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Blueprint directory

The Outdoor Issue:

Frozen Retreat Inside Sweden's Ice Hotel **Art in the Garden** Chihuly and friends at Fairchild **Nightlife Reserve** Architect Cal Fortis reinvents the Cameo **Yin Yang** Dedon's new seating system is the perfect poolside complement

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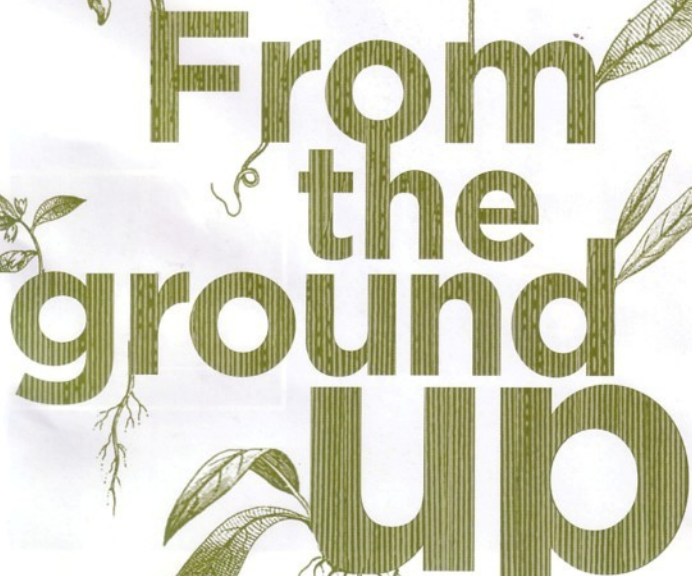
ART + DESIGN + ARCHITECTURE

Vol. 2

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT RAYMOND JUNGLES
DESIGNS GARDENS THAT WILL GRAB YOU.

WILD STYLE

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From the ground up

Renowned Miami
landscape architect
Raymond Jungles
doesn't mind getting
his hands dirty.



By Gaspar González
Photo by Colby Katz

Raymond Jungles's office is right where one might expect to find it. No, not in the middle of the Everglades, but maybe the next best place: on the banks of the Miami River, just west of downtown. The landscape architect's second-floor loft-style space commands a gorgeous view of Miami's least appreciated natural resource. "Look, that's a big one!" he exclaims, jumping up from a chair he dragged downstairs for this interview. "Did you see that manatee?"

Aside from its proximity to aquatic wildlife, the office setting is fitting for another reason—the Miami River (despite developers' dreams) remains a blue-collar setting, a place where, first and foremost, people get their hands dirty. That suits Jungles—who favors Levi's over the designer denim they peddle at the tonier emporiums around town—just fine. As a kid, he worked his way through high school and college. After college, he turned down a plum job offer so he could keep working on his own terms. It's all paid off: In a 25-year career, he's already been part of a landmark exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, been recruited to design gardens for some of Miami's most prominent residents (including Terry Riley), and most recently, been tapped to redesign one end of Lincoln Road as "an urban glade."

After the excitement of the manatee sighting (and despite a schedule that keeps him constantly on the go), Jungles managed to stay in his seat long enough to chat with us about his days in Gainesville, his longtime friendship with his mentor, Brazilian landscape architect Roberto Burle Marx, and what makes his gardens different. And, of course, we had to ask him about his name.





Island Modern...
Key West

I understand you grew up in Ohio. Where in Ohio? Did your parents influence your love of nature in any way? I was actually born in Nebraska, in Omaha. My mother and father divorced when I was five, and I moved to Southern California with my mother. We lived in Long Beach when my mother remarried. [My stepfather] was a German civil engineer who had lived in the Black Forest; he was a real nature lover. We camped in Baha [and] in Sequoia [National Park]... we'd sail out to Catalina. So, from a very young age, I was surrounded by nature. I didn't live in Ohio [until later].

