

# Builder's European-style mansion adds 'patina of age'

## Tropical touch adds vitality

BY MURPHY, FROM TK

booming luxury home market in South Florida. Murphy's company, Coastal Construction, has built or renovated many of these \$1-million-plus abodes — sales of which rose a staggering 32 percent last year in Miami-Dade.

The Murphys wanted their home equipped with not only the latest techno-gizmos, but to reflect their two passions: Europe and South Florida. (Murphy, a fourth-generation builder, grew up in Miami and the Keys.)

"I like the Louvre — the art of the building as well as the paintings — and I like Versailles and the great estates of Europe," Murphy said. "We wanted our house to be very European with tropical touches."

### ANTIQUÉ BACCHUS

The result: An almost 8,000-square-foot stone-and-stucco spread near southern Coral Gables. It has a turret, a circular stairway, a carved wood mantle, an antique Bacchus fountainhead, a 350-year-old French tapestry, Parisian crystal chandeliers and Florida cypress ceilings.

"Your home is your home," Murphy says. "What better way to spend your money?"

Among the home's touches:

▶ The guest powder room is behind a quartz telephone room, complete with a black rotary-dial phone.

▶ The marble for the fireplace and kitchen counters is a rare find: white, veined with warm coppery orange, tinged with black and gray. "I find granite too cold," Murphy says.

▶ The wine room off the kitchen/family room has a curved wooden door stained to make it look centuries old.

Murphy admits he almost went nuts during the 24 months it took to design and build the home, while still running his construction company.

The Murphys' architect and interior designer, the husband-and-wife team of William and Phyllis Taylor, think the meticulous planning was worth it.

"One of the greatest compliments paid to me a month ago was when I overheard a workman asking, 'How old is this house?'" architect William Taylor said. "They thought they had it for many, many years. I felt particularly successful: I had (added) a little patina of age."

From his clients' homes, Murphy borrowed the idea of secluding the master bedroom and his office in a separate wing for maximum privacy. They also placed the library, living room and dining room side by side, opening to each other via steps and arched entrances.

"He loved the idea of when they entertained that guests could move from room to room," said the Murphys' son, Tom, 30, who along with his brother, Sean, 29, works in the family business. (The Murphys' third child, Erin, 17, lives with them.)

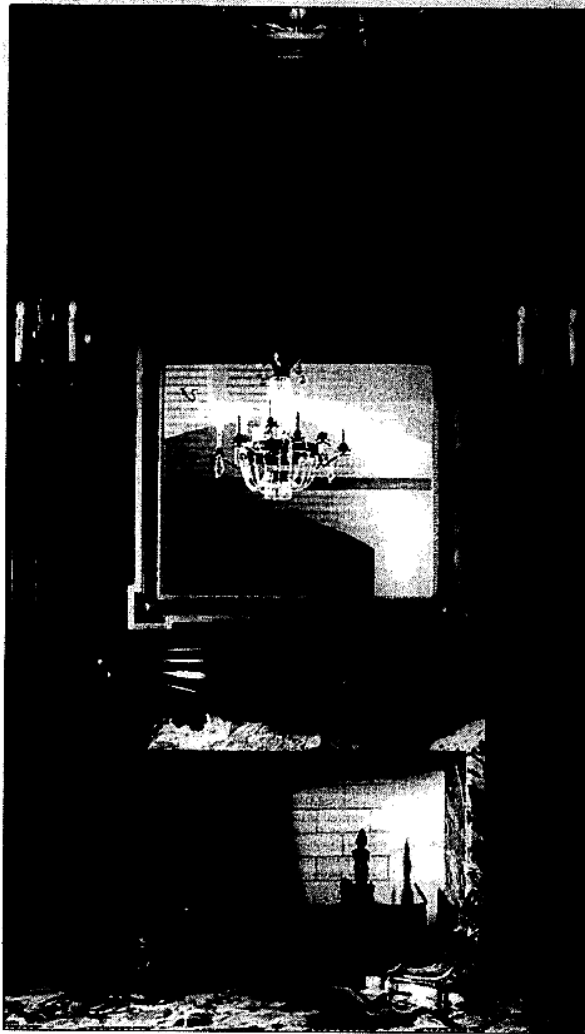
### FORMAL BUT WARM

The Taylors also borrowed ideas from homes in the south of France, which, while formal, still convey much warmth. That meant ceilings no higher than 13 feet.

