

ARCHITECTURE + DESIGN

A Chance Encounter At An Airport Lounge Leads To A Globally Inspired Renovation Of A Miami Bungalow

BY MIKKI BRAMMER / JUNE 11, 2020

Airports are rife with fleeting encounters, and occasionally, those chance meetings seem like fate. In September 2017, among a chaotic crowd of passengers trying to catch the last flight out of Miami International Airport before Hurricane Irma struck the area, designer Anil Kakar got to chatting with the couple next to him in a lounge. It turned out the duo, Dr. Marek Taylor and Christian Taylor, was looking for someone to help them with the renovation of their 80-year-old bungalow.

“When people usually meet under these circumstances, you exchange numbers but don’t really expect a call back,” Kakar acknowledges. “But they actually followed up after the threat of the hurricane was over and life got back to normal. They walked into my showroom, and the rest is history.”

The Taylors had kept the 1939 home as a rental property on and off for the past 17 years and wanted to transform it into their permanent residence. But what started as a plan to simply expand the kitchen became a full-fledged project that elevated the abode to a petite tropical estate.

“It was a classic midcentury Miami bungalow—it was worn out, very tired and outdated,” Kakar recalls. “The floor plan wasn’t conducive to 21st-century living and their lifestyle, so we opened it up as much as we could without losing the feel of the original vintage charm.” The designer teamed with architect Neal Aronson and general contractor David Hester to gut the entire house—restoring the hardwood floors, sandblasting layers of paint onto the original wood ceilings and lining the entire back of the home with foldable doors to allow for indoor-outdoor living and entertaining. “The most significant structural change was revamping the kitchen and the utility room behind it,” Aronson says. “It all came down, and that’s where we expanded.” Hester admits their work was cut out for them. “When I arrived at the property, it was in bad shape,” he recalls. The residence showed signs of corrosion, he explains, and required stabilizing features such as columns.

Although the changes restored the structure's midcentury roots, Kakar's vision for the interior design was far from the era's traditionally minimalist aesthetic. In fact, inspired by the Taylors' cultural backgrounds and frequent travels, it was enthusiastically maximalist. "They had just visited Greece and wanted a Mediterranean look, but they didn't want a cookie-cutter, all-white style with a little bit of blue," Kakar explains. "Christian's heritage is Liberian and Marek's is Polish, so they wanted European and Mediterranean flair mixed with Africa, Morocco and India—shake it up, and there's your cocktail."

Like the Taylors, Kakar travels extensively, sourcing and restoring vintage and antique pieces—many of which he incorporated throughout the bungalow. In the living area, hand-carved wood columns from an ancient building in India stand alongside a vintage thick-pile Moroccan rug. Overhead is a 1950s amber Murano glass chandelier the designer found in Parma, Italy. In the dining area, he restored a vibrant set of blue velvet, midcentury modern chairs that pay tribute to the house's era of origin. "I'm into color, layering, texture and pattern, though I don't like being identified necessarily by a particular look," Kakar notes. "But thank goodness a little bit of maximalism is back. It's more interesting and complex, and there's much more creativity involved."

The Taylors had no problem with decor that was slightly less conventional. "We're a little daring, so we like to push the envelope a bit," Christian says, adding it was essential that guests don't feel like they're in a museum. "Sometimes you come into a space and it looks so nice, you don't want to sit or touch anything. But we want everyone to be at ease—everything is to touch and use."

Just as crucial to the abode's vacation-infused vibe is its outdoor space, which features a pool, tiki cabana and Brazilian ipe wood deck. "We basically fit everything a 20,000-square-foot luxury estate would have into a smaller home," Kakar says. Perhaps his most striking touch is the installation of black-and-white striped awnings with a matching jet-black fence—the latter for which the Taylors needed some convincing. Now the couple can't imagine the property without the feature and is particularly fond of the way the greenery pops against the black.

Having hosted family members from around the world, the Taylors say the admiration of their residence is universal. "Our guests kept saying, 'Everywhere you look, there's something to see,' " Marek says. "It's amazing to observe the expression on people's faces who've visited the house before and now. I love showing it off."



Complemented by classic Florida greenery, a midcentury bungalow meets global maximalism in Miami.



Jeroen Nelemans' art hangs above a Lee Industries sofa with Suzani pillows in the living area of this upgraded 1939 Miami bungalow by designer Anil Kakar. A vintage Moroccan rug grounds the room, and another covers an ottoman from Jalan Jalan Collection, where Kakar sourced the chairs. Next to an antique Indian column, a midcentury modern lamp rests on a side table from India.



Kakar restored vintage dining chairs in blue velvet to surround and perfectly complement this Indonesian wood root table. Moroccan doors, an additional column and wall art made of antique Indian wood and semiprecious stones contribute the maximalist home.



Spanish floor tiles evoke a Mediterranean feel in the bar room, painted with Benjamin Moore's White Dove. Custom cowhide and metal stools pull up to an Indonesian wood bar, and linen draperies decorate the vintage Moroccan door frame from Berber. The owners' artwork and candlelit chandelier complete the maximalist look.



The back of the bungalow, also painted with White Dove, opens to the outdoors, exposing spaces such as the master bedroom and the Grecian-inspired kitchen. Atlantic Awnings fabricated the draperies and awning using Sunbrella material lying just above the pool, retiled by Essig Pools. Hand-carved Indonesian wood architectural pieces serve as decor elements.



Metal lanterns with red tassels hang from the loggia's wood beam ceiling by general contractor David Hester. Atop travertine flooring, Kakar complemented the clients' Indonesian sofa and pillows with Moroccan ottomans from Berber.



The existing tiki cabana on the pool deck is outfitted with the owners' chairs and Indonesian live-edge wood table. Kakar designed the property's fence, which encloses new ipe wood pool deck flooring