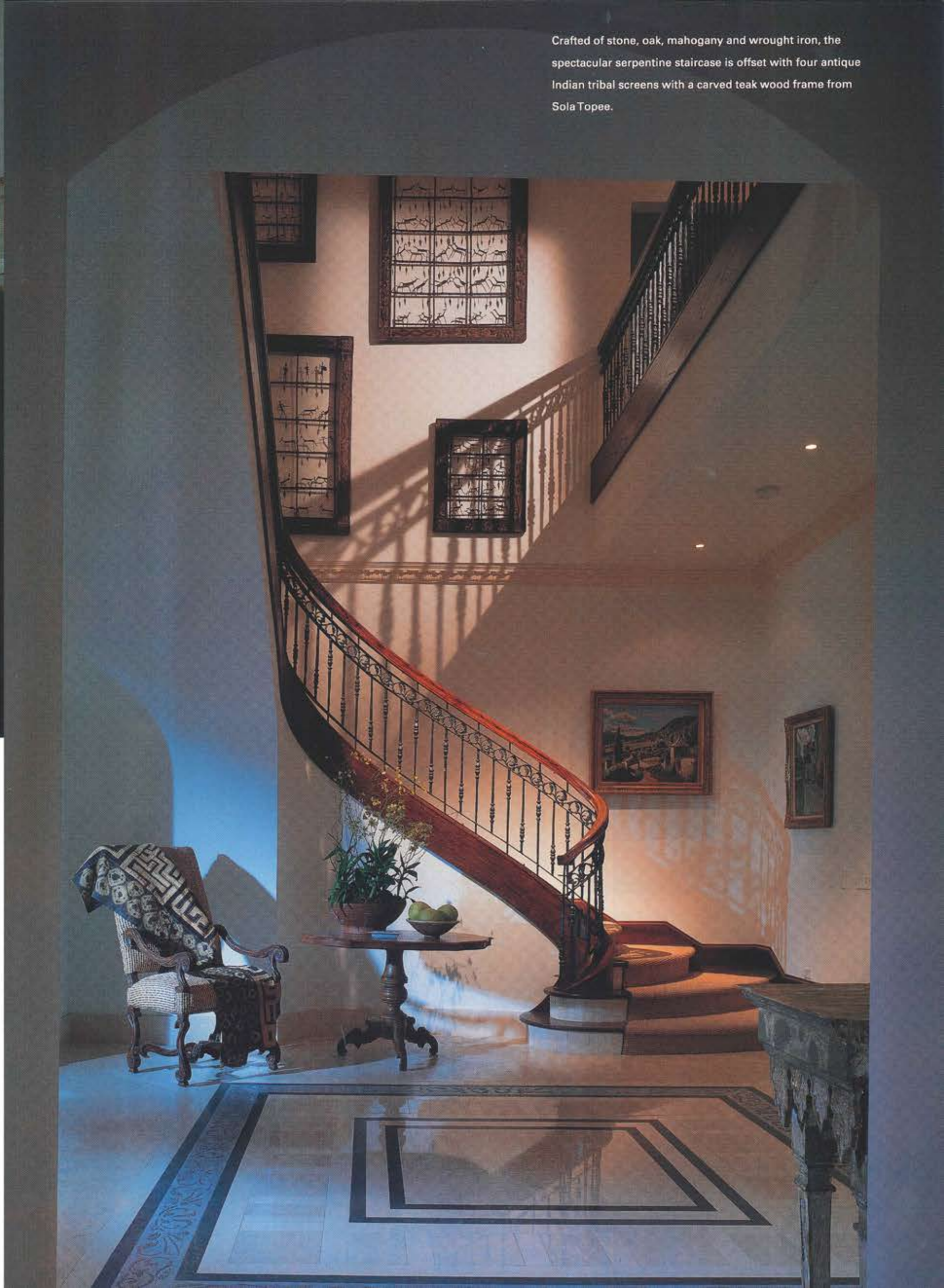
Wallace Tutt, contractor for the home and owner/partner of Tutt Design with Janet Bussell, initially met with the owners to discuss ideas. What

met Tutt's eyes was damage covering over 60 percent of the house. Part of the house had virtually collapsed and most of the walls had been consumed down to the exposed block.

"It was almost worse than having bare block," says Tutt, who was the general contractor for Cher's and Gianni Versace's Miami Beach estates. Nevertheless, he continues, "From that point, we started doing the space planning and designating the bedrooms, because it was being designed to be occupied by two families."

During the process, it was learned that the new FEMA (federal flood requirements) mandated raising the elevation of the house. Since the house contained very low ceilings, the decision was made to demolish it and build a new structure based on the original design. Then, because the zoning setbacks had changed as well, changes in

Crafted of stone, oak, mahogany and wrought iron, the spectacular serpentine staircase is offset with four antique Indian tribal screens with a carved teak wood frame from Sola Topoe.



the original layout became necessary. Staff rooms behind the kitchen had to be stepped back on the north side and the interior courtyard needed to be reduced. Nevertheless, the smaller courtyard proved to be more intimate and functional. And while the new living room replicates the original in size and location, it benefited from higher ceilings and enabled an addition of a bedroom wing to the south. This proved particularly useful for simultaneous occupancy by the primary residents and their cousins.

