

**TROPIC OF
JUNGLES**



**BOLDNESS AND
PROFUSION,
WITH BURLÉ
MARX IN MIND.**

BY BILL MARKEL, HONDIARY ASLA

GOLDEN ROCK PLANTATION DNS, SEVIS

ABOVE
Bronzy, strap-leaved
Aechmea blanchetiana
and shield-shaped
Philodendron magnificum
front a historic well and
recirculating fountain.

During last fall's ASLA conference in Phoenix, Raymond Jungles, FASLA, of Florida and Steve Martino, FASLA, of Arizona, mutual admirers and both as regionally charismatic as they come, met for dinner in a Martino neighborhood hangout whose name in Mexican slang means "white dude." Jungles ordered a local concoction, something like a prickly pear margarita. Of course he would. He wouldn't be drinking a chardonnay there any more than he'd plant a saguaro in one of his Key West gardens.

"A garden in Florida should not look like a garden in Hawaii, or Bali, or Fiji," says Jungles, who is known for designs that is bold and plant rich verging on chaotic (his word). And, he adds, "I don't like sterile gardens." And "We're not doing any hats with orchids." His home base is south Florida, but his work on houses, resorts, and botanical gardens has taken him around the world's tropical and subtropical belt, including the Caribbean, Costa Rica, Panama, Mexico, and China.

Jungles, who was born in Nebraska and spent his early childhood in Southern California, began wending his way toward tropical plants early on. He worked in a nursery while in high school in Columbus, Ohio, where he learned about plants and such things as how to ball and bur-lap. After moving to Florida at 18, he worked in landscaping and says he found landscape architecture by accident: "It was the only profession related to what I had been working at." He majored in landscape architecture

**FROM TRIPS
TO BRAZIL,
JUNGLES
BROUGHT
BACK PLANTS
TO FLORIDA,
"ALWAYS
LEGALLY."**



at the University of Florida, where he first discovered the work of Roberto Burle Marx.

"The freedom, the boldness, the clarity of it changed my life," Jungles says. In 1979, when Burle Marx was speaking on campus, Jungles—never shy—walked up to him and asked if he could visit him in Brazil. He went for the first time in 1981 and kept visiting and shadowing the master yearly until his death in 1994.

Burle Marx, celebrated for his modernist landscapes, paintings, and collaborations with influential architects such as Oscar Niemeyer, was also a self-taught botanist and planterman of the highest order, with encyclopedic knowledge of tropicals and 3,500 plants he had collected himself. Jungles joined Burle Marx on collecting trips and brought back plants to Florida. "Always legally," he says. Many of those plants became staples of Jungles's own palette and

the Florida landscape industry. A philodendron discovered in Burle Marx's garden, simply and appropriately named 'Burle Marx,' is now widely used along Florida freeways. Jungles brought back from Brazil a tall, wild-looking bromeliad with a pinkish bloom and gave it to Bulle Bromeliads, which developed it and named it *Portia 'Jungles'*.

Although Burle Marx was known for making bold patterns with masses of plants, Jungles points out that he didn't just see plants as colors or decorator objects. "Burle Marx used plants theatrically," to create high contrast in texture and color. He was scientific about their use and placement and introduced the concept of plant communities into parks.

But Florida is not Brazil. Without Brazil's bold and varied topography of cliffs, jungle, and rivers, Jungles says he has relied more on Florida's abundance of water and blue sky, as

well as bold paving, walls, murals, and, of course, plants, to make a distinctively Florida garden. Jungles says he has several imperatives in his planting designs: He plants in masses but makes room for treasured specimens. He keeps hard-scape simple and sculptural to offset plant colors and textures. He tries to create habitat for wildlife. He anticipates minimal maintenance (and quotes Burle Marx's saying that "in the tropics, garden maintenance is what you take out"). On a related note, he wants to let plants be what they are, to have them look sensational without a lot of pruning or training.

"I know that it's been said that a well-designed garden has only five plants," Jungles says. "I'm not designing Japanese moss gardens, as much as I admire them. If one of my landscapes is a little chaotic, I'm okay with that." (A closer look at projects begins on page 62.)

ABOVE

Travertine panels weed their way among *Cyperus involucratus* and water lilies.

FAVORITES FROM NEAR AND FAR

The south Florida climate is benevolent but has challenges, among them erratic rainfall, strong winds, and salty air. Jungles loves Florida's "extravagant, very green, and diverse flora"—it has the third-largest indigenous plant diversity of any state, along with many more exotics that have naturalized. He often relies on natives for a deep green background, brightened by tropicals from around the world, or murals or other art. Some Jungles favorites:



ACACIA SEYAL (RED-TRUNK ACACIA): Small to medium-size tree with bright red trunk. Small yellow powder-puff flowers. "Great in an elevated planter where you can see the trunk up close and look up into lacy foliage."



