

CITY&SHORE

ALLEN SAUNDERS ANSWERS ALL OUR QUESTIONS



By Greg Carannante
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Taking a glance at the stunning interiors designed by Allen Saunders, one could believe that the signature principle of design is “sophistication follows function.”

Reflecting his original take on 21st-century style, the pristine projects designed by his Miami firm marry form and function into, as he calls them, “timeless spaces.” Over the past three decades, such residential and commercial spaces have brought Allen Saunders Design international recognition and a host of honors, including seven ASID Design Excellence awards.

After graduation from the Art Institute of Pittsburgh, Saunders’s career launched at a Fort Lauderdale retail design firm before moving on to hospitality and then product design. A custom-millwork product design venture eventually led Saunders to provide interior design services to his millwork customers, which in 1992 gave birth to his architectural design firm. Since then, it has specialized in catering to a select, affluent clientele in South Florida, New York and Boston — including, in Fort Lauderdale, Wendy’s founder Dave Thomas.

Saunders himself is a resident of Edgewater, the hot new Miami neighborhood bordering Biscayne Bay. As for marital status, he says he’s “married to his design work — a passion that requires complete commitment.” He graciously made an exception to answer our recurring list of Quote Unquote questions.

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A recent project by Saunders in Boca Raton. Courtesy.

Aside from the weather, what do you enjoy most about South Florida?

The incredible melting pot. The international influence of ideas, culture and cuisine — most importantly my daily interaction with the fascinating people who bring it alive.

Aside from the weather, what do you dislike most about South Florida?

Bad drivers — does this only exist in South Florida?

Are you a beach person or a pool person?

The beach. Creating my personal, ergonomic sun-lounger in the warm, soft sand suits me just fine. (Unless, of course, that pool has a hot tub and swim-up bar).

When in your life are you or have you been the happiest?

Traveling for design — that g-force feeling when I am taking off in a jet to an international design destination. Exposing oneself to global design is invaluable.

What do you do when you’re stuck in a traffic jam on I-95?

Design daydream. I utterly fantasize about collaborating with Elon Musk to design an efficient traffic-less mode of road transportation. (I am still waiting for Elon to DM me....)

What music are you listening to now?

Miles Davis. Recently, I have found myself in the ‘Miles mood.’ There is something so pure about his music that resonates with me. With eyes closed I am transported to a New York jazz club. Maybe a subconscious musing of pre-Covid days?

compress singapore

Singapore skyline. (Shutterstock image).

Are you a fan, and if so, of what?

Good design. Seeing the incredible design that creative minds throughout the world have developed never ceases to amaze me. Prior to 2020, I was in Singapore seeing an exhibition titled ‘50 years of Singapore Design.’ I was astonished seeing the incredible product developed by the Singapore design community. Everything we see and use daily has been designed by someone. Someone thought hard about it and created something to solve a need. Collaborating daily with my talented team to cultivate design that is aesthetically pleasing, functional and problem-solving makes my heart beat a little faster.

If you had to choose: Beatles or Stones?

Hands down, the Beatles. My parents had stashed away the 1964 album Meet the Beatles in a dusty box of vinyl LPs. Around the age of 6 or 7, I discovered that box and dug out this album. I wanted to know what was a Beatle? And I wanted desperately to meet them. I played that album on my little record player as if it was the only album on earth, learning the words to every song. Oh, and did I mention that childhood dreams sometimes do come true? At a party in the mid-’90s at the Key Biscayne home of [race car driver] Emerson Fittipaldi, I met George Harrison.

What are your social media handles?

Instagram: @allensaundersdesign.

Apple or Android?

Apple.

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Tadao Ando (Courtesy Tadao Ando Architect & Associates)

Who is your real-life hero or heroine?

Tadao Ando, a self-taught Japanese architect. He is a design master connecting formed concrete, steel and glass. Ando’s intentional voids detailed into his structures invite shifting streams of sun inward, creating a mesmerizing display of light patterns and shadows. His creations are less building and more sculpture. The simplicity of Ando inspires me to analyze, edit and refine the details of my own design work.

What car are you driving now?

A black-on-black Range Rover HSE. I can be found tossing large objects into the boot and hauling them from place to place. Great in those torrential downpours, too, as I can raise the body height above minor flood waters. This well-designed, well-crafted automobile is highly functional, elegant and timeless.

If you had to choose: Rocky or Raging Bull?

Raging Bull. De Niro immerses into character and is unafraid to take chances.

I admire those who can transform — themselves and/or their surroundings.

What do you like most about yourself?

My curiosity. Asking questions is a sport for me. I have this inner need to know something about everything!

Vizcaya (Miami, Florida)

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens (Tribune Content Agency photo)

What places in South Florida do you recommend to guests visiting from out-of-town?

Vizcaya Museum and Gardens, ‘an oldie but a goodie.’ This 15th-century-inspired, Italianate palace and formal gardens is an historic architectural sanctuary that contrasts to what most of the world envisions when mentioning South Florida. Not to discount the Art Deco district, amazing art museums or sculptural skyscrapers, however Vizcaya remains a gem among the jewels.

If you could change one thing about yourself, what would it be?

Realistically timing my driving — coming to terms with the fact that I absolutely cannot do a 30-minute drive in an overly optimistic 10 minutes.

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

The creation of a design studio that helps people to live better.

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A recent project by Saunders in Boca Raton. Courtesy.