

## BABY BUILDINGS MODEL MAKERS CREATE CONDOS IN MINIATURE

Author: JO WERNE, *Special to The Herald*

Article Text:

As kids, they were avid model builders. Airplanes made of balsa wood. Little buildings scattered in the garden. Battle ships.

Now as adults, these South Florida entrepreneurs make architectural scale models for the real estate industry: models of high-rise condominiums that will dot the landscape in a year or two.

Like 3-D virtual reality films and sales centers, the models are an important selling tool for a product that doesn't yet exist. Some of the models are even illuminated so a salesman can point to a corner penthouse and tell the potential buyer, "This is where your future home will be."

For a developer, a scale model is an investment. Some models, depending upon the size, complexity and amount of details, can cost up to six figures.

Most model builders are architects, though some studied architecture just to learn how buildings are built. Other builders practiced architecture for a time until their love of model building lured them away.

That's what happened to Rene Puchades, 37, who graduated with a bachelor's degree in architecture from the University of Miami in 1991. "While I was a student, I got a job to build a model in two days," he remembers. "I was paid \$500. I thought that was terrific."

After practicing architecture for two years, he opened his business, **Re:Presentation**: Fine Scale Models, in Miami in 1993. Working with him are his wife Mary, an interior designer who manages the business, and five employees.

They have built models for the American Airlines Arena, Mary Brickell Village, Jade Residences and Onyx in Miami; Village of Merrick Park in Coral Gables; Aqua and Murano Grande in Miami Beach; and The Symphony in Fort Lauderdale, among many others. They are currently building four models, including a nine-foot model of Jade Beach, which will be built by Fortune International in Sunny Isles Beach.

Typically models are built in a scale of one-eighth inch, but when developers request more detail a larger scale may be selected.

While a blade was the only tool model builders needed as kids, today's model building is highly technological. First, the model is computer-designed: floor slabs, walls, windows, balconies, roof. When the plan with all its details, including the color of the building and architectural embellishments, is approved by the client, it is printed by a laser machine. Parts of the plan are cut out and the model is constructed by hand in plastics and acrylics.

"The parts are numbered, part A to part B," Puchades explains. "It's like putting toys together on Christmas morning. Without laser, I could not be in this business. I have to be a sculptor, artist and architect all in one."

The laser printer saves many hours of labor. For example, if a Mediterranean-style building has balconies with curving wrought iron, the laser duplicates the intricate design rapidly. Drawing the balconies by hand would require many hours.

# MODELS FOR BUILDING A BUSINESS HUSBAND, WIFE SCALE DOWN BIG PROJECTS

[Broward Metro Edition]

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## Document Text

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As a student at the University of Miami, Rene Puchades built architectural models for pin money. After graduating and practicing architecture for a couple of years, he decided to return to model making full time.

The result is re.PRESENTATION Inc., a studio that has created models of some South Florida icons, including AmericanAirlines Arena in downtown Miami and Donald Trump's 40-story condo planned for Hollywood beach.

Puchades and his wife, Mary, an interior designer, have ridden the wave of condo projects that is transforming the skyline of South Florida. Each condo has a sales center. And most developers want a model in it.

Seeing a small version of the building they are considering helps condo buyers feel more comfortable with the purchase.

"Man has always wanted to see things three-dimensionally," said Rene Puchades.

The models are built from hundreds of tiny parts, each typically scaled so that one-eighth of an inch equals one foot. They were once cut by hand. But in the early 1990s, an inventor married computer- aided design software with laser beams, making the intricate parts faster and less arduous to produce.

"That's what made me decide to make it a business," Rene Puchades said.

After an architect's plans have been transformed into designs that are cut by the laser, the resulting parts are then divided among a team of five to eight technicians for further refinement, painting and assembly.

It takes an average of six weeks to finish a model. Prices start around \$30,000 and contracts can run up to \$500,000 for a series of buildings, Puchades said.

Among the Broward County projects that have been modeled by re.PRESENTATION are the La Rive and Symphony condos in Fort Lauderdale and Aquazul in Lauderdale-by-the-Sea. In Palm Beach County, models have been built for the Opera Place and 610 Clematis projects.

Puchades is now at work on a model of a 53-acre mixed use development in the Doral area of Miami with town homes, mid-rise towers, offices and retail stores. The 12-square-foot table model is so big it's being built in three pieces, but so detailed that it matches the pattern and color of the pavers in each driveway.

If there is one job Puchades is proudest of, it is the AmericanAirlines Arena model. In addition to its difficult cylindrical shape, the model featured an elaborate cut-away of the arena's interior showing individual seats and the utility areas beneath the stands.

Puchades said devotion to quality is his core business strategy because the community of architects and developers is a small one. "Our business is word of mouth," he said. "We do very little marketing."

Rather than cut corners, Puchades said he has taken a loss on a few projects.

"Architecturally speaking, their models are excellent quality, and they always, always deliver on time," said Willy Bermello, principal of Miami's Bermello, Ajamil & Partners.

One test for re.PRESENTATION could come as rising interest rates slow the torrid pace of South Florida development. With an abundance of condos in the pipeline, some projects are already being canceled or reworked.

But Puchades sees a demand for his models even in bad times. "When things slow down, there's going to be more competition between developers," he said.

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RE.PRESENTATION INC.

Business: Scale models of architectural projects

Where: 2147 SW Eighth St., Miami.

Owner: Rene and Mary Puchades

Established: 1993

Employees: 5 to 10, depending on work flow

Advice: "Perseverance, hard work, patience and attention to detail usually translate into a quality product."