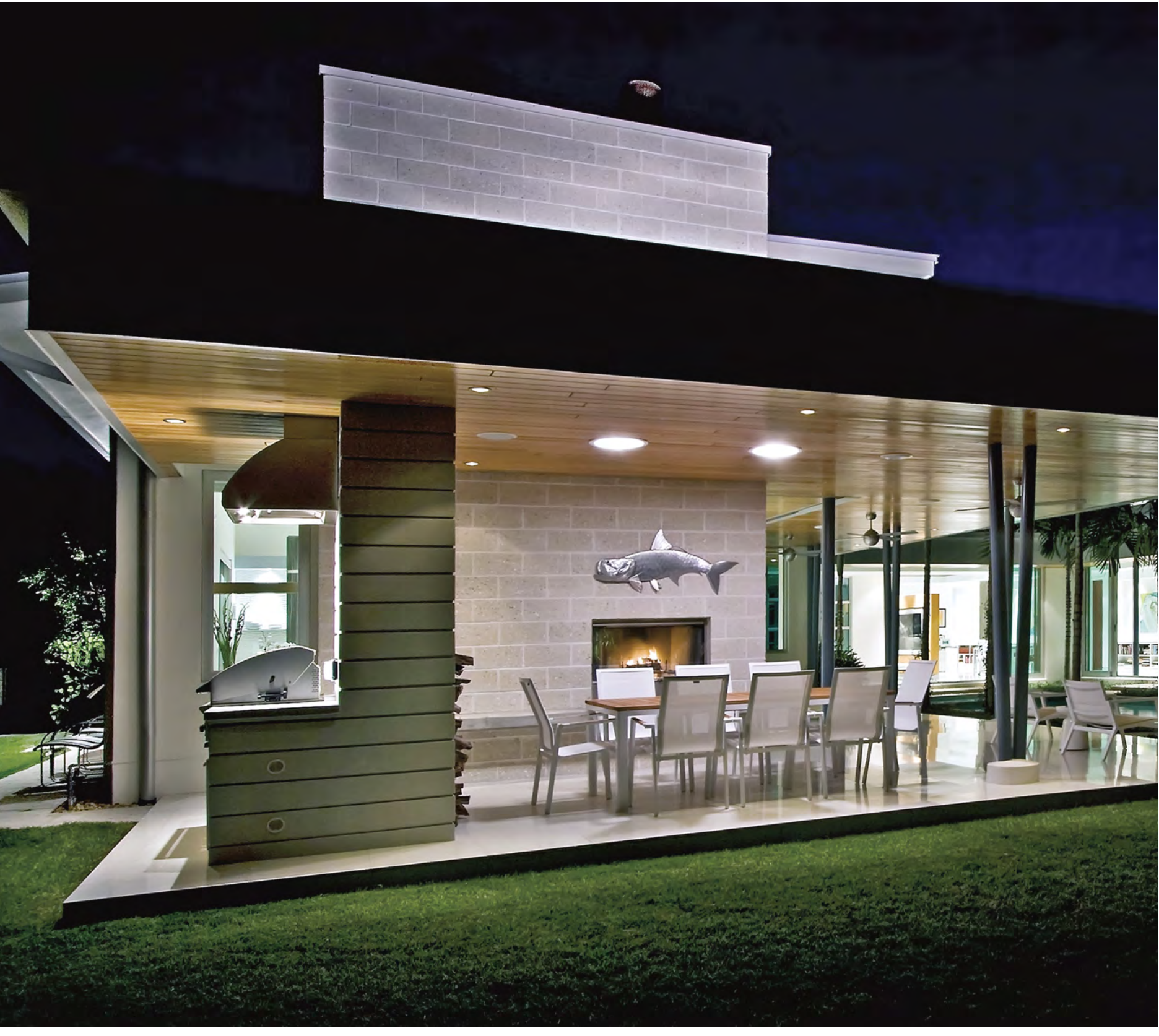


South Florida's sudden downpours are never a problem in the Balfoort's outdoor rooms. Swimming, dining or just lounging in the sun, the home's open court is the center of activity.

