

# PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

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## MOUNTAIN LIVING

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# Mountain Magic

*A Desert Home Embraces  
Its Magnificent Hillside Setting*

BY **TERRI FEDER** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **KAREN SHELL**

Set on the side of Camelback Mountain, this home features an array of patio spaces, including a wraparound deck. The deck and its fencing come to a point directly below the roof's gable, lending the look and feel of a ship's bow, points out architect Michael Higgins. The red-rock wall was put in by the previous owner.





In the entry courtyard, landscape architect Russ Greey added curvy planting beds against a new low-profile red-rock wall. The taller wall behind it is original to the property. The fountain, sculpted out of Arizona rock, was a collaboration between Greey, the homeowners and marble artist Pete Incardona. On the wall is a decorative ceramic plaque by local artist Jim Sudal.

**IN LATE 2011, WHEN THE OWNERS FIRST ESPIED THE** 1.9-acre property in Paradise Valley, Arizona, its 1950s-era Ranch residence had been vacant for more than two years. "The lot was so overgrown that you couldn't see the structure from the street," recalls the lady of the house. But despite its run-down condition, the homeowners were immediately smitten with the location. Says the husband of that first visit, "We stepped through the front gate into the courtyard and saw right away that it was a magical spot."

Abutting the north side of Camelback Mountain, the lot offers up-close mountain scenes, 180-degree vistas, and views of nearly every mountain range in the vicinity, including Mummy Mountain, Piastewa Peak, the McDowell Mountains, Four Peaks and the White Tanks. Other elements that charmed the couple were serpentine paths leading up and down the mountainside and man-made red-rock walls—some as high as 30 feet—surrounding the residence. Both were sprung from the imagination and efforts of the previous owner.

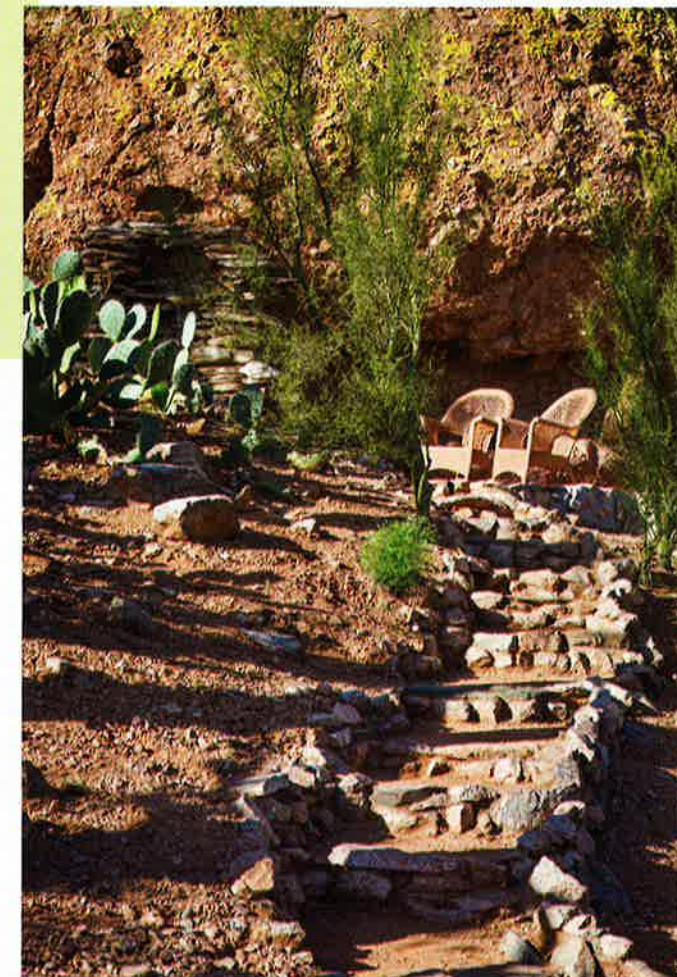
The new residents—both native Arizonans—were in the market to downsize from their 6,000-square-foot Spanish Colonial house when they discovered this property. Along with its breathtaking setting, they also were intrigued by its existing home. "Our initial intention was to remodel the house because it had a really good floor plan and we loved the idea of living in a real Arizona-style Ranch," the lady of the house confides. However, after several meetings with architect Michael Higgins, it became apparent that the couple would be better off tearing down the Ranch and building anew. This would be not only cost-effective, it also would give them the features they desired—namely higher

ceilings and doors, larger windows to take advantage of the views from every room, and the latest technology in insulation and wiring. "Although we agreed to rebuild, we decided to keep the original floor plan," notes the man of the house. The homeowners also wanted a home that was all on one level and that had a more Contemporary aesthetic, with open, airy, free-flowing spaces and cement floors.

