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THE BREAKERS RESORT

break it up

New York-based Bruce Bierman Design creates flexible spaces and uses sustainable planning for clients whose needs evolve and change over time

by Scott Meskes

The Breakers Resort in Palm Beach, Florida, is the site of a 4,100-square-foot gut renovation for a New York City family who bought and renovated a penthouse with the idea of using it as a second home. Choosing Bruce Bierman Design, the family was able to work into the space a long-range plan for sustainable living, the result being a home flexible enough to fit the nuclear family plus any guests or extended family members—all without a reduction in the unit's future salability.

BELOW: Many of the rooms of The Breakers Resort condo can be converted to temporary bedrooms thanks to convertible sofas and soundproof doors between spaces.

One of the first things Bruce Bierman does with a new project is to ask his clients to think about how they move through and use their home. He did that with the New York couple when they approached him to design their condominium in Palm Beach. With grown children, the clients bought the property for use during half the year. "The last second home they had had a number of extra bedrooms for the children that were never used," Bierman says. "Actually, they said their children never came to visit them at all." Bierman suspected intuitively that the old second home was something that just didn't work for the family. How many days, he asked, would the clients be having guests in the new home? About seven was the answer. Bierman thus offered to design the space for the other 180 days the clients wouldn't be using it, and this made a lot of sense to them.

"In this project, many of the rooms serve as dual-purpose spaces," Bierman says. The study becomes a guest bedroom with a full-size day bed and en suite bathroom. The library has an en suite bathroom and dressing room, and the library sofa converts to a bed. Both rooms are adjacent to the master bedroom and have entrances to the master bedroom that can remain closed off and soundproof. "If the children stayed, they would have privacy," Bierman says. "I like to design for everyday use rather than for occasion-driven events, which almost never happen. The client called me the other day, and she said, 'Now we





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—Bruce Bierman, Founder

TOP LEFT: The Breakers Resort's kitchen countertops are made of dense stone *pietra cardoza*. BOTTOM LEFT: Living area walls were constructed of sustainable bamboo veneer. RIGHT: One of the three and a half bathrooms in the (technically) one-bedroom condo.

don't have a defined room for my daughter and her husband or my single son; they visit all the time.”

Bierman jokingly refers to the flexibly designed condo as a “4,100-square-foot one bedroom with three-and-a-half baths.” The client requested a Caribbean beach-house look, so Bierman worked tropical elements into the design and chose mostly locally made materials with low off-gassing. He also made a point of reusing much of the furniture, reupholstering it and moving pieces into different rooms to give the appearance of something new. He used bamboo veneer on the walls in the living room and kitchen, and he brought in durable dense-stone *pietra cardoza* for the countertops. “We chose things for durability, cost, and not a lot of upkeep,” Bierman says.

Sometimes Bierman points out that manufactured items, because they may last longer, might in the long run be more sustainable. In fact, overall, he believes his industry needs to look beyond the pragmatic implementation of methods and materials toward a long-term plan for a space. “Architects and designers often stop at what they see as a finished product, as if the pictures you have of the project are the end result,” he says. “For me, sustainable design is not just doing it to the point of design. Does the design give the family flexibility to grow and not have to make changes in the future? If sold, would someone else have to make a number of changes? This is what sustainable design means to me.” **gb&d**