

GURU: RAYMOND JUNGLES

THE JUNGLE MAN OF WILD MIAMI

A landscape architect dreams up dense, thickly forested canopies that give way to modern high rises and million-dollar residences.

BY CANDACE JACKSON

A couple of years ago, Raymond Jungles took the day off and ended up wading into a pool of water and climbing a few cypress trees. "I love climbing trees," said Mr. Jungles, who added that it is something he has been doing since he was a little boy. "It gives you a sense of freedom."

Mr. Jungles was trimming a tree at Miami Beach's 1111 Lincoln Road, where a lush landscape of bubbling pools, seven-year apple trees and native Florida cypress frames a pedestrian plaza filled with cafes. The plant part is the work of the aptly named Mr. Jungles, a locally prominent landscape architect known for introducing junglelike, almost wild, green spaces into a city better known for its manicured settings.

Driving up Miami Beach's Collins Avenue on a recent afternoon, Mr. Jungles passed a typical condominium- and store-filled street lined with palm trees and a few neatly trimmed bushes. "This block has no character," he said dismissively. "Clipped hedges? Anybody can do that."

In Sunny Isles Beach, Mr. Jungles is working on a project that includes native plantings and Florida wildflowers along a 20,000-square-foot series of beachfront dune gardens at Jade Signature, a tower designed by Herzog & de Meuron where prices will range from \$2 million to more than \$26 million. He is also creating lush vegetation for several other high-end complexes, including Glass, an all-glass building where typical units are priced around \$9 million, and the Grove at Grand Bay.

Much of his work has been on private homes, including a few for celebrities and well-known athletes. A private Miami Beach garden he completed in 2012 was designed to give the home the feeling of being a treehouse, with floating concrete steps, an aquatic sculpture garden and an outdoor dining and cooking area.

"My gardens might look too messy to some people," said Mr. Jungles, 57, wearing black jeans, dark sunglasses and a slightly mischievous smile. "I prefer them to look casual, like nature is winning." His design fees for residential projects (just the schematic plans) range between \$30,000 and \$50,000, and large condo projects start between \$100,000 and \$200,000.

Mr. Jungles said he begins each project by doing lots of research, often including a visit to city archives to find historical pictures of a particular lot. He looks carefully at an area's previous incarnations to find out what did and didn't work about the space, and figures out what plants and trees are native to the location. He typically works closely with the building's architect, collaborating on the overall concept and design.

In the midst of the city's latest real estate boom, work has been pouring in. Mr. Jungles typically starts his day working from his beachfront condo in Fort Lauderdale. "I don't like to be surrounded by a lot of commotion," he said. He wakes up around 4 a.m., and draws by hand from a drawing board that overlooks the ocean. He sketches first with a thick pencil, then switches to progressively



JUNGLES ON JUNGLE Mr. Jungles's sketch, top left, and the final product for the Golden Rock Inn, a former sugar plantation turned hotel located on the island of Nevis in the West Indies. The garden is intended to look overgrown and relaxed.



MIAMI GOES NATIVE Mr. Jungles also designed the landscaping for Miami Beach's 1111 Lincoln Road, where a lush landscape of bubbling pools and trees frames a pedestrian plaza filled with cafes.

thinner ones as a design goes from conceptual to more tangible. Meanwhile, he'll listen either to just the sounds of the ocean or music ranging from rock to Brazilian to reggae.

Born in Nebraska, Mr. Jungles was a serious hockey player in high school who took a job at a plant nursery to pay his way through the sport (which he still plays). He fell in love with Miami on a spring break trip senior year, and at 18 he moved there and worked as a laborer in the landscape industry. He enrolled in college in Miami to study landscape architecture.

After college, he went to Brazil and sought out Roberto Burle Marx. The avant-garde landscaper is the designer behind projects such as Brasilia—the master-planned city capital known for its modernist architecture—and whose work has been shown at New York's Museum of Modern Art.

Mr. Marx eventually became a mentor to Mr. Jungles, who for 14 years returned for a few weeks annually to study and work with him. (Mr. Marx died in 1994.) Mr. Jungles began to take on small residential projects in college, which led to progressively bigger ones.

Today, his office has a staff of 18. The loft-like space overlooks the Miami River and is decorated with abstract paintings by Mr. Marx. There is a landscaped outdoor area with a big stone table, where Mr. Jungles will sometimes draw or hold meetings.

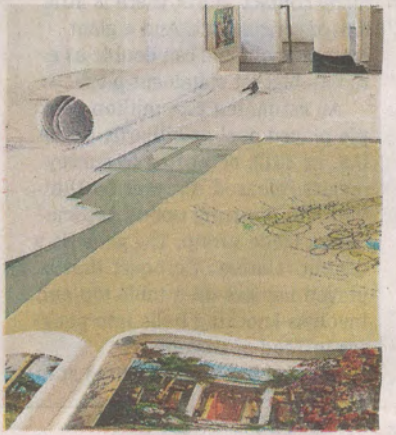
On a recent evening at his office, Mr. Jungles and his staffers buzzed about as they wrapped up a deadline for Jade Signature. With acres of beachfront, the landscape requires hearty, native plants that can withstand seaside conditions. Plans call for small beachfront alcoves—tucked away pockets surrounded by planted dunes and tilted sabal palm trees.

"He likes the crooked trunks instead of the straight ones," explained his daughter Amanda Jungles, who works in his office overseeing business development. Though they can be pricier to transport, Mr. Jungles prefers the character they give to a landscape, so "we have a lot of them."

Clockwise from top left: Raymond Jungles, Inc. (2); Marion Bremner

Stephen Dunn

MANSION



DESIGNING NATURE 'My gardens might look too messy to some people,' said Raymond Jungles, seen here at his loft-like Miami office, left and above. 'I prefer them to look casual, like nature is winning.'