



PHOENIX MAG

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The Right Fit

Once dated and underutilized, an oversized lot with unobstructed mountain views is transformed into a family-friendly paradise.

BY SHANNON SEVERSON PHOTOGRAPHY BY IAN DENKER AND ERIC KRUK

The cozy front porch, which offers enviable views of Camelback Mountain, conforms to the neighborhood's friendly front yard culture and includes covered banquette seating, where the homeowners can relax and read a book on a sunny afternoon, as well as a fire pit for gathering on cool spring evenings.



FINDING THAT JUST-RIGHT “forever home” takes time and patience. For many buyers, one of the most important features is the location. Houses and landscapes can be remodeled, but the setting and views are permanent. After two years of searching for perfection in Phoenix’s Arcadia neighborhood, Carri Baca was ready to give up when her husband, John, asked her to view “just one more” property.

Upon arrival, the couple weren’t that excited about the single-story ranch-style abode set below street level. The interiors featured low ceilings and a choppy layout, while the grounds were eaten up by a massive hardscape driveway. However, the house was situated on an oversized wedge-shaped lot on a double cul-de-sac with mature

trees and a never-to-be-obstructed view of Camelback Mountain. “We stood in the driveway, and we knew,” John recalls. “We put in an offer the next day.”

The Bacas immediately began planning renovations that would result in a home rich with detail and character. Their top priorities included orienting the house to take advantage of the mountain vistas; creating flexible, free-flowing indoor spaces in which to entertain family and friends; and developing multiple zones for outdoor living, gardening and play while also retaining the existing mature trees. “We wanted something classic that wouldn’t go out of style,” says Carri. “It should be luxurious with rustic wood, glass and metal elements, but it also needed to blend with the neighborhood and not stand out as brand new.” Carri also wanted to



ABOVE LEFT Entry gates open to a wide terraced walkway that was built around an existing Aleppo pine tree. Reclaimed Chicago brick, gables braced with wood corbels, and varied rooflines add texture and cottage character to the home’s facade. **ABOVE** Vaulted ceilings accentuated with rustic scissor trusses frame a French country fireplace, which showcases a botanical painting by Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest award-winning artist Dyanna Hesson.



relocate the kitchen to the front of the house, creating a greater connection to the friendly, walkable neighborhood and allowing the couple to easily host gatherings or visit with neighbors in the front yard.

With guidance from *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award-winning architect Michael Higgins, a decision was made to tear down the existing dwelling and start fresh. And because John and Carri weren't set on any particular architectural style, Higgins' designs were driven less by appearance and more by how the couple and their two young children live.

"Rather than start from the style, we started with the materials, including Chicago brick, a composite shake roof and raw wood," the architect

explains. "We used scissor trusses inside to add height to the spaces. It's inexpensive volume and gives the house more street appeal." Adds builder Ryan Patten, "We were able to achieve something that was unique. It's not an off-the-shelf look. It was a five-step process to get the beams just the right color so they didn't look brand new."

The end result is a 5,200-square foot, four-bedroom, five-bath English Country home with an established feel. It's cozy, not cavernous, and is built to withstand many years of use by active children, pets and guests.

The interiors offer a decidedly European feel, with wide-plank French oak flooring, a central fireplace and an all-white kitchen with a dish pantry. The dining room, framed by arched entries and cloaked in Chicago brick,

ABOVE "The house is furnished with pieces that are easily accessible," says interior designer Krissie Young. "With a family space that gets heavy use by kids and dogs, it's important to choose items that can be reupholstered at some point."



The airy kitchen is located at the front of the house. Large windows provide jaw-dropping views of Camelback Mountain just beyond neighboring homes. Wood ceiling beams, French oak flooring, a chunky pedestal dining table in the breakfast nook, and a dark-stained island add warmth and rustic charm to the bright white space.



The dining room is framed in the same Chicago brick found on the home's exterior, visually connecting the interior room to the outdoors. Bifold glass door open to the backyard kitchen and bar area.



