

# HAUTE LIVING

LUXURY REAL ESTATE AND DESIGN MAGAZINE



**STANDING TALL**  
Ugo Colombo in the lobby of his Coconut Grove project, Grovener House.



# Superman MAN OF STEEL

EUROPEAN-BORN BUT A MIAMIAN THROUGH AND THROUGH, UGO COLOMBO LEAVES HIS IMPECCABLE IMPRINT ON EVERYTHING HE DOES...WHICH BEGS THE QUESTION...IS THERE ANYTHING HE CAN'T DO?

By Seth Semilof  
Photography by Reynaldo Alés

**Y**our first impression of Ugo Colombo, one of South Florida's most powerful businessmen, might be a tad underwhelming given that his demeanor leans to quiet and unassuming. And though it might not be his intention, he has deservedly earned the respect and admiration he enjoys from his peers.

For Colombo, success stems from a simple philosophy: Create your own brand and perfect it. "Work and leisure is about feeling good about yourself," he told us. "It's not just the money, it about feeling good when you deliver a product people enjoy...who appreciate your efforts." I always go that extra mile because my customers have come to expect the best from me."

Colombo's company, CMC Group, of which he is Chairman and CEO, specializes in residential real estate development, investments, sales and leasing. Among its many notable projects is the Santa Maria, a \$150 million tower on Brickell Avenue. Located in Downtown Miami, it is the tallest residential building south of Manhattan. Another important development is Porto Vita, a \$400 million, Mediterranean-style village in Aventura. For that, Colombo collaborated with Don and Jeffrey Soffer of Turnberry Associates. When asked what his favorite project, he told us it was 40-story Bristol Tower. Not surprising given the curvilinear glass tower offers million dollar views of Biscayne Bay and the City of Miami. "For over 17 years old, Bristol Tower has maintained its contemporary ambiance and design," he said. "I'm very proud of that."

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THE SANTA MARIA  
on Brickell Avenue in Downtown Miami is the  
tallest building south of Manhattan.

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# “I ALWAYS GO THAT EXTRA MILE BECAUSE MY CUSTOMERS HAVE COME TO EXPECT THE BEST FROM ME.”

—Ugo Colombo

Columbo studied business administration at the University of Miami. His intention was to go into business with his father, a plastics manufacturer. However, while living across from the Charter Club during that period, his – and subsequently, his professional focus – changed. “From my balcony, I could watch how the apartments developed and I was fascinated,” he recalls.

**S**o while still going to college, he seized the opportunity to manage apartments for absentee owners at The Imperial on Brickell Avenue, where his own family resided. Eventually, Colombo acquired the units in the building through foreclosure proceedings and orchestrated a successful sellout of the property. “One thing led to another, and that’s how I got my start in real estate,” he added.

As simple as he makes it all sound, his kind of success comes from a well-conceived mix of savvy, creativity and vision – as well as a meticulous eye for detail. To remain at the top of his game year after year, Columbo has the certain flair for incorporating those attributes to every one of his projects.

His perfectionism requires him to continually play an integral role in every decision that his company makes – from initial financial negotiations to architectural plans to

a development’s interior designs.

Even when he ventures outside the real estate arena, it’s without trepidation – and always with his gift for knowing precisely which path to take. Just before the real estate market took off into the stratosphere in 2002, Colombo be-

came a partner in the Miami-based Glasswall LLC because he wanted to maintain total control over the product’s quality, cost and delivery (his brother, Claudio, is the company’s CEO). Glasswall manufactures, produces and installs all types of structural glass products. Its client list includes the Bath Club, Ten Museum Park and Jade Beach.

When I ask him what made him believe that he should invest in a company that sold to his competitors, he replied, “I saw this market coming. I saw more condominiums being developed, many of them glass-walled or finished off in sliding glass doors and balconies. Life is made of chances, and you put the pieces together.” He sums it up even more succinctly in a one-two-three assessment of his decision: “One, I was upset with the company that was supplying glass to me; two, I

had the opportunity to build my own company, and three, I felt the market was there to put these things together.”

Columbo also owns The Collection – an exclusive Coral Gables-based luxury car dealership which he bought in 1994. “I was really looking at the land, not the car dealership,” he





LOBBY OF GROVENOR HOUSE



THE ULTRAMODERN LOBBY of Grovenor House was designed by Florentine architect Michele Bonan.

