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CARIBBEAN LUXURY LIFESTYLE, PROPERTY AND DESIGN MAGAZINE

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REACHING NEW HEIGHTS

From fitting out ice cream stores and hair salons in Miami to designing ten-storey luxury resorts, since relocating to the Cayman Islands, architect Mike Stroh's career has reached heights he had never dreamed of, but always aimed for. *Words by Natasha Were.*



When Mike Stroh, founder of Trio Architecture, decided to move to the islands he did so not for professional but for personal reasons. He and his wife simply wanted their children - now 13, 11 and 8 - raised in a healthier environment. Fortune was on his side though, and the move has seen both this family and his career flourish.

Originally from Colombia, Mike completed his training in Boston, and spent several years working for other architectural firms, before launching his own company, Trio Architecture, in Miami in 2006. Much of his work at the time was for strip malls, fitting out stores and restaurants. Business was going well - until the economy crashed in 2008. However, having built good relationships with clients, work continued to trickle in and he was able to weather the storm over the next couple of years. But by then the dream of another lifestyle and location was taking shape.

MIAMI TO THE CAYMAN ISLANDS

When the Strohs arrived in Cayman in 2011, the construction industry was still sluggish. Although Mike would have been happy to work for another architectural firm on-island, no one was hiring. So instead, he opened a Cayman branch of Trio Architecture, but with few local jobs scheduled, continued to work in Miami, flying back and forth each week.

"During that time, due to the fact that I wasn't busy at all, I decided to build a home in Cayman. I knew that as an architect, designing a home for my family was going to take a long time, so this was the perfect timing for me to concentrate on this project," he recalls. "We decided to



hire Phoenix Construction for the build and that was where the stars aligned: Phoenix had closed down their architecture service so I started doing architectural work for them.”

Over the next four years, he worked alongside Phoenix on a variety of residential design-build projects, the success of which he attributes largely to his clients’ imagination and willingness to explore different aspects of architecture.

“No good architect can succeed without great clients,” he says.

The real turning point came in 2016 when he was asked to take on the task of turning the former Treasure Island into a Margaritaville resort. A huge project both in scale and complexity, it set his career on a new course.

A host of other hotel and resorts projects followed in quick succession: a 42-room business hotel, Locale, due to open in late 2018; another 129-room hotel in Cayman; an 85-room hotel in Playa del Carmen;→





a new residential development at Camana Bay and, most ambitious of all, the complete design, from the ground up, of the 357-room, ten-storey, five-star Grand Hyatt Hotel & Residences, at the southern end of Seven Mile Beach.

A THREEFOLD APPROACH

The name Trio stems partly from Mike’s initial concept of providing a service that included the three key elements of architecture, structural engineering and interior design. But the name also applies to the three aspects he strives to balance in any design: functionality, aesthetics and budget.

“I always approach every design in a very practical way,” he explains. “I first find out how families function – their particular dynamics and how the spaces will work – before we talk about style. It’s not just about a home that looks spectacular. It also has to work well, and the occupants of the house have to feel they belong there.”

Although he doesn’t align himself with any particular architectural style and his portfolio includes everything from Mediterranean to Caribbean and

Polynesian, getting the aesthetics right is an organic process. You have to let the design “speak to you,” he says, and see the direction a building “wants to go in.”

Woven into this is a commitment to deliver a design that meets the clients’ budget. A design that delivers everything a client wants, but exceeds the budget will ultimately leave homeowners feeling they have to sacrifice something to stay on budget. By designing within the budget, Mike ensures no dreams need be compromised.

ON BOARD FOR THE LONG HAUL

The Trio approach stands out for other reasons too. For most architects, their responsibility ends when their designs are granted the necessary permits and construction can begin, but for Mike that’s only the beginning.

Mike stays involved throughout the construction process – participating in meetings, updating plans when required and ironing out the wrinkles – up to the moment clients move in.

“Other architects offer this as an additional service but I don’t give it as an

option, it’s included anyway,” he says. “If I design a house and I don’t participate throughout the construction process, to me, that’s like having kids and someone else raising them.”

For Mike, whether in his personal or professional life, it’s all about relationship building. His family have embraced the social scene in Cayman and couldn’t be happier with island life, and these connections have in turn led to new projects.

Whether he’s working on a three-bedroom house or a 300-room hotel, Mike says, his priority is to connect with clients and colleagues. “No matter how you slice it, there’s always an artistic and emotional component to these projects,” he says. “If you invest in building relationships with all those involved, all that energy – all that synergy – shows in the final product.” 

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