



FORT LAUDERDALE

EBB AND FLOW BELOW THE DINING-TABLE

The house is well-camouflaged in its natural surroundings along one of the waterways in Fort Lauderdale, Florida. It's hard to imagine that it is a mere stone's throw from the city centre.

At the end of the nineteen-sixties the architect William Bigoney designed and built the house for himself. An eco-house avant la lettre.

A sinister detail: Bigoney was fatally shot by his third wife before she shot herself. The police were called out, but had difficulties finding the house and its entrance on account of its well-concealed location.

Today it is home to the architect Margi Glavovic Nothard and her husband Kim Nothard, the South African advertising guru.

text : Izabel Spike
photos : Alaia and Hans Fonk





Top left: the house designed by the American architect William Bigoney is almost entirely concealed in the thick vegetation on the banks of the northern fork of the New River. Yet the location is practically in the centre of Fort Lauderdale, Florida. Today it is home to the architect Margi and her husband Kim Nothard. They purchased a ruin and restored it sympathetically. Left: the outdoor dining space that sits on an island that emerges at high tide; it is accessed by a narrow walkway.

Above and adjoining: the living area still has much the same atmosphere as in Bigoney's day. Many of the cupboards have been restored; Hella Jongerius's red sofa stands out among the vintage furniture by Eames, Knoll, Macintosh and others. Margi made the table herself. Strips of glass in the floor are real eye-catchers - through them you can watch the movement of the tides below.

Overleaf:

The residence in all its glory - part of the pivoting louvered doors can just be seen; they function as exterior walls in the house.





In 1999 architect Margi and advertising expert Kim Nothard were looking in Fort Lauderdale, Florida, for somewhere to live and raise their family. During the house-hunt Kim came across the Bigoney house and e-mailed a photo to Margi, who was still in South Africa. She was intrigued by the sharp lines rising up out of the jungle. It was an unusual house, designed by a progressive architect who had adjusted his vision - inspired partly by Bauhaus and Gropius - to the subtropical environment.

The real estate agent had a dilemma: should he tell the couple of the bloodshed that had taken place there? He felt he must, but the prospective buyers were not fazed. They felt privileged to have the opportunity to live in the visionary architect's house and keep his legacy alive.

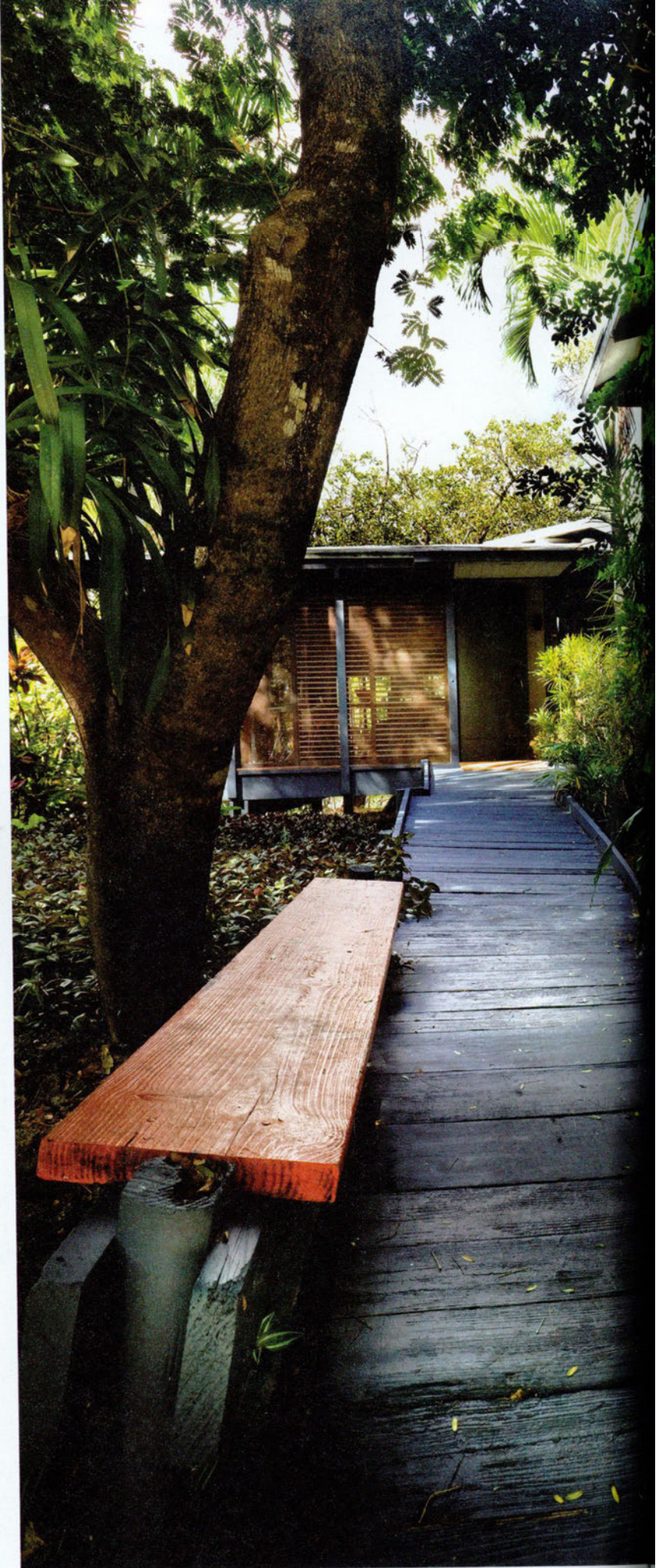
More or less experimental houses of this type do tend to be plagued by practical imperfections: form and idea prevail, and the possibility of a leaky roof or somewhat fragile construction does not appear to stand in the way of the architectural dream. The Nothards were prepared to put up with the practical drawbacks accompanying such dwellings, as well as the run-down appearance. They returned the house almost exactly to the way it had originally been, including the furniture, closets and kitchen. It has become a homage to the architect who was important for Florida architecture in the mid-20th century.

