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Contemporary Design
SOUTHWEST STYLE

MODERN ORGANIC

A reimagined landscape reflects the homeowners' design aesthetic and love of nature.

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Bold plant shapes and massed plantings in this updated Paradise Valley landscape are characteristic of contemporary design. They also reinforce the rectilinear shape of the existing pool and newly built casita. The oversized spa to the right of the main pool can be heated separately without having to heat the entire pool, making it a favorite hangout for the homeowners' grandkids.



WHEN OVERGROWN plantings begin changing the architecture of a landscape, it's time to refresh and start anew. That was the case at a Paradise Valley home where the vegetation had taken over and the style of the garden had lost its essence.

"All gardens go through changes, and you have to keep up with them, either by swapping out the plants that don't work, adjusting species or re-locating vegetation as it grows. This garden had just gotten away from its owners," says landscape architect and *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner Russell Greey, who worked on the landscape renovation with his associate Clayton Miller.

Plants hung over walls and impinged on walkways, trees were so full they blocked some of the prettiest views, and masses of lantana and other desert shrubs past their prime looked old and tired. "The vegetation was out of control. The existing salvageable plant material was being overshadowed by years of overgrowth," notes Greey.

The ranch-style home and a newly added casita, both designed by architect Scott Carson, are soft contemporary with metal roofs, buff-toned stucco walls and simple lines. The plan, says Greey, was to continue with a much cleaner

OPPOSITE Landscape architect Russell Greey collected random plant specimens already growing in the yard and brought them together to form what he calls the Eclectic Garden. With its massive organ pipe cactus and tree aloes, along with golden barrels, agaves and pink-blooming Mexican primrose, it is now a focal point in the landscape. **ABOVE** Adjacent to the casita, a staggered travertine walkway accented with stone leads to pool storage and a towering palo verde tree in bloom.





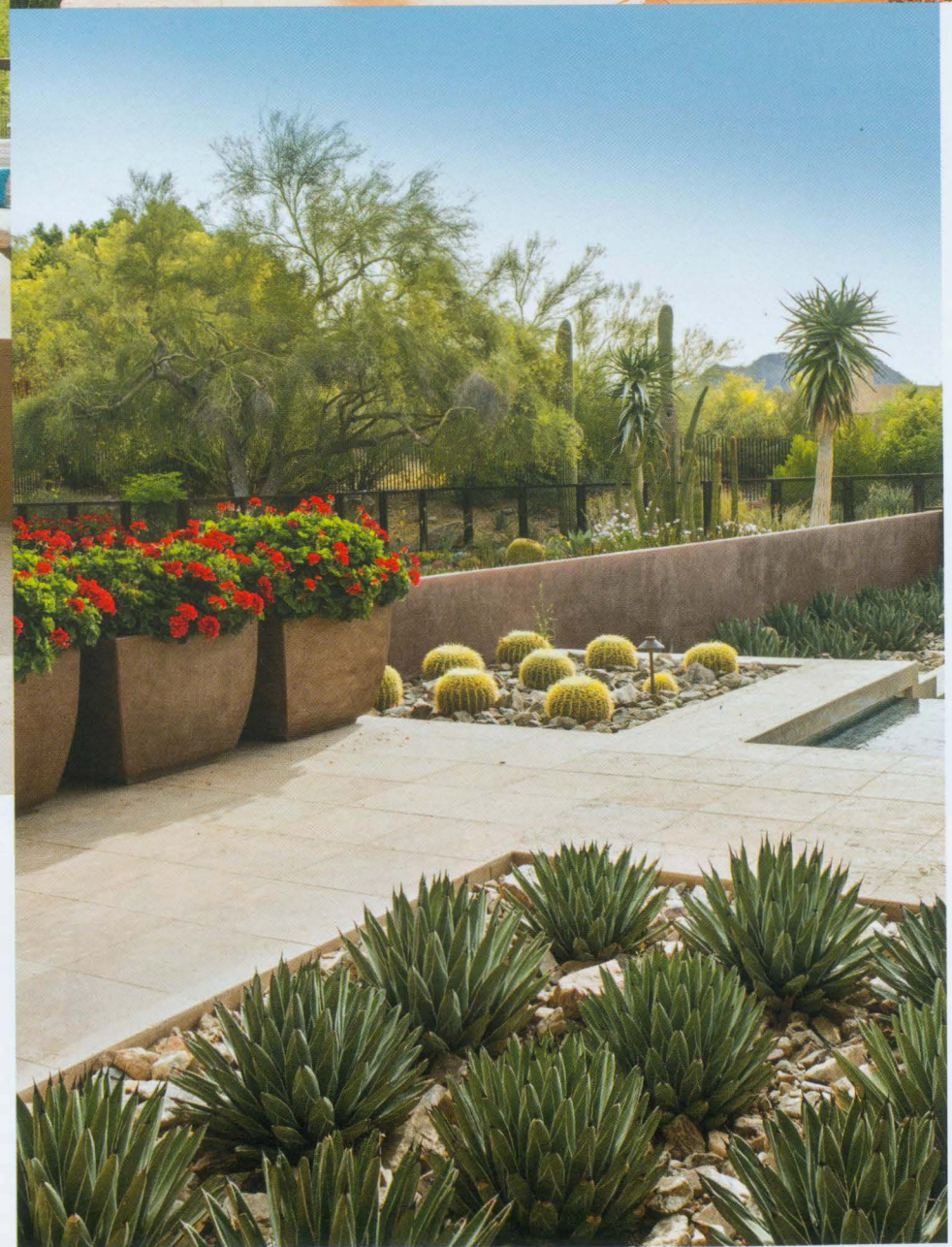
look for the new landscape. “The homeowners love the organic feel of native plant material, which complements the architectural style of the residence.

