

# SOUTH AMERICAN CHIC

VENEZUELAN ARCHITECT STEPHANIE HALFEN BRINGS HER DISTINCTIVE TALENT AND CLIENT-FIRST ETHOS TO SOUTH FLORIDA.

BY J. MICHAEL WELTON



PHOTOGRAPH BY MORIS MORENO.  
BY LIBERTAD RODRIGUEZ (OPPOSITE PAGE)

Stephanie Halfen designed this Golden Beach home to merge indoors and out.

Venezuela-born architect Stephanie Halfen moved to Miami in 2009 – and never looked back. Educated at Universidad Simón Bolívar in Caracas, she earned an additional degree from New York’s Parsons School of Design. She’d been teaching in Venezuela and thought she’d teach when she moved to South Florida. But then she dove into Miami’s real estate market, bought some land with her husband and designed a home for them to live in with their three children.

“I did everything: the permits, the construction documents, everything,” she says. “It was like a master’s degree.”

By 2012, she had everything she needed to set up her architecture practice, SDH\_Studio, in Miami. Her husband, who also happens to be a talented builder, joined the firm in 2013, and their full-service design firm took off. Since then, they’ve completed 24 projects, have 12 additional projects currently under construction, and 15 more in the design and permitting stage. The success of her firm is no accident.

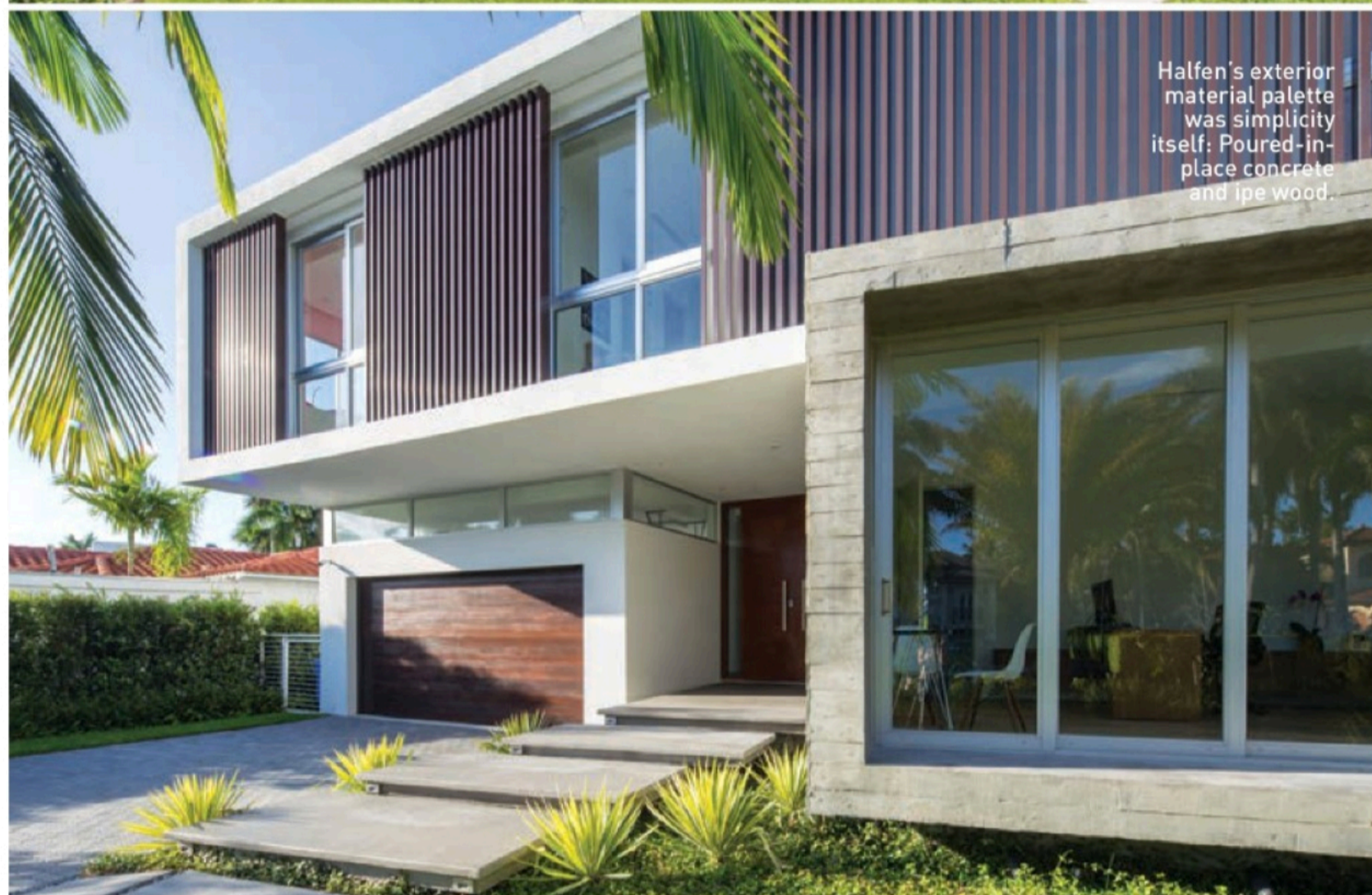
“There are a lot of modern homes in Miami, and 80 percent are generic,” says Halfen’s friend and client Patricia Wexler. “Then there are the 20 percent that are special. Mine is one that everyone says is unique.”

