

Real estate meets design in Miami: panel

Buyers seek quality in a luxury condo, from exterior and landscape design to wall finishes

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By Doreen Hemlock



Aerial view of Miami

Developers of luxury condos increasingly need to team up with top architects, designers, artists and high-end brands to ensure their buildings stand out in the competitive global market, industry leaders said Wednesday during a panel discussion in Miami's Design District.

Today's high-end buyers worldwide are "a lot more design savvy," said Alison Antrobus of Miami-based architecture and interior design firm Antrobus + Ramirez.

They seek quality in every aspect of a luxury condo building, from exterior and landscape design to wall finishes and even the personalized services typically offered by five-star hotels, such as multilingual concierges, said Dora Puig, principal real estate broker and owner of Luxe Living Realty.

That explains why Ritz-Carlton, St. Regis, Fendi Casa, Armani and other resort and fashion brands — plus some 20 Pritzker Prize winning architects — now are active in Miami's luxury condo market. They've been recruited to help satisfy more sophisticated buyers lured to Miami largely since the 2002 debut of the annual Art Basel Miami Beach show catapulted the area onto the world's cultural map, panelists said.

The latest luxury buyers in Miami want more than a vacation condo by the water — often decorated in white, with linen, chrome and big windows, said designer Ruby Ramirez of the Antrobus + Ramirez firm.

More families now are opting to live full-time in Miami high-rises, some moving from high-tax areas of the United States to cut costs, or others leaving cities in Latin America or elsewhere that are less safe, said David Martin, president of Terra Group.

Some local families also are leaving behind big, suburban houses for smaller "homes in the sky," so they can be near parks, restaurants, schools and other amenities often in walking distance, Martin said.

"There is this theme that people are looking for simplicity and efficiency" in luxury condo living, Martin said. "People are not looking for extravagance anymore."

The condo buyers are coming from a wide range of countries. Last year, [the Related Group](#) sold 2,500 condos in the greater Miami area to 92 nationalities, said Carlos Rosso, president of Related's condominium division. The bulk of Related's buyers long have come from Latin America. But with some South American nations' economies now ailing, Related is targeting other regions, too. In 2015, it sent a team to promote sales in France and soon, said Rosso, will deploy a group to market Miami condos in Turkey.

Assembling teams of developers, designers, realtors and other heavy-hitters to appeal to elite global buyers has its challenges, of course. Egos can clash: "You have to build a team that has good chemistry," said Martin, so teammates can have fun "and really enjoy the process."

It helps to unite the team early, so "we as developers and designers work together to define what is the lifestyle we're selling," said designer Antrobus. Too often, interior designers are called in late, she said.

One element of interior design gaining in popularity in Miami: higher ceilings.

On [exclusive Fisher Island](#), 10-foot ceilings now are standard, and some condos offer 18-foot heights, Puig said. Higher ceilings let in more light and also, provide more wall space to display art, she said.

At [Park Grove](#), a new Coconut Grove luxury project by Terra and Related featuring architecture by Rem Koolhaas, condos have ceilings at least 12 feet high, Rosso said. That means fewer floors offered per tower.

"We shouldn't be selling by square feet," joked Rosso. "We should be selling by cubic feet, because we're giving people a lot more space."

"The relationship between real estate and design" panel, held at the showroom of Brazil's luxury interiors brand Ornare, was part of the ongoing Maison & Objet Americas, an international trade fair for furnishings and design.

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