Bringing to fruition the new 3,500-square-foot abode required 18 months and much collaboration between members of the design team. Along with the architect, this included interior designer Sue Bickerdyke, Allied ASID, who assisted the lady of the house with some of the furnishings, and landscape architect Russ Greey, who gave much of the home's landscape a facelift. This entailed removing a slew of old railroad ties that had been installed as retaining walls and an abundance of overgrown, non-native vegetation, such as palm and sumac trees, and replacing it all with drought-tolerant, native flora.

Not only did Greey introduce a variety of cacti and several water features, he also brought in tons of dirt and boulders to maintain the integrity of the house and the property's slope. "Russ did an amazing job, particularly because it's very difficult to work with a steep slope like ours," says the man of the house. "And he managed to make it all blend into the mountain."

Say the homeowners, "Our daughter had always wanted to have a wedding in our old backyard. So she was like, 'What are you doing?' when we bought this property. Now she and our boys love it. To have the opportunity to live on Camelback Mountain is something that we always dreamed of; now we are a part of the mountain. It's really very special for us and for our family."



A stepped path created by the previous owner leads to a private grotto area—a favorite destination of the homeowners' granddaughter. At the end of the path is a waterfall "sculpture" that appears to stream from a mountain crevice.





**Above:** The living room's seating is situated to capture views to the north as well as the south. Anchoring the space is a limestone fireplace flanked by matching alder built-ins. A pair of ginger jars and an antique wood sculpture that was salvaged from a ship's bow dress the mantel. On the coffee table's kiln-cast glass top is a bronze asparagus spear by artist Robert Kuo. The gear-shaped chandelier has a copper-hued lining.

**Right:** Low water-use plants blend into the terraced terrain.



**Above:** In the kitchen, an angular island with a honed Calacutta Oro marble top features a raised center section for displaying art and other objects. Cladding the backsplash is a honeycomb-patterned tile that was inspired by the owners' discovery of a massive honeycomb hanging in a mountain crag just outside the home. Hand-carved detailing on the pantry's custom white oak doors (far left) mimics the tile's honeycomb motif.

**Left:** From this intimate seating area, the owners enjoy views of distant mountains.







The dining table in the great room features a slump-glass top with a gleaming underlay boasting a gold-leaf finish. The Italian leather dining chairs were selected after the homeowners admired them in a restaurant. The table's centerpiece—two hammered-bronze cherries with a red lacquer finish—are the work of sculptor Robert Kuo. Windows in the adjacent family room offer panoramic views. Flooring throughout the home is stained concrete topped with area rugs.





**Above:** The master bedroom, with its beamed cathedral ceiling, features a mostly monochromatic blue palette. Adding a pop of color and drama above the tufted headboard is a painting by Dyana Hesson entitled *Latin Ladies*. Nightstands by Robert Kuo, with copper repoussé door panels, flank the bed. In front of the limestone fireplace is a pair of Mid-Century-style chairs that have been in the husband's family for years. A painting by Edwin Kiefer dresses the wall above the fireplace. To the right is a series of mirrors that were placed by the homeowners to create the look of a connected work of art.

**Left:** The view just outside the master bathroom looks out upon this humble cross that the owners purchased in an antiques store in Nogales, Mexico.

**Opposite:** The master bathroom's unadorned windows showcase the natural world outside and an old red-rock wall that winds around the property. Calacutta Oro marble clads the bathtub ledge. Displayed on the wall is a painting on a tile backdrop entitled *Found* by artist S.J. Schaffer.

*See Sources.*

