

# Ahead of the Curve

FROM THE FOUNTAIN OF YOUTH TO FINANCIAL WIZARDRY, MAGIC IS IN HIGH DEMAND THESE DAYS. BUT AS THIS CURVACEOUS NEW DESERT HIGHLANDS HOME PROVES, FINDING A LITTLE ARCHITECTURAL FAIRY DUST IS CERTAINLY POSSIBLE.

*Story by Elizabeth Exline / Photographed by Thomas Bliss*

**W**HEN DRs. SUSAN THRASHER and Chuck Schwartz bought their lot, they probably weren't considering how a home could best capture the homesite's two views that were 180 degrees apart. And they probably weren't thinking about traffic noise, height restrictions or design guidelines. What they most definitely were thinking about, or maybe feeling, was the magic of the site. And those intuitive purchases often turn into the most interesting (and magical) homes.

"We knew we had the city-light view and then, 180 degrees from that, we had the Pinnacle Peak view," explains Erik Peterson, owner and president of Peterson Architecture & Associates. "We had a very tight building envelope, [and] we had a lot of grade to take care of on the site." Peterson speaks with the confident succinctness of a veteran problem solver, someone used to taking client requests and site conditions and fusing them into an architectural dialogue. In the case of Thrasher and Schwartz, the dialogue centered on the setting. The New York-based couple took a shine to Arizona after a meeting brought them West, and they subsequently built a town home in Troon North. But when they decided to retire in Scottsdale, they felt they needed something bigger, something that would be comfortable, down-to-earth and, style-wise, a clear departure from the Colonial homes they'd inhabited back East. "We wanted a house that would complement the desert landscape," Thrasher says,



**ARCHITECTS:** Erik Peterson and Luis Frausto (project manager), Peterson Architecture & Associates.

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Susie Hersker, Design Directives.

**BUILDER:** Richard Sinagoga, RS Homes.

**FRONT DOOR AND ENTRY SCULPTURE:** Lyle London, Art in Metal U.S.A.

**TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 4,383.





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**Abracadabra:** The radial floor plan maximizes views from the living room (above) and provided more space for a large kitchen (below).



dichotomous city-light and mountain views. In between these snapshots, natural, green-golden desert terrain takes over, a reminder that drama isn't always required for a great view. "Their site actually goes all the way back around [the house]," Peterson says. "This corner was so beautiful, so we really preserved that whole space."

The house's radial floor plan is the first of many features to finesse reality. "The radial plan," Peterson begins, "allows you to take a small lot with a small floor plan and make it feel bigger, because the spaces start to spread out differently; and it allows you to get a series of different views from different rooms." From the living room, for example, you can see the gallery that connects to the east wing and the kitchen; from the breakfast nook you see the second story, the kitchen and a glimpse of Pinnacle Peak through a well-placed window as well as the backyard and the city lights. The master bedroom contemplates the backyard as well, but because the house curves inward and is supported by faux-stone fins, the view is reined in and more private.



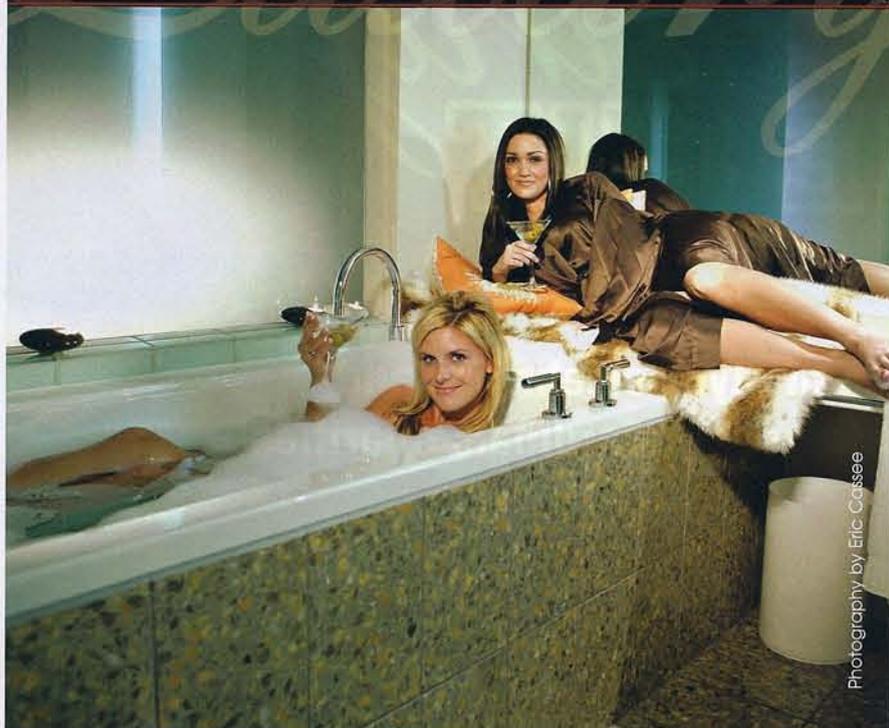
### Live It!

Living in a soft-contemporary desert home means clean lines (but not too straight), natural materials (but not too rustic) and a healthy collection of art for display.

Even the gallery holds its own surprises: The walls are in fact slightly curved, and the door's glass filters natural light into the hall, altering one's experience of the space.

The intrigue continues in the great room. Walled in by soaring windows on two sides, the room commands views of nature with just a handful of rooftops interrupting the landscape. "The lot is literally in between a ton of different homes and it's got streets all around it; but when you're in this space, you don't feel that," Peterson marvels. The illusion of privacy, in fact, is Peterson's greatest achievement. For though the dwelling is bordered by two streets, one of which sees a fair amount of traffic, you don't see it; don't even feel it. By opting for a sheer-descent water feature in the pool instead

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of a negative edge, the homeowners are shielded from the cars on the other side of the wall. In the master bath, art glass in the window above the tub allows for privacy without sacrificing the McDowell Mountain and Troon Mountain views. And just beyond the master suite, a lush side-yard garden acts as a visual and audio buffer.

Getting creative with a site is one thing, but dealing with community design guidelines is another, although Peterson was even able to reinterpret some of those. The roof, which must be a hip roof if you build in Desert Highlands, was his coup de grâce. "Typically a hip roof is on a rectangle," he explains, "and it's got the two hips on the side, and it's all done with tile. Our hip roof is not only curved, but it's offset. So one part of it is less than the other half and then it gives you a much more interesting shape, but it still follows the guidelines."

That this soft-contemporary home was completed while the homeowners lived on the other side of the country only makes its outcome more miraculous. Part of that, everyone agrees, is because the homeowners; Peterson; the interior designer Susie Hersker of Design Directives; and the builder, Richard Sinagoga of RS Homes; worked in harmony with each other. And that cooperative spirit pervades the owners' Arizona lifestyle today. They've made fast friends, they say, with the family living in the house that convinced them to hire Peterson. And they've befriended another New York-based couple who also live in Desert Highlands. (The husband is a cousin of one of Schwartz's New York colleagues.) "We probably wouldn't have met if we hadn't met them in Desert Highlands," Thrasher says, attesting to the community's convivial spirit. "They actually were wonderful and let us stay in their house while we were building our house... We just found people out [in Arizona] are like this. They're very welcoming." Coincidence, luck or destiny—whatever it is, it feels nothing short of magical. ■