



yucatan delight

By K. Schippe

Client:

Playa Associates,
Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Architect:

Segura & Schreiber S.C.,
Playa del Carmen, Mexico

Contractor:

Aventuras Arquitectura y
Diseno S.A.,
Puerto Aventuras, Mexico

Bali meets the Yucatan in the rich bathroom of one of the El Taj units. The walls are a Mexican limestone known as Crema Maya, while the countertops are a Marmol Emperador from Indonesia. The vessel sinks in some of the units also come from Bali. (All photos courtesy Playa Associates)

PLAYA DEL CARMEN, Mexico – For many people, the opportunity to visit a foreign country is the adventure of a lifetime. Here, you get two-for-one ... and that includes the stone.

The impossible of being in two places at once meets with reality with the Playa del Carmen-based Playa Associates' newest condo-hotel, the El Taj Oceanfront, which opened in February. Although located a short drive down the beach from Cancun on Mexico's Caribbean, the resort owes its greatest influence to another seaside paradise – Bali.

Helping to pull it all together and providing that extra touch of luxury guests demand: natural stone from both Mexico and Indonesia.

UNIQUE STYLE

El Taj Oceanfront –the entire Playa Associates complex, in fact – is a labor of love and a testament to understanding between developer Jack

Perlman and architect Sergio Segura.

Perlman, a New York native who hasn't left Playa since being stranded there more than 15 years ago, remained committed – through the development of four previously built luxury condominium complexes – to maintaining the town's charm as a small finishing village while stabilizing its tourist economy.

To help do that, he hired Segura, an award-winning designer and partner in Segura and Schreiber S.C.

Segura explains that he was working for the firm that constructed Perlman's first building effort in Playa.

"My company suggested they come and meet Jack Perlman," says Segura. "Shortly after that, we started doing our first building."

Until that time, the architect had mainly specialized in designing single-family residential units, particularly weekend villas.

"But, I had always wanted to do something right next to the sea, and I match each other well," he says.

Continued on page



The locally quarried Crema Maya provides a feeling that's light and spacious to the living areas of the units, while the Marmol Emperador lends additional elegance to the kitchen countertops (below).

understand the style he wants and the kind of work he wants to do. I love doing this. We work like a really good team."

That's good, because Segura says Perlman is very much hands-on with his projects.

"He tells me what he wants and what he needs, and I interpret that,"

the architect says. "I present him with my ideas and after plenty of discussion we agree on something very, very nice. I do the architecture and the functionality, and he puts in a very good amount of taste and enthusiasm.

"He's always at the construction site taking care of every detail," Segura

adds. "He helps a lot."

The style Perlman desires is, says Segura, a unique one. He calls it "very special for this place," although it's expressed slightly differently in each of the projects.

"For example, the Maya Villa is a little more Mayan in its finishes and in its details," he says. "The El Taj Beachside and now the El Taj Oceanfront are basically the same style, but there are little differences in some of the details and in their smaller decorations, although both feel Asian."

Perlman, who's responsible for the décor, brought many of the finish articles, such as furniture and light fixtures, from Indonesia, and the two men see a tie-in between the local Mexican materials and those from the other side of the globe.

"If you go parallel to the equator, you find many places around the world where they have the same finishes and the same culture while sharing many things in architecture because it's the same weather," says Segura. "After thousands of years, they become somewhat the same."

Still, the El Taj Oceanfront also borrows heavily from its own locale.



"We found just about everything else here in Mexico," the architect says. "The design is a nice mix of a Mexican beachside building style and a very, very Playa del Carmen style. It really belongs to this city and this place."

SET IN STONE

Quality is an intergral part of all Teriman projects, and that certainly includes the appearance of the projects inside and out. Segura says that manifests itself in two ways: visitors to the town often stop to take photos, while those who vacation in the luxury condos have a high return rate.

He adds that his design style isn't one that's necessarily popular among his fellow architects at the moment. One of his goals is to provide visitors with something he describes as "very sweet" in a look that they're not going to see elsewhere.

