

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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DESIGNERS' OWN HOMES





Charles Allem

SCULPTURAL FORMS IN A SEA
OF WHITE LEND SERENITY
TO HIS SOUTH BEACH HOME

"I wanted to create a fresh, very bright beach home," designer Charles Allem says of his pied-à-terre in Miami Beach, Florida. THESE PAGES: The entrance to the living room. "The sculptural forms help maintain the feel of continuous flow throughout," he says.





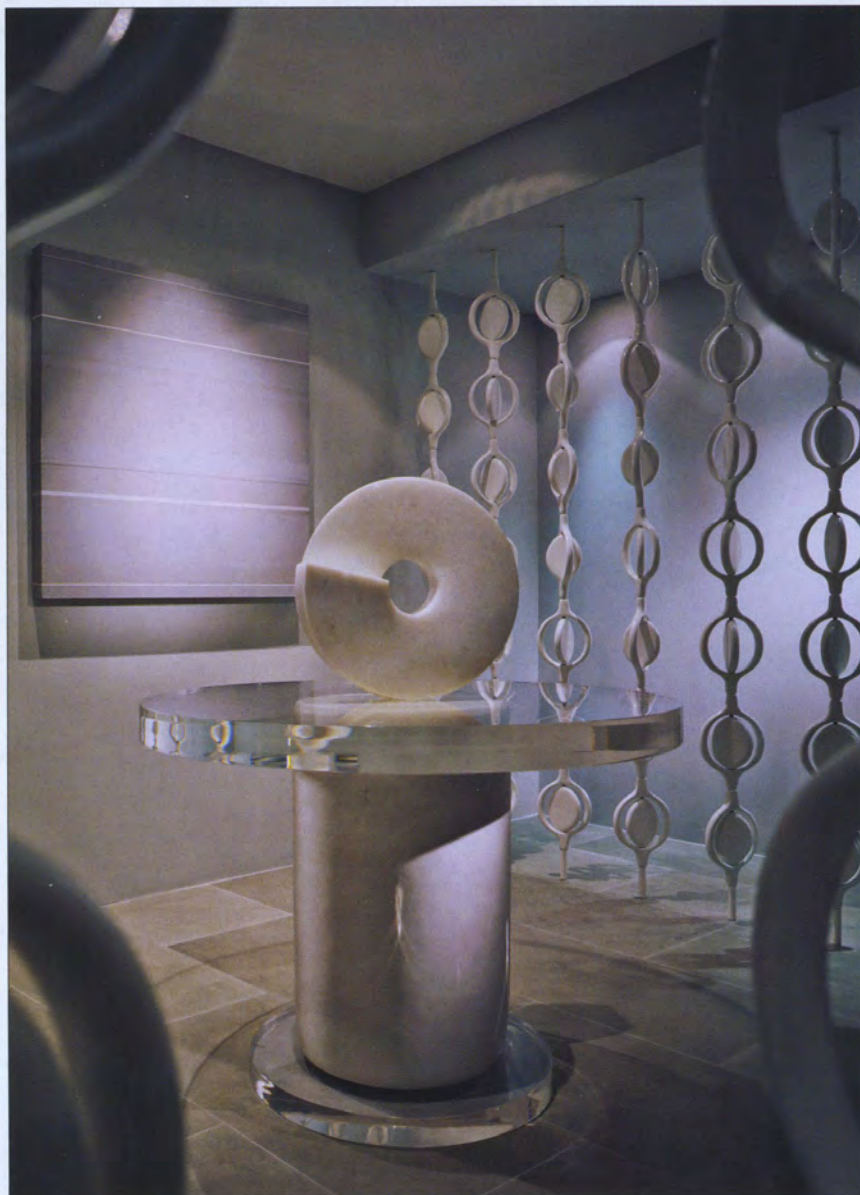
Text by Penelope Rowlands
Photography by Durston Saylor

“The expression ‘do not disturb’ captures the essence of this home. This is a place for reflection and inspiration,” says the designer (left). The white-and-gray palette “is pure and simple. It gives the space a sense of tranquillity. And that’s what I like.”

RIGHT: Two Arne Jacobsen Egg chairs, a circa 1950 Vladimir Kagan sofa and a custom round stainless-steel low table are grouped in the living room. *Illyria*, 1999, by Maxwell Hendler hangs on the wall. Allem added the white leather border to the Belgian wool carpet.

