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DESIGNER
EXTRAORDINAIRE

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Summer
STYLE



CULTURAL COUPLE

When Miami's design cognoscenti have a project to build, there's one man on speed dial—Walid Wahab. Here, he and his wife Susie talk about building a career around their passion for art and architecture.

BY BRIAN FICHTNER
PORTRAIT BY GARY JAMES

Walid Wahab makes a point of noting he was the only one from his MBA program at George Washington University to take up residence in Miami. "Like all good Venezuelans, I ended up Miami," he jokes. Since moving here nearly 20 years ago, Wahab and his wife Susie have embedded themselves deep into Miami's growing community of art and design.

The Wahabs' participation in Miami's cultural affairs owes much to Walid's company, Wahab Construction. Though he never actively practiced architecture, he was compelled by his passion for the field to stay connected. Renowned for its participation in architecturally significant projects locally, Wahab Construction counts among its clients names such as Luminaire, The Standard hotel, Del Monte and Gilbert Arenas. Indeed, guided by a passion for his every project and his ability to readily understand an architect's vision (he studied architecture and civil engineering as an undergraduate), Walid has become the go-to guy for design-savvy clients. Perhaps it was inevitable then—their congeniality is heartwarming—that the Wahabs would later befriend many of the company's clients.

"Interestingly enough, a lot of these people

we've met, that have pushed us, and helped us get more and more involved have been my clients," Walid says. "I don't usually socialize with my clients during the construction process, but by the time the spaces are done, they become our closest friends."

"At the end of the day it's always art and architecture. Our interest is in staying at the forefront of what's going on."—Walid Wahab

Of the Wahabs' many roles within the community, their involvement with the Miami Art Museum is the longest-standing one. They now sit on the museum's acquisitions committee, a responsibility Susie likens to taking part in an amazing class. If the committee is comparable to a class, then the ultimate field trip came in early March, when the Wahabs visited New York for the Armory Show, helping select new contemporary works for MAM.

"At the end of the day it's always art and architecture. My interest is in staying at the forefront of what's going on," Walid says. To that end, he not only works with the Miami Science Museum and the National Tropical Botanical

Garden, he also makes a concerted effort to meet architects he admires. A short time ago, he set out to meet David Adjaye ("I nearly declared my love for him," he says), and now calls him a close friend. In turn, Adjaye recently invited Walid to be a judge in the final review for Adjaye's Art and Architecture Studio class at Princeton University.

In addition to working with the Miami Art Museum and volunteering at the Miami Lighthouse for the Blind, Susie finds time to throw elaborate charity dinners featuring her native Lebanese cuisine. When asked how the events got their start,

she simply replies, "I love to entertain my friends at home. The word went out that everyone loves my food. After I was asked to give a dinner for silent bidding, they soon became famous."

Adding to their involvement, the Wahabs have joined the junior host committee for Art Basel Miami Beach. Both are effusive about the effect the fair has had on the community and local economy. "Art Basel, by itself, pushed Miami forward about 25 years," Walid says. "I can't tell you in words what it's done for the city. I can't think of even a single minor disadvantage."

Susie agrees. "It's my favorite week in the city," she raves. "It's the best thing that ever happened to Miami."