"We use a lot of curves and we use a lot of stone," Segura says. "Of course, natural materials are much better for human beings because you have the feeling of nature."

Although the exterior of the El Taj is a painted plaster fairly typical of Mexican architecture, the building sits on Mexican black Cantera stone, which



The exterior terraces feature a locally produced limestone called Marmol Aticato, which provides much the same neutral color palette as the interior stones. It's finished with a non-slip surface that's essential for safety during the rainy season.

is also incorporated into the first-floor balconies of the four-story building.

"We used stone in the base, which is about 3' high," Segura explains. "It makes the building look not that tall. We didn't want to have a tall building, so it looks like it has a basement."

Nor is that the only exterior use of stone.

"We have a slate that Jack brought

from Bali that we use for some of the details on the exterior," he says. "For instance, we've used it to make human faces and for other decoration."

Nor is the use of stone limited to the vertical surfaces on the exterior. A local stone called Marmol Aticato is used on the terraces. Segura says the finish is such that it's not slippery when wet.

Inside the apartment is a

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On some of the interior walls, a local fossil stone provides both color and decoration, as well as durability.

similar-looking stone, a cream-colored limestone known as Crema Maya.

“It’s really like a soft marble, and it’s very local – from the peninsula of

Yucatan,” says the architect. “We’ve used that in all the bathrooms, both for the floors and the walls of the showers. However, for (some of) the showers,

the floors are a black riverstone about the size of small eggs.”

Segura explains that the riverstone provides a natural feeling that’s very

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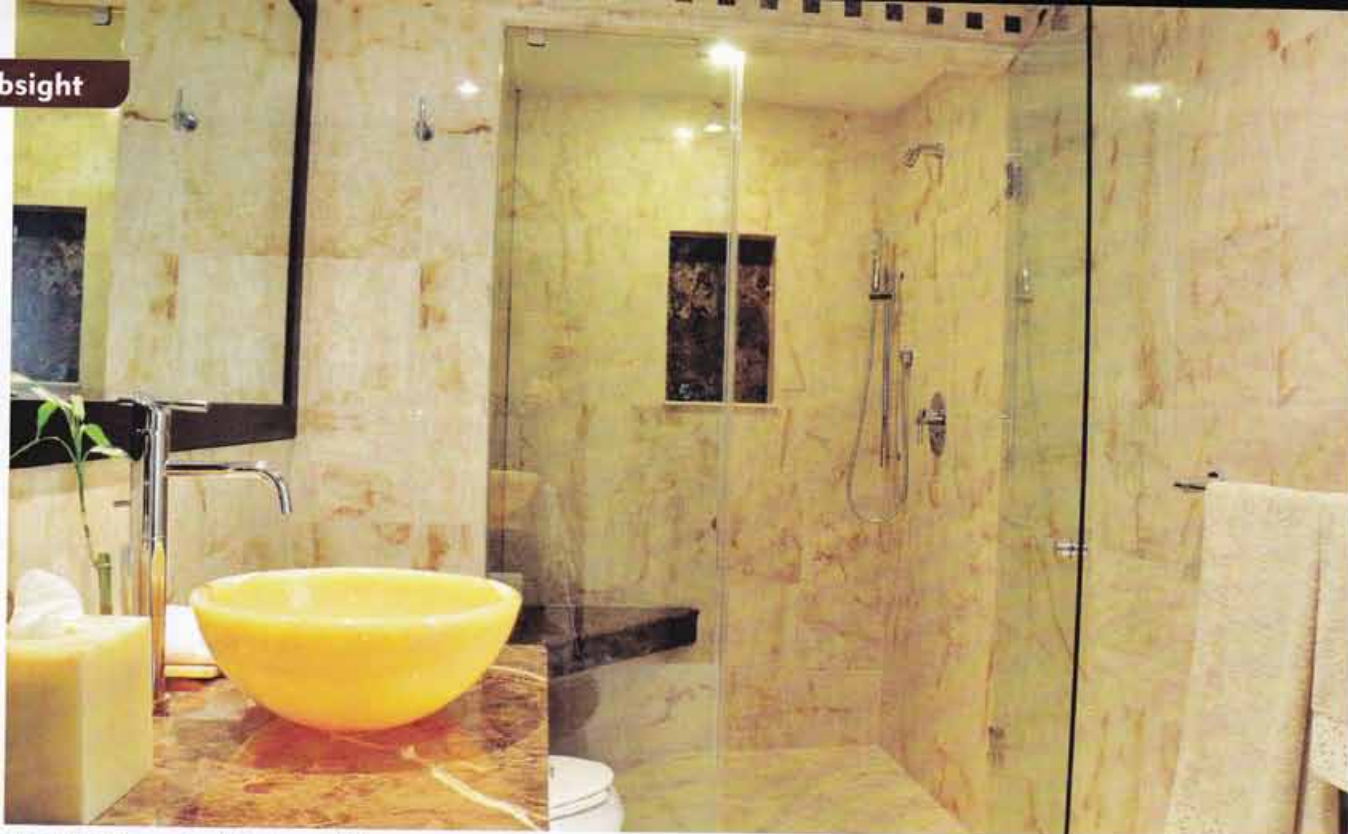
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The baths offer a mix of Mexican and Indonesian stone. Although the floor of this shower is finished in the local Crema Maya, others are done in a black riverstone to provide a passive foot massage for bathers.