When Manhattan-based interior designer Charles Allem went looking for a pied-à-terre in Miami Beach not long ago, he was after “a complete shutdown, a sanctuary of calm and rest,” he says. He yearned for a kind of anti-New York, a place where all faxes and phone calls, and meetings and deadlines, would suddenly cease. “I wanted no computers, no electronics. I wanted to come here and switch off completely. I wanted to use one palette to create a serene environment.”

After buying his 1,800-square-foot apartment, Allem attacked the interiors with a vengeance. He reconfigured the spaces and added limestone floors. “I tore everything out of it,” he says, speaking in the cadences of his native South Africa. “I like to keep a sense of volume. I don’t like clutter



RIGHT: The entrance hall “sets the tone for the entire apartment and provides a backdrop for art,” he notes. A sphere sculpture is on the Lucite-and-leather round table. An untitled work by Chris Classen is at rear. The Blow screen is by Elizabeth Paige Smith.



“I don’t mind color in a large home, but in a smaller one, I stick to one or two colors and change the textures and that’s that,” says Allem.





OPPOSITE: The study “is comfortable and inviting,” says Allem. *Untitled (Homage to Ryman)* by Rachel Lachowicz is above the sofa. A circa 1960 porcelain sculpture rests on the low table. Baker Knapp & Tubbs stainless-steel floor lamp with leather shade. Artefacto sofa pillow fabric.

ABOVE: Sliding glass doors open onto the terrace, where fiberglass armchairs surround the dining table. On the desk are a seashell sculpture, leather accessories and a set of circa 1950–60 porcelain vases. The mixed-media artwork on the wall is by Miami-based artist Pablo Contrisciani.

and excess.” Now his residence is as liberatingly spare as the vista—all sea and sky—beyond its windows, which Allem describes as “a jetliner view of South Beach.”

Conceived in a minimalist palette—pale gray, stark white—this interior draws its color from the changing light, including sunsets of unimaginable beauty, as it plays out during the day through floor-to-ceiling windows.

The rooms seem as ever-

changing as the weather; blached, they maximize the light. For Allem, such monochromaticity brings a welcome coherence. “I don’t mind color in a large home, but in a smaller one, I stick to one or two colors and change the textures and that’s that.” The predominant shade he chose here is, in effect, no color at all. “I’ve always loved white. I find it has such a brilliance to it.”

In the living room, he worked sparingly, setting a few

design classics, such as a pair of Egg chairs by Arne Jacobsen (upholstered in white leather) and a soaring Serge Mouille floor lamp, at a distance from each other. A constellation of recessed lights minimizes the need for table lamps. In such spare surroundings, even small objects, such as the vintage porcelain vase—dotted with tiny holes—set on the stainless-steel low table, achieve a rare prominence.

“I think editing today is so

"It's a luxurious, spalike retreat," Allem says of the master bedroom. The bed, which he designed, has a custom tufted leather headboard. A 1950s hexagonal porcelain "fossils" vase is on the built-in shelf at right. The basket-weave leather ottoman is from Ralph Lauren Home.



important," Allem explains. "We're living with a deluge of design. Everybody is designing something. Do we need another chair on the market? Really not. It's important to edit."

He applied this vision with a rare consistency from one room to the next. One corner of the master bedroom sums up the residence's strict lexicon.

There, a striking tufted white leather headboard (of Allem's own design) is next to a cantilevered bedside shelf—made of gray limestone, like the floors. A rectangular lamp, illuminating this nearly color-free scene, is just one of several Lucite pieces found throughout.

For Allem, such sparseness is a liberation: "Without any-

thing to focus on, the mind is free," he says.

Working for himself, he was able to take risks few clients would have countenanced. Inevitably, he omitted some things that others might treasure. "I try not to have books in my house," he says, by way of example, "because then I work." When he first moved

to South Beach, not working was very much part of his plan. But then real life intervened. He recently opened a Miami design studio. Now his apartment is "no longer a holiday flat." Rather, "it's my sanctuary, the place where I recharge."

Spending time there resembles a trip into a sensory-deprivation chamber—so empty



LEFT: "All the rooms blend into one," Allem says. *Embrace*, 1967, by Italian artist Ascânio MMM is on the sideboard at rear. BELOW: The bath, enveloped in gray limestone, "has a minimalist feel," he remarks. The custom mirrors were made in Miami Beach. Waterworks accessories.



yet so full. From the moment you arrive, "your whole body language shifts and changes," Allem says. For some, he adds, it takes a while to adjust: "Visitors just flip out." But for this designer, the minimalism is a welcome relief. As he puts it, paradoxically: "The simplicity of virtually nothing is everything." □

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