

# An Evening with Monica Puig

*The Olympic gold medalist talks about her life in tennis, healthy living in South Florida, Hurricane Maria relief – and a summer full of possibilities on the court*

By Thomas Swick

**M**onica Puig stood next to a model. It sprouted in 57 toy stories above a paper waterway, a replica of the Missoni Baia condo soon to rise in the Miami neighborhood of Edgewater. The cake white tower contrasted with Puig's highlighted brown hair that, freed from its game tail, cascaded down onto a purple dress. High heeled shoes gave her 5'7" frame a bit more rise while revealing the inescapable pale feet of the tour professional.

Someone asked what was going to be on the top floor.

"A penthouse," a condo representative said.

"It's for Monica," someone else added.

The guest of honor pointed to a miniscule floor in the middle and said she'd be OK there; all she needed to be happy was a view of water.

She added that a large condo wasn't her dream either; in fact, she does better in smaller spaces. In China, she explained, the players' lodgings are always large and her clothes end up scattered all over the place.

It was a crisp March evening in Miami, and everyone was gathered in the Missoni Baia sales office overlooking Biscayne Bay. Puig had been invited to talk about her life in tennis and Miami's conduciveness to healthy living. A young journeywoman on the tour, she had never made it to a Grand Slam quarterfinal – her greatest achievement on the big stage had been reaching the fourth round at Wimbledon in 2013 – when she traveled to the Summer Olympics in Rio de Janeiro and there, representing her homeland of Puerto Rico, won the gold medal. This made her name known to people outside the world of tennis, including promoters of luxury condos.

Puig took sips from a glass of water while attendees enjoyed prosecco and cocktails. The athlete's constant self-policing; her never-ending Lent. She didn't help herself to any of the hors d'oeuvres, either: the salmon salad toasts and Wagyu beef canapes, even though they were so petite they looked like small-scale representations themselves. On the plus side, she never lacked for company.

I had checked her Twitter feed (diligent, modern-day journo that I am) and seen numerous pictures of her dog.

Rio looked Japanese, a smaller version of an Akita, but I couldn't really tell from the pictures.

"He's a Pomsky," Puig said, her eyes lighting up. "It's a cross between a Pomeranian and a Husky."

She got him the day before she left for the Olympics, naming him for the city to which she was headed (not knowing, of course, that awaiting her there was glory). Her father, who was standing nearby, said that a relative had come to their house in Doral to watch the gold medal match, and brought a bottle of champagne in case of a victory. During the match, Rio had scratched at the cork as if in anticipation of the coming celebration.

Puig was called to the front of the room, where she climbed into an elevated director's chair. Joining her was Robert Gomez, director of the Biltmore Tennis Center and the Salvador Park Tennis Center, both in Coral Gables. He began by asking her about Miami.

She said that the hot climate was ideal for preparing herself for the harsh conditions tennis players often have to endure. (Earlier she had mentioned that she trains at the Evert Tennis Academy in Boca Raton.) It is the reason, she said, that so many players choose to make South Florida their home. She added that Miami has a lot to offer "a 24-year-old, almost 25-year old:" restaurants, beaches shopping, nightlife. She didn't just mean clubs, she clarified, "because I don't go there." And there was, too, the international

flavor of the city: people from all over the world, especially the Americas and the Caribbean.

Asked about exercise, Puig said: "Lots of hours on the court – that's where you can always find me. I like to do yoga in my spare time – it definitely helps keep me centered in a job that's very busy and keeps you a little out of whack sometimes. But I also do a lot of physical activity in the gym. I'm always working out, running, biking, doing something to keep my body fit and ready to play. Tennis is such a brutally physical sport that if you're not in the best of shape, it's not really going to work for you."

Connected to fitness is nutrition, which Gomez also asked her about. "Sugar is a girl's best friend," Puig asserted, "and that's something I've had to store in the back pocket. It's



**Monica Puig with her gold medal from the Rio Olympics.**

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— *Monica Puig*



**Monica Puig and Robert Gomez at Missoni Baia.**



**The bayside deck of the Missoni Baia sales gallery.**

**Inga Leshchinsky, Monica Puig and Robert Gomez.**



**Suzanne Tremblay and Nihan Goren with Ena Espino and Damian Silvi.**