How did you end up at the University of Florida? When I was a senior in high school, I rode a motorcycle down to [Miami] for spring break. I had friends here who were a year ahead of me [in school]. The beaches, the sun, the bikinis—all that stuff reminded me of Southern California, so my friends said, "Why don't you come down?" So I did [in 1974]. I got a job as a landscape laborer, so I really know this business from the ground up.

I worked long, hard hours. But I was lucky; I knew how to swim, so I then got a job as a lifeguard at Haulover Beach. The great thing about the lifeguard job was that, if you didn't take sick days, they'd pay you [for those days], so I was able to stash money away. I [eventually] got my A.A. at Miami-Dade College, and from there went to Gainesville. It wasn't easy to get in—I was not the best student.

What happened once you got to Gainesville? When I got to UF, I couldn't go right into the landscape architecture program. I needed prerequisites. I was not a shoe-in to get into the program. It was more, like, "If you get the grades, we'll let you in." I had a certain talent for graphic design, but I wasn't really a designer. I was a lifeguard. [Laughs.] But I did really well in my design classes and the professors really wanted me to [pursue the architecture track]. Then one day, someone said, "Check out this book." It was *The Tropical Gardens of Roberto Burle Marx* [by Pietro M. Bard]. As soon as I saw that book, I said, "This is what I want to do with my life."



I know you credit Burle Marx not only for inspiring you to become a landscape architect, but for being a huge influence on your work. Tell us about your relationship with him. In 1979, Roberto came and lectured at UF. I had secured an internship in Caracas, Venezuela [for that summer], so I said, "I'm going to be in South America. Can I come to your office in Rio?" And he said sure. I had heard he was amenable to having people come by. But, then, you know, things come up, and I never went.

After I graduated in 1981, an article came out about Roberto celebrating his 70th birthday. He was working on the [redevelopment of] Bayfront Park [in downtown Miami] at the time. So I started writing him letters. Lester Pancoast [the prominent Miami architect] and he were very good friends. Lester called me one night and said, "Hey, Roberto's in town. Do you want to take him out to dinner?"

What I didn't know when I met him was that Roberto was an industry—he had all these employees. And he had to take presents back [to Brazil] for all of them. I traveled back with him and helped him smuggle all these presents through customs. [Laughs.] Outside the airport, he said, "You come with me now!" I became part of his entourage, and I just had this window onto everything that was being done in Brazil. Every year, until Roberto's death [in 1994], I'd go down to

Brazil for his birthday, and we'd go on plant-collecting excursions.

What was your first professional experience after college? I've never worked in a landscape architecture office. I had an internship one summer [when I was in college], but I didn't want to be inside, standing in front of a drafting board. I wanted to be outside, on-site. There used to be a philanthropist [in Miami] named Martin Fine. He sponsored my thesis project [at UF]. I took the whole Bayfront Park project as

[the subject]. I got to study [Isamu] Noguchi's plans, Roberto's plans. It was published in the *Herald* and other publications. One headline was, "Student's Park Plan Earns Raves." So [Miami architect] Bill O'Leary said, "You wanna work for me?" I told him no. Then he said, "What are you gonna do? Plant hibiscus hedges?"

I was doing everything on my own at the time—driving the truck, digging the holes. One of my first projects was to design and install a million-dollar garden. I had no business experience, but I was fortunate enough to get a couple of other projects that were of a fairly decent scale. Tony Burns, the CEO of Ryder—I designed his garden and swimming pool. I didn't want to just do the plants. [At the time] the business was called Jungles' Complete Landscape Service. I found an old business card just the other day. [Laughs.]

You're known for incorporating numerous water elements—pools, fountains, waterfalls—into your designs. Is that a geographic influence, based on the fact that so much of your work is in Florida and the Caribbean, or is there another reason for it? Well, water has long been one of the building blocks of gardens. When I was in high school, I saw a book that [Mexican landscape architect] Luis Barragán had done. One of the things he said was, "Water is the heart and



soul of the garden." I'm also a frustrated sculptor. What I do with water and space is sculpt. [Initially] people said, "It's too expensive, too much maintenance." I always had to fight keep the water in.