Taking a European approach of the builder leading the project, Tutt guided his team through a marathon process to meet a completion deadline of 10 months. The team consisted of Janet Bussell, who designed the bathrooms, kitchen, flooring and most of the interior and exterior finishes; Matthew MacDonald, the interior decorator responsible for furnishings and window treatments; and Youssef S. Bahri, the architect, together with the primary residents, specifically the wife.

"We basically worked on the plan we had conceived for renovation but were now able to enlarge some of the areas," says Bussell. "We were



also able to use 12 inch blocks, conceal an electronic hurricane system in the masonry walls, and increase the height of the ceilings. That worked to our clients' advantage." Indeed, in the original house, ceilings had been only eight and nine feet. In the current house, they became a better proportioned 11 feet on the first floor and nine on the second.

The handsome proportioning is also apparent in the entry loggia, with stone columns lining the walkway. Here, unpolished, crosscut travertine flooring begins, continuing in the courtyard to the right, where it is redefined with a border of Mexican pebble stones in shades of grey. Through-



To achieve an understated formality, simple bookcases frame the limestone fireplace from Mantles'n Stones. Antique British Colonial tables and cane settee mix well with an upholstered George Smith sofa from Monica James & Co. Linen draperies restate the tropical influence.



The old world kitchen utilizes contemporary lighting and appliances along with a romantic chandelier that burns candles. Countertops are Calcutta marble, while drawers have polished chrome bin pulls and cabinet doors contain sheet metal grills.

out the exterior, the unpolished travertine prevails, at times in combination with the identical keystone that surrounds the arches. Always, it is distinguished by a pitted, rough texture that mimics decades of use.

In the entry foyer, the travertine is polished to a gleaming finish and sports a bold pattern based on the concept of a carpet. The entry foyer is also home to a serpentine staircase that is jokingly referred to as "the Scarlett O'Hara stairway." "It's wide and grand and when you come down you glide and feel regal," says Bussell. Comprised of an assortment of materials, the stairway uses oak for the treads, strips of stone for the stair elevations, and a combination of iron elements and wood for the railing. An array of hanging art enhances the configuration.

To reinforce the "old look," interior decorator

Matthew MacDonald introduced a rich diversity of furnishings and antiques, including British Colonial, Chinese, African, Japanese and Eastern. Then, by arranging the living room into two seating groups, he exemplified the elegantly understated feeling of the house. "The overall look we wanted was casual and tropical," says MacDonald. "The clients have a house in Germany that is more formal, and they wanted to reflect the fact that this was a house on the water. But it had to have elegance, too." Mac Donald emphasized elegance through the living room's antique British Colonial carved end tables and an antique British Colonial cane settee, all offset by a parquet wood floor with stone surround. The abundant seating that he utilized to accommodate both families here is also evident in the kitchen, which literally serves as another living room. Bussell says, "Our clients wanted an old



world kitchen that would be one of the main living areas of the house."

For a little Old World romance, Bussell added a candle-burning chandelier. For utilitarian purposes, she crafted a center island work space, but broke tradition by eliminating the use of wall cabinets. To compensate for missing storage, she flanked the refrigerator with matching stainless steel cabinets. Then, to offset the sleekness of the white cabinetry, she added polished chrome bin handles to drawers and old-fashioned sheet metal grilles to cabinet doors.

To refer back to the Tropics, MacDonald placed natural, burlap shades on the doors. When open, they allow full views outside. The room is a coveted gathering place, with a table for 12 and glorious views of the gardens and the bay. But views are as prevalent in the two separate bed-



One of two guest bedrooms opening onto the interior courtyard.



room wings, furnished to the tastes of the individual family in occupancy.

"We designed knowing that one portion of the house would be used seven or eight months a year and another only two," says Bussell. Thus the bedroom plan for the family in shorter residence provides outside access through walkways, loggias, terraces, and courtyards.

The house looks so authentically "1930s" that it fools even the experts. When Tutt used the house for a fund raising event for Miami Beach City Commissioner Nancy Liebman, a driving force behind Miami Beach's Historic Art Deco District designation, Liebman commented on how gratifying it is to see old homes in the area are now being beautifully restored. "This home is a perfect example," she said. ▲

## RESOURCES

**French Doors**  
 MQ Windows Inc.  
 DCOTA Ste. A-274  
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 Dania, FL 33004  
 (954) 929-8500

**George Smith Sofa**  
 Monica James & CO.  
 140 NE 40th Street  
 Miami, FL 33137  
 (305) 576-6222

**Fireplace & Front Door  
 Surround**  
 Mantles'n Stones  
 DCOTA Ste. A-262  
 1855 Griffin Rd.  
 Dania, FL 33004  
 (800) MANTLE1