The backyard features numerous areas designed for entertaining, play and relaxation. Just a few steps from the master bedroom patio, a hammock, slung between two mature Aleppo pine trees, offers a shady spot to nap, read or watch the kids splash in the sparkling pool.

“When we’re in the backyard, it feels as though we’re at a resort.”

—JOHN BACA, homeowner



TOP AND ABOVE Both the master bedroom and bath are fresh and serene thanks to the use of neutral hues, warm wood accents and sumptuous textiles. "The pecky cypress ceiling is something unique that I haven't seen done anywhere before," says builder Ryan Patten. "The entire master suite is really a jewel box."

opens to an outdoor kitchen and entertaining area.

"I had never done a brick dining room before, but I love the idea of bringing the outside in when you have the opportunity," says interior designer Krissie Young. "I adore old homes, so I enjoy creating spaces that feel like they've been there for a long time. Carri wanted texture in the room, and the brick brings warmth while the arches give architectural value. The dining room feels like an enclosed porch and having it entirely in brick just finished it, in my mind."

Charming details abound, including Dutch doors and custom reproductions of antique doors, leaded-glass windows, cubbies for the children's treasures and window boxes full of bright blooms. "Nothing was left out," says Young. "Carri thought about every single little corner. The focus was on her and John's children and creating a place they'd never have to leave. She had a list of the types of features she wanted, including a porch swing and a place to sit by the pool, while John was interested in having a space to watch a game or eat outside."

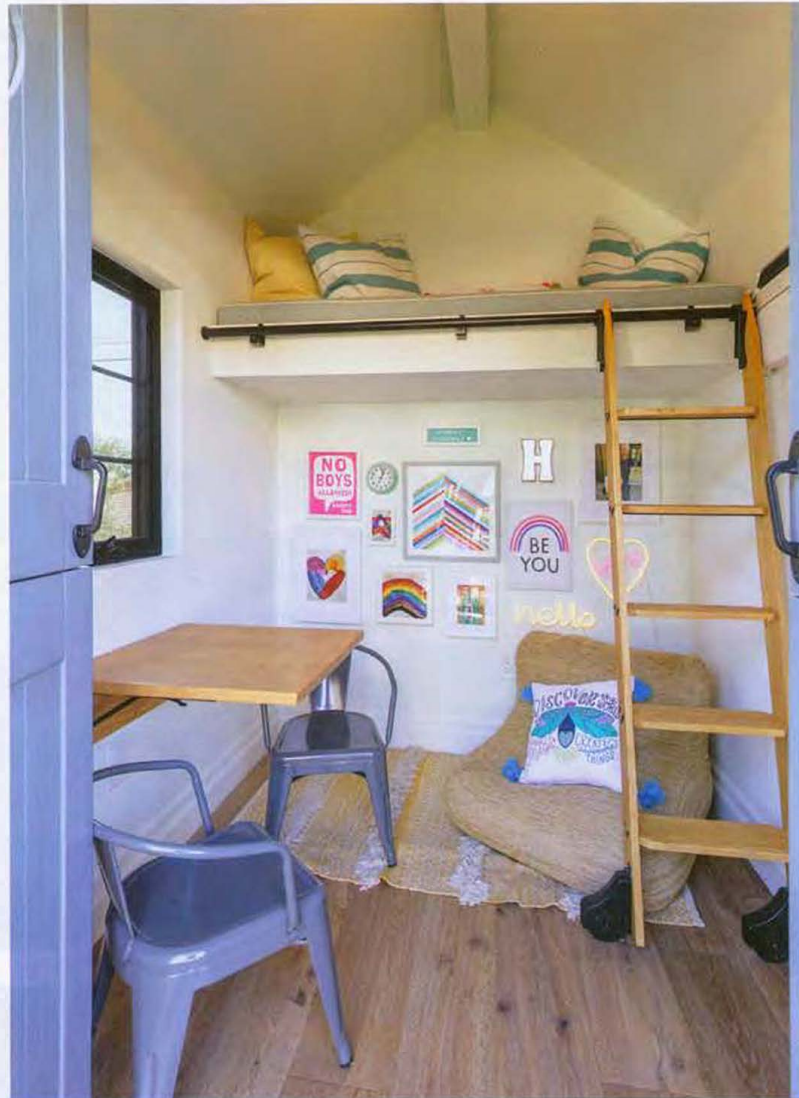
Landscape architect and Masters of the Southwest award winner Russell Greey maximized the property's outdoor living potential. A wood entry gate opens to a circular stepped terrace that descends from the street to the grand front entrance. Rising up from the center of the terrace is a towering Aleppo pine. "The house is an Arcadia ranch-style



