

## Neighbors & Friends

# Preserving Historic Trees in COLEE HAMMOCK

Conscientious owners and builders are now including certified arborists on their development teams

Colee Hammock is one of the most desirable neighborhoods in Fort Lauderdale, having originally gotten its name from an actual hammock—a closed-canopy ecosystem of tropical hardwood trees. It was named in the city's early days for James Louis Colee, a civil engineer who purchased land in the area in 1891. In a nod to the hammock, the emblem of Colee Hammock features a live oak tree. A Broward County ordinance, in effect since 2000, preserves and enhances this natural environment, by protecting indigenous trees from being removed and helps to maintain a healthy and sustainable landscape.

Recently, the owner of combined lots site in Colee Hammock was inspired to build upon the overgrown site that included nearly 120 non-indigineous trees. The owner envisioned a Balinese-style home, one that combined the aesthetics and feel of a sanctuary and resort. The goal was simple: to feel as if the trees and home were one; to build a home that seamlessly melded with nature.

Responsible development must include a well-conceived construction program and special attention must be paid to preservation of any structures or living plant material during all phases of construction. Tree preservation requires careful planning, constant attention and guidance. Long before architectural plans are completed, a comprehensive tree preservation program must be established, and the principals of that design must be thoroughly adhered to.

In preparation for this endeavor, the property owner, in cooperation with developer Macken Companies, brought



together an award-winning team that included VCM Builders, Randall Stofft Architects, Witkin Hults Design and Metric Engineering, a local certified arboricultural firm.



**Alan Macken**

Alan Macken of Macken Companies took principal lead role in designing the residence with the design team and ensured the development program was well conceived. From inception, the owner and project team members worked closely with the landscape architect, Witkin Hults Design and the project botanist at Metric Engineering to identify and preserve the plant material worthy of preservation.

During the series of site inspections, it became apparent that the property contained some of the area's most graceful and mature foliage. Special attention was made to preserve the live oaks and gumbo limbos, many of which have existed on site for nearly 50 years.

With the owner's vision, they began the challenging process of carefully clearing the site, removing nonindigenous trees, protecting the existing specimens, and creating an environment where the home was



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designed in a manner that took into consideration the existing foliage. More importantly, that foliage became a highlighted component of the overall home design.

Randall Stofft Architects brought in huge expansive windows, floating exterior steps and an array of spectacular interior amenities. Witkin Hults Design planned the resort-style grounds, which include a main pool, spa, koi and reflection ponds. These exquisite gardens and foliage were further developed to enhance the Balinese-style masterpiece while keeping Colee Hammock's beautiful trees intact.



**Andrew Verzura**

"When building around these trees, you have to be patient and diligent, knowing full well that the specimen trees cannot be replaced," said Andrew Verzura, Principal at VCM Builders. "It is the tree roots that truly govern the design of the house, so we jogged the house and its amenities around them."

Verzura added, "One of the major challenges we faced was having to physically lay out the

foundation with stakes and string lines to see how the house would impact the trees. That was an arduous but necessary process."

The next challenge was to design and install a foundation that cantilevered the specimen trees. Since the house was literally designed around the trees, it was mandated by Metric Engineering that VCM Builders maintain a six-foot radius from the base of each tree.

"The purpose of this was to ensure minimal stress on the base of the trees and limit the amount of shock during the excavation and construction process," Verzura said. "The trees were properly fenced off at all times throughout the construction process to ensure there were no debris or unnecessary movement around the base of these trees. Our team as well as city staff inspected this process."

An elegant and stunning residence is now taking shape in a wonderful park setting. As a result of the team's preservation, the original serenity and privacy that the foliage provided was preserved.

"In the end, we are really proud of all of the hard work and creativity the entire team put into this project, and we appreciate the owner's vision and commitment," said Macken. "Colee Hammock has remained such a special gem of a neighborhood because of the care and diligence of the City, County and its homeowners. The team has designed and built a stunning home, one that has not only earned the respect and satisfaction from its owner, but from the surrounding neighbors as well." 🔥