

# REFINED VERNACULAR

*F*ew experiences are more rewarding than an architect building her own home. But more often than not, that's a dream that doesn't materialize. Jaya Kader Zebede defied the statistics by building a family home for herself, her husband, and their four young children. Living in the light-filled house has surpassed their highest expectations.

For starters, the Zebedes purchased an exceptional island site near Miami Beach, overlooking the wide waterway and verdant Indian Creek Golf Course. That pointed Jaya in a specific direction. The concept would be to integrate the structure with the beautiful water and landscape views.

Before establishing a specific style, she considered the features of Florida vernacular homes. Broad porches, balconies, dormers and wood battens became desirable elements to integrate into the design, but not a wood exterior or tin roof. Far from it, for she had her own ideas. "I decided to reinterpret the cracker house with masonry," says Jaya, who sensitively sited the house on the property so as not to overwhelm the landscaping. She then organized the space as an "H" plan but with a slight departure. One of the "legs" of the "H" was shifted to receive the side-entry garage.

A slate-colored concrete tile roof visually connects the house with the landscaping. Punched-out squares over the requisite front porch refer to battens in Old Florida houses. Second floor terraces in the back and a large, four-window dormer further the references to the vernacular. And the short distance between the front and back doors is yet another reference. Stretching through the light-filled hallway, an axis begins at the front door and terminates with tall French doors leading to the back porch. The doors line up along a perpendicular axis. Encased in clear, almost uninterrupted glass, they introduce the main views to the pool, the waterway and the golf course.

*Written by*  
**Roberta Klein**

*Photography by*  
**George Cott**

**K. Z. Architecture,**  
**Jaya Kader Zebede,**  
**AIA,**  
**Principal in Charge,**  
**Jonilla Dorsten,**  
**Mary Horst**  
**ARCHITECTURE**

**K. Z. Architecture**  
**with**  
**Nuhouse Inc,**  
**Jaya Kader Zebede,**  
**Iggy Olsson Cuba,**  
**Principals in Charge**

**INTERIOR**  
**DESIGN**

**Hall Bell Aqúi,**  
**Deena Bell, ASLA**  
**LANDSCAPE**  
**ARCHITECTURE**

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In the hall/axis from front to back door, simplicity reigns with an Odegard rug, a Richard Mishaan bench and "Sleeping Woman" Series #2, an oil on canvas by Juanita Meneses.

In keeping with a desired minimal look, only a Richard Mishaan bench of wenge wood and "Sleeping Woman" Series #2, an oil on canvas by artist Juanita Meneses, grace the hallway. All are offset with limestone flooring used throughout the public spaces.

With the determination to integrate the inside of the house with the outside, Jaya made some bold and unorthodox architectural moves. She situated the dining room to face the front of the house and introduced windows in the dining room's interior walls for natural light and glimpses of the view. The walls are clad in maple that harkens to the wood board siding of old cracker houses.

Throughout, the architect's philosophy reso-

nates. "I believe architecture should address context and the purpose it's serving," says Jaya, a native of Costa Rica. "The house was designed with the thought of our family, how we live, what's important to us, which is why the dining room is the heart of the house." As such, it succeeds in its mission. "It brings our everyday life together with our formal life," Jaya explains. "That's where we have the traditional Sabbath dinner every Friday night."

While the treatment of the dining room walls is unique unto itself, the motivation was also to make way for the adjacent stairway. And nothing is more unorthodox than the placement of the stairway in front of the French doors.

From bottom to top, the stairway captures the



The dining room – the heart of the house – features interior windows, a nickel and onyx chandelier and "Squatting Woman," Series #5, an oil on canvas by Juanita Meneses.

most spectacular views – views so sacrosanct that in any other architect-designed home there would be severe consequences if they were not exclusive to the main living spaces. But Jaya had a different vision. She wanted everyone to experience the views. With constant traffic to bedrooms and a working studio upstairs, going up and down ultimately provided a visual banquet. Joseph Zebede, Jaya's husband and a prominent physician, confirms this. "To me," he says, "the outdoors are very important. Jaya did a beautiful job allowing the outdoors to penetrate the house and the indoors to embrace the outside. When I walk from one place to another within the house, I perceive the light and surrounding landscape actively permeating through the structure."

