LIVING THE

High Life

Views Are the Star Attraction of a Revamped Hillside Property

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Clean, comfortable and Contemporary is how the homeowner describes his backyard, which overlooks picturesque Camelback Mountain. A raised spa, fire-feature seat wall, outdoor bar and in-pool table with sunken stools make this an ideal setting for entertaining. Unfilled travertine pavers were selected for their ability to breathe and stay cool underfoot.

Above: Singular plants that "stand out on their own merit"—such as these potted golden barrels—were used throughout the property, says the homeowner. The jagged edge of the walkway leading to the front door was done intentionally to pay homage to the mountain.

Opposite: Situated at the top of the hill near the front entry is an area that was cut out of the mountain. A waterfall was installed at the top to create an unexpected arrival experience. Recirculated water is pumped up the hill and flows back down the wall from an infinity-edge basin and into a small pond below.

MOUNTAINSIDE LIVING MAY NOT BE FOR THE FAINT OF HEART, especially if it means traversing a steep slope to reach a front door or navigating a turnaround at the top of the drive to head back down to the street. But for most Arizona residents, the outstanding views and proximity to the stars make life on the hill the pinnacle of desert living.

Paradise Valley, Arizona, is known for its great mountainside sites, and one in particular caught the eye of its current owner. The property, which backs up to the Phoenix Mountains Preserve, offers expansive vistas that range from north Scottsdale to the east Valley to downtown Phoenix and out to South Mountain. It was love at first sight.

In 2005, he began renovating the property's Contemporary-style house and its understated and overgrown landscape. His vision was to make the yard appear seamless with the natural surroundings; incorporate a more architectural plant palette closer to the house; and make better use of the patio areas. Although the homeowner subcontracted much of the work himself, he teamed up with landscape architect Chad Robert, a Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest, to help with the strategic planning and design.

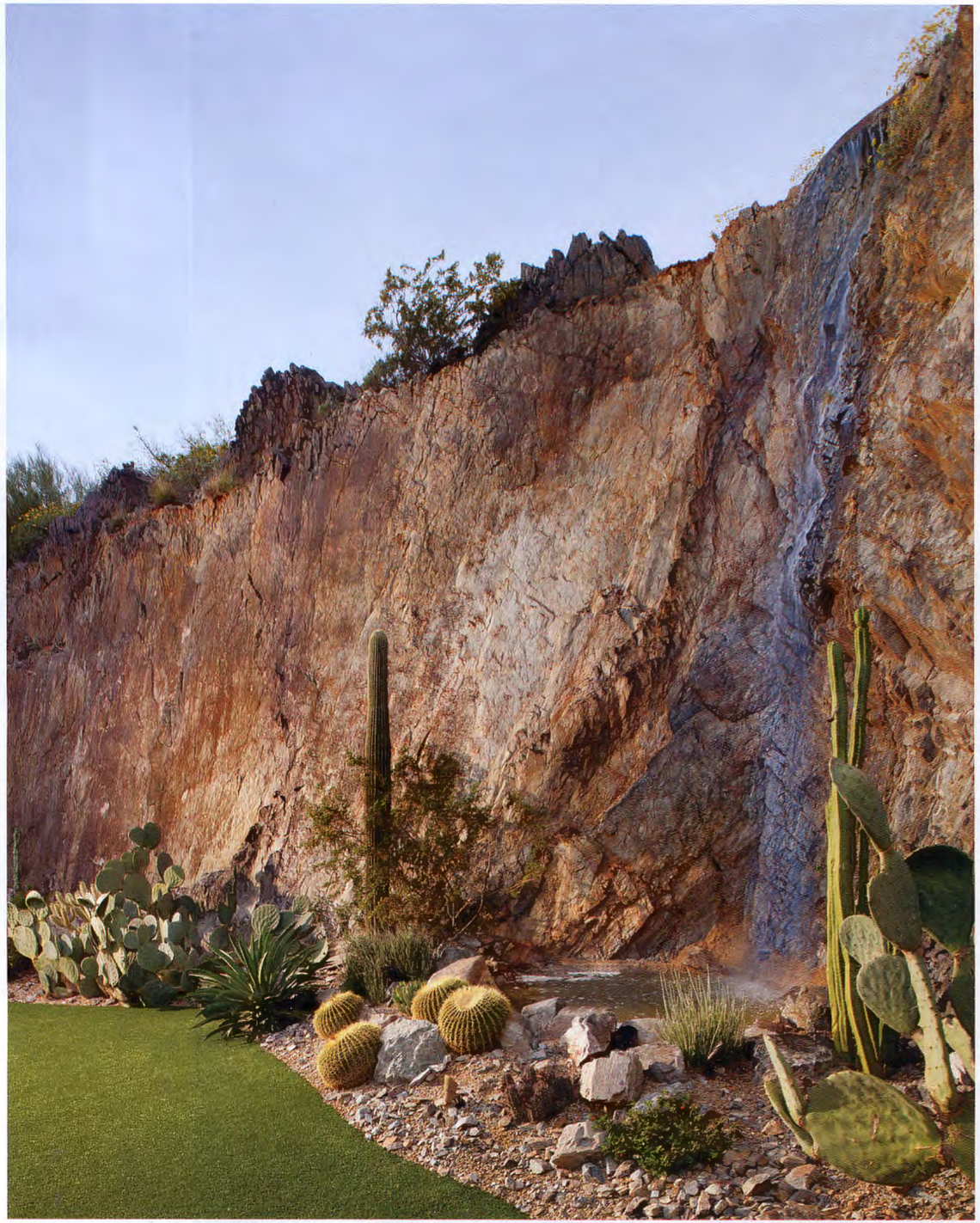
Robert was involved in clearing away unsightly fountain grass, scrub brush and salt cedar trees that presented a fire risk, and placing trees and shrubs for screening and erosion control. Since the town of Paradise Valley regulates hillside development, homeowners are required to preserve the aesthetics of the terrain. This means planting only native indigenous species; erecting fencing that is unobtrusive; and installing outdoor lighting that is directed downward and is low in lumens.

