# *Max Strang Architecture*

UNIQUE HOMES, BEAUTIFULLY EXECUTED THROUGH SUSTAINABLE TECHNOLOGY

*by Jennifer Kirkland*

Architect Max Strang tells the story of how his own house defined his early career. Movie director Michael Mann was scouting locations in Coconut Grove, Florida, for his 2006 cop drama *Miami Vice* when he suddenly found himself facing a house that looked like something out of the jungles of Bali. Primordial palm trees surrounded an Oolitic limestone façade shaded by an enormous upper terrace that was accented by exposed, rust-finished steel beams. "That's the drug lord's house," Mann said, and cast it in his movie.

The house that Strang designed and completed in 2005 has become something of a landmark. It's been on HGTV three separate times, and it was in the *Burn Notice* TV series, also as a villain's house.

Strang's small, highly creative firm, Max Strang Architecture, has been based in Miami since 1998, but in the last few years, Strang has been focusing more on custom single-family homes notable for their innovative combination of sustainability and modernism, winning AIA Florida and AIA Miami Awards in the process.

"We design unique homes that are beautifully executed, and that's what keeps delivering us acclaim and repeat business," Strang says. "We focus on collaborating with the client to come up with something that is unique for them." Strang understands the importance of building relationships with his clients. He grew up in a modern, mid-century house in Winter Haven, Florida, and the architect, Gene Leedy, was a close family friend who influenced Strang's style. "That was my early indoctrination into classic modernism," he says, and it led him to study architecture at the University of Florida and Columbia University.

Strang relocated to Miami to launch his firm in 1998. "I thought Miami offered a big-city feel, but it was also near to the place where I grew up, and I wanted to have a lot of family close by," he says. At first, the firm would take any project with

## *LEED-Certified Winterhaven House*

This Central-Florida lakefront residence is anticipated to achieve a LEED-Silver rating upon completion. The home features many state-of-the-art sustainable feature,s and the design aesthetic reflects the owners' modernist sensibilities.

- Passive design features include large overhangs, cross ventilation, a windowless south side, and concrete flooring.
- Active design features include photovoltaic solar cells (expected to provide up to 50% of energy needs), geothermal AC, Icynene spray-foam insulation, Low-e glass, and recycled materials and finishes.
- Resysta, a new kind of siding made from 100% wood-free hybrid material manufactured in Germany, was used in the home. According to Max Strang, this is the largest residential application to date of this eco-friendly product.

## *Stein Residence*

The Stein Residence in Coconut Grove, FL, was designed to accommodate the owner's art collection. Limestone flooring and white walls bring a crisp, minimal look to the home. The custom kitchen, fabricated by Eggersmann (**eggersmannusa.com**), evokes the feeling of a modern treehouse. The red coconut chair is by George Nelson (**georgeneslon.org**),

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MAX STRANG, OWNER

the slightest creative merit. "We even did some explorative modern designs for Home Depot and BP," Strang says. But he always knew he wanted to concentrate on high-end custom homes, and ever since his own house appeared on the silver screen, that plan has been unfolding nicely.

Strang's collaborative approach can be seen in the Stein Residence, also in Coconut Grove. Many of the interior-design details of this minimalist, modern glass house are inspired by the owner's art and photography collection. "We put a lot of thought into designing rooms and light and space around his collection," Strang says.

The Stein Residence is a striking contrast to Strang's house. Where the large upper terrace of the Strang house brings the inside out, every room of the Stein Residence has floor-to-ceiling glass to bring the outside in. "It's a very modern glass treehouse," Strang says. Stein's gray and white palette also contrasts the warmer earth-toned palette of the Strang house, where sustainable, local limestone blends with the rust-painted steel and wood.

Florida is a land of many environments, and Strang is excited to bring sustainable technology to his original hometown, currently completing the first LEED-certified home in Winter Haven. He describes the design as strikingly modern and sustainable. "We push sustainable," Strang says. "I don't think any reputable architect today is designing without sustainability in mind. It's great when the client is on the same page as us; but if not, we try to bring them to the same page." Strang hopes all his future projects will be LEED certified, and currently all of the firm's designers are either LEED APs or LEED GAs.

While the recession meant cutting back, Strang has been seeing some great new projects, including a waterfront house in Surfside, Florida, and three other new homes about to break ground. Strang would like to move into residential development, and design entire communities. "I want to provide a product, not just a professional service," he says. In the meantime, he just has to figure out a way to tell his kids that they live in a drug lord's house. ■

A MESSAGE FROM GREENBROOK POOLS
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