NATURAL HIGH

THE BEAUTY OF EARTH'S ELEMENTS INSPIRES A SERENE YET GLAMOROUS OCEANFRONT RETREAT IN MIAMI BEACH

INTERIOR DESIGN BLANCA WALL, THE WALL STUDIO, MIAMI, FL
TEXT BETSY RILEY
PHOTOGRAPHY GABRIEL VOLPI, MIAMI, FL

LEFT: A sitting room, located off the kitchen, offers a rich mix of textures accented with a sculptural steel coffee table. The fireplace surround matches the nearby waterfall island. Designer Blanca Wall and the clients chose the Sam Gilliam piece above the fireplace, *Musketeers*, to add something casual and unexpected to the space.

ABOVE: Out on this spacious balcony terrace, the homeowners can watch cruise ships come and go. Brushed teak armchairs, a driftwood-style table, and a tumbled limestone floor with fossilized pieces embody the seaside ambience.

DESIGNER BLANCA WALL moved to Miami from her native Sweden to study architecture, interior design, and fine art at Florida International University. She fell in love with the cosmopolitan city and stayed to launch her career, creating glamorous oceanfront residences and founding her own firm a dozen years ago. But her love for design wasn't rooted in studies of local starchitects like Morris Lapidus. It began during early childhood on her family's farm.

"I loved digging in the dirt and searching for unique stones," she says. "I thought I'd be an archeologist." Her fascination with materials sparked an early interest in construction. "I loved the notion of building things, of being in my grandfather's woodshop. I would build tables, small boats, and treehouses, and decorate them with my grandmother's scraps and whatever nature had in store."

Miami has also captured Wall's imagination. She compares the city to Hong Kong, Dubai, and other international centers that have blossomed over the last few decades: "It's attracting people from all over the world who crave culture and the arts."

The high-rise residences Wall creates reflect her love for both natural materials and fine art. Case in point: A three-bedroom condominium at the Apogee tower in Miami Beach's South of Fifth neighborhood. In fact,

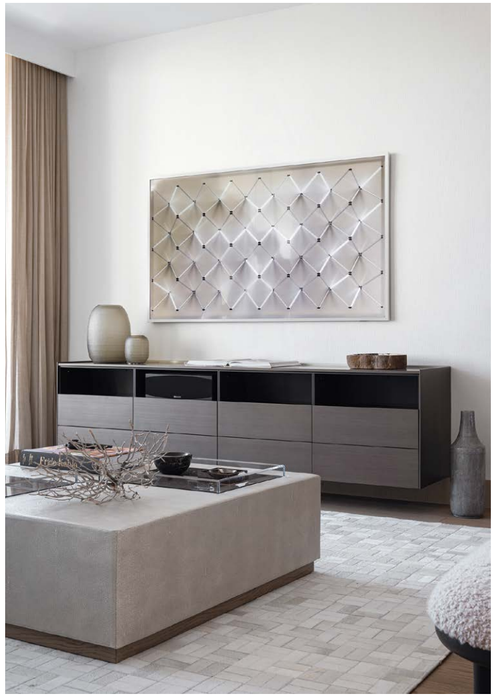
LEFT: The homeowners' existing table got a new live-edge top in a light contrasting oak, and their previous chairs were refreshed with new lime-washed oak legs. The mirror reflects artwork hanging in a narrow hall opposite. The cantilevered bench below the artwork in the adjoining entry hall is reinforced with steel so that it is functional as well as elegant.

she'd designed numerous apartments in the same building previously, which is how she was referred to the new owners, a couple who were downsizing from their family house near Washington, D.C.

Her clients are elegant and low-key and wanted their new home to "mirror their essence," says Wall. Out went oversized polished marble floor tiles, in came white oak flooring and fossilized limestone. "We wanted to focus on having materials as close to nature as possible—stone that was honed, wood floors that were brushed," says Wall. "The goal was a feeling of understated serenity."

