


LIFESTYLE

Sunshine state of mind

As the executive director of Design Miami, RODMAN PRIMACK is playing a key role in the transformation of a city once more associated with sun-worshippers and senior citizens into an international centre of design and art

TEXT DAVID NICHOLLS | PHOTOGRAPHS MARK LUSCOMBE-WHYTE

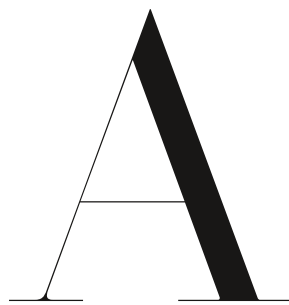


Rodman Primack (on right) and his husband Rudy Weissenberg at the Cape Florida Light in Miami-Dade County



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE LEFT Rodman with Tiffany Chestler, director of cultural programming at Dacra for the Miami Design District (a sign for which is pictured top centre), in front of the *Fly's Eye Dome* structure, designed by Buckminster Fuller (also bottom right). Discussing 'Chromatropic', a new print created in collaboration with Pierre Frey for Design Miami/Basel 2015, with Craig Robins, co-owner of Design Miami. Miami Design District is famed for its street art





As the sun prepares to set over Key Biscayne in Miami, Rodman Primack leads the way towards a local landmark: a nineteenth-century lighthouse which, like many of the Sunshine State's residents of a certain age, is remarkably well preserved. The Cape Florida Light is an icon of Miami-Dade County, and like the art deco buildings in ice-cream shades that line the tourist-laden Ocean Drive, it has long played a role in how the world views – and visits – Miami.

But Rodman, the executive director of the Design Miami fair, is at the forefront of a movement that is broadening the world's perception of the Florida city. Founded in 2005, Design Miami is staged twice a year – each June in Switzerland as Design Miami Basel, and in Miami itself each December. For the dealers and designers that take part, it is a chance to sell to a high concentration of the fabulously wealthy. For the latter, it's an opportunity to add to their collections in a sun-drenched atmosphere fizzing with excitement and Perrier-Jouët. Last year, Design Miami attracted nearly 36,000 visitors and included exhibitions involving the likes of architects Daniel Libeskind and Peter Marino, and French fashion brand Louis Vuitton.

Rodman joined Design Miami in early 2014 after serving as chairman of the London auction house Phillips de Pury. Prior to that, he was director of the Gagosian Gallery in Beverly Hills. There was a stint at Christie's, too, as head specialist of Latin American art, and a period working under Peter Marino in New York. Somehow, between all of this, he also built up a successful interior-design practice and textiles business, which he continues to run out of New York. You could say all of this was always on the cards for a little boy in California who, at the age of eight, suggested to his parents that he would rather like to have a subscription to *Architectural Digest*. 'Even at that age, I was so driven by a desire to have life look like this,' he says.

A life like this involves a lot of travel. 'Over the past five weeks, I've been to Los Angeles, San Francisco, Zurich, London, Barcelona, Paris, New York and Milan,' Rodman says, uncertain if he's missed a city or two. This is all part of his job: meeting with designers and gallerists and spreading the word about Design Miami. A few days after my visit, he's off to Hong Kong and Shanghai.

As for Rodman's home, the very idea of it is similarly peripatetic. His husband Rudy Weissenberg, a former



THIS PICTURE Lunch at The Cypress Room in Miami Design District with Ximena Caminos, executive creative director of the Faena Group of hotels. BELOW Inside Miami Design District's headquarters

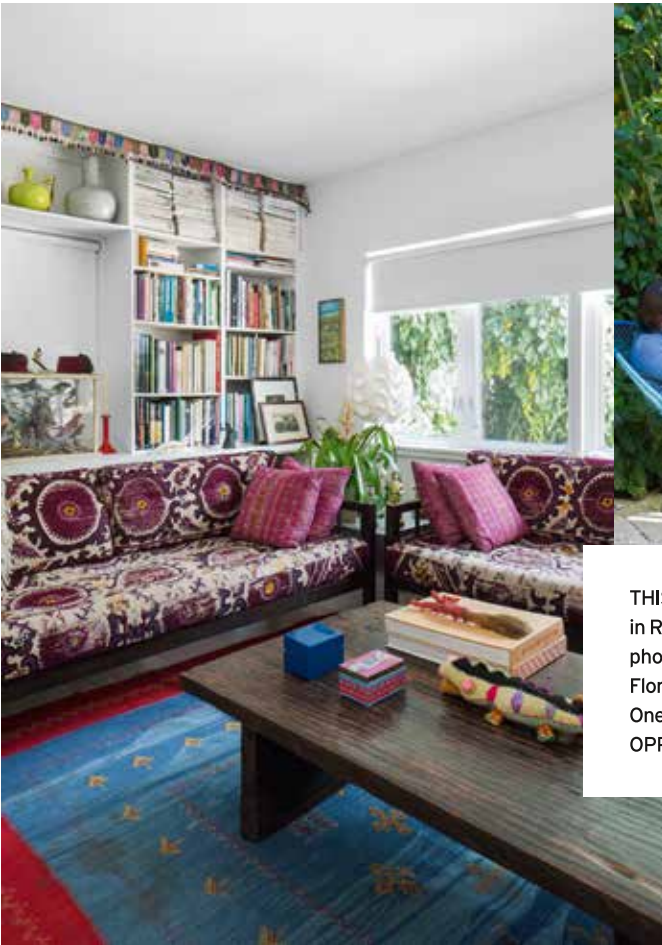
television producer who now works in his family's commodity businesses, as well as curating exhibitions, is predominantly based in his native Guatemala City. And they are no strangers to the two-and-a-half-hour flight between the two cities.