Inside Out:

An architect and builder collaborate, building a residence that represents true Florida living.

Text John O'Connor **Photos** Myro Rosky

Ask anyone from outside of Florida what images living in this state might conjure up and you might hear words like balmy, breezy and relaxed. For Todd and Michelle Balfoort, who act as builder-and-architect team on many projects, these words ring true. They believe in a true Florida lifestyle, and that is reflected in their own house. This stunning residence keeps its ecological footprint small, while affording them and their three boys indoor-outdoor living on a grand scale. Their own home acts, inadvertently, as a showcase for their beliefs on what life in the tropics in 2012 can look like. We had a chance to speak with Michelle about their collaboration on this project.

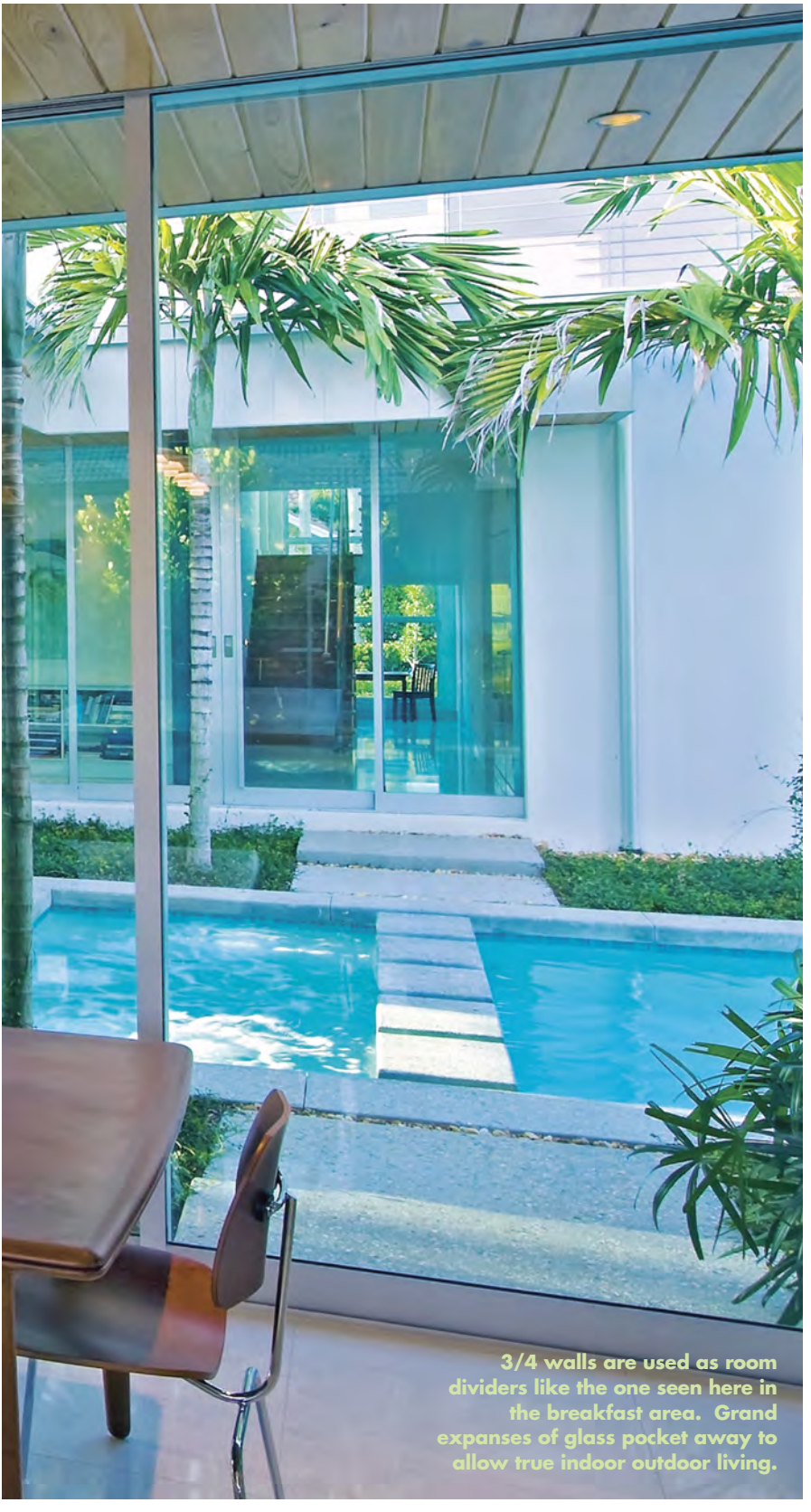
Tropic *You both have degrees in architecture and Todd has a masters in building construction as well. In your collaboration on this project did Todd lean towards construction and you towards aspects of design?*