Halfen designed the home for Wexler (who’s also from Venezuela), her American husband, and their three small children. But she doesn’t hesitate to collaborate, even from long distances. During the first year of the project, she was working in Miami while collaborating with a colleague in Argentina and Wexler in California.

Wexler and her husband wanted a warm, contemporary house where they could enjoy their children and friends. “They wanted a place to entertain,” Halfen says. “They love the outdoors and wanted to be able to enjoy Miami’s weather.”

Halfen’s first challenge was the 10,000-square-foot lot that’s 175 feet deep, a piece of land shaped like a thin, inverted slice of pie. Only 45 feet face the waterway with a boat dock while 75 feet face the road. The resulting home is 5,300 square feet, with a total construction space, including garage and terraces, of 6,200 square feet.

On top of that, Golden Beach has rigorous height restrictions. For every foot a structure



Halfen’s exterior material palette was simplicity itself: Poured-in-place concrete and ipe wood.

reaches over 18 feet, it also has to step back a foot, often resulting in a layered wedding cake look.

Given the restrictions, Halfen designed the front as a wide, floating space and the back as two intersecting spaces. Both arrangements make the home feel as open as possible. Inside, 15-foot-tall living and dining areas integrate with the see-through stairway for a spacious effect.

Every area embraces Miami’s sun, sky, and landscape. “I was able to bring the outside in. The landscape is framed by the windows, and there’s natural light in every corner of the house,” Halfen says. “It was fundamental to the design to make the house seem really wide and comfortable.” She used poured-in-place concrete and ipe with a

slight touch to keep the home’s aura warm and inviting.