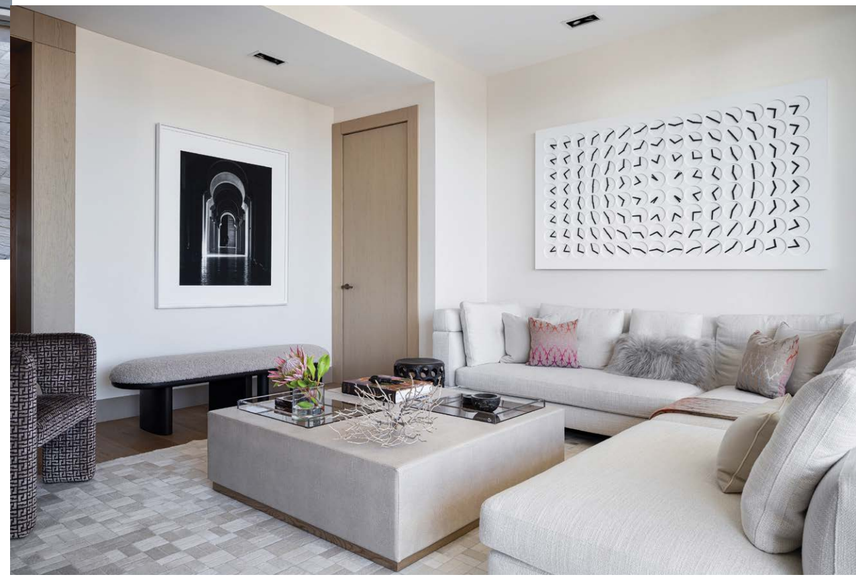
The new entry, a hallway opening off the elevator foyer, sets the tone. The utilitarian space previously lacked a "sense of arrival," as Wall puts it. To add impact, she anchored it with a large, mixed-media work by painter James Verbicky, flanked by sleek linear sconces and mounted over a cantilevered French limestone bench lit from beneath.

ABOVE: A sectional sofa, oversized ottoman, and hair-and-hide rug provide a comfortable corner for the entire family and the dog to relax. The wall artwork, titled *A Million Times 120* by Humans Since 1982, is actually a functioning clock.



ABOVE: A low-profile television screen is disguised as artwork above a cantilevered console in a bronze metal finish.

BELOW: Another view of the corner sitting room reveals the Humans Since 1982 clock installation changing time and a black-and-white photograph from Holly Hunt.



Although some of the owners' previous furnishings were repurposed for their new home, most of the art was sourced for the space. The team opted for investment pieces that create interest and add subtle touches of color. In a sitting area off the kitchen, a draped composition by noted artist Sam Gilliam hangs above a ventless fireplace with a streamlined marble surround that echoes the nearby waterfall island. A focal point in the living room—in addition to the spectacular city view—is a framed "clock" titled *A Million Times 120* by Swedish artists Humans Since 1982, whose massive kinetic installations hang in iconic places such as Moncler's flagship store in Milan.

The kitchen turned out to be Wall's favorite space, but she says it also required the most "dynamic intervention." High-rise buildings present structural restrictions for remodelers, and the homeowners had a daunting wish list. They wanted a smaller island, a walk-up bar, a dedicated breakfast area, and plenty of cabinets. Guided by Robert Kerr, Wall's frequent collaborator and the architect for this entire project, the team reduced the size of the island and added a cantilevered breakfast table on the far end. A bar and wine cellar were tucked into the back wall. Illuminated black upper cabinets with glass doors provide ample storage and drama

BELOW: One of the residence's bedrooms was transformed into an office with shelves that hide a Murphy bed, which can be pulled down for overnight guests.

ABOVE: Wall had to convince the homeowners to choose marble countertops for the kitchen. "When you walk into kitchens in Italy, you see countertops that have patina-ed over time," she says. "There's something really beautiful about that, like an old leather chair."

RIGHT: The primary bedroom, which overlooks the water, is a "celebration of textures," says Wall, thanks to furnishings like the bouclé sofa, tufted headboard, sheepskin pillows, and silk area rug.

