organic oasis

SCULPTURAL SEATING FIT FOR A TROPICAL PARADISE + **COCONUT GROVE**

Architect Max Strang (above left) uses indigenous materials such as oolite, and furniture designer Bannavis Andrew Sribyatta forms recycled plastic to look like natural vines.

If art were to function as furniture, then the handcrafted chairs by Bannavis Andrew Sribyatta, founder of Miami's Project Import Export (P.I.E.), meet the criteria hands down. Place these "relaxing chairs" — aptly described by Sribyatta — on the outdoor patio of a Coconut Grove "rock house" renovated by local architect Max Strang, and it's absolutely kismet.

Built in the early 1940s, the home today is a bit jungle-esque in ambience, which is one of the reasons why Sribyatta's chairs, which incorporate sustainable rattan, water hyacinth, vines or extruded recycled plastic (designed to look like natural vines), fit in so well here.

Sribyatta's belief in sustainability led him to use extruded recyclable polyethylene — a fancy term for a material that's extremely durable, come rain or shine. The designer manipulates the noodle-like vines by hand, weaving them into one design statement after another over a rattan framework. While a typical chair seat is 18 inches high, these are lower, about 12 to 15 inches. "You're a lot closer to the ground," he says, "so you can utilize the chair in a more relaxed state. People can stretch their legs out instead of having to fold them or bend their knees."

The Bangkok-born Sribyatta, also an architect, has a creative knack for coming up with the unexpected, hence his eco-friendly, unorthodox approach to furniture design. His Sushi Daybed, Pearl and Spoon Lounge pop up at this rock house as poolside places to recline. The shape of the human body, food and flowers are all his muses when he designs furniture, giving outdoor spaces like these an esoteric yet inviting feel. "Florida is a relaxing place, so I design relaxing chairs," he smiles. Comfy cushions are always a given.

One of the distinctive aspects of the home itself is its use of the indigenous material known as oolite. "If you dig six inches here, you hit oolite," says Strang. "It's the bedrock of Miami; you see it everywhere in Coconut Grove."

Strang surrounded the reflecting pool, a rectangular plunge pool and a hidden step-down grotto with keystone, which is a type of coral rock, for a smoother counterpoint to the rough-hewn oolite. He also integrated mondo grass as a pathway between the pavers and poured concrete columns stained in a burnt-orange, saddle-like hue with Ipe wood louvers for a cozy touch of warmth. "It's a raw yet refined feel," he says.

Sribyatta's designs can be found at Avant Gallery in the Miami Design District. *projectimportexport.com; strangarchitects.com; avantgallery.com* — SUSAN FRIEDMAN