



{ARCHITECT}

Ralph Choeff

Miami's maven of tropical-modern design finds peace in coastal living.



'Because of our climate, our views, you can literally live like this all year.'

Ralph Choeff is seated on a creamy, plush Minotti sofa inside a 10,500-square-foot, seven-bedroom, seven-bath spec home, known as Casa Ischia, that he designed on Miami Beach's Hibiscus Island. He wears a bespoke navy Tom James suit with an open white-collared dress shirt and speaks in that self-assured, clipped manner characteristic of a Brooklyn native.

"What I want to do is, I want to open all of this up for you because — I'll blow your mind," he said, springing to his feet. He darts toward a wall of pocketing sliding-glass doors that run along the home's southern perimeter, revealing panoramic views of Biscayne Bay and downtown Miami's skyline.

"You cannot imagine, sitting here, what this space transforms into,"

he said, sliding each of the living room's eight glass panels into one another, completely removing the barrier between outside and in. The home's ipe wood floors give way to the limestone pool deck. The glittering blue mosaic, wet-edge infinity pool does just what its name suggests, flowing seamlessly into the bay.

PART OF ARCHITECTURE

It's about an hour before sunset. Miami's blue skies are stitched in a soft muslin of clouds casting a hazy, pre-twilight glow onto the bay. This view was mesmerizing before opening the doors. Now, there's a palpable peaceful feeling of floating with the current and the bay breeze. "You become part of the architecture of Miami," Choeff said. "You really have to experience it to understand it."

This is what Miami's tropical modern architecture is all about.

Choeff, 61, principal at Choeff Levy Fischman Architecture + Design, has spent the past three decades perfecting the style for discerning and high-profile clients, including Alex Rodriguez and his Coral Gables home. The style combines the clean lines and sharp angles of mid-century modern architecture with tropical wood, stone and stucco indigenous to Miami.

"It's very conducive to South Florida living because of our surroundings," Choeff said. "Our climate, our views — you can literally live like this all year."

LIVING WITH WATER

Choeff's high-end clientele clamors for tropical modern homes with outdoor summer kitchens, oversized spa-like bathrooms that open to the outside, multiple lounging areas, mini master suites for guests,

custom closets and smart technology that allows them to control everything from home security and lighting to entertainment from a central wireless device.

When asked about the future of Miami's architecture and design, Choeff's tune switches from aesthetics to pragmatism:

"If I see a future in architecture, it's how to deal with climate change, global warming and sea-level rise," he said. "The architects have got to be on the forefront of this solution, along with the scientists. How will the homes be built higher? What ideas do architects have for the water flowing through the house that's going to come in? Living higher, living differently. It's not just putting barriers up to stop the water. It's how to live with the water, as well."

WORDS BY SHAYNE BENOWITZ / PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICK GARCIA