

# 5 real estate tastemakers ruling the East Coast

By Heidi Mitchell

February 25, 2014 | 5:37pm



The Residences at Miami Beach.

Their contacts are enviable, their influence deep. Whole careers have been made by their patronage — tall towers risen under their watchful eyes. These five tastemakers form the big leagues of New York and Miami's real estate and architecture arenas. Here, we reveal their personal paths to success and style.

## Laurinda Spear, 63



Laurinda Spear (inset). Arquitectonica's Westin Times Square in Manhattan.

Photo: Patrick McMullan (inset)

**Breaking ground:** As founding partner, with her husband, of Arquitectonica in 1977, Spear has pushed the architectural firm's work, from Miami's swooping AmericanAirlines Arena and Downtown master plan to the teetering concrete slabs of the High School for Engineering & Architecture in Queens.

**Skyline star:** Her perforated 500 Brickell Ave. condo, Gehry-like Miami City Ballet, and Dade County Courthouse, which resembles a cruise ship, transformed the city's landscape. And her firm's Westin Times Square hotel changed the look of Manhattan when its multi-colored tower lit up Midtown in 2002.

**Early influences:** Spear interned for Morris Lapidus, whose tropical modernism informed her style. But her debut commission — her parents' Miami home, designed with Rem Koolhaas in 1975 — caught people's attention. The flamingo-hued "Pink House" is one of the most photographed in Miami.

**Her daughter, her muse:** Daughter Marisa Fort Adams joined the firm in 2012. "We're totally on the same wavelength and we energize each other's ideas," Spear has said.

## Jorge Pérez, 64



(Inset) Jorge Pérez. (Main) Pérez Art Museum in Miami, FL.

**Claim to fame:** The Condo King of South Florida began developing low-income housing, but moved on to launch The Related Group of South Florida, behind projects like the SLS Hotel & Condos, Icon Brickell and Brickell Heights.

**Local bonafides:** His \$40 million donation anchors the new Pérez Art Museum Miami (PAMM), whose Latin American Masters collection is unrivaled. “It was very important to have a Hispanic name on a great public institution,” Pérez says.

**First purchase:** Pérez bought his first piece of art more than 40 years ago. “It was a Miró lithograph,” he recalls.

**Friends in high places:** A chance meeting with developer Stephen Ross kicked things off. The pair launched Related — and a 35-year friendship. Says Pérez, “We talk almost daily about everything.”

## Bjarke Ingels, 39



(Inset) Bjarke Ingels. (Main) The pool and public spaces at Grove at Grand Bay in Coconut Grove.

Photo: Stephen Voss (inset)

**Generation next:** The dashing Dane spent two years at Rem Koolhaas' OMA studio in Rotterdam, and has been perhaps the most prolific of his protégées. Ingels' firm, BIG, has buildings going up at 625 W. 57th St. and on 125th Street in Harlem, and he also has projects in Miami, Mexico City, Hamburg, Copenhagen and Baku.

**In the works:** Critics call Ingels' condo project in Coconut Grove the "twisting twins"; perhaps the message is meant for mentor-turned-rival Koolhaas, who is designing the Park Grove nearby. Its two glass-and-stone towers will rise 20 stories, housing 96 residences with 12-foot-high windows.

**Easy being green:** The media-savvy architect believes in sustainability, but not at the sake of excitement. "People shouldn't have to choose between a life in the garden or a life in the city," he told a rapt audience at a 2009 TED Talk in Oxford. "They can have both."

**Practicing what he preaches:** An avid cyclist, he bikes to his Manhattan and Copenhagen offices, and recently returned from a three-week cycling tour of Argentina.

## Valerio Morabito, 39



(Inset) Valerio Morabito. (Main) Morabito's Beach House 8 in South Beach.

Photo: Stephan Goettlicher

**Heir apparent:** Morabito is the scion of the second-largest general contractor company in Italy. But it was the renovation of his own home on Manhattan's Upper East Side that gave him star status. The townhouse with an indoor pool recently sold for \$26 million. "It was a work of love," he says. "I like building everything from scratch for myself."

**In the works:** He purchased a beachfront plot of land in Miami during the economic downturn and is turning it into Beach House 8 — eight private residences stacked one atop the other on Collins Avenue. The 2,600-square-foot homes are wrapped in marble.

**Dream team:** When he sees a great opportunity, he gets his four main investors on a conference call. One of them is real estate mogul Ugo Colombo, head of CMC Group, which developed Miami's 55-story Epic Residences & Hotel.

## Horacio LeDon, 47



(Inset) Horacio Ledon. (Main) The Residences at the Miami Beach Edition.

**Big seller:** In the past 11 years, this Miami native sold over \$1 billion in real estate. Last year, LeDon moved to Douglas Elliman, where he's the president of development marketing in Florida and a senior managing partner in New York.

**Midtown master:** In 2004, LeDon looked at Wynwood and saw potential. "As a risk taker, selling Midtown Miami, situated on a 56-acre railyard in economically blighted Wynwood, stands out professionally as the most career-defining," he says.

**Favorite child:** Faena House and Edition in Miami, with marquee names like Ian Schrager and John Pawson attached, are taking up most of LeDon's time, but Park Grove, in Coconut Grove, gives him the most pride. "It'll be as socially and culturally defining as the other two when it's completed, establishing Coconut Grove on par with the world's best neighborhoods." The design is by Rem Koolhaas' OMA studio. Also on his roster: A reimagining of the Shore Club to launch this fall.

**Mother knows best:** As the only child to a single working mother, LeDon's mom instilled a work ethic. "She's probably why I'm still single!"