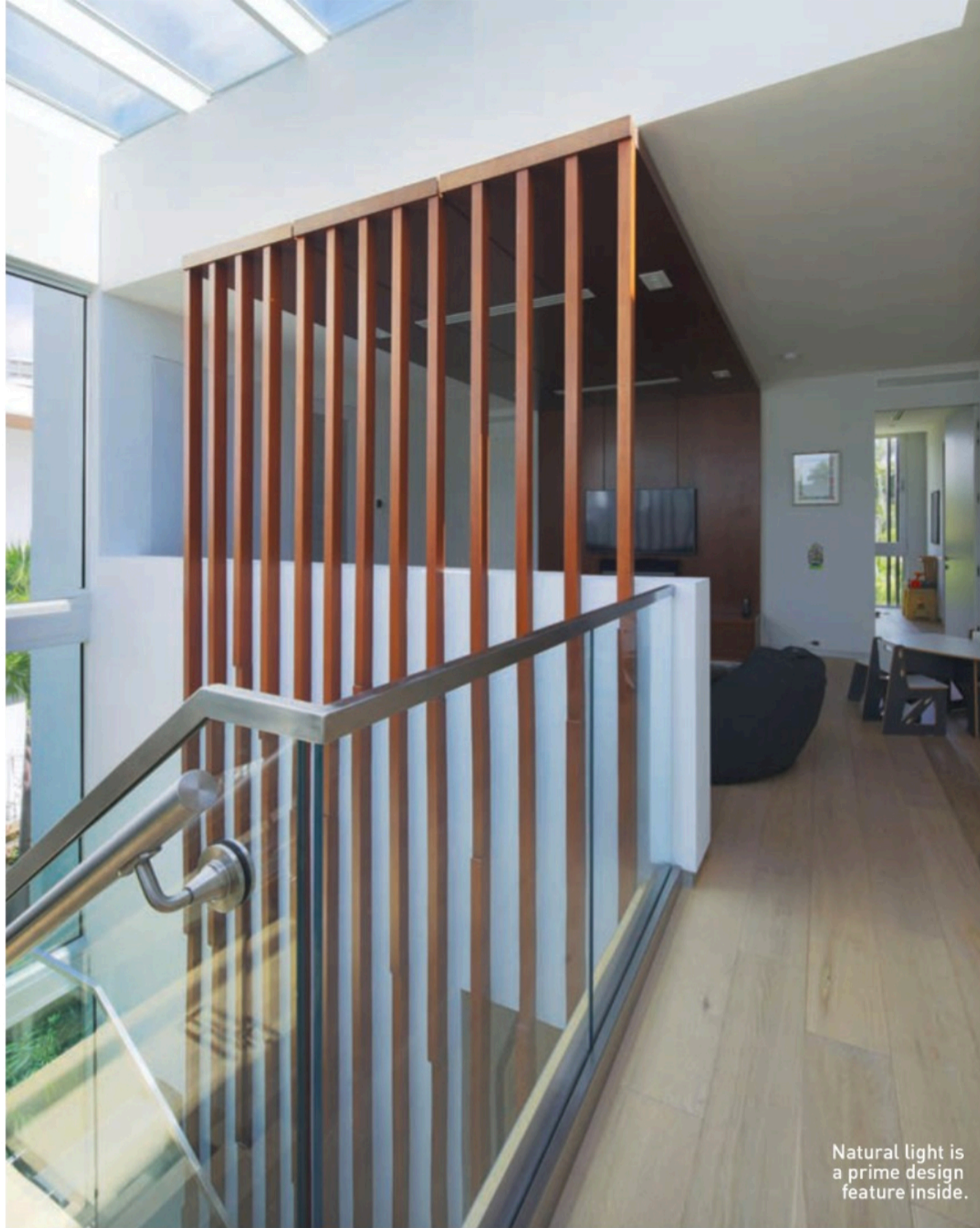
“It’s all about the clients,” Halfen says of her design process. “My inspiration is their inspiration. That way they always sense that it’s their home and their design. They’re not being pushed into something they don’t feel comfortable with.”

Her dedication to clients has paid off. “She doesn’t have any conformity patterns in her head—and she listens!” Wexler says.