At the top of the stairway with stained maple risers, four square-shaped windows bathe the upstairs hallway with natural light. Facing them, like an echo, is a show of man-made beauty in the form of four square-shaped oil on canvas landscapes by artist Russell Sharon.

On the first floor, the light-filled axis framing the French doors is anchored by the living room on one end, the family room on the other, both capturing the main view. Although the home is 5,200 square feet under air conditioning, the rooms are so comfortably scaled that each one exudes a feeling of well-being.

The living room is a prime example. Totally understated, it expresses a soothing environment that beckons and welcomes use.



Muted earth tones in the living room reflect on custom chairs and Baker sofa, while Andrew Ferrandis's commissioned four-part mixed media abstractly reflects the view. Tufenkian rug is from Tibet.

Iggy Olsson Cuba, a partner at Nuhouse, Inc., an interior design firm, met Jaya when the house had just been completed. "I felt very inspired by the clean and airy architecture," says the Swedish native. "It had an unusual layout and symmetry that appealed to me and an incredible amount of natural light. It reminded me of Scandinavian architecture."

Cuba and Jaya collaborated on the interior design, creating a spare layout with minimal furnishings. Influenced by the home's location and extraordinary light, they selected fabrics in earth tones with crisp accents. In the living room, where a circular wenge wood cocktail table serves custom chairs and Baker sofas, linen shades filter the sun. A transition from limestone to stained maple flooring is evident.

Hanging is Andres Ferrandis's commissioned

mixed-media assemblage. Titled "De las Horas, De la Luz," it depicts the outside landscape, visible from indoors, in four components.

At the opposite end of the axis, the family room holds a custom cabinet in espresso-stained oak. Concealed is audio and visual equipment while books are proudly displayed. In keeping with the artistry of the home, the two small tables were hand made by sculptor Frank Verrilli. The counterpart to "De las Horas De la Luz" hangs on the wall while rugs in both the rooms are Tufenkian from Tibet.

Art played a critical role in the home, and in essence, was integral to it upon completion. When the family first moved in, there was barely any furniture. Jaya was so drawn to the series of women painted by Juanita Meneses that she gave the artist the house for an exhibit.





Now, in addition to Meneses's painting in the entry hall, the dining room showcases her "Squatting Woman," Series #5.

The all-important dining room took on extra family meaning from a dose of serendipity. With Jaya's help, her mother had purchased an impressive Baker dining table for 12 for her apartment. But then she and Jaya decided the lustrous inlaid table was more suitable for the Zebede's dining room, which is where it was placed. Although the style is somewhat transitional, it is totally compatible with the architecture. The satin nickel with onyx chandelier of pure forms is the perfect counterpoint.

While the dining room is the heart of the house, the breakfast area near the family room and kitchen runs a close second. Because the table would be located within the great hall, "I



The transparency of the house is indicative of its total integration with the outdoors, which reflects the major concept. Windows are Weather Shield through S & P Architectural Products. Exterior doors are from MQ Windows of Europe & the Americas.





thought the space merited a sculpture-like object,” Jaya recalls. The vision was fulfilled with the wenge wood table. Its striking four-part base resembles a modern sculpture.

Looking back Joseph Zebede says, “This was not a typical client/architect relationship. But once I understood the house at a conceptual level, I knew that everything made perfect sense. It is not just about beauty but how beauty can work effectively.” ▲

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The unorthodox placement of the handsome stairway provides prime views for anyone walking up or down – a main goal of the architect. Over the breakfast table hangs a 27 x 37 canvas titled “Secuencias con Secuencia” by Sandra Perez.