

Daniel Vasini: creating landscape “illusions” at Eighty Seven Park in North Beach

"We want to create the illusion that the new building is sitting in the park."



Daniel Vasini and rendering of Eighty Seven Park

Daniel Vasini has a bold vision for the outdoors of Eighty Seven Park, the condominium tower set to rise at 8701 Collins Avenue in Miami Beach: Create private gardens that mesh with the big public park next door, so the building feels like it's inside the park.

"Landscape architecture is about illusion," the designer said. "So, we create the illusion that the private park is actually public, because we create a visual connection."

In the private gardens, Vasini plans to use the same types of trees that already exist in the park, and open sight lines to the Atlantic. He's also on a team chosen by the city to revitalize the park that spans eight blocks of beachfront.

Vasini works with West 8, the Dutch firm that designed Soundscape Park in Miami Beach among other noted ventures worldwide. He brings a unique sensibility to South Florida: Born in Venezuela, educated in North America and now working between New York and Holland, the 35-year-old grew up spending summers in the Miami area.

Here is an edited version of his nearly hour-long conversation with *The Real Deal*.

What are your plans for landscapes around the Eighty Seven Park luxury condo project and the park next door?

Let's start with the public park known as North Shore Open Space Park, which I hope will be re-named as part of the [renaissance of the North Beach area](#). Before we knew about the condo project, David [Martin, president of the Terra Group] asked us to draw up a vision for the public park and think big.

We came up with a vision aimed for real people in the community: teachers, professionals, fire fighters, barbers ... to be embraced by nature. It's not an Art Basel park. It's a natural park for the community and the ecology.

One day, David had us informally present our vision to the community and city. Soon after, the city drew up a Request for Qualifications, and several firms pitched. We teamed with Calvin, Giordano & Associates, which gives us great Florida expertise all in one firm, and we were selected.

We're finalizing our contract now. We expect to start designing this year. Then, we'll go through a community outreach process. The city has funds for the revitalization project, thanks to donations from stakeholders [including [Terra](#)]. Maybe in two years, if the community pushes hard, we could implement Phase One.

We believe that landscape architecture is about illusion. You create an illusion when you see it from far away, when you get closer, when you're under it. There's background, foreground, sense of place and light.

We want to create the illusion that the new building [[Eighty Seven Park](#)] is sitting in the park. We want the private gardens surrounding the [70-unit, 20-story] building to look like gardens of the park, gardens that just happen to be private.

The private gardens will have several layers of trees that flow from the Atlantic: palms, seagrapes and gumbo-limbos. On the streetscape will be flowering trees — poincianas and trumpet trees — that celebrate the color of South Florida. And we'll continue the line of oak trees, which already are in front of the park.

From the street, you can see all the way through to the park — even the fence is glass, so there's permeability.

How did you come up with the design for the private gardens?

We wanted to continue the feeling of the park. You match your neighbor and create one whole.

The first layer is palms. They allow for strong winds and extreme salty conditions, and they're very subtle. They dance with the wind.

What's curious is the city doesn't allow coconut palms anymore, because they're not native. But ecology is changing, with sea level rise and climate change. There's constant flow, which means species should also flow. To be so strict that something doesn't belong here because it's not native is an old concept. Nature has no boundaries.

But the park is 'invaded' with palms, so to continue it, we got permission for palms to be allowed. They may not be native, but they're natural I'm a mix of Italian, Venezuelan, Indian and Spanish, I'm natural, and I have a right to be here.... Let nature be. Obviously, it's a matter of not being dominant or Napoleonic.

The next layer, which was my hardest job, was to convince the client that seagrape is the right species. There's an idea that seagrapes are where homeless people gather, that they're dirty, they cluster and have no view lines. They may behave like that if they're not pruned for many years. But seagrapes are our identity in this area. They like dry soil and resist wind. And with pruning, which is the essence of landscape design, we'll create seagrapes in the private gardens with unique shapes: Y, O, Z, C, S... an alphabet of seagrape trees.

In gardens, there is always water. So, we brought in two lines of water, one streaming all the way to the Atlantic. You'll find surprises as you walk down... a contemplation area, a water drop.

I grew up in Miami all my childhood, so I want to communicate what this is all about.

Do you design differently for public and private spaces?

Yes, because of maintenance. Private space usually has higher maintenance for pruning. Public parks have to be more durable.

And there's the layer of scale and intimacy. In public parks, you have to recognize the face of the other to feel safe. In private gardens, you want to create intimacy and distance, to be separate from the other.

In this project, we try to bind the public and private with the botanical spectrum: layers of trees that flow from the ocean to the urban setting.

What are trends in landscape design today?

There should not be any trends in landscape design itself. Landscape architecture is about timelessness, about the environment that has always been there, the sense of place, the identity.

Now, there is a move for landscape architecture to be more engaged in the project dialogue, to be together with the team, to be recognized as a profession. And that's how we're working successfully on Eighty Seven Park.