BELOW: The original primary bathroom had a recessed tub, but the design team filled in the floor and added a sculptural tub at the owners' request. Their wish list also included lots of specialty lighting to both illuminate and add subtle drama. Here, "shadow boxes" around built-in mirrors amplify both the bath and newly reconfigured walk-in closet. Limestone and river rock surfaces introduce touches of nature.

at night. But the star of the show is the exquisite Calacatta Gold marble that wraps the island, countertops, and backsplash.

"As designers, we live for these types of transformations," says Wall. "But sometimes clients are describing a unicorn, and you're thinking, 'How am I going to be able to give them that?'" Then she adds with a laugh, "You always want to tell them, 'Absolutely, we can do that!'"

Fittingly, the kitchen played a key role last winter when the owners hosted a celebration of their new home for friends visiting for Art Basel. The homeowners flew in a favorite chef from the Eastern Shore, as well as the Swedish artist/engineer who created the clock. Wall spoke to the group about the home's design journey, happily realizing she'd delivered on that unicorn.

SOURCES

TERRACE
Sofa and drink table – Luminaire, Miami, FL
Armchair – Christian Liaigre, Miami, FL
Organic table – Michael Dawkins Home, Miami, FL
Floor lamp – Clima Home, Miami, FL
Area rug – Sharron Lewis, Miami, FL

LIVING ROOM
Sofa, drink table, and floor lamp – Christian Liaigre, Miami, FL
Cocktail table – Nest Casa, Miami, FL
Cabinetry and fireplace wall designed by The Wall Studio, Miami, FL, and fabricated by The Millwork Lab, Miami, FL
Art – Sam Gilliam, Galerie Thomas Schulte, *galeriethomasschulte.com*
Drapery – Shade and Sound, Miami, FL
Area rug – Saccaro, Miami, FL

DINING AREA
Table – Holly Hunt, Miami, FL
Chairs – Casa Italia, Naples, FL
Mirror – Anima Domus, Miami, FL
Lighting – Luminaire, Miami, FL
Art – James Verbicky, Madison Galleries, *madisongalleries.com*
Sconces above bench – Allied Maker, *alliemaker.com*

SITTING ROOM
Sofa and lounge – Casa Italia, Naples, FL
Accent chair – Divine Custom Designs, Miami, FL
Cocktail table – Casa Dio, Miami FL
Round accent table – Nest Casa, Miami, FL
Bench – Le Jeune Upholstery, Miami, FL
Floating console – Poliform, Miami, FL
Floor lamp – RH, *rh.com*
Clock installation – Humans Since 1982, *humanssince1982.com*
Area rug – Saccaro, Miami, FL

KITCHEN
Cabinetry – Poliform, Miami, FL
Backsplash and island material – Opustone, Doral, FL
Island and table designed by The Wall Studio, Miami, FL, and fabricated by Yomar Consulting, Wilton Manors, FL
Stools – Thomas Hayes Studio, *thomashayesstudio.com*

OFFICE
Desk – Anima Domus, Miami, FL
Chair – Design Within Reach, Miami, FL
Accent chair – Divine Custom Designs, Miami, FL
Table lamp – Nisi B Home, Hollywood, FL

PRIMARY BATHROOM
Cabinetry – The Millwork Lab, Miami, FL
Tub and shower – Designers Plumbing and Hardware, Coral Gables, FL

PRIMARY BEDROOM
Bed and headboard – Meridiani, Miami, FL
Bedside sconce – Christian Liaigre, Miami, FL
Sofa – Fine Line Furniture & Accessories, Coral Gables, FL
Console – Interlude Home, Miami, FL
Drapery – Shade and Sound, Miami, FL
Area rug – Niba Designs, Hollywood, FL

THROUGHOUT
Architecture – M3 Design Development/Kerr-Tek Design, Miami, FL
General contractor – Home Image Builders, Doral, FL
Automation – Prestige Audio Visual, Miami, FL
Millwork – The Millwork Lab, Miami, FL
Flooring – Natural Wood Floors, Miami, FL
Greenery – Citiscapes, Miami, FL