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# GREEN THUMB

With an eye toward classicism, landscape designer Fernando Wong makes his mark on South Florida with three major and distinct projects.

By Jesse Bratter Chait  
Photography by Brett Hufziger

From the new Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club to the upcoming ICA, Miami, Fernando Wong's landscaping talents are on display throughout much of South Florida.

It took two years for Fernando Wong, of Fernando Wong Outdoor Living Design ([fernandowongold.com](http://fernandowongold.com)), and his team to scour the state and find the perfect signature trees for the reimagined site of the Four Seasons Hotel at The Surf Club. But it was well worth the wait, as the exploration led to 14 majestic specimens, including a 100-year-old kapok that towers nine stories high and a 45-foot-wide banyan that had to be cut vertically into five fragments and reassembled on location in time for the property's recent opening. With a presence in Miami, Palm Beach and the Hamptons, Wong is certainly having a moment in the South Florida landscape, and the transformation of The Surf Club is only the beginning.

"The Four Seasons in Surfside has an understated elegance," says Wong, who often turns to his background in classical architecture and interior design when dreaming up landscapes. That was especially helpful in The Surf Club project. "I needed to create a connection between two very distinctive architectural styles—the more traditional building that Russell Pancoast designed in the early 1900s and the new, transparent Richard Meier glass boxes that reflect the sky almost as if they weren't there," he says—not to mention the other design powerhouses (Joseph Dirand, Lee Mindel and Kobi Karp) who have touched the project as well. Stretching along 815 feet of coastline, the oceanside refuge of intimate courtyards, sand dunes, luxurious swimming pools and lush tree canopies speaks to the iconic social club's alluring past while embracing its new era.

But whereas The Surf Club illustrates grandeur, another of Wong's

projects, the Institute of Contemporary Art, Miami, is an exercise in restraint. "The intent there is for us to be a little bit quieter so that the landscape becomes a supporting actor to the sculptures," he says of the 15,000-square-foot sculpture garden that will accommodate classes, events and, most importantly, a revolving art collection. Set to open in the Design District at the end of this year, the museum will feature modern architecture by Spain-based Aranguren + Gallegos Arquitectos, with help from local firm Wolfberg Alvarez & Partners. Wong aims for the garden to offer an oasis of shade trees and bamboo plantings amid the urban surroundings.

And still, he takes another direction with the Four Seasons Hotel and Private Residences Fort Lauderdale, a "civilized jungle," as he calls it, scheduled to open in 2018. With the interiors under control thanks to Tara Bernerd and Martin Brudnizki, the landscape challenge there was to mitigate views of the road and vehicles between the hotel and the ocean. "My vision is of an exotic island, like Bora Bora or Saint Lucia," says Wong, who is incorporating a variety of palm trees and native plants not only on the ground level, but also on the third-floor pool deck, where "a canopy of coconut palms helps to create the sense that you're standing on top of a mountain, looking down to the seashore."

Patience. Kindness. Gentleness. These are all attributes important for a landscape designer to possess, as plants are living, breathing things that need to be nurtured and given time and room to grow. As Wong brings these major landscape projects to fruition, he is showing us that he has them all.