Rodman and Rudy's home when they touch down in Miami is a Thirties bungalow on one of Biscayne Bay's tiny Venetian Islands. Miami is in the middle of a construction boom, and this is apparent even here as older houses are gradually giving way to plus-size replacements. 'Over the past few years, the property market has gone crazy, with modest, normal houses being remodelled into McMansions,' Rodman laments. 'Super charming places like this are few and far between these days.'

He is right: their house is charming. When they bought it in 2009, they focused on redecorating rather than remodelling, although they did replace the swimming pool – once they had cleared away the collection of shopping trollies amassed by the eccentric previous owner in the garden.

Given who lives here now, it is no surprise to discover that the two-bedroom house has been decorated with considerable flair. The colours sing and patterns abound: stripes and zigzags, florals, geometrics and ethnic prints. ▽





THIS PAGE CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT One of two sitting rooms in Rodman and Rudy's house. The couple in the garden. A photograph by Luis González Palma in their bedroom. The Florida room, with a hippo-shape footstool by Renate Müller. One of Rodman's fabric designs lines a wall of their bedroom. OPPOSITE Bold colours and prints enliven the sitting room







In the main bedroom, the walls are covered in one of Rodman's fabric designs, based on historic Japanese woodblock prints. And there is no shortage of eye-catching pieces of art and furniture – from the cartoonish Michele de Lucchi table in the dining area to a hippo-shape footstool by Renate Müller in what is known as the 'Florida room' overlooking the pool. This latter space has windows on three sides, although two of these have been covered by enormous cardboard installations by the contemporary Constructivist artist Florian Baudrexel. 'There's too much light in Miami,' Rodman says, explaining the artworks' positioning. While this is a somewhat difficult concept to grasp for someone who lives in London, I take him at his word.

The couple entertain regularly and, although it is hard to fathom how, they manage to make space every December for a party for more than 100 guests. By their own admission, their social and professional lives tend to blur. Rodman has dinners to host and openings to attend most evenings of the week: 'Work is completely integrated into life. There isn't the feeling of leaving at 6pm and being done.'

A short drive away and nestled between the arty Wynwood neighbourhood and Little Haiti is the Miami Design District – 18 blocks of formerly largely unused warehouses and industrial facilities that, over the past 15 years, have been transformed into an area rich in galleries, smart restaurants and international boutiques. It has become a new destination in the city and, for many, it has made a destination of the city itself. Responsible for this is Craig Robins, who co-owns the Miami Design District and is CEO of the property development company Dacra. Additionally, as co-owner of Design Miami, Craig is Rodman's boss.

While the majority of Design Miami is held in Miami Beach, the Design District also takes part, with resident businesses staging exhibitions, pop-up shops taking over still-vacant spaces and outdoor installations set up in public areas. Rodman's Design Miami office is based within the district's impressive headquarters, and it is from here that he devises and executes his plans for the fair: 'It's a job that is really aggregating my interests.' He clearly loves it. 'When I worked in art, 90 per cent of my conversations were business discussions, and it's the opposite in the design world. The dealers I work with aren't here to be "masters of the universe" or to become the next Larry Gagosian. It is a smaller market and it's a time of transition, so I find that exciting.'

He's a well-known face in the design district, and from the hellos and friendly nods of recognition that he receives as we walk around some of his favourite spots, it is obvious he is a popular one, too. Perhaps that is because the locals recognise Rodman's supporting role in steering Miami through its own transition to being a city of greater twenty-first-century relevance, and one that is now influencing design and art on an international level. You get a sense that it is a city where things are really happening and where the dreams of an eight-year-old boy who has traversed the world to get here seem to have come true □

Design Miami: designmiami.com

THIS PAGE FROM TOP Rodman at the home of Nina Johnson-Milewski, of Gallery Diet, with the designer Emmett Moore, whom Nina represents. Outside Pérez Art Museum Miami with Leann Standish, who is its acting director. Visiting the pop-up gallery Design Pub, with its curator, Jessica Acosta-Rubio. OPPOSITE Rodman and Rudy having lunch with friends at the home of Andrea Noboa, who is pictured at the top left of the table

Rodman is a well-known face in the design district – and a popular one. Perhaps because locals recognise his role in steering Miami into a city of twenty-first-century relevance

