



DESERT PARADISE

A Guide To Living In The Valley Of The Sun

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built to suit

this mountainside home conforms to the land and suits its environment

By RaeAnne Marsh



Doubling as a water feature for the swimming pool, the spa is constructed of flat-stacked layers of stone—a more natural look than covering the surface of its walls with broad stone slabs.

Many mountainside homes in the Phoenix area “fit the landscape” by cutting and filling the land to support the house. Not so with Jerry’s and Rachel’s home on a prime view location overlooking expanses of valley and rocky mountain.

“We built the house to fit the mountain,” states Jerry. “Our sons are ecologists, and we wanted to honor their commitment.”

The house spills down the hillside, multiple levels navigated in the main areas by just two or three short steps.

In spite of this restriction, the

rooms flow easily from one to another. “It was planned for entertainment,” says Jerry, describing the traffic flow as “incredible.”

But it is also designed for maximum separation of bedroom and public areas.

The front door is located in almost the exact center of the length of house. Inside, the entrance foyer is a pivot point to the four basic areas of the home.

To the east side is a doorway leading to the family room of the “children’s wing,” beyond, which are three bedrooms each with its own bath. Although their sons are grown, it was important to Jerry and Rachel that their custom home have rooms their sons could call their own, whether visiting on their own or, down the road, with their own families, explains architect Susanne



Ceiling fold takes the eye upward and outward for sense of spaciousness that soars.



Display shelves fill a window open to both dining and living rooms. Outside windows like the one to the left feature deep display ledges set with the same 1 3/4-inch Blue Stone used on the niche wall. Colors of the stone and tile go well with the grays and reds prominent in the Native American artifacts.

Rothwell, of Phoenix-based Rothwell Architecture. The fact that there is an extensive wing in that direction is not readily evident. On the outside, it’s the garage that focuses attention. On the inside, the door to that family room, when shut, appears to be simply the door to a well-placed coat closet.

Up a curving staircase at the back of the foyer is the master bedroom, with its own deck and private access to the spa. An avid reader, Jerry has a light directed down onto a corner of the spa so he can read while relaxing in the warm gurgling water — immersed in book and spa at the same time. Inside, the room is spacious, seemingly even more so because two walls are all window and let the outside in and because the ceiling soars up and outward to peak at the rear window. Next to the bed is an array of buttons for the Lutron system that lets Jerry control all the lights for the house, “so I don’t need to walk around the whole house.”

A few steps to the west side of the foyer, the slate floor becomes a wide stairway leading down to the kitchen, past the elevator that connects the home’s interior to a garage one level lower. From the kitchen, the traffic flow continues to areas that are all easily reached from one another.

Finally, three steps across the foyer from the massive glass front door are two glass doors that give access to the outdoor entertainment areas in the rear of the house. This is part of the traffic flow that wraps back around to the kitchen. “It was designed as a party house,” says Jerry. “You circulate in a massive circle.” Which is why they have “sliding doors to open every place.”

The deck that runs along the entire back of the house wraps itself around jutting and recessing architectural contours, giving ingress and egress to the living room and, continuing around the corner, to the breakfast patio (set solidly on terra firma at this recessed end of the house) and on into the breakfast room next to the kitchen.

Able to access all the main entertainment areas of the house and easily allow movement between them, the cantilevered deck is itself a main entertainment area, built above the desert floor at the midline of the Palo Verdes. Here, on a wide corner, is a cozy, conversational, living room-style grouping of comfortable cushioned chairs enclosing a fire pit on three sides and looking out over the valley. And a few steps away is the swimming pool, shaped with the same right-angle symmetry as the deck.

“The design was constantly in evolution during the

Fireplace designed by architect in rustic iron, surmounted by pre-Columbian engravings chosen by the interior designer to give coherence and completeness to that wall.



construction, because of the site," Jerry recalls. But it started with architect Rothwell walking the site with Rachel. "Where are the views?" Rothwell asked, and Rachel responded when she found the best one, "This is it. This is the living room." The living room, Rothwell believes, was most critical because it would be used all the time.

"They're lucky enough to have the view and the sun in the right

location," Rothwell observes, noting that the back of the house gets almost no direct sunlight so even with it being nearly all window, the natural light won't deteriorate the furniture and artwork. (Plus, the glass is all low "e" solar gray and acts like sunglasses.)

Which brings up the second imperative in designing the house, equally important as good traffic

flow — to showcase Jerry's and Rachel's extensive collection of Native American art. Navajo rugs and Hopi pottery and kachinas, among other featured Native American cultures, stand out on floors, walls and shelves throughout the house. But aside from this collection, Jerry's and Rachel's taste in décor is decidedly contemporary. Making the two styles fit together, Rothwell



The niche wall, stepped and curving, separates dining and living rooms. These rooms are on display through the view window from the kitchen. Ceiling lights are in two rows above the table, each row directed at an angle to the opposite side of the table.