Michelle Balfoort Yes, because those are our defined roles. But as the project progressed, Todd was able to run with ideas I was discussing and take the detailing to the next level or, sometimes, I would try and push a construction detail to be more in keeping with the overall concept.

You each have your own firms to deal with. How difficult is it to combine talents on a residence, which, in the end was to be your own?

Todd has done a lot of projects with other architects and I've worked with other builders, but we most enjoy our collaborations together. We've been married for 15 years, were educated together and so on. I would say we definitely have the same design intuition, which, inherently, falls over into construction.

So, for example, in this project, I did most of the design in sketch and schematic 3d modeling while Todd worked out the house in an actual model. We spent a relatively small amount of time discussing program and the remainder of the design de-



3/4 walls are used as room dividers like the one seen here in the breakfast area. Grand expanses of glass pocket away to allow true indoor outdoor living.

velopment flowed pretty easily as we worked out constructability issues. We think we both have compatible backgrounds to combine our talents. He often raises constructability concerns at the document phase, and I am often sketching details on site during construction.

Everyone is conscious of energy costs and so forth these days, but you guys went the "extra mile" so to speak, opting to try for LEED certification, which I hear you achieved. What made you go that route?

Of course, having 3 little boys, we are as concerned about the environment and the future as most parents. We wanted our impact on the environment to be as thoughtful and "thought out" as our attention to the space and details. In the end, the house did achieve LEED certification.

What are the benefits of LEED in this particular house?

We chose reflective, standing-seam metal roofing, high SEER air conditioning units, green Solex glass and "air tight" construction (for when mechanical cooling is an absolute necessity.) These all yield lower energy costs. We also chose drought tolerant, native plantings that, when coupled with efficient irrigation gave us a 58% reduction on water usage. Inside the house, low-flow toilets, high efficiency appliances, and low volume bathroom fixtures helped reduce water consumption as well. All of the flooring is either of recycled material, like the terrazzo, or made from environ-

"We chose reflective, standing-seam metal roofing, high SEER air conditioning units, green Solex glass and "air tight" construction... These all yield lower energy costs."

mentally preferable materials, cutting down on waste – and wasted energy.

There's a common misconception that more glass used in a residential design has to equal more energy spent cooling a home here in South Florida. Is this fact or myth?

While it's certainly true that added glazing could generate heat gain, that's not the case in this house. We paid attention to the home's site orientation and used expansive overhangs to cut the sun. The use of "eyebrows" cuts down the time the glass is exposed to direct sunlight. That shading greatly improves its efficiency.

Tell us about the plan of the house itself. What we found interesting is that you've created a sequestered, 3-sided courtyard that becomes an indoor-outdoor room with swimming pool, bridge, and hot tub, leaving enough room for outside dining or lounging.
So many architects fail to explore that court house typology down here anymore, even though it was such a huge part of local design in the 1910s and 20s and again in the 50s.

The form of the house was really derived from its relationship to the site and the interior functions we needed as a family. Even though it's a U-shaped design, the

pool and exterior space 'complete' the center of the house and the pool carries through and is expressed in a reflecting pond on the other side of the entry.

