

PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

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Extreme Homes

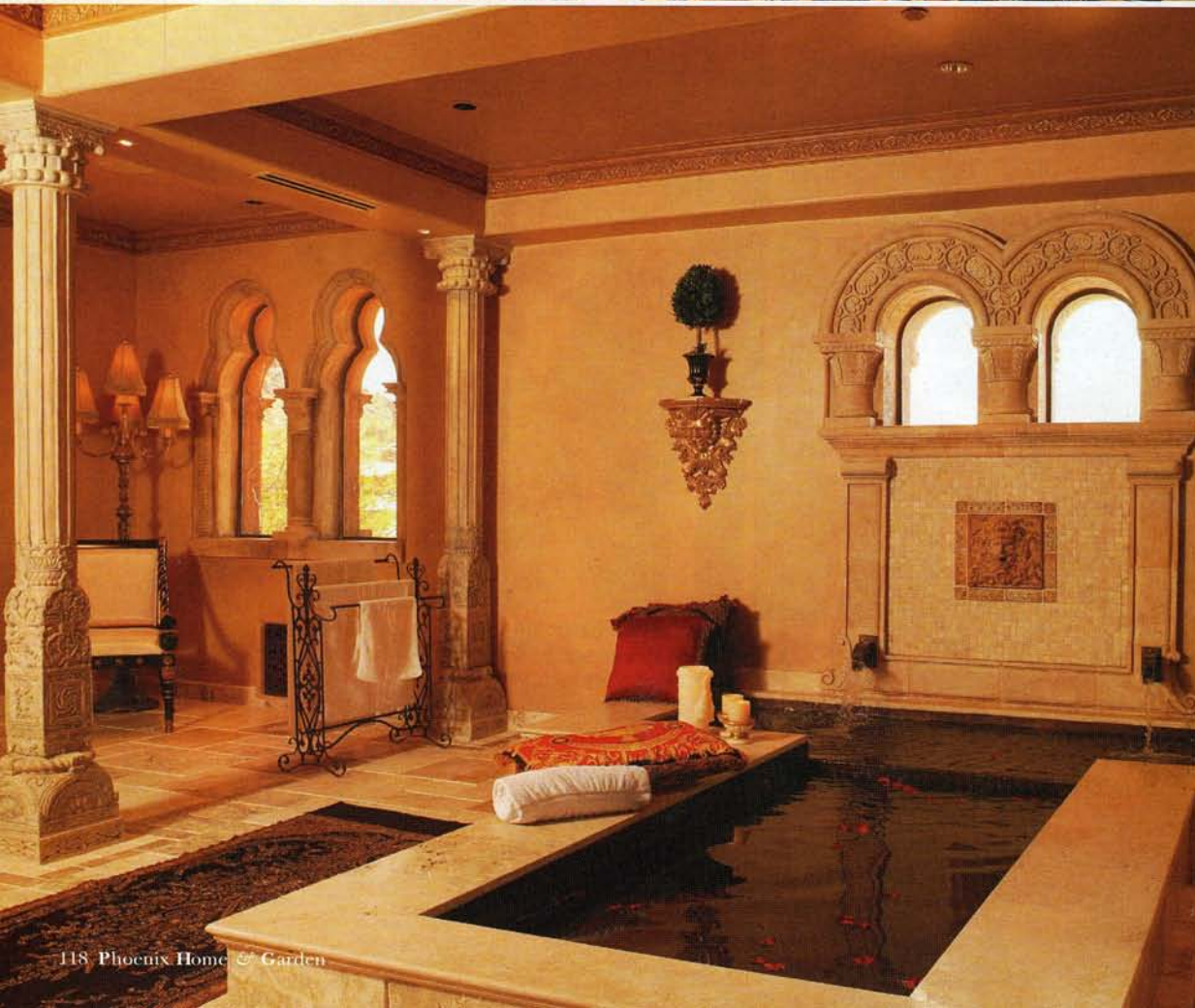
Old World Estate
Colonial Hacienda
Historic Italian Villa
Artist Glass House

Medieval Masterpiece

A Gothic Italian villa, complete with gargoyles and turrets, looms in north Scottsdale

Text by Teresa Esquivel • Photography by Jeffrey Green

A hand-carved gargoyle scares away evil spirits from its corner post at the Scottsdale home of Howard Feldman. The facade's eroded appearance, over-size sconces, leaded-glass windows and detailed Gothic arch entry set the stage for the home's intriguing interiors.