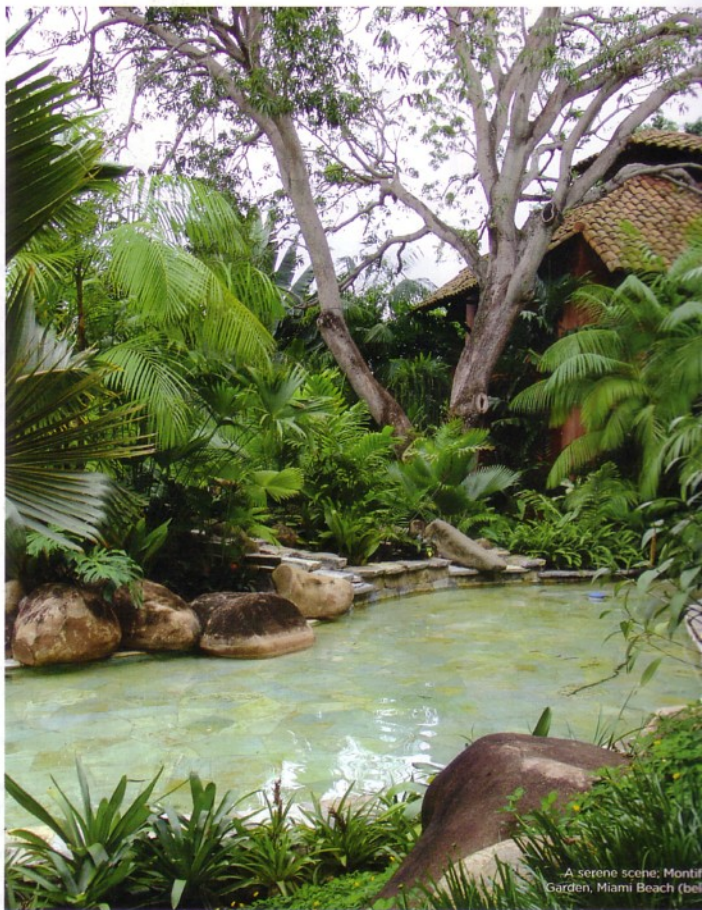
How do you approach the integration of architectural components like sculptural walls into the natural environment? Most of the people who work for me are architects. Hardscape and the natural [landscape] are inseparable. Design is about space. How do you make something that is nothing into something that can be shaped, felt? The hardscape element is what really helps define the space. It's the bones of the garden. Initially, that's what I spend most of my time thinking about. If I'm successful, the project will look like it's always been there. And it'll look like *one* project—you won't be able to say the architecture begins there and the garden begins here.

Your work has been celebrated as a departure from traditional landscape architecture.

What tendencies would you say your work is a response to or a reaction against? One thing I never want to do is design from a formula. Every job has its own essence. Of course, when I design something, it's going to be more modern; the hardscape, more minimalist. It's not enough that it look pretty, although beauty is central to everything. I want to create a habitat, design with sustainability in mind, celebrate indigenous plant life. It makes my gardens more of a contribution back to the planet. To me, landscape architecture is about the stewardship of the land. I try to design things that are timeless, that I'll like 20 years from now.