How would you describe the home's overall style?

We were both influenced by the Mid-Century Modern vernacular of Richard Neutra and the California developer Joseph Eichler. Eichler was responsible for building "modern architecture for the masses" by hiring students of Wright and other Mid-Century Modern masters. Their vocabulary of cantilevers, floor-to-

"People think the South Florida heat is unbearable in summer. Of course it is, if you have no outdoor spaces to capture the southeast breezes, no overhangs to deflect the sun..."

ceiling glass, expressed structure, and "machine" produced finishes all spoke to us. But in reality, we didn't set out to build a house that was a categorized "style". We both appreciate the mid-century masters and just wanted to successfully combine their principles with our tropical climate & lifestyle. Our house was designed and built in a style we'd call "tropical modern"… a clean vernacular of wall, glass, column, and mass while being responsive to the environment.

Wherever possible, you seem to have used operable windows… even in the clerestory of the kitchen and living room. We also noticed you've employed a unique sliding door system on some of the exteriors, allowing the doors to completely disappear.

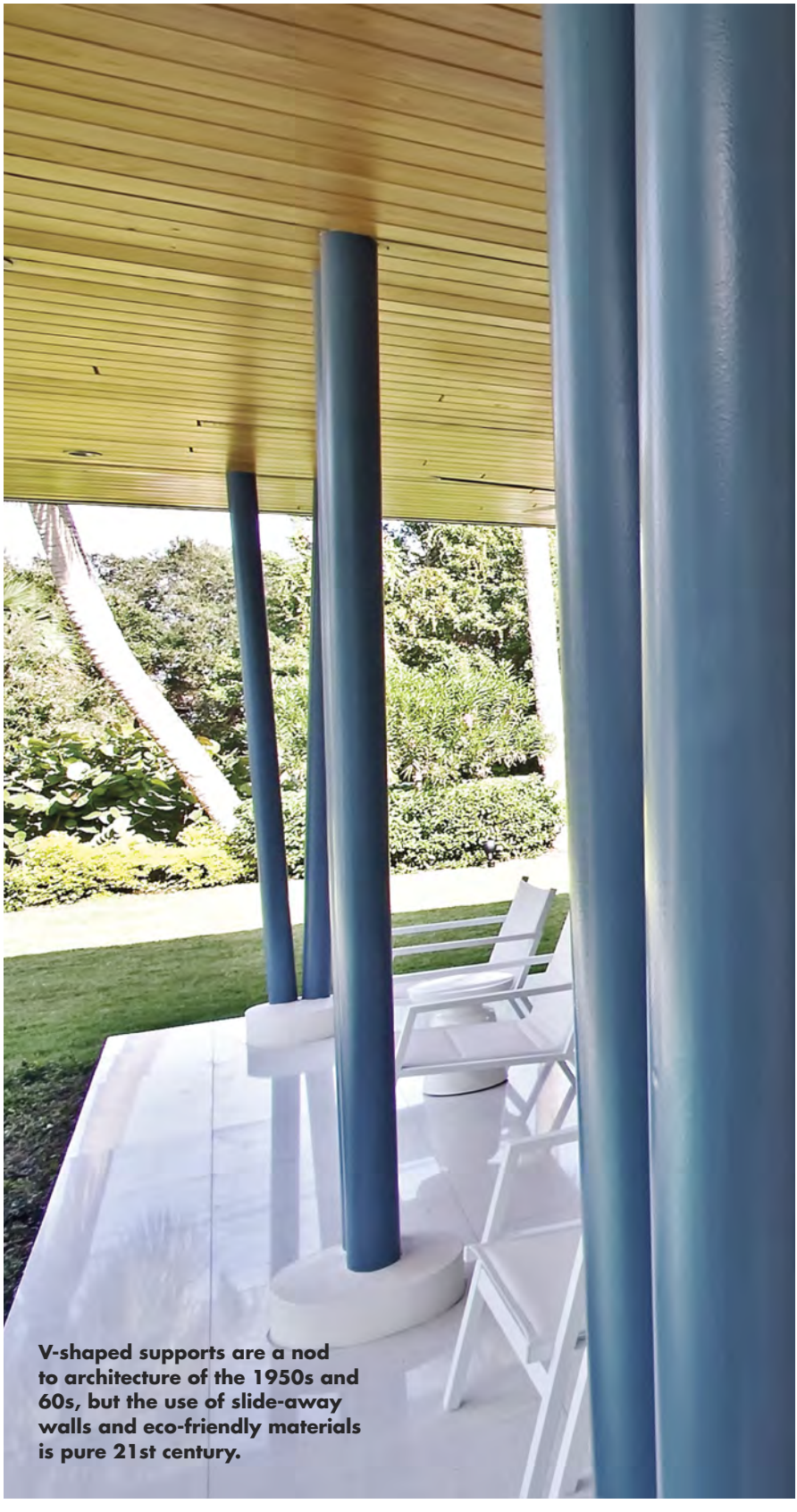
Well, we were both born and raised in Florida, and understand the climate. People think the South Florida heat is unbearable in summer. Of course it is, if you have no outdoor spaces to capture the prevailing southeast breezes, no overhangs to deflect the sun, and a parking lot of impermeable and reflective surfaces around your house.

