

A WALK IN



THE PARK

Tucked behind a wall of greenery lies a treasure trove of amenities designed for an active family of five.

BY NANCY ERDMANN PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WOODALL



As if put there for the homeowners' personal enjoyment, Camelback Mountain appears as a majestic backdrop in the backyard of their Paradise Valley residence. "This is what we see when playing on our tennis court," says the husband.

Landscape architect Chad Robert added a circular fountain at the far end of the property and planted its perimeter with vibrant annuals. The bocce ball court is visible in the distance.



Flanked by artificial grass, the lower-level bocce ball court, which is filled with decomposed granite, looks directly toward the back patio. The landscape architect used slow-growing Mexican blue fan palms and a mix of accent plants and shrubs to create visual interest along the brick pathway.



DRIVING PAST THIS PARADISE VALLEY PROPERTY, ONE WOULD BE HARD-PRESSED TO GUESS

WHAT RESIDES behind its verdant perimeter of 'Lady Banks' roses and sour orange trees, as there is no way to see inside. But once past its entry gates and through the house, palatial grounds abound, with outdoor amenities most often reserved for parks or school grounds. Designed not only to take advantage of the picturesque mountain views but also to serve as a safe haven for family, the 3.1 acres were gradually transformed over a period of 10 years from mostly raw desert to a paradise for kids and fun.

"We lived only a few blocks away when we saw the house being built," says the husband. "As it progressed, we found ourselves falling in love with it. When it sat empty for two years, we decided to not only buy the home but also the adjacent property behind it." From almost every vantage point, the combined lots offer views of three landmark mountains—Camelback

Mountain, Piestewa Peak and Mummy Mountain—and the homeowners wanted a landscape that equaled the beauty of its surroundings. They also wanted their three children to be able to enjoy plenty of activities within the boundaries of the grounds.

Although there were some existing plants from when the house was built, the couple decided to start from scratch. "After we saw Chad Robert's portfolio, we knew he was the one for us," says the wife. He not only served as the landscape architect but also the contractor. "Chad has such an amazing eye, and he took care of all of the permitting, which can take a good deal of effort and time."

The goal was to integrate the two lots to make them appear as though they were designed together with the new one blending with the old, explains Robert, a *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner. Creating destination spots was key to the design. Along with the addition of a full-size lighted tennis court and a ramada with a bathroom and built-in kitchen, the main elements include a bocce ball court, four-square court, playground, crushed granite pathways, trail for riding bikes, an enormous circular fountain, pergola, bridge, a winter fire pit area with bancos, and numerous gas fire features. Various paving designs were utilized throughout, as were decorative Talavera tiles. "All of the materials we used were copies of or inspired by the main house, which is Spanish Mediterranean in style, to ensure that the project appeared cohesive and integrated," notes Robert.

More than 80% of the existing grass was removed to conserve water, and it was replaced with separate garden vignettes populated with vegetation more suited to Arizona's arid climate. A hummingbird garden is filled with dozens of vibrant selections, such as penstemon varieties, milkweed, woolly butterfly bush and Baja fairy duster. There are separate gardens for roses, vegetables and cacti, plus a fruit orchard with everything from pomegranates, peaches and plums to apples, limes, lemons and oranges. "It's absolutely astonishing how beautiful it all is," says the wife. "We looked through plant books with Chad to pick out the ones



The homeowners requested more privacy at the front of their house and also wished to save on water usage, so Robert removed the grass and replaced it with more drought-tolerant plantings, such as silver emu, bells of fire, sage and several varieties of agaves.



ABOVE A ramada decked out with a barbecue/kitchen, fireplace, TV and bathroom was added in the rear yard, making it a destination getaway. A specimen-size *Agave weberi* makes a grand statement. **OPPOSITE, TOP TO BOTTOM** The full-size tennis court was designed with faux-grass spectator seating and can be tented for parties and other outdoor functions. • Decorative cement tiles that complement those on the upper terrace were used for the ramada's floor. • Robert added a bridge leading from the ramada to the cactus garden. The boulder-lined pathway is ideal for bike riding.







The landscape architect designed this winter fire pit gathering area, which sits between the house and back fountain, to take advantage of the changing colors on Camelback Mountain. The location also acts as an entry point to the tennis court at right. Mexican blue fan palms and Canary Island date palms draw the eye toward the mountainscape.

we liked, but he really took the reins with all of this.” Notes Robert, “The plants were all chosen to complement and blend in with the existing ones and go with the style of the house. The cactus garden, which is reached via a bridge, was done in a more native palette and sited to protect the children from the dangers of the thorns and wildlife associated with the garden.”

With its existing grand staircase leading from the back patio to the added-on acreage, the yard feels impressive due to its size and unexpected beauty. Finished before the start of the pandemic, the family was happy to have a place within the confines of their property to be outside and have so many amenities to enjoy. “The kids love nature and to run around just having fun,” says the wife. “We even have an old-school bell that we ring to let them know it’s time to come in.” An ideal outdoor getaway for sports parties, adult get-togethers or just hanging out with loved ones, the landscape is nothing less than a magical paradise.

ARCHITECT: Bing Hu, H&S International.

BUILDER: John Schultz, Schultz Development.

LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT AND CONTRACTOR:

Chad Robert, Exteriors by Chad Robert.

For more information, see Sources.