

A POETIC **SANCTUARY**

Villa Lyla: Where Architecture Meets the Bahamian Soul

Nestled along a tranquil canal on the island of Nassau in The Bahamas, Villa Lyla emerges as far more than a private residence. It is a deeply considered architectural poem that celebrates proportion, layered forms, and an intimate, grounded dialogue with its tropical landscape.

Here, at the water's edge, Villa Lyla offers a peaceful retreat that masterfully balances formal rigour with an easy, climate-responsive way of life. Surrounded by lush, verdant gardens and granting direct access to private docks, the villa feels profoundly attuned to both its natural setting and its nautical surroundings, inviting the gentle rhythms of the Caribbean to shape everyday living.



Named in loving memory of the homeowner's late daughter, Villa Lyla carries a quiet yet palpable sense of reverence. This emotional foundation infuses the entire project with warmth and meaning. Designed by the acclaimed South African studio SAOTA, the house engages its environment with remarkable sensitivity. Expansive glazed apertures and generous overhangs dissolve the barriers between inside and out, allowing light, air, and tropical vegetation to flow freely through the spaces. In the balmy Bahamian climate, this openness encourages a seamless indoor-outdoor lifestyle, where the scent of salt air, the sound of lapping water, and the play of sunlight become integral to daily experience.

The villa is firmly embedded within its site. Courtyards, broad terraces, and thoughtfully planted edges blur the boundaries between built form and garden, creating a sense of continuity rather than separation. The architectural plan unfolds around a series of carefully composed axial relationships that draw the eye through the house and beyond – framing captivating sightlines towards the canal, the rich greenery, and the distant horizon. These deliberate vistas foster a feeling of expansiveness and calm, connecting inhabitants visually and emotionally to the landscape at every turn.

A defining element of the building's visual language is the use of oversized coral stone fins. Sculptural yet highly functional, these striking features modulate intense sunlight, frame views, and delineate thresholds between spaces. Their robust, textural presence adds depth and character to the façades while rooting the villa firmly in its coastal context. Complementing them is locally quarried coral stone, deployed in contrasting tones and finishes, which lends a tactile, almost geological connection to the island itself. The material palette feels both ancient and contemporary, honouring the Bahamas' natural heritage.

Beyond the main dwelling, the spatial composition extends gracefully. A separate pavilion provides a private guest suite and office, preserving seclusion for all while maintaining a consistent architectural language. Throughout the volumes, generous ceiling heights and a unified material palette create a cohesive, airy atmosphere. Natural light is abundant yet artfully controlled, shifting gently throughout the day to animate the interiors with subtle drama.

The interiors, masterfully realised by ARRCC, embody a restrained yet expressive elegance. Warm timber and stone finishes bring a sense of







tactile comfort, while large-format glazing continuously draws the outside landscape inward. A thoughtfully curated collection of works by Bahamian artists, including pieces by the late John Beadle, infuses the home with a vivid sense of place and cultural identity. These artworks converse beautifully with bespoke furnishings, such as a sculptural dining table by Nada Debs and a delicate pendant light by Martin Doller. Together, they craft a layered, textural environment that enhances the architecture without competing with it.

The landscape design by Raymond Jungles plays an equally vital role, transforming gardens and courtyards into true outdoor rooms. Planted with resilient native species and enriched with water features and artworks – including a prominent sculpture by Lionel Smit – these spaces are integral to the architecture. They provide moments of retreat, transition, and quiet reflection. Far from mere decoration, the planting strategy is ecologically responsive, supporting year-round growth in the humid, coastal conditions and reinforcing the villa's sustainable ethos.

Conceived as both a cherished family home and a personal haven, Villa Lyla achieves a rare harmony of architectural clarity and material sensitivity. It thoughtfully navigates the interplay between shelter and openness, permanence and lightness. In doing so, it presents a quietly confident vision for tropical living – one that feels enduring, contextually rooted, and profoundly connected to both place and memory. In the gentle embrace of the Bahamian landscape, Villa Lyla stands as an inspiring example of how thoughtful design can elevate daily life into something timeless and restorative.

*by **saota***