Traffic flows easily on both sides of the kitchen island, as the kitchen leads into a secluded breakfast area. Curving wall of the breakfast nook repeats the curved design of the dining room's prominent wall feature between dining and living rooms. The curve is also repeated in the interior wall that extends from the family room on the main floor to the master bedroom above.

and interior designer Lona Lowenthal-Beth, who has since retired, blended Native American with contemporary through an emphasis on natural materials, and, points out Lowenthal, in a manner that is friendly and inviting and "makes it not look like a museum."

The floor is slate, in large 24-inch tiles that accentuate their impact as a natural material, and Rothwell notes that the look of the slate matches the natural shale of the mountainside. Lowenthal chose for the interior walls a light color with a subtle tinge of green to also "fit in with the setting." Window ledges around the dining, living and family rooms are set

with Blue Stone, as are the fireplace hearth and the low serpentine wall separating the dining and family rooms.

This low wall is not only an innovative architectural feature but an expression of Jerry's and Rachel's philosophy. From the living room, which is three steps lower than the dining room, the wall is a showcase, with halogen-lit niches for individual pieces of pottery. Pieces are also set out on each section of the stepped top. But from the dining room, the wall is bench-height and designed to serve as extra seating for large buffet or cocktail parties.

There are no soaring cathedral

ceilings in this house; some rooms, in fact, have low ceilings because they actually are underground, although artfully incorporated courtyards contribute to those rooms their own sense of openness. Even more evocative of soaring, however, is the pitched ceiling in the living room (and master bedroom) that, widening as it reaches the window, sweeps across the room with much the geometric shape of a paper airplane flung toward the heavens.

Under this ceiling, sueded leather couches face each other in an inviting conversational square on the extra large Navajo rug in front of the fireplace. Opposite the



Contemporary style of the custom-made dining table is a comfortable fit with the Native American art on display. Rusted iron framework matches the fireplace in the living room. Visible outside beyond the first set of sliding doors is the fire pit conversation area.

fireplace, a comfortable lounging chair faces into the corner for a long view out the window and down the valley. Except for the smaller ones under the sweep of the pitched ceiling, all the windows in the living and family rooms are shielded by sunshades that can be retracted upward and hidden in their casing. The sunshades, like the lighting throughout the house, respond to easy, centralized controls.

Very spacious for entertaining, the dining and family rooms are completely open to each other, and both are open to the living room a few steps down. The kitchen, a few steps up from the dining room, overlooks both living and dining rooms and, like those rooms, enjoys the view out the back window. The architect made this possible by incorporating a wide window over the rear-facing kitchen sink. Closed, it looks like an attractive wood cabinet. When it is accordion-folded open, "I can stand in the room and enjoy

looking at the art in the other rooms," says Rachel. Adds Jerry, "I can stand at the kitchen sink and have a view of the valley."

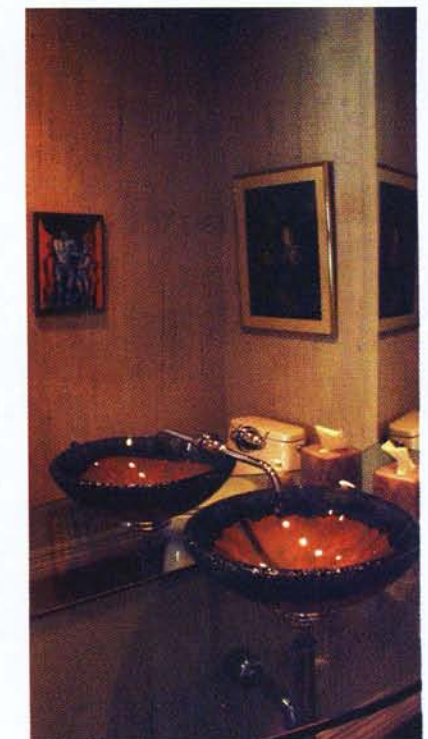
Every room has a view, Jerry notes, so "we feel like we're on vacation every day."

Along with giving every room a view, the home needed to be designed and constructed with an eye to solving the biggest problem the site presented – drainage. To effectively protect the house required full-size drainage ditches, but they are well-camouflaged as they go around and under the house.

Another potential difficulty was providing hot water to the far-flung areas of the 5,500-square-foot house. "We would have needed three or four water heaters," Jerry explains. But as construction was beginning, Rachel happened across an article about an innovative hot water system called "on-demand hot water" that effectively supplies hot water to every tap from a single small unit. And because it takes up

such little space, it left Jerry and Rachel with extra storage room where the water heaters no longer have to be.

Initially, Jerry was less than enthusiastic at the idea of building his own home. But he found the planning and building went very smoothly. He pays high compliments to their architect, Susanne Rothwell; their interior designer, Lona Lowenthal-Beth; and the construction company, Scottsdale-based Shultz Development Corp., for their skill and flexibility. "We had so much fun building the house because of the people we worked with." ■



One hundred percent contemporary, this powder room's sink is a clear glass shelf on which rests an art-glass bowl. The faucet juts directly out from the mirror.