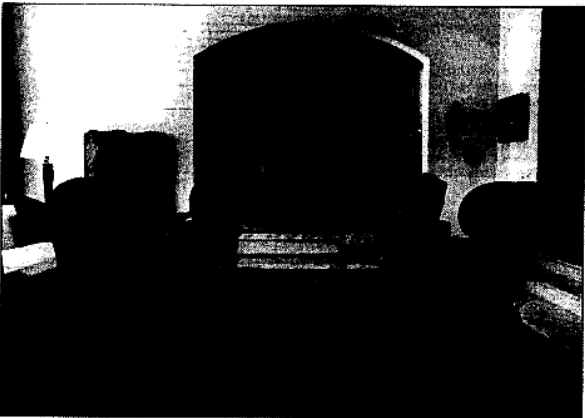
"Very frequently people in South Florida are impressed with space and volume, but people are never comfortable in those two-story-high living rooms — they look for a cozy library or den or family room to spend their time," says William Taylor. "I want my people to be comfortable in each and every room."

Phyllis, who designed the interior, wanted to bring South Florida's tropical feel to the house. It was her idea to paint the woodwork, doors and crown moldings an antique greenish-brown — a color she dubbed "swamp green." At first, she met stunned silence from the Murphys.

"I know it wasn't a good sales tool to call it swamp green, but it brings it back to the Everglades," she says.



**FIREPLACE:** Tom Murphy chose orange-veined marble instead of granite because it has a warmer look.



**ROOM FOR LIVING:** The view from the living area through an arched entry into the dining room at back. The openness facilitates entertaining.

The Murphys agreed, and now they think it's one of the best features of the home. "I surely haven't seen it anywhere else," Murphy says.

**TRADED CAR FOR HELP**  
Their present dwelling is a long way from the first house Murphy built for himself at age 21 in 1971. He saved \$3,800, borrowed \$2,000 from his father, and bought a lot in South Miami-Dade near The Falls.

He built a three-bedroom, two-bath house — mostly by himself, using leftover materials from construction sites. He designed the house himself, a ranch-style home with an atrium in the middle. Toward the end, he traded his '68 Chevy Malibu in exchange for a worker to help him finish the

house. "It was built like a fortress," he said. "It took a year and a half. I used a pick and shovel to dig the foundation."

Two years later, he sold the home for \$60,000. "I thought I was the richest guy in the world," he said. "That's when I started my business."

After that, he began experimenting with home designs, including building a Hawaiian-style house. For his family, he built three homes in Miami-Dade, three in the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, as well as a log cabin in Montana and a tin-roofed, clapboard home in Boca Grande, an island off the west coast, near Sanibel.

"No two have been the same style," he says. With the older two sons

grown, he, Leslie and youngest son Erin moved to a Deering Bay condominium in the mid-'90s so they could be closer to Palmer Trinity School in South Miami-Dade. A junior, Erin is class president and quarterback of the football team. (Murphy also was building luxury homes and condos at Deering Bay.)

But the Murphys wanted to try to build again, this time their dream home, in the middle of a lush lot. Leslie scoured neighborhoods for a year.

Finally, she found an older ranch-style house perched on an oak-rich lot, on more than an acre. She loved the land not only for its trees, but for the squirrels, five wild macaws and dozens of green parrots. The owner called it Silver Oaks. The land fit her husband's



**FAMILY PORTRAIT:**The Murphys, from left: Tom Murphy Jr. with wife, Leslie; his sons Sean and Tom C. with wives, Jennifer and Suzanne; Tom Murphy Sr. and his wife, Dot; Erin Murphy, center.



**GALLERY:** Multiple chandeliers light a long gallery, with consoles holding artwork placed along the wall.

**The home has a turret, a 350-year-old French tapestry, and Florida cypress ceilings.**

stone entrance plaza. Key West landscape architect Raymond Jungles, known for his work with Florida native plants and palms, designed their grounds. Ferns overflow in the front; native palms in the back.

But true to their love of European style, the Murphys kept their back gardens formal, with the scalloped-edged pool the focal point, surrounded by four large Canary Island date palms.

Inside, their home maintains the same formality, with exceptions made for today's lifestyle. Handmade floor-to-ceiling cabinets, for example, house the big-screened television and audio equipment.

Murphy wanted everyone to feel comfortable in his house, from his sons watching sports to his parents coming over for dinner.

"We're a very close-knit family," Murphy said. "We're together most weekends."

### TOUR FOR OPRAH

The house is already attracting attention from one of Murphy's clients: Oprah Winfrey. She told Leslie: "I want to see it. All those special touches."

Now, says Leslie, with Silver Oaks virtually done, it's time to invite Oprah for dinner.

criteria: The front of the lot faced north; the back, where the pool would be, was in the sunny south.

Trouble was, the owner wouldn't sell.

### SECOND CHANCE

A year later, with the Murphys still looking, Wimbish-Riteway Realty partner Carolyn Miller called them up: She had the perfect lot for them — it was just going on the market that day. It was the same lot.

"We put a deposit on it that day," Murphy said. They promised the owner, who was moving farther north in Florida, to keep the name of the home — Silver Oaks. They bulldozed his ranch house. But they kept the trees, even an oak that was in the middle of the front yard.

William Taylor designed the home around it, including the

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