ABOVE Verdant karupia (*Lippia nodiflora*) grows between stepping stones set just outside the laundry room. Planters burst with potato vine, ice plants, hibiscus and annuals. **TOP RIGHT** Reproduction antique French doors lead to the master bedroom. **BOTTOM RIGHT** Inside and out, no detail was overlooked. Pale green garden shutters and a window box brimming with cheerful blooms bring attention to a custom leaded glass window.



FAR RIGHT A formerly unused side yard was transformed into a family paradise with a lush lawn, playhouse and covered poolside ramada where guests can lounge in front of a fireplace or watch TV. A small citrus garden includes Meyer lemon, orange and lime trees. **RIGHT** The homeowners' daughter wanted a "playhouse in the trees" and that's exactly what architect Michael Higgins created. The delightful space features a cushioned loft, reading corner and a fold-up table. The room is air-conditioned for year-round use.



homewith a beautiful garden effect, and keeping the existing trees helps maintain the aesthetic of the neighborhood," says Greey of his decision to build around the verdant conifer.

A quaint seating area, complete with a fire pit, is accessible from the kitchen and the sports room. "When we have gatherings, we end up in the kitchen a lot," says Carri. "The women are in the kitchen and the men are in their man cave. To me, function and flow are so important and make the house feel much bigger than it is."

The once-underutilized yard now bustles with activity. On the far western edge of the property is a sunken batting cage for John and his son. Directly to its north, tucked behind a detached garage and guest suite is a sports court, where the family can enjoy a spirited game of basketball. Multiple entertaining areas, including an outdoor kitchen and poolside ramada, accommodate large groups, while a small patio off the master bedroom offers John and Carri an intimate setting for morning coffee or an afternoon snooze on a nearby hammock. "When we are in the backyard, it feels as though we're at a resort," says John.

The most eye-catching and delightful element of the backyard, however, is an elevated playhouse nestled between two large eucalyptus trees.

Higgins designed the sweet escape for the Bacas' daughter. Inside, it offers enough room to relax with friends, do homework at the flip-up desktop or even enjoy a nap in the loft bed. "The treehouse turned out better than I ever expected," remarks Higgins, who gave the family a rendering of it as a housewarming gift. "The Dutch doors and heart-shaped windows were part of my sketch. I draw these all the time and people rarely build them, so to see it done so well is a real treat."

The Bacas took a run-of-the-mill ranch and created a place where every detail—from a spacious kitchen that invites family to gather for Saturday morning pancakes to a lush garden bursting with juicy tomatoes and fragrant roses—was carefully considered.

"The process of starting from scratch can be hard and stressful," says Carri, "but I felt as though every member of our design team really wanted us to have the home of our dreams—and now we do." □

ARCHITECT: Michael Higgins, Higgins Architects LLC. **BUILDER:** Ryan Patten, Arcadia Custom Builders. **INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Krissie Young, Studio K Design LLC. **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Russell Greey, Greey | Pickett

For more information, see Sources on Page 158.



LEFT The sunken batting cage is hidden behind a wall of ficus trees. **ABOVE** The sports court is adjacent to the detached pass-through garage. When the garage doors are opened up, the adults socializing in the front yard can keep an eye on the action happening on the court.