healthy for people's feet, and acts almost like a massage.

The same cream/beige color

palette shows up again in some of the bedrooms and in parts of the building's central patio, with another local lime-

stone referred to as fossil stone because of the sea creatures imbedded in it.

"Again, it's a very nice, soft



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stone," he says. "It's used mainly as a decoration, but it's not slippery and the color is similar. It just provides a very good feeling."

Other than the decorative slate on the exterior of the building, the only other place the Indonesian stone appears is in the sinks and countertops.

"We used Marmol Emperador for the countertops in the kitchens and bathrooms," Segura explains. "The bathroom sinks are made of stone from Bali, while some of the other sinks and the light fixtures are made of onyx, which is beautiful. All the stone is done in a leather finish, so the feeling is very nice."

In all his stone selections, Segura adds that developer Perlman was looking for something beautiful and natural.

"The Mexican stone is not that expensive, but it's very beautiful," he says. "In Bali, they have miles of spaces where people are working with stone. In this case, it was a very good place for buying, but it also matches very well with our Caribbean style."

SOMETHING SPECIAL

While finding the right stones to use for the project was an important part of the El Taj Oceanfront equation,

finding people to build to Perlman's required quality was also critical.

"We started building in the middle of 2008 and finished in December," says the architect. "Finding the labor to do the work has been very important. Particularly with the stone, we sometimes had to teach them a little bit. Or, it would break and we'd have to do it again until we'd get the high quality we want."

Aventuras Arquitectura y Diseno, a design/build firm from Puerto Aventuras, Mexico, was hired as the general contractor for the project.

Ana Enriquez, an architect with the firm, says that, as with Segura, its background is mainly in doing residential projects – homes and apartments – but, "We're among the leading builders around here."

One of its biggest projects: the main concept for the non-Segura-designed Puerto Aventuras.

However, she adds that the firm was particularly pleased to be hired to work on a Segura-designed project.

"Sergio is a good architect," Enriquez says. "We were glad to work with him because of the quality of his designs."

At the same time, she says the timeframe, plus the quality of construction demanded by Perlman were challenges, as was training the construction crews to match the Bali look with the locally produced materials, such as the stone.

However, in the end, Enriquez says El Taj Oceanfront enhanced the reputation of her firm and, "We would like to do more things with Sergio."

Segura says the end result was definitely worth the extra supervision the job entailed.

"We really had to spend the time doing the supervision to get the best qualities for the job," he says. "And, at the end of the day, our reputation is very important."

That, and a happy client, and the architect adds that Perlman often stops by his office to thank him for the finished project.

"For all of us, it was a matter of teamwork," Segura concludes. "We're very proud of this building because it's unique, even in Playa del Carmen. People here like it because it represents the Playa del Carmen style. It's something very special, really." ■

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