Sit on Fort Lauderdale Beach under an umbrella (with all open sides), and a nice southeast breeze… then you'll understand how this house works. Next, try sitting on the beach right behind the AIA wall (no breeze), and give yourself no umbrella…now you'll understand how most other houses in South Florida work.

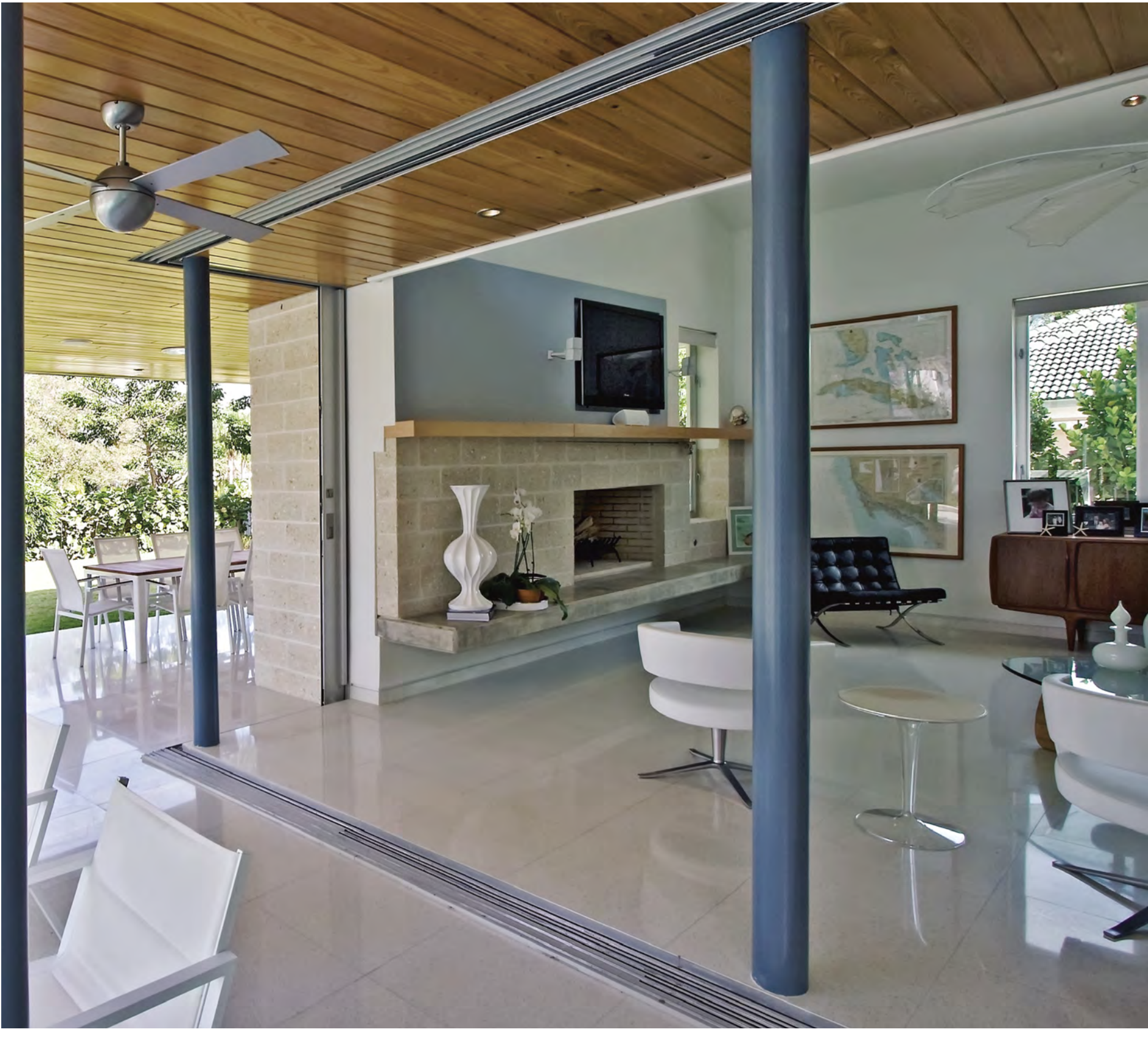
Early in my design education I played with the concept that the internal space of a structure does not need to be solely defined by the exterior walls; that design can extend beyond the interior to capture and define space in the landscape as well.

