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LUNCH WITH LYDIA

From a hospital to Ritz-Carlton luxury



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Piero Lissoni, the Italian architect charged with reimagining the clunky carcass of the old Miami Heart Institute into luxury condos worthy of the moneyed set, has just landed from Milan to check on the project's progress. His Ritz-Carlton Residences, III units that from the outside will seem sculpted out of glass, is slated to go on-line in the summer of 2016.

Lissoni, well-known not only for his architecture but for designing minimalist-style furniture, lighting and objects of all kinds, is happiest out on the wide terrace of the property's sales center. It's sleek — with modernist lines, soaring ceilings and a sculptural swoosh of a staircase leading to the possibility of upstairs rooms. He's enjoying a particularly lavish sunset over Surprise Lake, the pinks of the sky swirling across Miami Beach and out to the Atlantic.

• TURN TO LISSONI, 7M



PATRICK FARRELL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

SHOWER WITH A VIEW: Piero Lissoni looks out over the beach from a shower in his showroom for the future Ritz-Carlton Residences.

LUNCH WITH LYDIA



PATRICK FARRELL/MIAMI HERALD STAFF

BIG MONEY: The condos at Piero Lissoni's Ritz-Carlton Residences will be priced from \$2 million to \$25 million.

From a hospital to Ritz-Carlton luxury

• LISSONI, FROM 1M

"The quality of the light in Miami is absolutely special," he says in his lilting, unrushed way. "That's why when I agreed to design this property, I said, 'The first thing we have to do is cut it clean, open it up, lose spaces to have space. If the typical height of a ceiling in Miami is three meters, I want closer to five meters.' Usually investors don't prefer ceilings so high. They prefer to build two units with the height I want to give to just one. But to transform this place into homes for a sophisticated international buyer, I felt we needed volume. And we needed to fill it with that Miami light."

Lissoni, who calls himself "100 percent Italian" when it comes to his sense of fashion, is in jeans today. And sneakers.

"Because I was traveling. But the sneakers are an Italian label. Diadora. Simple design. There isn't the bulkiness of some American sneakers. As an Italian, I follow what my grandfather taught me and what my father taught me, which is that to be elegant does not mean expensive labels. It means to understand quality, and to be a little understated. In Milano, you will see ladies with an old vintage bag, a shirt they bought for five Euros at a flea market combined

with maybe a Chanel jacket, and they look so elegant but in such a natural way. You have to learn how to remove elements, not add and add, because then you become baroque."

Lissoni applies the same philosophy to architecture.

"I am called a minimalist, but that is just a label — it's less offensive than to be called a coke dealer or something else, but it is still a label. What I prefer to say is that I like simplicity, though behind simplicity there can be much complexity. In literature, for example, there can be such simple writing with such complexity in the back. Only the best writers know how to make it seem simple."

The Ritz-Carlton Residences, Miami Beach, with units priced from \$2 million to \$25 million, all feature Italian stone, Boffi kitchens and baths designed by Lissoni himself — in straight clean lines, of course. The half-acre deck, featuring an infinity-edged pool with waterfall, will sit atop the climate-controlled garage. Among amenities will be a 36-slip private marina on the placid saltwater lake that serves as a dolphin and manatee sanctuary, a 25-seat Imax theater, one spa for two-legged residents and another for the four-legged variety. Across the lake will be 15 single-family homes

that are part of the project.

Perhaps one of the biggest selling points, the project's developers believe, is the Ritz-Carlton service that will be available 24/7. These are not intended as short-stay units, meaning owners who are away won't be able to rent them to tourists looking for a sexy weekend pad, like at many condo-hotels. But residents can take advantage of all sorts of Ritz-Carlton pampering, order room service from the restaurants on the property, call down to reserve the house boat, actually a stylish VanDutch yacht with captain, which for a price will take them out for a spin along the Intracoastal or the Atlantic, or perhaps to dinner somewhere in town with a dock. And say you're about to return to your Surprise Lake pied-a-terre from Beijing or London or wherever. Before your arrival, for \$50-\$100 an hour, you can have house-keeping stock your bar and fridge, dress the place in fresh linens and fill it with flowers.

"This is a very unique address in Miami," says Lissoni, whose design and architectural credits include hotels such as the Monaco & Grand Canal in Venice, the Al Porto Hotel on Lake Zurich, the Bentley Design Hotel in Istanbul and the Mitsui Garden Ginza Hotel in Tokyo.

"One of the best things about it is its humanistic scale. The tallest part of the property is [nine] stories. If you're in a 60-story tower, I don't care how big and grand your terrace is, you are still not so much in touch with nature. Here you will be close to the water, close to the trees, close to the birds, you will be living inside of paradise, not high above it."

But what about the property's history as a hospital? Did he have any reservations about dark energy lingering there?

"Yes, the first time I went there it was so heavy. I asked the owners, can we combine many different people from different religions to do a special spiritual cleansing? I am not religious. Maybe it was a little tribal. But I wanted a rabbi, a priest, an imam, maybe somebody from the Buddhist religion. Because it felt bad in there."

They ultimately went with feng shui master Patrick Wong.

And where the spiritual stuff may have faltered, the heavy equipment kicked in.

"The Caterpillars are the best rabbis. Once the bulldozers went in and started knocking down walls and all the fresh air came in, all the old spirits flew away. Plus, we were surprised to find that the building had a very good structure."

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