ALCANTAREA ODOATA (BROMELIAD): Another giant Brazilian bromeliad. Looks like a grass; spiky leaves coated with silvery powder. Yellow bloom is four feet long. Takes some salt spray.

AECHMEA BLANCHETIANA (BROMELIAD):

Bromeliad from Brazil. Orange form was rare, but now common. Blooms last for months. Use in drifts; mix with silvery grass.



BURBURA SIMARUBA (SLIMED LIMBO):

Jungles says, "Who doesn't enjoy saying the name!" (It refers to sticky sap.) Up to 90 feet, semideciduous tree lets in winter light and allows other plants to live in harmony underneath. Beautiful red trunk. Native to Florida through South America.



PALMS, ALWAYS

Jungles thinks that nothing is better than palms at creating "a feeling of the place." It's no surprise that he uses them heavily. He likes to place them as in nature—small palms as understory, large ones for canopy—and cluster palms of different heights ("In the wild, birds drop seeds at different times and the plants vary greatly in age."). Jungles makes his selections from 23 species of Florida native palms and dozens of Caribbean natives—he points out that Cuba alone has 30 native species. Among his favorites:



ROSTOYNA BORLASI (ROSMARCK PALM): "A legacy plant." No longer scarce. Silvery blue, can reach 35 feet and more with a full top. Best to let it grow big. "Maybe too trendy."



COPEYNICIA BAILEYANA (SILVER PALM): Fan palm from Cuba, one of Burle Marx's favorites. Looks like a stately concrete column. Traditionally used singly as an accent, but Jungles likes to plant three to five in a natural-looking stand.



CAPPARIS CYDONIALLOANDRA
(JAMAICAN CAPER):

Understory shrub or small tree. Substitute for *Ficus benjamina* in a hedge ("prune almost never instead of monthly"). Grows in low light. Beautiful waxy dark green leaves; coppery on bottom. Fragrant flowers and fluorescent orange seed pods.



COCCOLOBA DIVERSIFOLIA
(ROSEBUSH PLUM):

Native understory tree—plant it under gumbo limbo or live oak. Small tree related to sea grape; good near ocean but not right on the beach. Deep dark green foliage. Birds love its fruit.



HAMELIA INTERM (KOREBUSH):

Large perennial flowering shrub or small tree, native from southern United States into South America. Mix it in borders. Orange-red tubular flowers attract butterflies and birds. "Gives a sense of the woods"—a nice way of saying it's kind of messy.



QUERCUS VIRGINIANA (LIVE OAK):

"Near the top of my list of favorite trees. Will be around for a hundred years or more." Semideciduous; encourages understory plants. Provides habitat for squirrels, birds, and other wildlife.

CLOSIA ADAMA (PATCH APPLE):

Evergreen tree native to Cuba and elsewhere in the Caribbean. Starts as an epiphyte. "Branches become pieces of sculpture."



CYDODIUM MUIJAE (CYCAD):

"You know exactly what size it will become." Stiff erect leaves up to six feet long. Naturally sculptural; no pruning needed. Needs little water or food; no spraying for pests as for other cycads.



PHILODENDRON 'BURLY MARY':

Originated in Burtie Marx's garden. Takes much more sun than most philodendrons. Shiny green leaves. Makes a solid ground cover. 12 to 18 inches tall. Can climb up to eight feet high.



SABAL PALMETTO
(SABAL PALM):

The state tree of both Florida and South Carolina. "Looks like it's always been here." Inexpensive large specimens are dug from fields converting to agriculture or grazing land. It's a tall fan palm typically used in matching pairs, but Jungles likes to create more natural-looking stands, with different sizes, some leaning in different directions.



SERENDA REPENS 'SILVER'
(SILVER SAW PALMETTO):

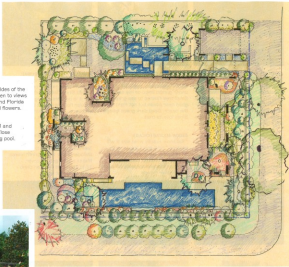
Small fan palm that grows throughout Florida. An understory palm with silvery fronds that can brighten the shade. Seeds that are sought for medicine have encouraged planting of the palm and increased habitat for wildlife. "which explains an increase in rattlesnake bites," adds Jungles, indicating what seed seekers sometimes encounter.