But how does that "inside out" living work with a family?

When we started to talk about the possibility of this house, Todd & I immediately focused on how we live with a young family. We thought the exterior space



V-shaped supports are a nod to architecture of the 1950s and 60s, but the use of slide-away walls and eco-friendly materials is pure 21st century.



should be equally as important and vibrant as the interior. That became our primary focus. If you can't grasp the importance of "exterior space", we'll loan you our three boys…you'll quickly understand the concept of "expansion".

Visually speaking, floor-to-ceiling sliding glass walls plus floor and ceiling surfaces that run continuously from inside to out allow space to flow continuously as well, bringing the outside in.

Physically, the U-shaped floor plan funnels the breezes off the river, and clerestory windows help to draw warm air up and out of the house. The overall effect is a house that is open, airy, and inviting.

We noticed that some of the interior of this house is finely detailed: polished terrazzo tile floors, exotic woods on the kitchen cabinets… but this is juxtaposed with béton brut…or raw concrete. Was that contrast a goal here?

The U-shaped floor plan funnels the breezes off the river… clerestory windows help to draw warm air up and out. The effect is a house that is airy and inviting.

Absolutely. One of the basic tenets of Modernist architecture is the expression of structure, and we tried to make material finish selections using this philosophy. We have always loved the use of exposed concrete but didn't want it to feel too industrial. We used it here next to the polished terrazzo to soften the effect and play the two opposing finishes against one another.

Instead of an asphalt driveway, which is so common here, you have a parking "pad" made of separated squares. Why did you do that? Was it just a design element, or is there more to it?

All of the exterior paved surfaces are made of "Tabby finish" concrete. The joints of grass provide a clean, modern aesthetic, increase percolation of rainwater back to the aquifer, and decrease run-off onto adjacent property and streets. The Tabby finish concrete is a tropical nod to the old Tabby concrete of the South in which crushed seashells were actually used as aggregate.

What was your favorite part of the experience in designing and building this home?

To see the sketches and ideas start to form and come out of the ground is wonderful. We have had an outpouring of excitement from our neighbors. We stayed within budget, on time, and got a fantastic house in the end. The only argument we had was in picking out the couch!

I wish clients understood how much fun the whole process can be. Yes, fun! I'm sure some of your readers will fall over when they read that!

The home's sitting room has canvases by both Evelyn and Frederic displayed among furnishings and sculpture acquired by the couple over the years.