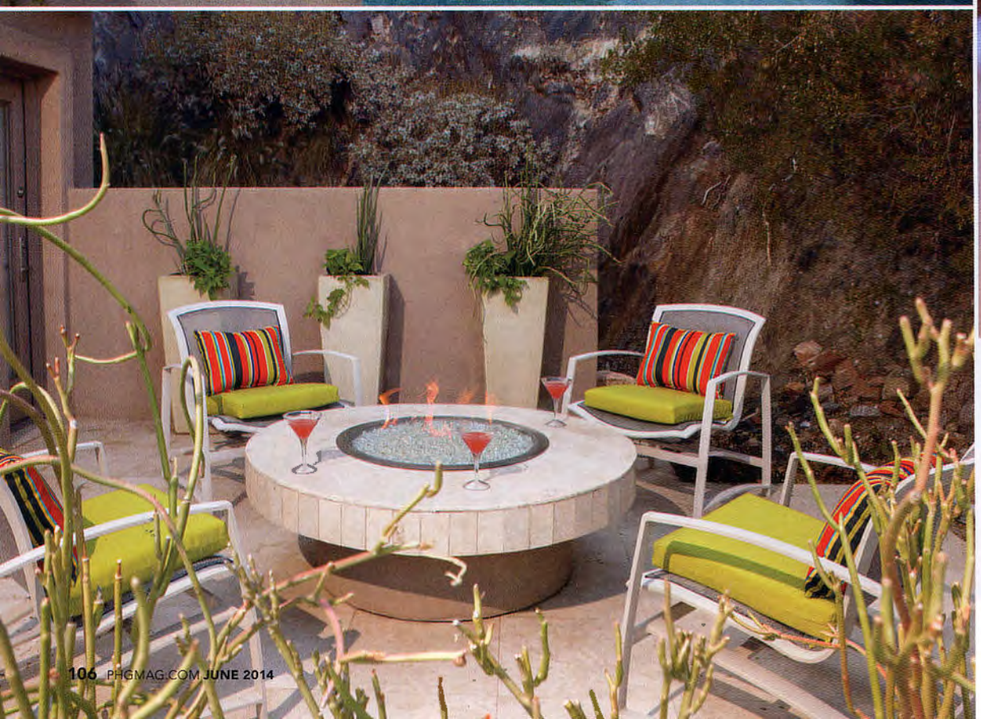
Another priority was reworking hardscaped areas to make them more functional for entertaining. "There was too much hardscape in the narrow front entry drive, so I added a patch of grass to make it easy and practical for guests to park, and it also allowed us to eliminate the existing concrete slabs," Robert explains. In the backyard, there wasn't enough hardscape, so spots were carved out for lounge chairs, raised planters and fire features.

The main outdoor living area, which is situated in the backyard, takes advantage of all the views. While such upgrades as new pool tile, a poolside bar and upscale patio furnishings were incorporated into the redo, the overall aesthetic is one of simplicity. The landscape architect agreed with the homeowner's desire to keep the look clean. "Sometimes restraint is just as powerful as filling up a space," says Robert.

The owner has since tested the limits of the yard. "It's an amazing entertaining space. I've had parties of up to 450 people here," he muses, noting that guests are sometimes shuttled up and down the hill. "One time, I brought in an aerialist circus act that performed over the pool on engineered trussing. Another time, I laid a Plexiglas catwalk runway over the water for a fashion show. The models arrived on a hydraulic lift located below the infinity edge of the pool."

Parties aside, the landscape serves as a platform for other entertainment, mainly wildlife. "Birds, wild frogs, owls ... the sounds they make are amazing," remarks the homeowner. "I really like the privacy and the unique habitat of living up high. It's a lifestyle that can't be duplicated."





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Opposite top: With the Phoenix Mountains Preserve serving as a rugged backdrop, the pool area was planted with low-water-use flora that suits the setting. "I wanted the yard to have more architectural-looking plants, but I also wanted to preserve the natural surroundings," says the owner.

Opposite bottom: Landscape architect Chad Robert situated this private seating area close to the mountain, as it is the least windy spot on the site. The low wall hides pool equipment and serves as a canvas for tapered pots filled with slipper plants. In the polished-travertine fire pit, flames burn through a bed of chipped glass set in a stainless steel frame.

Above: Durable resin wicker furnishings are paired with weather-worthy cushions on the south-facing patio. "The sunsets are amazing," says the owner. "This is one of my favorite places to hang out." Potted agaves in matching cast-concrete pots provide continuity. Travertine flooring flows from indoors to out.

See Sources.