

OCEAN DRIVE®

November 2007

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MEET THE MOGULS

Building Modern Miami

Ugo Colombo has created some of the Magic City's most recognizable structures. Now this man of many pursuits is launching a true Epic

BY RIKI ALTMAN PHOTOGRAPHS BY MARIA LANKINA

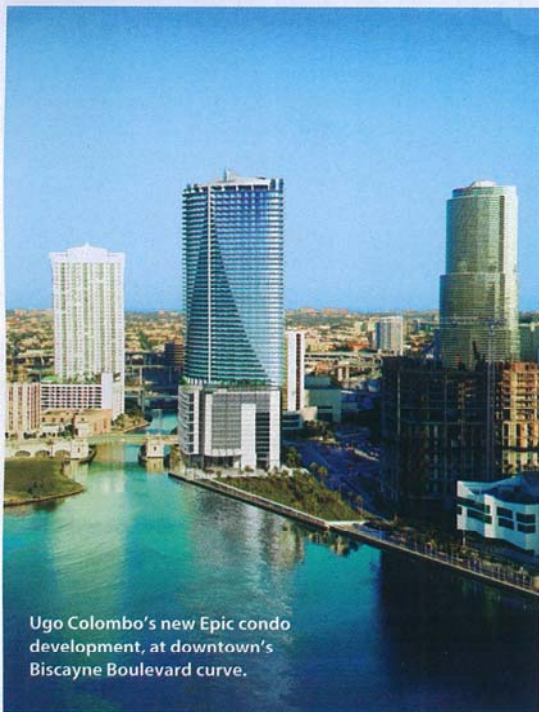
He races Ferraris, eats prosciutto-and-mozzarella *panini*, has an accent so charming it could melt butter, and analogizes real estate to fashion—it's no surprise 46-year-old real-estate developer Ugo Colombo hails from Milan. Much to the delight of the thousands of residents who call his buildings home, he also has a deep-rooted sense of the Italian aesthetic. "Italy is the country of design," he says.

"There are elements in a building's architecture that make something look better than other things," Colombo explains. "Glass looks better than painted concrete. Metal looks better than concrete. So it depends on how you dress the building. Obviously, all those elements cost more money. One, you need the elements to play with, and then you need a good architect to put it together. You know silk is better than Lycra, but just because a dress is made out of silk doesn't mean it's well-cut. [It's] no different than fashion or any other design."

Visitors to the sales center of his latest project, appropriately christened Epic, can see he knows how to impress buyers. Once you approach the curve where Biscayne Boulevard meets Biscayne Bay, a new world emerges. Once there, a smiling valet takes your car and points to the elevator, which opens to expose—get this—a heavy-linen sofa with pillows.

Inside the sales office are elements of his latest concepts: wood and stainless-steel Snaidero cabinetry, tall windows overlooking the water, Calcutta marble and high-tech appliances. Queen Anne chairs bear pillows embroidered with the project's logo. Fragrance from a Japanese quince-scented candle follows guests as they investigate the miniature scale-model display. Refreshments are served on silver trays as salespeople recite the laundry list of amenities they can expect from the condo-hotel. Terms such as "accelerated passenger elevators," "conciierge," "on-site tailor and cobbler," "à la carte services" and "catering" are slung around with abandon, causing previously secure people to wonder why they have compromised their lifestyles for so long.

It's this attention to the smallest details that has become Colombo's mark of distinction. "Ugo, in particular, is a stickler for perfection and including very upscale, never-before-seen-in-the-USA European design, finishes, appliances, etc., to the South Florida high-end consumer," says Bruce Weiner, president and chief operat-



Ugo Colombo's new Epic condo development, at downtown's Biscayne Boulevard curve.



Intelligent Design

Ugo Colombo came to Miami from Milan more than two decades ago, and since then has built a résumé filled with some of the city's most impressive construction projects, including the Santa Maria in Miami, the Grovenor House in Coconut Grove, and Cipriani Ocean Resort and Club Residences in Miami Beach.

UGO COLOMBO

ing officer of Turnberry, Ltd. The two met in 1997 when working on Porto Vita, Aventura's tony condominium/private club. "We revolutionized the super-high-end club lifestyle experience."

"I made it a point in my business to always deliver a quality product—delivering a product that is up to the standards of what people expect," Colombo explains. "The goal is to make people feel good about what they have. When you buy something expensive, you always have, like, that second thought. I want that second thought to be a positive one."

In his portfolio are a number of posh developments, including Miami's Santa Maria and Grovenor House in Coconut Grove. He has also partnered with Giuseppe Cipriani and the Patrinely Group to create another condo-hotel, Cipriani Ocean Resort and Club Residences on Miami Beach, with occupancy expected to be available beginning in late 2009. It's the 40-story Bristol Tower, however, that holds a special place in his heart.