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**A MAN AND HIS CAR**  
Colombo takes a stand at his Coral Gables-based luxury dealership, The Collection.

explains of his decision to purchase it. "It was up for bid at an auction after being seized by the government."

Colombo also snatched up the dealership's surrounding properties in order to prepare for his development of 4000 Ponce, an enormous mixed-use tower completed in 2002.

**D**espite Colombo's inarguable talents, he's also a master at striking up and cultivating fruitful and harmonious business partnerships – something he's been doing to great effect for years. After collaborating with renowned architect Luis Revuelta on Bristol Tower, the pair has since built a mutually rewarding business relationship on a foundation of respect and admiration for each other's work.

Revuelta, who has described working with Colombo as "an architect's dream," also served as the architect on CMC Group's recently completed condominium project in Coconut Grove, Grovenor House, which offers high-tech features such as Grovenor Link, a cordless, in-residence,

touch-pad concierge.

Colombo's teaming with Turnberry's Jeff Soffer on the Porto Vita development in Aventura stemmed from their personal relationship. "We met through mutual friends and raced boats together," Colombo says. "We became business partners through the Porto Vita development. His father owned the land and sold half to me; I thought it was a great opportunity to buy in that area. Once the property was sold, Jeff and I decided to build Porto Vita together. We split our responsibilities, which was good." While mixing business and friendship is often a recipe for disaster, in this case it was totally positive. "Jeff and I were friends before, and Porto Vita was a success, so we never fought or were involved with lawsuits," Colombo explains. "We are both reasonable guys, which makes things go well."

Then there's Colombo's collaboration with the Lionstone Group, which bought the DuPont Plaza property in downtown Miami in 2001. The highly coveted parcel of real estate is now the future site of the Epic Residences & Hotel, a \$225 million, waterfront, mixed-use development overlooking the Miami River and Biscayne Bay in the form of



THE KITCHENS AT EPIC feature dark wood Snaidero cabinetry (top) and the bathroom (below) features a 72X60-inch tub by KOS.



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# “I DON’T WANT SPECULATION IN MY BUILDINGS; I WANT A BUYER WHO APPRECIATES WHAT THEY PURCHASED.”

—Ugo Colombo

two glass towers — one that comprises 48 stories, one with 60 — on the north bank of the river. The plans call for a public walkway that will connect to the river walk planned for One Miami, the project adjacent to it. Epic will also house 5,000 square feet of retail space and almost 25,000 square feet of restaurant and lounge area as well as a 12,000-square-foot spa overlooking the bay. Amenities include a sky deck pool with an underground music system, chilled towel service and a complimentary selection of sun care products, plus a laundry list of building services that cater to its residents’ every whim.

Because delivering this sort of deluxe lifestyle is Colombo’s specialty, it’s not surprising that he makes it a point to say he wants the buyers of his products to do so with the idea of enjoying them, not with the intention of making a lucrative profit off them down the line. “Everyone purchases something looking into the future, with an eye to make more,” he concedes. “But I am not allowing anyone to buy three or ten units. I don’t want speculation in any building; I want a buyer who appreciates what they purchased.”

As for the state of the current real estate market, Colombo is as relaxed about that as he is about every-

thing else. When asked how he thinks the numerous projects in progress will impact the city within the next year to two years, he responds, “If everything planned is going to be built, there should be no problem. The inventory that is under construction now is not that much, when you look at the growth and demand in Miami from the outside. People looking for prime properties are finished; the Class C properties will be hard to sell. I think the market will adjust itself.”

Despite living in the United States for more than 25 years, Colombo still embraces that laid-back, European way of thinking: appreciate life, enjoy it, savor it. Though it’s difficult to imagine given all he has on his plate, he’s definitely not all work and no play; when he’s not boating, jet skiing or waterskiing, he might be found enjoying dinner at Casa Tua or Quattro.

And even though Colombo always seems to have some new project in the works in South Florida, he has no immediate plans to venture too far from home with his projects. “I want to limit where

I develop,” he tells me. “I want to find a niche high-end market, produce a good product and be happy with life.” Sounds like a plan that, like everything else Colombo does, can’t miss. ☺

