

# INDULGE

Miami Herald

AUGUST / SEPTEMBER 2017

Landscape-architecture star  
**FERNANDO WONG**  
in his happy place,  
turning Miami green

## FALL HOME & DESIGN

+ Inside EDIE LAQUER'S  
Bal Harbour residence

Off the court with  
UDONIS HASLEM



## editor's letter

This is the fourth Home & Design issue I've edited at INDULGE, and I learn something each time: a tree-lined neighborhood I hadn't yet discovered, an Italian house-painting technique I have tucked away for our dream home, the stark difference between a well-lighted room and one that is not. Also, each time, I develop an overwhelming feeling of, *I want that home*.

Both of those traditions continued through this issue. I struggle to keep a few pots of herbs and a small Key lime tree alive on my balcony, so I am in awe at the lush, living landscapes created by our cover star, Fernando Wong (p. 102). I also am in awe of Wong's American Dream story, which is so smartly told by writer Susannah Nesmith, an amateur gardener herself. Prediction: You're going to be hearing a lot about Wong in the coming months, not only for his breathtaking work at the new Four Seasons at The Surf Club and his serene sculpture garden at the forthcoming Institute of Contemporary Art, but as the landscape designer of the moment.

I also learned a thing or two about the arts of perseverance and craftsmanship from Edie Laquer, whose grand St. Regis Bal Harbour condo has been the object of my "I want that home" envy since I first laid eyes on it (p. 94). Immaculate marble surfaces. Rich leather furniture. A sunlight-drenched kitchen in the sky. An adorably spoiled dog. It's the sort of home that befits Laquer, a groundbreaking Miami real estate powerhouse who built her legacy in a male-dominated industry. "It's a tough business," she explained to writer Lydia Martin, "but it's tougher when you're the only woman in a game of powerful men."

On the list of enviable homes, the one where we photographed architect Ralph Choeff, pioneer of the tropical-modern aesthetic, is high up there (p. 56). And I wouldn't mind putting in an extended stay at the Diplomat Beach Resort in Hollywood, wasting away the days in a Trina Turk-designed pool cabana and singing away the nights in Nokku, the karaoke bar hidden within modern Japanese restaurant Monkita. The newly renovated Diplomat is our Staycation feature this issue (p. 74).

Just before this issue's release, we learned that INDULGE is a finalist in three editorial categories of the Florida Magazine Association's 2017 Charlie Awards: Best Column Writing, Best Photograph and Best Social Media. Winners are announced in mid-August at a gala at The Ritz-Carlton Naples. We're honored to be recognized, and we thank you for your continued support. Together, we'll keep discovering, we'll keep learning, and we'll keep being in awe of the people and places who make us fortunate to call Miami home.

Evan

KEEP IN TOUCH!

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What's  
your home's  
best design  
element?

INDULGE

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"A floor-to-ceiling picture wall with photographs of family and friends."

"A previous owner rebuilt a back room to accommodate antique French doors that she collected."

"Wallpaper by Aerin Lauder for Lee Jofa called 'Beaujeu.' It's in our master bath, but I want to put it everywhere."

"In our Golden Beach home, African-American contemporary art by Kehinde Wiley and Mickalene Thomas."

"Our backyard pool and waterfall."



Evan S. Benn  
Editor in Chief



### PHOTO SCHOOL

INDULGE contributor Felipe Cuevas shoots everything on his @culinarylense Instagram account with an iPhone 7 Plus. Here are his tips for getting the perfect shot.



FOOD: "Backlight adds drama, and dimension brings out texture." Shot at Madruga Bakery in Coral Gables (p. 66).



PORTRAIT: "Get as close as possible in 'Portrait' mode. Good light is a must." Chef Massimo Bottura photographed in Modena, Italy.



OVERHEAD: "All about composition. Look for lines to balance the image." Shot at Bocaito in Miami.

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## Express yourself.

A Fernando Wong-designed landscape often includes native greenery — along with a pop of the unexpected. So you may find a 100-year-old banyan tree erupting from a luxury hotel's courtyard, just as you may get a soaking tub in the backyard of a private residence. An Edie Laquer-designed home — her own luxury condo — displays a similar mix of the expected and not. There are finely crafted comforts, fitting for a woman who has built her legacy largely on the brokering of major high-rise deals, plus personal touches like a pumpkin-orange Bentley and a smoking room in which no smoking is allowed. In Wong and Laquer, meet two Miamians who have left permanent, one-of-a-kind marks on the city.

NICK GARCIA



# ONE WITH NATURE

FOR HIS MOST AMBITIOUS PROJECT TO DATE, WORLD-RENOWNED  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT **FERNANDO WONG** RESHAPED A STRETCH  
OF SURFSIDE INTO A LUSH MEDLEY OF TROPICAL FLORA.

WORDS BY SUSANNAH NESMITH  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK GARCIA  
PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: RICARDO MESTRE  
HAIR AND GROOMING BY ANDREA ECHAVARRIA







Wong added 240 palm trees and 250 shade trees to the new Four Seasons property, as well as a 100-year-old banyan (pictured), and a nine-story kapok tree.

## WONG'S FIRST JOB IN THE UNITED STATES WAS DIGGING DITCHES ON A LANDSCAPING CREW. HE LEARNED ENGLISH BY WATCHING *SOUTH PARK*.