“Linear organization, patterning, layering and massing are considered contemporary forms of design,” explains Greey. “By placing singular elements in repetition in walkways and patios, you are taking nature and organizing it to complement the contemporary architecture.”

While the perimeter of the property was left natural and organic, the areas closer to the house are more organized and massed. Lines of ocotillos, illuminated at night, cast shadows against the walls at the entrance to the residence. Rows of whale’s tongue agave (*Agave ovatifolia*) and golden barrels pack garden beds and delineate patio spaces. Chunks of natural stone and



ABOVE Dominated by squares, rectangles and massed plantings, the backyard is softened by low Venetian plaster walls painted a desert rose shade. With its deep patio designed for casual entertaining, there is plenty of overhead shade for hot Arizona days. In the distance, the top of Camelback Mountain can be seen peeking above the trees.



ABOVE Travertine stepping stones and sun-loving Dawe’s aloe (*Aloe dawei*) lining the wall, draw the eye toward a towering Hercules aloe at the end of a garden path in the backyard. **LEFT** Sculptural specimens, such as King Ferdinand agaves in the foreground, golden barrels and sharkskin agaves (*Agave ‘Sharkskin’*) growing along the back wall, are set in mass plantings, bringing consistency and simplicity to the yard, says Greey. Concrete pots filled with hardy geraniums add a pop of red to the predominately green landscape.




large concrete pots, both part of the original landscape, have been repurposed in other areas, providing focal points and texture.

The use of masses of unique plant material in a landscape, however, does not come without its difficulties. “When a plant dies in a grouping, it is not always easy to find a replacement that looks the same in size and shape,” Greey admits. “To avoid that, we locate additional plants of the same species outside of the main garden, so that they will grow at the same rate as the others but will be out of site until we need them.”

While Greey kept the plant palette minimal and mainly desert-adapted, he also allowed for colorful annuals and perennials to soften the garden.

OPPOSITE This casual sitting area and the lower-level guest casita were designed entirely around an enormous palo verde tree that has been on the property for years. Greey constructed the weathered-steel fire pit on an existing site wall, adding both a practical and artistic element to the hardscape. **THIS PAGE** A plant bed at the pool’s edge is turned into another focal point, with the addition of Hercules aloes and white-flowering lantana. A wash in the background was revegetated with native cacti by Greey for a natural desert look.





Vertical rebar fencing against a rose-color wall serves as a unique divider between the structured garden in the foreground and natural desert behind it. Planted between the rebar and wall is a row of prickly pear cacti. Inside the fencing, the repetition of feather grass, agaves, crushed granite and chunks of rock creates a sense of organization in the landscape. Greey used steel edging to separate the different groupings. A solitary bench provides the perfect spot for meditation.

“The homeowners love the organic feel of native plant material, which complements the architectural style of the residence.”

