

A MODERN ESTATE IN MIAMI BEACH

By Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz

Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz's 'Sand Castle' in Miami Beach, Florida, echoes the fashion for bleached beach fabrics in its use of striking white furniture, set against walls of saturated color

The design of this Miami Beach residence is inspired by the local flavor: a taste for strong colors, along with an admiration for sculptural shapes. (Think models on the beach!) Each room in the house is painted in a different Fiestaware color, but almost everything else in the rooms is white. Fiestaware was used extensively in the United States in the 1930s, and it was especially popular in Miami. (The house dates from 1932.)


The use of white for the movable pieces makes a direct reference to the popularity of white linen and cotton outfits for the beach. People with beautiful bodies and dazzling suntans move around against a background ablaze with bright colors. Thus, in this living room, the furniture and accessories, most of them "dressed" in white, are enhanced by the setting of tanned walls. Even the tablescape on the center coffee table has been designed according to the concept of white sculptural shapes placed against a backdrop of saturated colors.

By emphasizing sensual shapes with white, we create a timeless interior that evokes not only the fun of having a home at the beach but also the easy living that's the legacy of bleachable fabrics. ♦

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PHOTO BY ANTOINE BOOTZ. COURTESY OF METROPOLITAN HOME MAGAZINE





The home of New York interior designer Benjamin Noriega-Ortiz and custom lighting designer Steven Wine glows with the warmth of reflected light, courtesy of the artwork of Venetian plasterer Mile Djuric.

PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST AS AN OLD-WORLD MAN

By Jennie D'Amato

To Mile Djuric, a wall is not a structure—it's a canvas on which he "paints" his plaster works of art

DECORATIVE ARTISTS KNOW A THING OR TWO ABOUT FANTASTICAL REQUESTS:

- "MAKE THE ROOM LOOK LIKE A WHEAT FIELD."
- "I WANT TO FEEL LIKE I AM NESTLED INSIDE AN OYSTER SHELL."
- "GIVE ME ONE WALL THAT LOOKS LIKE A PIANO: INKY, STICKY BLACK, LIKE LIQUID GLASS."

Mile Djuric, owner of Decorative Art & Design, in Stamford, Connecticut, delights in these "dream assignments," as he calls them, because they are usually given by the most innovative of interior designers and are generally accompanied by encouragement to experiment and go out on a creative limb. In the last several years, Djuric has taken the three assignments described above and realized them through the medium of Venetian plaster, a form of wall treatment that is as striking now as it was thousands of years ago, when it was used by Egyptians and Romans to great dramatic effect. Djuric's aesthetic feats have earned him a reputation here and abroad: If you want something special for your walls, he's the guy to call.

“The light this room captures and reflects is intense,” says Noriega-Ortiz. “At sunset, this room turns pale pink, pale orange. It changes, from day to night, in color and intensity.”



Unlike Europeans, Americans tend to use the term “Venetian plaster” to cover a range of plaster treatments, from Stucco Lustrò Veneziano to the radically different Calcenova, that beautifully soft, true lime plaster that gives a complex, light-enhancing look; or Mantovano, a fourteenth-century Italian marbled lime plaster with an Old-World, old-stone feel. Djuric imports close to 30 of these organic plasters from Italy and England, including many lime plasters made by father-son European artisans. Given that the human eye can differentiate one object from another in distances of about 0.93 millimeters — the thickness of a coat of nail polish — Djuric is very alert to texture, the visual and tactile quality of surfaces that informs our world, and, for Djuric, the crucial element in successful plaster finishes.

Ask him his favorites, and a few come readily to mind: Stucco Lustrò Veneziano, a waterproof synthetic resin; Italy’s fabled Marmorino, with its embedded chips of marble; and Aquarello, used for centuries on the exteriors of villas and churches in Italy. Djuric learned his trade from master plasterers both here and in Italy over a period of 20 years, a luxury he affords by putting a percentage of each annual profit into furthering his knowledge of the oldest and newest techniques and of modern art media. As a result, he has learned to manipulate other disciplines, such as silver and gold leaf, glass, leaf embedding, faux bois, and trompe l’oeil painting.

A perfectionist, hard-working, affable, and kind: These are the words clients use to describe Djuric. They are qualities you want in a contractor who may be in your home for several months, as Christopher and Carline Dean, of Westport, discovered when they hired him for a wall treatment. Eleven ceilings and one year later, he finally packed up his kit and left their 1860 Georgian mansion twinkling with reflected light in pink, gray, sage, silver, and gold. “The difference is in the charm his work brings,” says Carline Dean. “The colors are unique; he has the ability to match anything. You don’t have to change a thing in the room.”

The Westport husband-and-wife team of architect Jonathan Wagner and interior designer Robin McGarry asked that their living room have “the look, the endless feel, of moving wheat,” recalls Djuric. The movement was to come from the light reflected within the plaster, not from the texture of the walls’ surfaces. For the job, Djuric used delicate English lime plaster, a medium requiring 16 coats spread thinly, with pressure and consistency. “It captures the light in a very fascinating and gentle way that reflects back to you as no other plaster does,” he says. The pale golden walls are smooth and soft, and seem to be filled with light, movement, and, at the same time, peace. “Mile does some of the most beautiful Venetian plaster in the area,” says McGarry. “And as an interior designer, I’ve seen a lot of Venetian plaster.”