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NOW IN SOUTH FLORIDA | REAL ESTATE

SUNNY ISLES BEACH

THE MAESTRO

There's something about the charismatic architect and designer Michele Bönan that brings to mind a great Italian director—which, of course he is.

By Drew Limsky

Portrait by Nick Garcia

From Cipriani Downtown to Casa Tua, Miamians are well familiar with the work of Florentine designer Michele Bönan. His revered work extends from palatial estates to hospitality to luxury yachts. Now, with **The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Sunny Isles Beach**, where prices start at \$2.5 million, Bönan will be catering to a rarefied South Florida residential clientele. (Completion is expected in 2018.) He will leave his famous mark on the common areas, in the bathrooms of the residences and in the suites reserved for guests of the owners. Beautifully tailored in custom-made Florentine finery, Bönan effortlessly unfurled all his legendary charisma to talk about the new project, Florentine style and elegance always.

I want to discuss your vision for the project, but first I want know about this bracelet!

[Laughs, looking at his edgy piece of jewelry with its tiny pepper charm] It's from Napoli, for *buona fortuna*—good luck. It's by Pippo Perez. He told me, "Don't touch, never! You need this!" Once it's on, you never take it off.

You have such beautiful clothing. Do you have them custom-made or do you have a favorite designer? Custom-made in Firenze. Once I found a jacket, but the salesperson said, "I'm sorry, the jacket is perfect, but your legs are too short." I said, "Take your jacket!" [laughs] I have a special tailor. You can find fantastic people in Florence. Think about the style of Florence: Salvatore Ferragamo, Gucci, Emilio Pucci...

...and Signore Bönan! Tell me how this project is informed by your special Florentine sensibility. The shape of the building is



MIDCENTURY MINDED
Architect and designer Michele Bönan—seen in clothes fashioned by his Florentine tailor—poses before a midcentury-inspired screen in the sales office he designed for The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Sunny Isles Beach.



IN THE FLOW
 From top, Bönan says he was inspired by the organic shapes of The Ritz-Carlton's architecture, the updated midcentury look of the sales center carries Bönan's unique stamp.

organic, and inside, I wanted the same concept. I asked who would be the client, and I was told families with children. So I wanted to create something cozy—not stiff, not dark. But always elegant. Since I started working in Miami many years ago, with [developer Ugo] Colombo, on the Grovenor House, my goal has been to create a common area that people really use.

You designed this stunning sales office. How similar is it to the eventual project? The Ritz-Carlton is a very special brand, and this sales office is in the same location as the building. We wanted to create it with approximately the same materials and colors, though the dimensions are completely different. The carved wood on the walls is oak, and it should look like driftwood, as if it was just found on the beach. The bathrooms have oak vanities and Calacatta marble. And I use teak floors.

Is it deliberate that the sofas and tables in the lounge feature pieces that deliberately don't touch and that you can see through? It's organic and it reminds people of the 1950s and 1960s.

You wanted to be photographed in front of the screen, which is also very midcentury. Yes, it's a revival of midcentury Miami with natural materials.

And the wicker chairs in the lounge are so wide and comfortable-looking. These are from the American company McGuire. Normally I design everything, but in this case I love this line. It's a high-society company founded in the 1950s.

The chrome drawer pulls and door handles are so substantial, yet totally clean and sleek, such a part of the functional art you create. Elegance is simplicity—never forget.

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—MICHELE BÖNAN

