

# IF A SULTAN LIVED IN TAMPA

If Homeowner Michael Martin Tells His Three Children Bedtime Stories Straight Out Of Scheherazade's *Thousand And One Nights*, it Wouldn't Be Surprising — Considering The Moorish-Style Home In Which The Family Lives

INTERIOR DESIGN Sean Rush, Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL  
BUILDER Steve Ware, SWI Construction, Clearwater, FL  
LANDSCAPE ARCHITECTURE Shea Huges, Sunrise Landscape, Tampa, FL  
TEXT Marina Brown  
PHOTOGRAPHY Daniel Newcomb, North Palm Beach, FL



ABOVE: A castle in Spain? A Moorish riad? No, a totally restored Boom-Era diva on Tampa's Davis Island. Complete with a tower meditation room, two-bedroom guesthouse and a fountain-splashed pool, the sprawling estate is reborn.

THIS MOROCCAN-INSPIRED ESTATE, COMPRISED OF 14,000 square feet that includes a main house, pool house, and a two-bedroom guest house, all embracing a fountain-splashed pool and vine-wrapped pergola, isn't tucked into the corner of a Middle Eastern medina. It's proudly visible in the middle of one of two Davis Islands, a 1920s "boom era" dot a stone's throw from downtown Tampa, Fla.



“There were many trips to Fez (Morocco), to Rabat ... wherever I could obtain the most authentic and highest-quality pieces,” interior designer Sean Rush says. “The search for beautiful tiles and woods wasn’t always easy, but it was adventurous.”



Original brass Berber lanterns from Fez flank French doors by Tischler that open to an interior courtyard. Rush-designed, handmade and glazed tiles from Morocco wrap the outdoor space. Many rooms share access to the courtyard’s light through Vasquez Custom Metals’ elaborate grillwork.

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Interior designer Sean Rush isn't Moroccan either. Sean Rush Atelier is a Palm Beach-based design company and gallery that creates atmospheres. As a visual artist who studied in Florence and painted High Renaissance ceilings and walls, Rush now uses that aesthetic to produce architectural and interior projects that provide touches of the exotic and more. As for homeowner Michael Martin, he both did and didn't know where his journey would lead. “The house had belonged to Yankees’ owner George Steinbrenner for many years,” Martin says. “By the time it came up for sale, though, it needed over 100 windows replaced

and was in a general state of disrepair.” In *Florida Design* magazine, Martin spied a home Sean Rush had done in Palm Beach. A trip to South Florida produced a meeting of the minds, and soon the homeowner and designer began a collaboration that would continue for the next several years. While the home is officially a “Spanish Colonial,” reminiscent of many of the houses built in both Palm Beach and Tampa in that period just before the Great Depression, Martin had in mind the Moorish architecture he loved in the south of Spain where he had lived. Rush,





With Mies van der Rohe “Barcelona” chairs from Knoll, brass occasional tables from Mecox and a vintage Ralph Lauren cocktail table at its center, the living room sings to the owner’s antique rug in coral, saffron and pale indigo. Accent pillows in antique Kuba cloth, leather and Ralph Lauren cashmere add to the drama.

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steeped in North African styles, could bring authenticity while also making a home where children can play and the family could actually live a 21st-century lifestyle.

“There were many trips to Fez (Morocco), to Rabat . . . wherever I could obtain the most authentic and highest-quality pieces,” Rush says. “The search for beautiful tiles and woods wasn’t always easy, but it was adventurous. Crawling through tiny spaces into underground storage rooms often brought the most amazing finds.” He points to the entrance doors

carved in the 9th century for a noble riad, or Moorish house. “Everything is either authentic or created in Fez by artisans using ancient patterns. I love things that are created by the hand of man — mass-produced or synthetic items hold no appeal for me.”

Nor did the renovations that earlier owners had attempted. “We removed every floor, every ceiling, and sometimes walls as well,” Rush says. “Steel beams were vital to opening up the myriad smaller rooms.” But one architectural aspect only needed Rush’s ceramic



“MY WORK IS INTERIOR DESIGN SEEN THROUGH THE EYES OF AN ARTIST,” RUSH SAYS. “I SEEK THE ‘BONES’ OF A SPACE, THEN STRIVE TO BREATHE IT BACK TO LIFE.”



artistry — the *sahridj* or fountain which is a central feature of a Moorish riad. The house wraps around the garden courtyard, light-filled and sweet with plantings, color and bubbling water. Other rooms shielded by elaborately turned wrought-iron work or by *moucharabieh*, latticed-spindles that offer privacy as well as fresh air, lead off the court. But it is here that the splendor of Moroccan tile work is on full display. Called *zelige*, each one or two-inch tile is hand-made. No one exactly alike, they are arranged to create florals, arabesques and geometries.