COPRAWITA MACROGLOSSA
(CUBAN PETTICOAT PALM):

Beautiful, sculptural. Dry brown fronds hang down, creating a petticoat, or a "column of texture." Single trunk grows up to 30 feet tall, topped by fan leaves.

RIGHT
Opposite sides of the interior open to views of water and Florida foliage and flowers.

BELOW
A vivid wall and foliage enclose a swimming pool.



VACATION HOUSE, KEY WEST, FLORIDA

This small residential project is a microcosm of Jungles's regional approach to landscape and planting design. He designed the garden for a New York family's vacation place in Key West, Florida, originally, as described by Jungles, "a nondescript house on a 10,000-square-foot lot." Sliding doors on opposite sides of the house join indoors and outdoors. A shallow pond (home to water lilies and papyrus) becomes an extension of the living room. On the opposite side, a swimming pool extends the kitchen and dining room.

Jungles says, "The planting design is intended to enhance the owners' appreciation of nature"—to give them a slice of sunlight, water, lush foliage.

The view from the living room, across the pond, is of a narrow planting bed: dense and deep green, enlivened by contrasting colors and textures with plants selected by Jungles based on their tropical appearance and low water requirements.

The planting bed's relatively few plants create a powerful sense of the tropics. Low to the ground are big-leaved *Philodendron magnificum* and a shade-loving cycad (*Ceratozamia*), which resembles a miniature leather palm. Silver buttonwood (*Coscarpus erectus* var. *arizonicus*) is a contrasting gray green; it's a versatile dense Florida evergreen that can be trained into many shapes—here a small tree. *Bougainvillea* twines through the foliage and adds splashes of red.



LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE: JUNGLES

GOLDEN ROCK PLANTATION INN, NEVIS

This was the first time I worked with a backdrop of dramatic peaks like Barle Marx had in Brazil," Jungles says. On the lovely 36-square-mile island of Nevis in the Caribbean, the site was a 100-acre property with a 12-room hotel owned by the minimalist artist Bruce Marden and his wife, Helen, also an artist. Nevis looks much different now than when Columbus sighted it in 1493. Slave-holding sugar cane plantations of the 17th and 18th century had deforested the lush tropical vegetation, and the hotel site had been unfarmed for 60 years, abandoned to the grazing of feral goats.

After clearing invasives off the site, not much was left except for one big *Ficus benjamina*. Jungles climbed the tree and pruned it to open views of the ocean and the 3,000-foot Nevis Peak. He sculpted the property with a plentiful supply of thousands of unearthed boulders—many of them painstakingly placed by Marden—and added water features such as terraced waterfalls and a chute (an architect, Edward Tuttle, designed lily ponds).

The Mardens love plants and wanted a lush, wild landscape around their hotel. Jungles's goal was to "make the place as rich as a botanic garden but not grouped by families." He planted Caribbean native species as well as tropicals from around the world adaptable to the coolish 1,000-foot elevation, with its wet and dry seasons. Jungles and the Mardens traveled around the island to gather from a limited nursery supply and hand-picked other plants in Miami for barge shipments to the island. Jungles worked right on the site, using paint wands and stakes, to lay out every plant in place.

For two phases of the project, two and a half acres in all, Jungles estimates he used 10 to 40-foot containers of plants and hundreds of different species. "With so many plants," he says, "you have to have a few holding things together." Much of the holding together is done by masses of native grasses and succulents such as aloes and *Kalanchoes*. Large agaves line the drive. Swaths of sword-leaved bromeliads surround the cottages. The large *Ficus* that Jungles hand pruned

stands as a center point along the walkway to the hotel. Nearby are lovely large palms, *Cephaelis bolipasa* and *Roystonia olivacea*.

Inspired by Barle Marx's concept of linkage, Jungles used vivid colors to unify the garden and architecture. Helen Marden painted shutters and doors of historic stone buildings orange and red, which Jungles matched with orange and red flowering plants: *Bauhinia galsinii* (African flame), a shrub or small tree; *Cordyline frutescens* 'Peter Buck' (good luck plant); *Antirrhinum blanchetiana*, a large orange bromeliad; and *Bougainvillea* 'Ha-

waiian Torch.' A streak of silvery foliage threads through the scene: Bismarck palm, buttonwood, agave, and saw palmetto. Jungles also likes purple and yellow—as in the massed ground covers of Mexican bush sage (*Salvia leucantha*) and *Eulalia frutescens*, a clumping grasslike plant with yellow or orange flowers. Even the hardscape is notably green: The main drive, for instance, consists of *Zeylia* grass, which needs no watering, with two paved tracks down the middle. ■

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