In this case, one man's home truly is his castle. With gargoyles, gas lamps,

turrets, a wine cellar, a secret door and a grotto, this north Scottsdale house has been described as over the top. And it is. But for Howard Feldman it's home, and it is precisely what he wanted, right down to every window, hinge, tile and door.

"This is not just a story about an extreme house," Feldman says. "It's also a story about an extreme owner and an extreme architect."

After interviewing many architects, the homeowner met his match in Rick Schreiber. "I looked every weekend for a house," Feldman recalls. "But nothing was edgy or authentic enough. So I decided to build a house that would be true to some concept, down to every single detail. I've always loved English Tudor, but that style doesn't work here. So I wanted something Old World, something that looks like it's been here a long time, is detail-oriented, and designed with a discriminating eye. Rick got it. When we talked, he would finish my sentences."

Feldman began the process by making daily purchases of European design and architecture books. Later, he made regular visits to the copy center. Before long, he had compiled some 60 file folders filled with ideas for every detail of the house. "There were files for tile, ironwork, statuary, windows, everything," Feldman recalls. "I broke the house into parts." Schreiber adds: "It was like a gigantic stew."

Clockwise from upper left: A music room features a grand piano that plays itself when its owner, a classically trained pianist, is busy entertaining guests. • Iron castings were used for the dining room railing and gracious stairway leading to the master suite. • Kitchen features include straw embedded in the ceiling, custom tiles, and cabinetry made to match the Habersham hutch and island. • A wall fountain takes center stage in the Roman-style master bath. With the push of a button, a skylight overhead reveals open sky.

The homeowner rented an office and warehouse specifically for use while building the house. Here, items were stored, meetings were held, and the stacks of files became one.

"We all met there so we could be confronted constantly with the materials and the vision," *Feldman says*. "We spent a great deal of energy educating the trades on seeing the vision, on doing things right, on overcoming mediocrity."

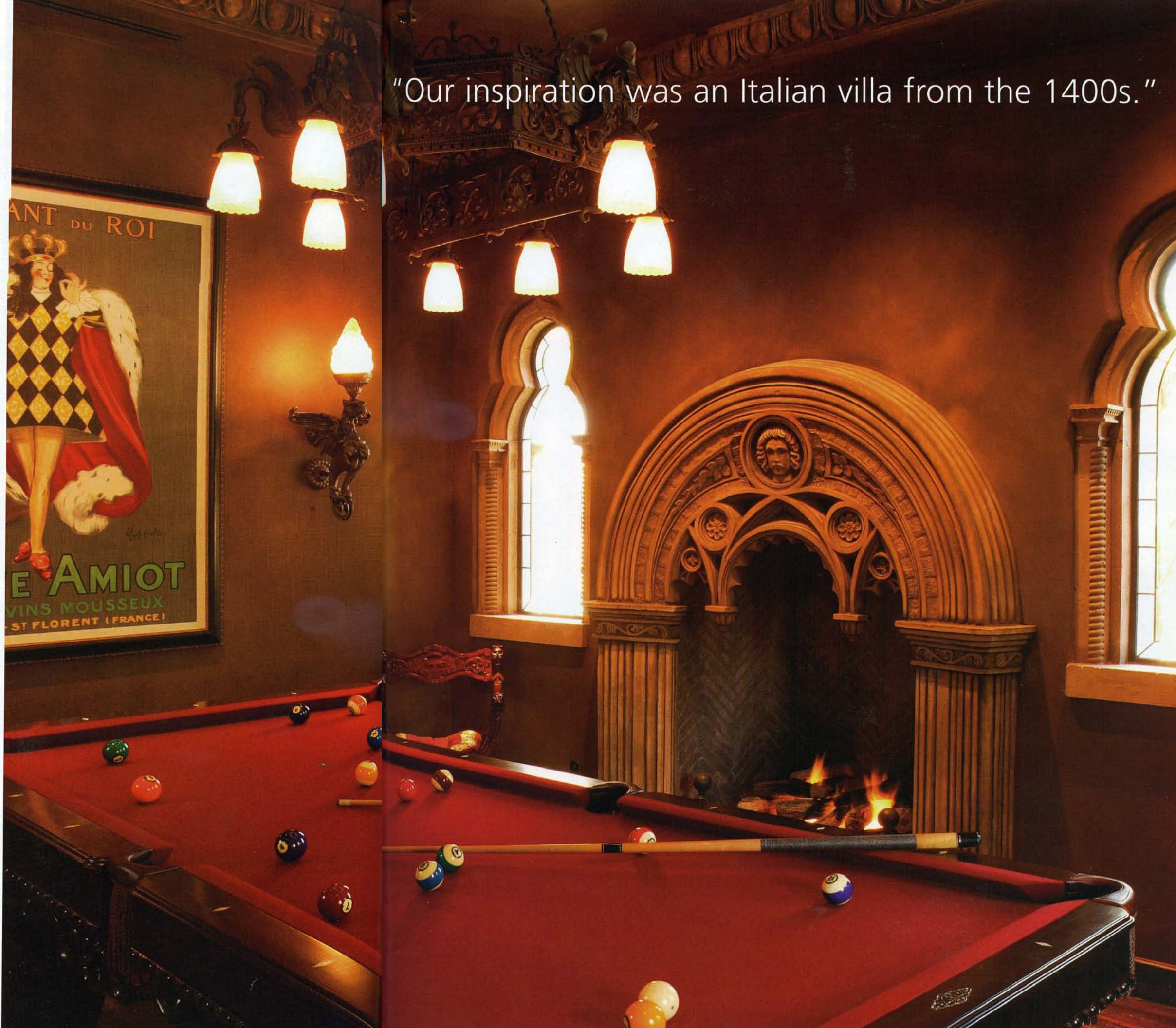
So that everybody remained perfectly clear and focused on the task, Schreiber produced a detailed full-color rendering of the home's exterior before building began. Today, so exact is the match that one would be hard-pressed to guess which came first, the drawing or the house. In addition, the architect created at least 36 sketches of all interior rooms, complete with furnishings, accessories, finishes and flooring.

