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## REBRANDING THE BAY

Thom Filicia brings his famous eye to his first major project in South Florida.



GETTING ABOARD Thom Filicia is the design mind behind Biscayne Beach.

In a country of reinvention, Miami stands apart. It is the place where people come to do what they haven't done before, to be what they haven't been before. The city was, is and will continue to be fueled by a singular alchemy of vision, entrepreneurship and chutzpah. Case in point: Thom Filicia. Five years after launching his namesake design firm, he won fame as the design doctor on the ultimate reinvention show, Bravo's Emmy award-winning *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (2003–07). Now, with his first foray into the hot-house world of Miami real estate, the New York-based designer has signed on as design partner of Biscayne Beach. The 51-story, 399-unit condominium development in the fast-growing East Edgewater neighborhood, scheduled to break ground in early 2014, seeks nothing less than to redefine how Miamians live and play. Filicia shared with *Interiors South Florida* how a residential building will reflect a city that's fast becoming an icon.

### Do you think that Miami has now fully committed to modernism?

If anything, Miami has committed itself to a multitude of influences. Fifteen, 20 years ago, Miami was trapped in hip and trendy South Beach style. But Miami has evolved and matured so that the food and culture and theater and museums and arts have provided the layers that make a city iconic.

### Is the city iconic yet, or is it in a state of becoming?

I think Miami has gone through a series of moments, dating from the 1920s—they hit and then they disappeared. Fifteen years ago,





WILD WAVES From top: A study of an interior by Thom Filicia; Biscayne Beach's undulating architecture.

Miami was an adolescent—hip and young and fun, a party town. But now Miami is a beautiful woman in her 20s, more mature and interesting. I've been coming here since college and remember thinking that you could visit five or six times and be exhausted by it, or outgrow it, but now you can come at every stage and there's something for you, and it's a place that you can call home. It has transcended South Beach, and the emerging neighborhoods are the foundation for what will make the city iconic.

#### Such as East Edgewater?

Yes, I love the central location, and I love that it's close to the Design District and Midtown. And I love that it's on the bay because there's such a movement toward using the water in a different way than it's been used before, with paddleboarding and kayaking. It's different from the beach lifestyle of catching some rays, jumping in the water—and then you start drinking. People

want to do something healthy and active. I'm a boater. I love kayaking and paddleboarding. I'm one of those people who want a bay lifestyle. Luxury has a different meaning than it used to—not just pampering and comfort, but access.

#### How does it feel to create and collaborate on Biscayne Beach?

To be the decorator on a project of this size, to be working as the design director, working with the architects and overseeing the sensibility of the decor—the beach club, the public spaces, the amenity spaces, all the fit and finish of the units—is great. I've never been involved in a project at this level. My role includes everything from uniforms to materials to what restaurateur we'll have, to logos and colors and branding. I'm the person who's saying, 'This is our vision, and we have to make sure that all of these pieces contribute to the vision.' I couldn't be happier to be part of this.







### What are some words that describe the style of Biscayne Beach?

Fresh, crisp, smart, timeless. I think there's also going to be an earthiness to it. It's going to be restrained and edited, but not in a cold minimalist way. It's going to be sophisticated yet approachable. Balanced. When we put the look-and-feel book together, I said I want this to be as appealing to someone coming from Canada as someone coming from Brazil—and as exciting to the realtors who are selling it. I want the people on the project saying that they want to live here.

### How did the TV show impact your work?

I had my company the entire time I was shooting *Queer Eye*, and it was always difficult to keep my design company going and keep myself in my industry and not just be a TV designer, an entertainer. I worked really hard to make sure that didn't happen. In terms of doing design

at this level—like doing Tina Fey's house—I got those jobs because of my high-end work, not because of the show. Now, this job is kind of a hybrid because the developers know that I'm capable of doing this level of design, but they also understand that I bring name recognition. So that's how *Queer Eye* has been beneficial to me.

### Miami is such an international city. Would you say that your travels have impacted your design of this project?

I've been to Barcelona, Panama, Brazil. I would say that travel is an amazing opportunity, but even more so connecting with the culture and the people. When I travel, I go to all the recommended places, hit all the iconic things that you want to see, but I always end up at the local watering hole, meeting people, whether I speak the language or not, staying out until the sun comes up, being behind the scenes. I come back with some sense of the locals—what they're



feeling, their sense of humor. These are the things that inform design. I always tell people who are about to go somewhere that connecting with people is your biggest takeaway. It's a gift—it comes from how you were raised—and that's the springboard for everything you do as a designer. If you become successful, or very affluent due to your success, you can lose your ability to connect. Being open is the biggest gift you can give yourself because that fuels your inspiration, your ideas, your creativity. ■

**EYE LINES** From top: In the pool area, horizontal lines encourage serenity and lounging; Filicia with his fellow cast members of *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy*.