"When we bought the house it was a ruin. The estate agent assumed we would pull it down and build something new. It was sombre and many of the trees had blown down. We had the place thoroughly cleaned, stripped off old coats of paint and returned it to its basic form. True, it was a lot of work, but now you can see the structure again and it's spectacular. This house is a living organism; a design laboratory. I bring my students from the Florida Atlantic University of Urban Design here to show them what environmental design is all about, how we are in tune with nature", as Margi put it.

William Bigoney studied under Walter Gropius at Harvard Graduate School of Architecture. So it is not surprising that Bauhaus influences can be detected in his work. When he moved to Florida in 1949 his influence on local architecture was almost immediately apparent, in his design for 233 waterside villas at Lauderdale Harbors/Rio Vista. Another distinctive Bigoney project was the Fort Lauderdale Police Station at Broward Boulevard.

The house he designed for himself is on a northern fork of the New River and follows Gropius's principles regarding the creation of a micro-climate indoors in keeping with the natural situations outdoors. It has been designed to catch the slightest breeze, making air-conditioning unnecessary. The wooden structure blends seamlessly into the natural surroundings of thick undergrowth and tall trees. The house is made up of two square 'pods' arranged stepwise and standing one behind the other under a gable roof. From a cul-de-sac, a long walkway leads to the front door set in the largest volume of some 14 x 14 metres. That part is right beside the river and contains the living room, dining area and kitchen. Rather than make regular walls, Bigoney designed pivoting louvered panels on all four sides, with a 1-metre wide veranda encircling the house.

He added four rectangular strips of glass in the roof to allow sunlight to enter from above. It is made from Homasote, a building





product made from recycled materials by one of America's earliest manufacturers of eco-products. The main volume rests on stilts, one reason being to make less impact on the roots of the trees. Also, at high tide, water can flow beneath the house. Openings have been designed in the dining room floor and fitted with glass to enable the occupants to watch the ebb and flow. At high tide, part of the house seems suspended above the water, and on the river side a small island emerges which accommodates an all fresco dining space. Indeed, Bigoney designed much of the furniture, the closets and kitchen himself entirely in the Bauhaus tradition, and the present owners have retained it. The slightly smaller pod behind the main volume is situated somewhat higher up. It is built above the garage and houses the bedrooms.

"Basically the house is a cheap structure. You wouldn't be allowed to build that kind of structure here today. The Florida building regulations no longer permit it", Margi explained.

She studied architecture at the University of Natal in South Africa, and moved to Los Angeles for her Masters degree. In 1996 she and her husband arrived in Florida, where they could develop further.

In 1999 she started practising architecture from home with her own Glavovic Studio Inc, initially fairly theoretical work. She did not focus on one specific field, but on a wide range of creative, design-orientated projects. Work came her way thanks to her social contacts, particularly in Fort Lauderdale's artistic circles. One such assignment was the building of the Young Circle Arts Park in Hollywood, Florida.

Margi: "What interests me is the introduction of design into all manner of projects, whether it's a bathroom makeover or an entire city. To add an extra dimension by means of high quality design. It's not just about design or money, but more about thinking up creative solutions for all kinds of conditions. Extraordinary solutions for ordinary conditions. 'Green' solutions are part of it, but not necessarily the point of departure." That type of extra dimension is what she created when converting an old warehouse in Fort Lauderdale into the Girls' Club, for the artist Francie Bishop Good.

"It was an existing square building and, with that as the starting point, I created from very little something special, inside and out. For instance, I 'packed' part of the façade in fibre glass panels on which, at night, images can be projected. It has livened up the neighbourhood and attracts new people. Inside, I opted for a layering of materials attuned to the existing walls", Margi Nothard explained.

The Girls' Club comprises a large rectangular gallery space traversed by white walls, fibre glass panels set in aluminium frames. A bright orange staircase leads past an orange wall to the mezzanine floor. Francie Bishop Good has her studio at the back of the complex.

Margi concluded: "With the Girls' Club we sought to change Broward County into a contemporary art environment. We show schools and other institutions around to introduce them to art."

Left: the walkway leading to the house. In the background, the front door of the main volume which opens into the living space.

Below: the architect Margi Nothard in the doorway of a complex she designed - the Girls' Club in Fort Lauderdale. In the background, a self-portrait by Jennifer Dubnau.

Overleaf:

Scenes from the Girls' Club in Fort Lauderdale, initiated by the artist Francie Bishop Good. It is housed in an old warehouse that Margi Nothard transformed into a modern gallery. She placed fibre glass panels against the front elevation which now encircle the old structure like a second skin. At night, images can be projected on the panels.

The photos were taken during the 'Talking Heads' thematic exhibition, a collection of portraits of women curated by Francie Bishop Good and artist/writer Michelle Weinberg.







girls' club

17