"It's Italian Gothic," Schreiber explains of the design style. "Our inspiration was an Italian villa from the 1400s. Howard likes it on the edge—scary, with deep, darker tones. This house appears to have been added on to over the centuries. The plasterwork appears to be falling away, and every window and door is different."

The 5,500-square-foot house is two stories high and has two turrets, one in front and one in back. Downstairs are the public spaces; upstairs is the master suite, with an office, sleeping chamber, art gallery and a vast Roman-style bathroom. The front turret houses a bar and spiral stairs leading to an underground wine cellar. The back turret has a breakfast room on the main level and the master shower upstairs. Outdoors are a guest house, outdoor shower, swimming pool, spewing fountains, and a grotto with a spa and fireplace.

Eye-catching windows and a carved cantera fireplace surround are adornment enough for one wall of the billiards room. One of a pair of dragon sconces, as well as an ornate overhead fixture, are among pieces the homeowner chose to complete his vision. Flooring is of 100-year-old pine.

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This page: A Dutch door in the front turret leads to a wet bar off the billiards room. Below that is a wine cellar. The hanging light fixture is from the 17th century. **Opposite:** The home's commanding front entry was inspired by that of St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. The tracery-embellished window was hand-carved, and the hinges on the custom Bolivian cedar door were based on a 13th-century design.



Outdoors are a guest house, swimming pool, spewing fountains and a grotto

More specifically, from the grand Gothic arch entry to custom ironwork, details of the house were based meticulously on centuries-old designs. Travertine floors in the main living space, as well as custom-made tiles on the kitchen floor and backsplash, were laid in patterns pulled from Feldman's pile of reference books. Likewise for the entry door's custom hinges. Gargoyles were hand-carved in Colombia, and every door was made in Bolivia. One, which Schreiber calls the "door of all doors," is curved and intricately hand-carved from a single piece of Bolivian cedar.

Although architect and homeowner saw to it that workmanship was always first-rate, they also developed a "good enough" theory in order to avoid unnecessary spending. "This was possible because of Rick's knowledge of materials," Feldman says. Exterior corbels made of lightweight foam and faux-painted to look like stone are one such example. Lead tape rather than true leaded glass also was deemed "good enough" for the living room's large pocket doors.

To complement the home's Gothic architecture, Feldman selected heavy fabrics, dark woods and ornate accessories. Dragon sconces, stone sinks, tapestries and a gilt-edged desk are just a few examples.

"We pulled it off," Schreiber says. "This style appeals to a particular type of person. It's a Cher house. It's mysterious and spooky at night."

"It is a little spooky here," Feldman agrees. "But I like the intensity of the house." 🌿

See Resource Guide.

Surrounded by gushing water, the pool's grotto features a spa, fireplace, bar and gas lamps. The back yard is on the lowest part of the lot, allowing privacy from the street and a view over the back wall when inside the house or on the upper patio.

