



Under the spell

From colonnaded courtyards to coffered ceilings and frescos, the design of this new house reflects a strong Italian influence

Whether it's a grand palazzo or a rustic country house, every Italian home has an unmistakable ambiance. Along with an enviable sense of history, there are visual reminders of those who have gone before – the well-worn stone flaggings, handcrafted wood beams, and decorative, hand-painted ceilings.

Not surprisingly, many travelers fall under the spell of Italy, and look to re-create such a style back home. For Affiniti Architects, the Italian influence requested by the owners of this Florida

house not only suited the Venetian-style waterfront location – it also provided an ideal way to screen the house from its neighbors across the water.

Architect Mitch Kunik says the house needed to be designed to maximize an angled view of a resort a little further down the channel.

"Introducing a series of courtyards and colonnaded elements was a way to direct the eye and provide a degree of privacy."

Kunik says the Venetian architectural style of the resort was also an influence.

Left: Extensive stonework frames the archway at the front entrance of this new Italian-style house. Architect Mitch Kunik says the enclosed, secluded entrance was a deliberate ploy to create a more intimate, welcoming feel – and to play down the perceived size and stature of the house.

Above: As in traditional Tuscan houses, a mix of stone and plastered walls forms the front facade. The layered sequence of planting in the landscaping is reminiscent of the layering of key architectural elements within the house.



Above: The double-height grand foyer is flooded with natural light from several large, arched openings. To create a transparency through the house, the architect used similar openings to link the main living areas. The walls have a distressed, hand-painted finish designed to replicate traditional Tuscan country-house interiors.

Facing page: Decorative stone archways and a hand-painted, vaulted ceiling define the formal living room. This room also features antique velvet and silk furnishings, and an Italian coffee table with an aged gold-leaf patina. Custom lighting sconces enhance the ambiance.

“The house needed to be compatible with the older architecture in the area, but we also wanted it to have its own identity. The owners’ love of Tuscan architecture made this style an appropriate choice.”

From the street, the Italian influence is readily apparent – but it’s not just the traditional tower, the terra-cotta barrel roof tiles and deep overhang that determine the style. Stone and plastered walls, archways, shutters, and stonework around the doors are other key features. But Affiniti Architects also ensured a sense of privacy

– the gated and walled front yard provides a secluded, intimate entrance.

Once inside the double-height atrium, however, the house opens up to the outdoor living areas, and ultimately the water view beyond.

“It is a staggered view, almost like a series of rooms that open first to the pool, then through the colonnade to the terrace, and through another colonnade to the water beyond,” says Kunik. “Similarly, inside the house, all the rooms open up to one another to create a sense of





transparency. The grand foyer opens up to the formal living room, which in turn opens to an office, and then a library, to present a layered sequence of spaces that unfold with a sense of scale."

Kunik says the use of similar finishes and materials both inside and out also helps draw the eye through the house. Similarly, large columns inside are repeated with the colonnades on the exterior.

"These elements help to reinforce the transparency – they also frame the view, directing the eye to the best vista."

Interior designer Lesly Maxwell specified traditional Italian materials and finishes throughout the house – from the aged marble and distressed wood flooring to the highly detailed, custom hand-painted, fresco-style ceilings in the formal living and dining rooms.

"Continuity was important," Maxwell says. "Similar textures were used throughout the main living areas, with many surfaces, such as the rustic wood beams in the family room, distressed to create an aged look and a traditional, weathered patina."

Facing page: A traditional cast iron chandelier, sconces and a European tapestry provide a simple, yet evocative backdrop to the formal dining area. The coffered ceiling features hand-painted panels, which replicate historical Italian designs.

Above: Distressed wood beams, stone walls and a traditional chimney enhance the rich character of the family living space, which has a less formal look than the entertaining rooms. The kitchen features simple, furniture-style cabinetry and tumbled marble backsplashes.



Stone arches and accent walls help create a less formal look for the family living area.

"We were always conscious of the need to balance the more ornate decorative elements with the needs of the family," says Maxwell. "The house needed to be comfortable, and it needed to be well equipped for entertaining."

For this reason, the kitchen is large enough to accommodate several people working at one time. Two islands provide plenty of counter space – there is also a

butler's pantry and separate drinks area.

In keeping with the Italian look, the cabinetry was designed to look as though it could have evolved over time. Painted and glazed cabinets around the perimeter are contrasted by stained mahogany island cabinetry. Countertop materials also provide contrasting textures – a polished granite top is paired with a honed island top of Vermont soapstone.

As with most rooms in the house, including the bedrooms, the family living area opens out to extensive terraces.

Facing page: Mahogany-framed archways are designed to draw the eye through the house to the pools and colonnaded courtyards of the outdoor living areas.

Above: The colonnades are positioned to maximize an angled view down the waterway. This covered terrace or loggia, which incorporates an outdoor kitchen, also helps to provide ventilation – in much the same way traditional Italian houses were kept cool in the days before air conditioning. Air above the water is cooled, and then compressed to create additional air movement through the loggia.



Above: From the water, the house is reminiscent of the Doge's Palace in Venice. Key architectural elements on this facade include the stone tower and multiple arched colonnades. The house has its own jetty.

Facing page: Terraces on the top two levels provide additional outdoor living areas. The roof deck incorporates an outdoor games area, which opens off a large recreation room. An additional full media room is positioned on the middle level near the master bedroom suite.

Architect: Mitch Kunik, AIA, Benjamin Schreier, AIA, Affiniti Architects (Boca Raton, FL)
Interior designer: Lesly Maxwell, Lesly Maxwell Interiors
Landscape architect: John Lang
Builder: Gordon Family Homes
Roof: Terra-cotta barrel tiles
Paving: Saturnia
Exterior doors and windows: Eagle Window & Door
Interior window frames and moldings: Stained mahogany
Decorative lighting: Laura Lee Designs California
Ceiling art and wall textures: Axelband Decorative Paint Finishes

Kitchen cabinetry: Painted and glazed wood; stained mahogany from Grabel Cabinetry
Countertops: Granite; honed Vermont soapstone
Backsplash: Tumbled marble from Ceramic Matrix

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