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RIVERSIDE HAVEN

A DESIGN TEAM BLENDS THE SERENITY OF
THE NEARBY LANDSCAPE INTO A COUPLE'S
NEW HOME IN FORT LAUDERDALE.

WRITTEN BY ANJULIE RAO / PHOTOGRAPHY BY CLAUDIA URIBE

ARCHITECTURE / MAX STRANG, STRANG ARCHITECTURE

INTERIOR DESIGN / MARGARET MARQUEZ,
MARGARET MARQUEZ INTERIORS

HOME BUILDER / JAY LEFKA AND
KARL VARGO, BOMAR BUILDERS



Building a home in an urban area rarely offers opportunities for seclusion. But for one couple looking for an escape from the bustle of Fort Lauderdale's F.A.T. Village arts neighborhood, architect Max Strang was able to design just that: a modern and comfortable sanctuary that celebrates its private site.

Homeowners Elliot and Ileen Gross sought solitude and natural beauty when they purchased the original 100-year-old house on the property located at the end of a quiet street on the New River. Yet, it quickly became apparent that the residence was not meant to be: Moisture from the river and climate eroded its foundation and, according to Elliot, "the floors started collapsing." They carefully considered their options until one morning, the husband says, "I just woke up and without hesitation decided to mow the place down."

So, Elliot turned to Strang to create a sleek, modern structure that rejected the traditional Mediterranean-style abodes found in the area. Instead, the architect devised a house encompassing the airy, cubical volumes that define much of his practice. While Strang completed the design, Elliot worked with general contractors Jay Lefka and Karl Vargo to refine the details to his specifications.

The resulting residence sits long and low against the riverside. Covered in white stucco, its pristine appearance set against the tropical flora is striking—the structure appears formally sculptural but complements its lush surroundings. The home is comprised of one level but includes three elevations creating delineations between the ample family space, the large master bedroom and suite, and a study and maid's quarters. "We hid the guest room on an upper level to the back for added privacy," explains Strang.



Above: For his clients' secluded Fort Lauderdale residence on the New River, architect Max Strang created an arrival terrace that maintains the home's minimalist appearance and offers a quiet entrance. Large stone inlays set the scene for the strong, simple flooring motif carried throughout the interiors.

Right: Designer Margaret Marquez emphasized natural elements for the furnishings. She used wood-like porcelain tiles from Walker Zanger on both the interior and exterior spaces. The dining table is B&B Italia and the leather dining chairs are Maxalto for B&B Italia, both found at 4141 Design Group. The artwork is by Donald Sultan.





In the living room, the sofas, leather bench and coffee table, all by Liaigre, provide a touch of luxury. The rug is from ABC Carpet & Home, and the standing light fixture near the window is by Flos from Luminaire. The large painting to the right is by Briggs Solomon from Holly Hunt and the two photographs to the left are by Robert Longo. The windows in the living area, and throughout the home, are from Windowman of South Florida.







In addition to emphasizing solitude, the architect addressed two major considerations while designing the space: the clients' lifestyles and personal preferences, and the site's placement against the river with views of a nearby nature preserve. Elliot, who works from home as a radio frequency engineer, is a self-described introvert who enjoys peace and quiet. "As a private person, I work and play out of the comfort of my house," says the husband. So Strang responded with a floor plan that provides physical separation from work, play and living: He put Elliot's work space on a lower level divided from the living areas on the main floor. Outside, Strang created a large entertaining region with a swimming pool and covered patio on the slightly elevated main level that appears to float above the back terrace. The space, which overlooks the river and nature preserve, is ideal for hosting large parties, and an outdoor bathroom helps to keep guests separate from the living and work areas.

For the furnishings, designer Margaret Marquez created a clean palette of colors and textures to soften the home's modern edges. "The clients are laid-back and requested durable, low-maintenance materials," says Marquez. While

much of the flooring is porcelain, the wooden-like staircase that leads to the upper-level guest suite provides a material respite. "We wanted to warm it up a bit," says Marquez, "but wood is difficult in this area and gets destroyed easily." As a solution, the designer employed porcelain tiles treated to look like the wood used on the outdoor cabana area. The same tiles were also used on the interior ceiling providing continuity from the inside to the outside.

Strang also emphasized an indoor-outdoor flow by orienting the house away from the street and employing floor-to-ceiling windows to the east and west river-facing views. The master suite and living spaces all have views of the water, while the nature preserve on the east river bank ensures privacy. Even the smallest details—a small garden outside the master bath that includes 200-year-old cypress tree roots—highlight the natural setting.

"It feels like the house is pleasantly in the middle of nowhere," says Strang. The homeowners are also very happy with their quiet sanctuary nestled into the city. "We're in a little oasis but one mile from everything," says Elliot. "I never have to leave." ■

A sitting room off of the kitchen features mixed-material side chairs and a double-chaise sofa by Artefacto—"So no one fights for the chaise," says Marquez. The coffee table is from Holly Hunt and the rug is from Carpet Boutique.

Because the homeowners wanted to avoid materials that would require maintenance, Marquez sourced quartzite for the kitchen countertops and paired it with Modulnova Twenty cabinetry from MiaCucina. "It doesn't chip, it doesn't burn, it's practically indestructible," she says. Adding a touch of sleek luxury, the leather stools are Zanotta Lio found at 4141 Design Group and the appliances are Gaggenau from Ferguson.



Privacy is maintained throughout the home, especially in the master bedroom, with cleverly offset physical barriers that still allow light to diffuse throughout individual spaces. The headboard and bedside tables are both custom through M Cabinets, the bedside lighting fixture is Axo Clavius from Y Lighting and the bedspread is Sferra from Thread Count.





Master bathroom finishes continue the wood detailing seen throughout the house. The Swarovski blossom fixture from Capitol Lighting is congruous with floral sculptures in a courtyard garden that can be seen from the bath. The sink basin is by Idea from MiaCucina and the fixtures are all Dornbracht from Designer's Plumbing & Hardware.





“When you drive down our driveway, it looks like you’re in the middle of nowhere,” says homeowner Elliot Gross, who worked with landscape designer Mauricio Del Valle of Mauricio Del Valle Design on shaping the grounds to his liking. So, while the residence appears quiet, minimal and inconspicuous from the front, the back of the home is where the magic happens. A large outdoor entertainment space showcases Richard Schultz loungers from Clima Outdoor.

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—MAX STRANG