Not only was this his first luxury high-rise, but it was also the first time he worked with architect Luis Revuelta, who is also responsible for Epic. "He never did a building before, either, but I liked his ideas and his concept and his design," Colombo explains. "It's still my favorite building."

Colombo was the first Bristol Tower resident 18 years ago, setting up home in



Ugo Colombo and his wife, Sara.

the 10,000-plus-square-foot penthouse. He lived in the space alone until he got married and started a family. Colombo, then a 40something bachelor, met his Canadian wife, Sara, while vacationing in Monte Carlo. They have been married for two years and spend much of their time with Uberto, their one-and-a-half-year-old son, as well as their five dogs, some of which were rescued. The couple is expecting another addition in December, but this time it's a baby girl. Colombo says he hopes that by then the renovations of the couple's 11,000-plus-square-foot manse on North Bay Road—the former home of Carl Fisher—will be complete.

Surely he will then feel more comfortable parking his marine-blue Porsche Cayenne Turbo, convertible Aston Martin V8 Vantage and Audi Q7 there. (He also confesses to making long hauls on a scooter.) Other toys include a flashy Dodge Magnum and a white Ferrari F430 Challenge built especially for racing, which he takes out on the track annually during the Ferrari Challenge Trofeo Pirelli.

But constructing skyscrapers, globetrotting, cruising, skiing, racing and spending time with his family aren't Colombo's only activities. He is also partially responsible for The Collection's luster, since he not only owns the land it is built on but also constructed the Mediterranean-influenced, multilevel luxury-car showroom in Coral

Gables. Though a luxury-automobile enthusiast, Colombo says he leaves management to Ken Gorin. "Ken has the same philosophy as me, which is, the customer is the most important piece of the business, and if it costs an extra penny to make him happy, eventually it will be paid back."

Colombo also owns Glasswall, a Coconut Grove-based window and glass-manufacturing company now run by his brother Claudio. Though Claudio is relatively new to Miami, manufacturing is not a new concept to either brother, since their family business back in Milan is plastic manufacturing. Colombo says his father is his role model: "He has been a great dad and he taught me a lot," he says. "He always brought me to the office and to the factory when I was a kid. The only way he didn't succeed was that he didn't get me to play golf. I don't have the patience for it."

But his father did provide the means for Colombo to move to America more than 20 years ago by allowing his son to live in his Miami condominium. "My father bought an apartment here thinking he would retire, but he never did," Colombo says. Instead Ugo made it his residence and enrolled at the University of Miami to study business. Shortly after graduating, he entered the world of condo management and formed a company, CMC Group. Soon he was taking advantage of the hot '90s real-estate market, buying and selling foreclosures. He brought Bristol Tower to life in 1993 and asserts this was Brickell's first real luxury high-rise. "I like the development end, seeing something growing from an idea to reality, turning ideas into concrete," he says.

Today he gives back to the city via charitable support of nonprofit organizations, including Children's Home Society of Florida, March of Dimes, Society for Abused Children, Humane Society of Greater Miami and United Way of Miami-Dade. And while it is not uncommon to spot him out on the town with the likes of Flavio Briatore and Colin Farrell, this self-proclaimed family man labels himself "very reserved."

"I have plenty of weaknesses, but I don't want to discuss them," he says. "It takes a little while to know me. I'm shy. Nobody believes me, but I am."

"I like seeing something growing from an idea to reality, turning ideas into concrete."


Weiner says, "I've gotten to know and have developed a great deal of respect and admiration for Ugo as a business partner and friend." After

showering the developer with compliments ranging from "intelligent" to "worldly," he also adds "understated" and "low-profile" to the list.

Colombo admits that he holds his cards close: "I had a girlfriend once. For the first three months she thought I was laying masonry because I said I was in construction."

But he doesn't always pull away, according to CMC marketing associate Lindsay Jackman. "People would be surprised to know that Ugo is very hands-on," she says. "He has created a great working environment that inspires creativity and allows growth within the company. Many employees have been here for more than 10 years. He's a very kind person with a big heart."

"I have my moments," he acknowledges, but "I'm generally, you know, I'm fair. I always give a fair chance to everybody. It's difficult to have a relationship with everybody. There's like 500 people here. But the people whom I interact with, there is a mutual respect." He claims that very few employees in any sort of managerial position under him have resigned.

Colombo won't share his plans for the future, saying simply that his goal is to "keep things going as they are. I like to keep it interesting." 



La Dolce Vita

Ugo Colombo is a prolific developer, but he also finds time for more recreational pursuits, such as cruising, racing and spending time with his wife, Sara, and son, Uberto.