Cast in the courtyard's light, the living room, despite its great length, feels intimate. Horizontal beams break the linear expanse and hide ducting. The Mies van der Rohe “Barcelona” chairs introduce a mid-century note, while Rush chose the “Chesterfield” sofa because it seemed masculine. It is upholstered in 200-year-old Moroccan carpet fabric. Beside it, Rush pays homage to Giacometti with hand-sculpted and cast tables,

ABOVE: Rush kept most of the walls a pale Venetian plaster, allowing the dark woods and beams to create drama in the dining room. Antique brass Moroccan lanterns pair with vintage Murano glass wall sconces to cast a soft glow over the custom sapele and walnut table crafted by Michael Barlog.



Columns cast of stone, lattice wall covering and rare sea-mined coquina decking from the 1920s shape the pergola. At night, illuminated floor lanterns with their penetrated tracings make reflected light dance across the water.

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Ringed with privacy bamboo, the pool area and its pergola are redolent of the Alhambra, the haven of the sultans of Spain. Triple arched-French doors line the home's rear exterior, where casual furnishings from Allegro Classics shape poolside social groupings. Large glazed pots from Johnny Mangos add an exotic touch.

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while the three-foot-tall table lamps, created from Ming-style porcelain horses and topped with monogrammed shades, stand guard.

Following his attraction to wood, Rush designed a dining room table of sapele and walnut, the base and top separated by a channel of Lucite, as if the top is afloat. Bespoke leather sleeves from McLean Saddlery top the chairs, each hand-tooled and articulated by equestrian clasps. A custom-designed sisal area rug trimmed in ostrich grounds the space. Outside, a stroll beneath the flowering pergola leads to the pool house and guest quarters.

Horizontal tiles of the green of Fez keeps the North African flavor despite the appearance of a wooden Buddha who doesn't seem to mind one bit. Casual outdoor furnishings and a brilliant carpet-covered cushion are perfect outdoor transitions, punctuated by antique camel bone and wood Moorish tables.

An authentic recreation takes time and a special vision. "We imported nine tons of tile and brought in over three dozen palms," Rush says. "It required a lot of patience, but the end result is truly one of a kind."



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SOURCES

Front Exterior

Moroccan tile - The Medina of Fez, Morocco

Entry gate - Vasquez Custom Metals, Inc., Tampa, FL

Entry

Moroccan doors and mosaic wall tiles - The Medina of Fez, Morocco

Floor lanterns and light fixture - Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Courtyard

French doors - Tischler Windows and Doors, Delray Beach, FL

Antique dining table and chairs - Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Berber lanterns and mosaic wall tiles - The Medina of Fez, Morocco

Living Room

Sofa - Restoration Hardware, West Palm Beach, FL

Fabric - The Medina of Fez, Morocco

Barcelona chairs - Knoll, Design Within Reach, West Palm Beach, FL

Leather accent pillows - Rabat, Morocco

Cashmere pillow and sheer draperies - Ralph Lauren Home Collection, Palm Beach, FL

Vintage Ralph Lauren cocktail table - Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Occasional tables - Mecox, West Palm Beach, FL

Table lamps and tool wall art - Custom designed by Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Wall art fabricated by Heath & Company, West Palm Beach, FL

Stairway railing - Vasquez Custom Metals, Inc., Tampa, FL

Drapery fabric - Kravet Fabric, Bethpage, NY

Area rug - Owner's Collection

Dining Room

Dining table - Custom designed by Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Fabricated by Michael Barlog, Tampa, FL

Dining chairs - Restoration Hardware, West Palm Beach, FL

Leather chair sleeves fabricated by McLean Saddlery, West Palm Beach, FL

Chair fabric - Kravet Fabric, Bethpage, NY

Lantern chandeliers - Rabat, Morocco

Antique carved table in hallway - Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Area rug - ABC Carpet & Home, Delray Beach, FL

Pergola

Sofa - Allegro Classics, Burlingame, CA

Armchairs and table lamp - Custom designed by Sean Rush Atelier, Palm Beach, FL

Lamp fabricated by Heath & Company, West Palm Beach, FL

Antique tables - Rabat, Morocco

Lattice wall - The Medina of Fez, Morocco

Wooden Buddha - Paula Roemer, Inc., West Palm Beach, FL

Rear Exterior

Chairs - Allegro Classics, Burlingame, CA

Glazed pots - Johnny Mangos, Delray Beach, FL ♦