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The Artists: Ira Grabow & Frank Goni

GREENBROOK POOLS, Coral Gables, Fla.

By Shabnam Mogharabi

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G THE CANVAS: The windy tropics of Key Biscayne, waterways hugging an island nook

THE PALETTE: Tumbled marble, crisp clean tile, an artist's brushstroke

THE MASTERPIECE: sweeping display of modular elements, where ancient Polynesia meets modern Miami design



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Judge's Verdict:

"I like the flow of the pool, its simplicity. It finishes the house and looks like an extension of the architecture. The water color matches the ocean perfectly. My eye gets drawn to the water and out to the ocean.

"This is a long pool. It took some feat to build it, to form the negative edge and spa, how it comes around and is suspended 8 feet out of the ground. The pool also is close to the house. They put in a grate for drainage, so when water runs off the roof of the house, it doesn't go into the pool. It takes a lot to pull those details off and still have everything tie in so well."

— **Mike Ferraro, President**
Phoenician Pool Construction

Greenbrook Pools' client list reads like a Miami edition of *People* magazine. The firm has designed "utopias" for Madonna, Sylvester Stallone, Oprah Winfrey, Gloria Estefan, Jon Secada and former Dolphins head coach Jimmy Johnson.

Three years ago, the company was approached by Miami architect Charles H. Pawley. He asked the firm to work on a high-profile client's oceanfront home on Key Biscayne. President Ira Grabow leapt at the chance. He assembled his top-notch team that included his hydraulics expert Frank Goni.

"We knew this one would be magazine quality," Grabow says. "We do jobs that nobody else can do. There's not a job we can't handle, and this was one of them."

Creating this South Pacific style paradise was challenging, to be sure. But they came up with a subtle architectural wonder that has become a veritable star of the Florida design scene,

gracing magazine covers and appearing on an HGTV special where Grabow appeared.

From the ground up

The home was to be situated on a small, vacant lot in a nook of Key Biscayne. Part of a natural island chain that borders Biscayne Bay, the soil is moist, shallow and incapable of supporting the weight of a large pool.

Consequently, Greenbrook Pools used pilings to carry the structure's load on the weak soil. These long, slender columns were driven into the earth to form a foundation and then stacked to carry a vertical load.

"The pilings had to do all the support," Grabow says. "The whole structure was elevated out of the ground, outside of the dirt."

The rough site work took months, as the pool's size grew in conjunction with the multilevel home adjacent to it. At 65 feet long, the pool ranges in width from 15 to 17 feet.

"It's 6 feet deep in the deep end, which is the narrower part, away from the spa," Grabow says. "The architecture had a lot to do with the size and shape, especially to get the views and the right effect from the infinity edge."

In the back, the negative-edge weir wall is elevated 8 feet out of the ground. "Frank Goni, who handled the hydraulic design of the pool, modified the water flow over the negative edge to give it a nice spillway. When you stand behind it in the yard, it looks like a big waterfall spilling down from the house. It's dramatic," Grabow adds.

Shades of gray

With the structural challenges out of the way, the Greenbrook Pools team focused on implementing the vision of architect Pawley. Grabow and Goni worked closely with the designer to understand how the materials used in and around the aquascape would interact with the home.

"We wanted to tie the pool in with the curvature of the back of the property," Grabow says. "The property shapes itself, and getting a water feel from the house was important."

To achieve the muted look that dominates the home's design, the company installed a decking of aged travertine. The whole vanishing-edge weir wall also was constructed of travertine, as was the wall in the back spilling into the catch basin.

The pool itself was finished in French gray Diamond Brite, with large, stone waterline tiles. The tumbled marble accents

measured 4-by-6-inches and complemented the glass tile used to line the pool's steps.

The large, half-moon spa was fully finished in the same tile. "It was kind of a blend of dark bluish and smoky gray glass tile that went along with the finish," Grabow says.

Additional elements gave the project functionality. Broad steps provide access to the pool and spa, which are linked to a separate equipment pad and feature automated controls that are tied into the house's automation system.

A long, in-pool bench spans nearly 75 percent of the vessel's length, enabling swimmers to lounge while enjoying a sweeping view of the bay over the negative edge.

Finally, subtle halogen lighting gives the pool an ethereal glow from the home's numerous balconies.

"We also put lighting in the catch basin in the back," Grabow says. "The uplights create a nice effect."

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