



SAM CALIENDO

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S. Caliendo Building & Design, Inc.

**TOUR** A Sam Caliendo house and you'll know why the Chicago-born designer's work has been showcased on "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous." Silks upholster furniture and drape the walls. His houses boast custom everything, as well as futuristic security systems, Italian cabinetry in the catering kitchens (catering kitchens?), elevators, rooftop pools and veritable canyons of marble.

But wait. Caliendo's gimlet eye shoots w-a-a-a-y across the kitchen, skimming its mother-of-pearl surface. "Do you see that?" he asks. What? "That." I peer dutifully, prepared for the unspeakable: a fleck of dirt, a smudge. Something.

"**THE DOOR** on that cabinet is crooked. I'll have it rehung, because it is supposed to be perfect," explains the man who measures by millimeters because "inches are inexact."

Just how meticulous is he? Caliendo is so meticulous that the guy who cleans his car also shines the engine and muffler. So fanatical is his devotion that he repainted walls three times — in a garage.

**THE WALLS** were, after all, in one of his houses, where every room, virtually every indoor and outdoor feature has been conceived, drawn, designed, decorated and mid-wifed by Caliendo. "I build the house. You see it. If you

like it, you buy it. If you don't, you don't," he explains.

His clients clearly like it. His designs have made him a millionaire by age 25 and a multi-millionaire a few years after that. That's not a bad showing for a kid who never even took one design class.

"I never inherited a dime," he says. "But I had a father like the gestapo. Holidays were for work. On Christmas, he'd take half a day. My father was meticulous. He taught me to never cheat anybody." Unlike his father, the teenaged Caliendo was no hard worker. "I was a hell raiser. All I wanted to do was party and play." Love-struck coeds did his homework. "They got me through high school," he remembers.

"**AT FSU**, I got the rudest awakening in my life. There was nobody who was going to do my work for me. I made a decision. Did I want to amount to something, or did I not?"

Determined to succeed, Caliendo halted the party. "I literally divorced myself from every person I knew." The strategy earned him a 3.8 average, with help from his photographic memory and phenomenal grasp of detail. He planned to enter law school.

**AND THEN** his life changed forever. On March 12, 1972 at 1:05 a.m., his parents died when their car crashed into a concrete telephone pole. Sam Caliendo, orphan, was broke. His cousin (now attorney for Sam Caliendo Design) loaned him \$700 to finish school. The student invested his last \$1,300, earned selling cars, in a duplex at AIA and Los Olas Blvd. Every Friday, he'd dash from class and drive to the duplex to continue the renovation and hope for its profitable resale. "I had no choice. I had nothing. When I bought the building I had less than nothing, because a \$10,000

payment was due in 12 months. Thank God for 10-cent frozen fish sticks and Domino's pizza," he says.

Despite the recession of the 1970s, Caliendo sold the building at a profit. He set records selling real estate throughout Broward. He bought waterfront homes in the \$80,000 range, renovated and furnished them, then sold them for \$150,000 to \$200,000. He designed more expensive homes. "I always gave people more than they expected, never anything common or ordinary," he points out.

**TODAY, HIS** firm deals only with very monied home

buyers. "I would be hard-pressed to do a house for under \$2.5 million," he says. Those who buy his homes tend to be couples with a need for com-

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mercial vaults and champagne bars scattered lavishly about the premises.

Fifteen years of travel has enabled Caliendo to find craftsmen and suppliers from

all over the globe to carry out his designs. "If I drive through Italy and see a lamp I like, I'll track down the manufacturer, drive to the factory and pound

on the door. If I like what I see, I'll spend \$20,000 right there."

His lifelong love of the automobile has him considering a car dealership and design in the future. He's look-

ing over bank stocks and may go public.

**THOUGH CALIENDO** is an active Republican fund raiser, he dismisses talk of political candidacy. "When my family died, I sat down and outlined on a legal pad everything I was going to do to reach success. I've beat all my goals but the last two: to buy a Lear jet and be a United States Senator. Well, I'm working on a deal for the Lear. And I don't want to be a Senator."

*By Marianne M. Armshaw  
Contributing Writer*

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