



GOING TO TOWN

A Delray Beach residence exemplifies the joys of life in the tropics

text Beth Dunlop
photography Robin Hill





The Silberstein home draws on the prototype of a Charleston "sideyard" house — well suited for gracious urban living on a small lot. PREVIOUS SPREAD: The living room features furniture from B&B Italia and Cassina, and the painting is by the late Robert Flynn.

●● For 20 years, architect Jeffrey Silberstein and his family had lived happily in Boca Raton. Then Silberstein found a small lot — zoned multifamily — within walking distance of his architectural practice and downtown Delray Beach. The street itself was of mixed architectural offerings, from little cottages to two-story apartment buildings.

He looked at the lot and looked back around the low-scaled urban landscape, and ideas were clear. “To quote Louis Kahn,” he says, “when I saw it, I knew what it wanted to be. I knew that it needed to be so simple that, because of this very simplicity, it would be sympathetic to the neighborhood and yet stand on its own.”

He built a basic box containing two utterly modern side-by-side townhouses based on age-old prototypes of urban living. He moved into one and sold the other. The houses make reference to European city dwellings and similarly to the Charleston “sideyard” house, “where the front door is not necessarily the front door to the house, but when you open it you step into an oasis,” Silberstein says. Indeed, this is the case for the Silberstein family home. The face to the street is flat but not unfriendly. There’s a gate off to the side. Open it, and you are on a long, narrow walkway through the tropics — with abundant foliage lining one side and the house on the other.

The house is only 18 feet wide, though it is 80 feet long. It is a compact home that embraces the idea of indoor-outdoor living. “Most of the time, we live with the doors wide open,” Silberstein says. Indeed, the living room opens to a pool and looks out onto the garden.

The living room is, in fact, an all-purpose space accommodating an open kitchen, the dining table and the family’s primary gathering space. Upstairs, there are three bedrooms and two bathrooms for the four Silbersteins: Jeffrey’s wife, Rosemary, 21-year-old Angelica, and 17-year-old Sarah. Neither daughter had lived any place other



A loggia opens onto a small pool. Architect Jeffrey Silberstein designed this house to open up entirely, allowing a full connection between indoors and out. The house is one of two designed together.



Even the bathroom exemplifies the home's strong link to the landscape. Jeffrey Silberstein designed his family's home to allow for both privacy and intimacy. The freestanding bathtub is from Victoria + Albert.

than the Boca Raton home, and their father reports that "they were very much against the idea of moving." They grew to like it, however, because "all their friends think it's the coolest place on earth."

Silberstein selected furniture from many sources, with a sofa and chair from B&B Italia, a coffee table from the Pace Collection and a dining table from Cassina. Other pieces were sourced more economically from online sites such as Victoria + Albert for the bathtubs and Andrew World for the dining chairs. Downstairs and on the stairwell, the floors are slate. The bedrooms are carpeted. The walls are all white. The kitchen cabinets are ebonized ash; counters are black velvet granite, and stainless-steel fittings are from Dornbracht.

The house has revolutionized life in the Silberstein family. Jeffrey walks to work and to the gym, and the whole family walks to Atlantic Avenue to eat and shop — a "green" life all around.

And one thing has led to another. From this house, Silberstein got a contract to design another townhouse, a wider and taller structure. Now he is doing a third urban-infill duplex. All are based on urban European, tropical and early American (and Southern) prototypes.

"The idea," says Silberstein, "is to create a footprint that is so compact that it is in no way invasive but at the same time create architecture that somehow seems larger than life." For Silberstein, that is not an architectural oxymoron but rather an achievement based on essential principles of design: stepping back and letting the architecture speak for itself.

"You don't need to create lots of extra elements to make the experience. Just let the architecture do it," he says. "It's amazing how strong a statement that can be." ●



Silberstein designed these two side-by-side houses on a lot that allowed for multifamily residential development but truly could not accommodate more. The building makes reference to the simple, sturdy architecture found on the street.