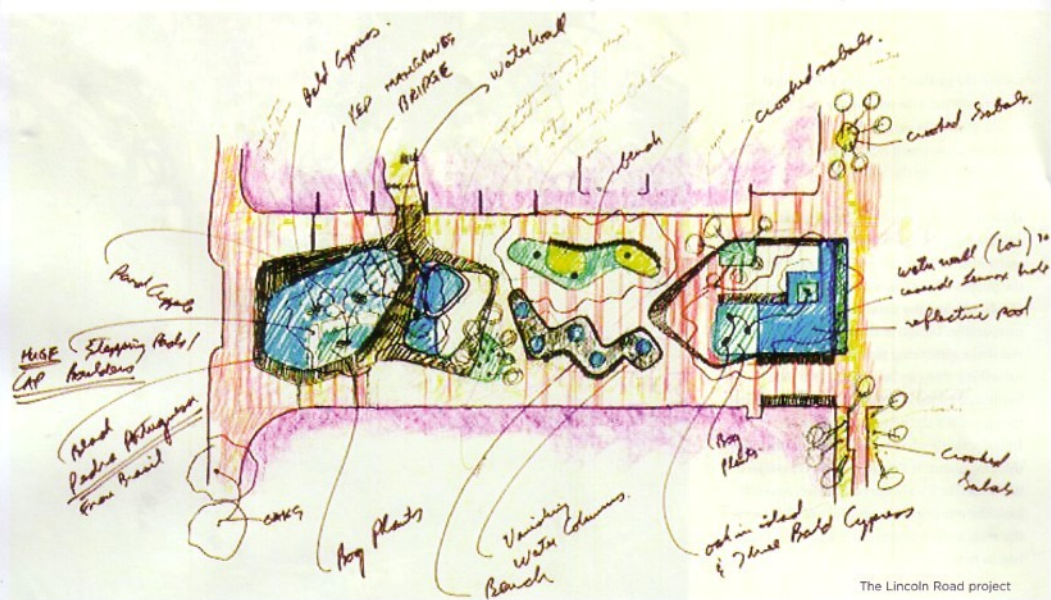
You designed the landscape for Miami Art Museum director Terry Riley's home. Are there any special challenges that come with designing for someone whose aesthetic sensibilities are as strong as your own?

There are people who have a very developed aesthetic sense that is different from mine, and those are the projects I turn down. Terry and I had a good rapport. He wanted the garden to look natural. I loved the architecture [of the house]—I could have moved in. We were in synch.



A serene scene: Montif Garden, Miami Beach (below)





The Lincoln Road project

Given your relationship with Riley, do you think there's any chance you'll design a garden for the new Miami Art Museum? That would be a dream for me. I love Herzog & de Meuron [the architecture firm]. I love Terry Riley. And that was my thesis project—the Bayfront Park area.

You've already done a number of high-profile public commissions, including a bromeliad sculpture for the Museum of Modern Art in 1991. MOMA was one of the highlights of my life. It was Roberto Burle Marx's exhibit and he's known for these columns covered with bromeliads or orchids and the museum staff needed someone to do that. I think it might have been the first time they did live plants at MOMA. It was a real honor to be able to do that.

Do you approach private and public spaces differently? Not really. People who really love and understand plants—those are my clients. Botanical interest is something that I bring to my gardens that

maybe other landscape architects don't. I don't do "landscapes." I do gardens. There's a big difference. A garden is an interstitial space between the architecture. Whether you do that for a crowd of people or for just one, it's the same thing: You want to get down to creating intimate space. I've [done commissions] at Fairchild Tropical Garden, and at the Naples Botanic Garden—I'm doing the Brazilian garden there. I want to work on more [public] spaces, gardens that more people can appreciate.

Speaking of which, you were recently selected to design a \$6 million streetscape that will once again close the western end of Lincoln Road to traffic. What do you have in mind? It's going to be in the spirit of Morris Lapidus [who redesigned Lincoln Road as a pedestrian mall in 1960], but on a different scale. Now you're going to have this iconic sculpted retail space/parking garage that Herzog & de Meuron are doing. We're keeping some big, open areas. One of the [Miami Beach officials] calls it "an urban

glade." We'll have large water gardens, shade trees, live oaks, palm trees. We're going to make it look like this [naturally] existing space.

I know preservation is important to you. I don't think enough can be said about how lucky we are. Think of the natural environment we have at our disposal. If you're going to landscape, why not use at least 50 percent indigenous materials, so that birds and other life forms at least have a fighting chance of surviving?

OK, last question...My name, right?

How'd you know? It's usually the first question or the last. *The Washington Post* does an annual thing where they feature people whose names tell you what they do, and one year they featured me. It might have been a drawback when I was a kid and it was, like, I was "Tarzan," or whatever. But for my profession, it's a great name. It sticks in people's heads. I don't think I'm brilliant enough to have come up with that on my own. ♦