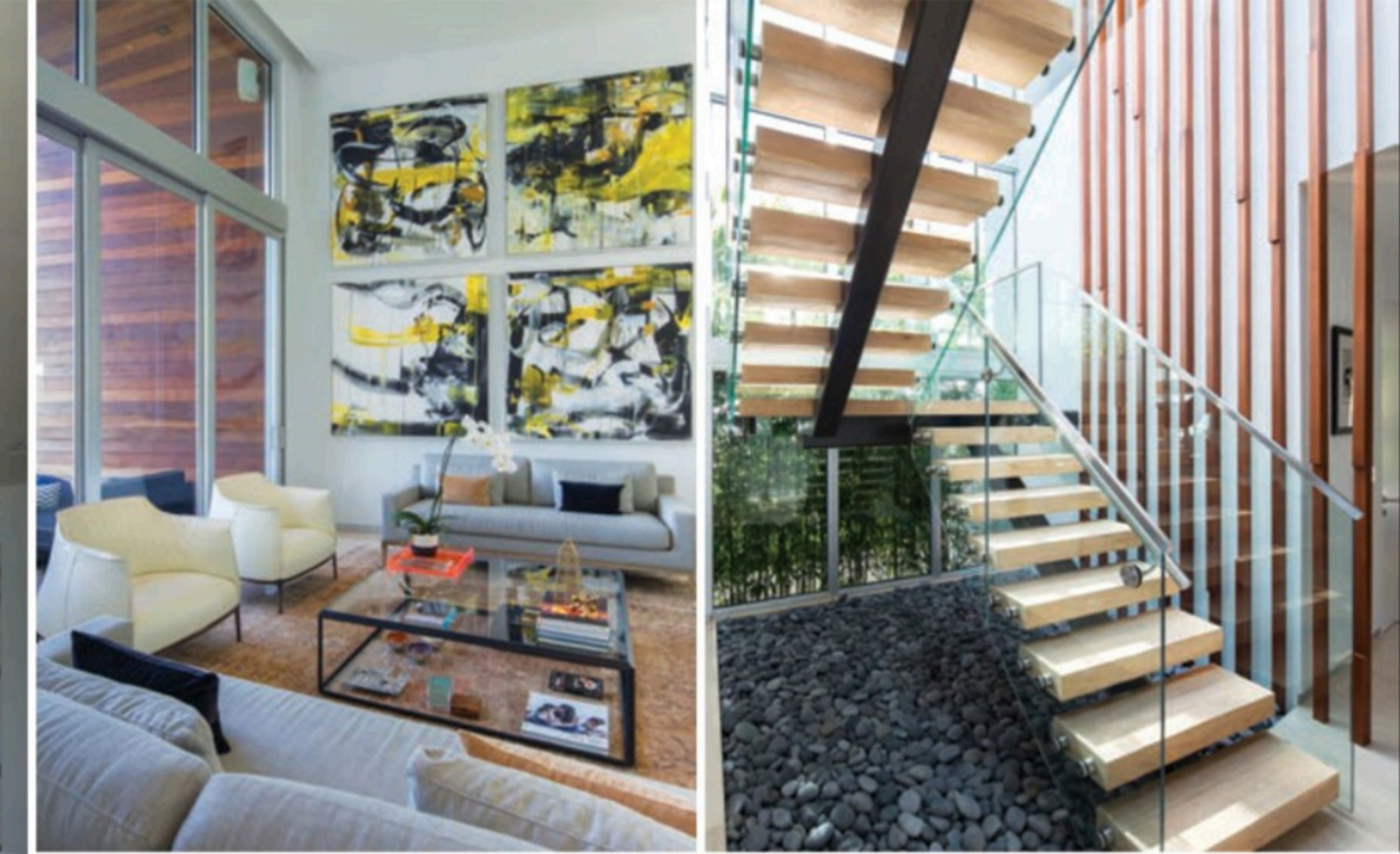
Halfen left Venezuela in 2009 in search of a better life for her family here in the States. Thanks to her thoughtful, modern architecture, she’s able to share that with a growing list of clients. ♦

FOR MORE INFORMATION VISIT [sdhstudio.com](http://sdhstudio.com)

PHOTOGRAPHS BY MORIS MORENO AND LIBERTAD RODRIGUEZ



Natural light is a prime design feature inside.



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