Fernando Wong, the award-winning landscape designer behind the new tropical oasis at the Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club, looked at 175 pictures of banyan trees before he found the right one for the club's courtyard.

The trunk of the sprawling 100-year-old tree had to be split into five sections so it could be trucked down from Hobe Sound. But no other tree would do.

"The structure of the branches fit the site," he said simply.

Wong prides himself in not having a signature style, instead letting each individual site inspire him.

"Always, the landscaping is the frame for the architecture," he said.

### FROM DIGGING TO DESIGNING

Wong came to landscape design accidentally. Though he studied architecture and interior design in his native Panama, until his early 20s, he had never really considered landscaping.

"My dad encouraged me very forcefully to be an athlete," he explained. "I was a swimmer and a pentathlete. From 19 to 24, I traveled a lot, all over the world, competing. But I knew I needed to become an adult and make a living."

A friend in Florida offered to sponsor him if he wanted to immigrate. The job: working on a landscaping crew.

"He was digging ditches," explained Wong's partner in business and life, Tim Johnson. "He taught himself English by watching *South Park*."



Johnson said the owner of the landscaping company saw Wong "doodling" and immediately took him off the crew and sent him to the office to start designing.

### SEEDS OF CHANGE

Similarly, Johnson never thought he'd be working in landscape design. The two met on Lincoln Road in 2002, when Johnson, a Wall Street veteran, was running his own public relations firm. Three years later, Wong opened his own design firm out of their spare bedroom, but it wasn't until the Recession hit in 2008 that Johnson joined the firm.

Today, Fernando Wong Outdoor Living Design has offices in Miami Beach, Palm Beach and the Hamptons and does work around the world.

The landscaping project at the new Four Seasons in Surfside is the firm's largest to date, and presented unique challenges. Wong had to frame two very distinct architectural styles, the graceful Mediterranean Revival club built in 1930 and the Richard Meier-designed glass towers of the new hotel and residences that wrap around it. Early designs had to be rearranged to allow unobstructed access for fire trucks.

When Wong first signed on to the project in 2012, the nine acres between the club and the Atlantic were an "arid desert, just sand," he said.

The property now boasts 240 new palms and 250 shade trees. The firm spent nearly \$1 million just transporting the banyan and 13 other specialty trees, including a nine-story kapok, a rare Moreton Bay fig and nine massive seagraves, each 20-feet wide.





Besides significant commercial projects, Wong also designs landscapes for private residences around the world. His concept for this home in Miami Beach took into account several large trees that were already part of the property.



## TRICKS OF THE TRADE

Landscaping trends and tips from Fernando Wong and Tim Johnson of Fernando Wong Outdoor Living Design.

### 1. WATCH THE WATER.

People today are more mindful of where irrigation water is coming from, and where rainwater will go. Some are opting to spend more for cisterns to collect rain for irrigation. They're also opting for permeable driveways and paths. Wong uses a lot of stepping stones with grass in between them instead of concrete pathways.

"That way, not all of the runoff from the roof runs into the street and causes floods," Wong explained.

### 2. FAKE GRASS IS COOL.

New synthetic sods are vastly improved over the old, bright-green, plastic stuff. They don't require the irrigation or chemical fertilizers and pesticides that can make real grass a bad choice environmentally. Newer products even incorporate a few brown blades, to keep it real.

"We were against it at first, but it's really very nice," Johnson said. "You really can't tell the difference. And it drains better, because with the gravel bed underneath it, you're essentially creating a French drain."

### 3. NATIVE IS OFTEN NICER.

High-end property owners are increasingly asking for natives in their landscapes, for environmental reasons and because they can thrive in ways exotic ornamentals just never will.

"We recommend them for their reliability," Johnson said. "And they'll need far less irrigation."

### 4. ACCESSORIZE THE YARD.

Many of Wong's clients are now asking for their landscape designs to include more than just plants, chairs and a barbecue. They want pizza ovens and outdoor televisions, entire outdoor rooms devoted to living and entertaining.

"Our clients travel a lot," Johnson said. "They want that resort experience in their backyards."



'I TEND TO DESIGN IN THREE DIMENSIONS. SOMETIMES THAT INCLUDES TREES THAT ARE ALREADY THERE.'



#### SOME TREES STAY

The firm moves a lot of big trees, but they're almost always saving trees that were slated for demolition, Johnson said. And sometimes, they're presented with spaces that already have stately trees worth designing around.

That was the case with a Miami Beach home with a sprawling oak in the backyard, its gnarled branches contrasting with the clean lines of the contemporary home and Wong's linear design. That design turned Florida's most common tree into a striking specimen in the middle of the garden.

"One of the things I tend to do is design in three dimensions and sometimes that includes large specimen trees that are already there," Wong said.

Wong likes working with intricate spaces. He was commissioned to design the landscaping for the 15,000-square-foot sculpture garden at the Institute of Contemporary Art, opening in December in the Design District. The project was complicated by the fact that the space has to accommodate events, and the landscaping can't draw attention away from the art.

"We wanted it to be a backdrop," he said. "My landscapes are very, very quiet." □

With the Four Seasons Surf Club project complete, Wong turns his attention to outdoor spaces he is designing for the Four Seasons Hotel and Residences in Fort Lauderdale and the Institute of Contemporary Art in Miami. Construction in Fort Lauderdale is expected to begin in November, and the new ICA opens in December.