

Retro Ride: Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort by Daroff Design

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The theme's the thing at Universal Orlando in Florida. And the brief for an on-site destination hotel, Universal's Cabana Bay Beach Resort, called for mid-century swank—delivered on the tight budget appropriate to a value-priced hotel. Karen Daroff of [Daroff Design + DDI Architects](#) joined at the conceptual phase, storyboarding the entire immersive experience: starting at the shuttle bus drop-off and ending with cocktails by the pool. All would take place in and around an appropriately boomerang-shape Shulman

+ Associates–designed building, its white-and-pastel exterior suggesting years of basking in the Florida sun.

There’s nothing sun-bleached about the interior of the 1,800-key property, all realized in a single gargantuan phase. Skipping the brownish orange of the Apollo 13 era, fresh tangerine complements vibrant blue everywhere from the guest quarters—half of them family suites with kitchenettes—to the bowling alley. “It’s a contemporary interpretation,” Daroff explains. As for the sunny yellow curtains in the fitness areas, Universal had pointed her to videos of the TV exercise studio of Jack LaLanne.

In the double-height lobby, ribbons of aqua swish through the terrazzo, brushing past an oval of turquoise carpet set into the center of the floor. The carpet, in turn, surrounds a giant “terrarium” that recalls the one at Miami Beach’s recently demolished Americana Hotel by Morris Lapidus. In Daroff’s version, live jungle plants grow at the base of preserved palm trees that rise, inside a white-painted steel cage, toward an oval skylight. Nearby sofas’ liquid lines evoke vintage Vladimir Kagan—at a supersize 25 feet long. “Everything is bigger-than-life,” Daroff offers.

Plastic laminate, strategically deployed on walls and sliding screens, looks like walnut or teak, two species characteristic of the mid-century. That’s real walnut, however, surfacing shell chairs by Charles and Ray Eames. It was the original intention of the Eameses to make a version of their famous shell chair with wood veneer, but that became possible only recently, with new technology. One notable anachronism, however, is the chairs’ location, the mezzanine’s 3,000-square-foot Starbucks Coffee.