

Florida Properties

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Brillhart Architecture designed this 5,900-square-foot house on Di Lido Island in Miami.

HOMEBUYERS DRAWN TO TIMELESS BEAUTY



Bontona Peninsula features a classic and timeless contemporary design and is move-in ready.

CRAIG DENNIS

by *Tonie Auer*

Ultra-luxury home designs in South Florida vary as much as their owners, but one trend that will likely never go out of vogue is the allure of water and outdoor living.

"To fully enjoy the South Florida resort lifestyle, buyers are looking for properties that are directly on deep water capable of dockage to moor a boat or yacht," says Innovative Creations, Inc. principal and creative director Katia Bates. "Buyers also look for the best locations near restaurants, shops, beaches and entertainment of all kinds with quick access to the ocean and no fixed bridges."

Peggy Marker, president of Fort Lauderdale-based Marker Construction, agrees. "Everyone wants to see the water, and almost all of the homes we build are on or near the water," she says.

ON THE WATERFRONT

Following her belief that being on the water is king, Bates, who is widely known for styling the Gianni Versace mansion (now an upscale hotel) in

Miami Beach, bought and extensively renovated (along with her husband, homebuilder Tom Bates) Bontona Peninsula at 529 Bontona Avenue in Fort Lauderdale.

"The most appealing feature of the Bontona Peninsula property is its pedigree," Bates says. "It always belonged to an important Floridian family. To seal the status from the previous family, we kept the bronze dolphins, which are now located as a feature sculpture in the fountain right in the middle of the main entrance driveway."

But, more than its history, Bates says it is a rare property on almost one acre of land with about 700 feet of dockage on three sides able to accommodate mooring for superyachts as well as a number of smaller tenders, sea toys and fishing boats without losing the fabulous and endless views of the New

River and Intracoastal Waterways.

With all the dockage available at Bontona Peninsula, a yacht owner could potentially purchase the property to offset the dockage charges for mooring at a regular marina, Bates says.

Another trend is the shift away from the dark Mediterranean style that dominated the luxury home market for so long, Marker says. "Homeowners are moving more toward transitional design with the clean lines of modern homes. And, with very few exceptions, they want brand-new. Most of our clients will raze a home and build their vision from the ground up, unless they're getting a historic home."

Bates agrees that newer homes are in demand. "Most buyers are now looking for transitional or classic contemporary styles that are sophisticated and timeless," she says. "They want classic interior design and architecture with a contemporary style. And they want more unique and exclusive features, such as custom furniture, wallcoverings on canvas and boiserie/wood paneling designed especially for them."

BRINGING THE OUTSIDE IN

Most luxury homeowners want to maximize square footage for resale

value because the cost of land is so expensive, says Jacob Brillhart, owner and founding architect of Miami-based Brillhart Architecture. But he is finding many clients who want smaller homes with meaningful indoor-outdoor connections and ample green space instead of rooms designed around big-screen televisions and six-car garages.

"We are building slightly smaller homes between 3,500 to 4,500 square feet. Owners are putting more money into smaller packages with improved quality and design that is integrated into the landscape," he says. "We have seen a great response to courtyard homes with windows on multiple sides and smaller rooms, as well as homes raised off the ground. Much of this surrounds the concept of climate change."

Advanced building materials have also increased in use. "Glass technology and insulation have come so far, we can create homes that are livable and secure, but also offer greater transparency," Brillhart says. "Floor-to-ceiling hurricane-impact windows allow residents to sit in their living rooms but feel like they're sitting outside. For second stories, you can create beautiful spaces that feel as if you are living among the trees."