—RUSSELL GREEY, landscape architect



Purple blooming snail vine, which is an aggressive climber, makes a great natural screen as it swiftly covers a wire mesh wall trellis. Pink-flowering Mexican primrose can be seen waving in the wind as it pops up between cardóns and spiky agaves. And hardy geraniums, which thrive in pots in the Phoenix area longer than almost any other annual, brighten up concrete pots with vibrant red blooms.

The landscape professional added Venetian plaster walls throughout the yard in hues of red and rose to extend the existing design, as well as built terraces and extended decking to the pool. "The topography was difficult to work with, making it necessary to level out or terrace the terrain in certain areas to give it a clean, layered look," he says.

Because the house is so rectilinear, angular forms were used in the hard-scape with the addition of rusted steel planters, rebar fencing and a square steel fire pit. "The crisp lines of the house and the eclectic style of the



THIS PAGE AND OPPOSITE Painted Venetian plaster walls are repeated in both the front courtyard, which features ample seating for the homeowners and guests, and front entry. In each space, the linear feel of the landscape is replicated with plants lined up along walks and walls. When lit from below, the red-tipped ocotillos show off their branching shapes against the side of the house.

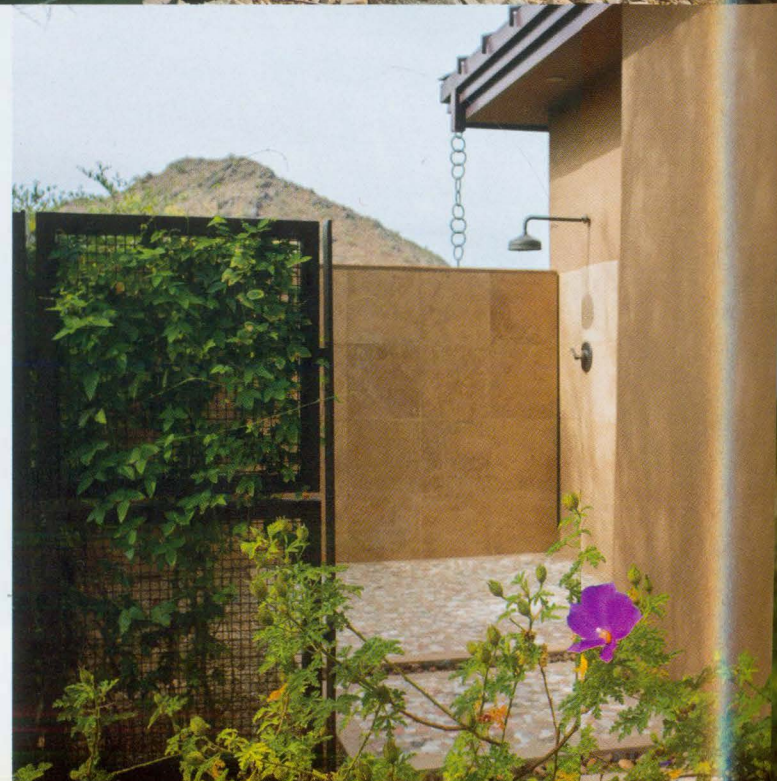
OPPOSITE Three bougainvillea vines mirror a trio of cardóns in this picture-perfect spot off the master bedroom, while Mexican primrose, desert mallow and concrete pots filled with geraniums provide long-lasting color at the request of the homeowners. **THIS PHOTO** This formerly forgotten side yard was enclosed with rebar fencing to keep out javelinas and vegetated with whale's tongue agaves (*Agave ovatifolia*). A mix of large and small stones creates a textured ground plane. **BELOW** A travertine wall serves as the backdrop for an outdoor shower off the guest casita. Fast-growing snail vine (*Vigna caracalla*) on the steel gate creates a natural screen element.



garden play off of each other, creating a contemporary counterpoint to one another,” Greey points out. “We raised the modern-day vibe of the house with a fresh, easy landscape.”

For the homeowners, the yard now features a streamlined look that is timeless. “The new landscape works very well with our home, because it is a clean, simpler design,” they say. “We like the structure of the plantings along with some color and softness of a few flowering plants. Also, the addition of the casita helps the whole design feel complete. It is a private backyard oasis.”

Carson adds, “The harmony between the house and landscape is evident from the raised steep planters to the selection of desert plantings arranged in a very organized manner, echoing the organization of the lines of the home. Russ did a great job of taking cues from the simple forms of the house and using those to organize the landscape.” □



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— the homeowners