



The homeowners purchased this ceramic totem by Phoenix artist Janet Orr after viewing it in the sculpture garden at Shemer Art Center and Museum. The totem stands in a gravel bed above a peaceful Southwestern Zen garden at this Paradise Valley, Arizona, residence.

Art

IN THE PARK
A Desert Landscape Features
Delightful Discoveries at Every Turn

BY CATHY CROMELL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WOODALL

A GARDEN IS NEVER STAGNANT, SO I APPRECIATE clients who interact with a landscape to make it their own," remarks landscape architect Chad Robert. Eight years ago, he began collaborating with two such hands-on gardeners. The couple loves plants, garden art and rock specimens, and enthusiastically seeks ideal landscape settings to showcase their collections.

Located on a hillside in Paradise Valley, Arizona, their 2-acre property started out somewhat barren in comparison to its current leafy abundance of trees and shrubs, as well as dense plantings of cacti and other succulents. "The transformation began when I asked Chad to create a Southwestern Zen garden," recalls the lady of the house.

Over time, other enhancements followed, including a shady courtyard where the homeowners enjoy morning coffee, meandering paths, and a hillside staircase that leads to seating with a crow's nest view of the surroundings. The swimming pool and deck also were renovated.

Robert, a Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest, chose a desert plant palette to integrate with the site's natural vegetation. "Closer to the home, such plants as agave, candelilla and fencepost cacti become more architectural and are installed in masses," he says. "I also added blooming plants that feature cyclical seasonal interest like the blooms of *Trichocereus* cacti."

With Robert's design footprint in place, the homeowners have been digging in—literally—ever since. As members of Desert Botanical Garden (DBG), they attend its semi-annual plant sales and also visit nurseries as far away as Palm Springs, California, seeking unusual varieties. "I'm not afraid to move plants around the yard to find their preferred growing sites," comments the

husband. In fact, he's become quite a tree expert, taking classes at DBG to learn how to maintain their property's 152 trees.

A stroll through their landscape offers wonderful surprises, whether it is the unusual reddish bark of palo rojo trees that the owner snapped up at a DBG sale, multicolored glass sculptures sprouting among blooming aloe, or geological specimens with practical uses.

For example, Robert incorporated quartz rocks as downspouts in a water feature; elsewhere, a distinctive flat-topped boulder was craned into place to serve as a table. "We like rocks so much that we drove home from Santa Fe with granite boulders in our vehicle," recalls the lady of the house. "Luckily, it was all downhill," her husband jokes.

The front yard, newly renovated by landscape designer Thomas Park, a Phoenix Home & Garden Young Gun, features even more rocks—in the form of low gabion walls. Intrigued by their appearance, the man of the house asked Park to provide him with five empty gabion wire cages. "I made cardboard mock-ups of their size and shape, placed them in different positions until I got the look I wanted; then filled the wire gabions with rocks," he explains. The result is a unique monument that draws attention to its hillside location.

"My husband has a good sense of placement for artwork, which allows us to enjoy the pieces from varied vantage points, indoors and out, notes the wife. She also makes art for the landscape, including creations that dangle from tree branches.

The homeowners continue to fine-tune their landscape on an almost daily basis. "Come back tomorrow," suggests the man of the house. "Something will be different." ■



Space near the front entry was repurposed into a peaceful courtyard. As a nod to the owners' love of geological specimens, landscape architect Chad Robert incorporated three quartz rocks found on the property as spouts in the water feature. "I replaced existing steps on the hillside that were made of railroad ties with zigzag stairs designed to blend in with the natural rocky slope," he notes. The springstone sculpture titled *First Born* is by Zimbabwe artist Gedion Nyanhongo.



Above: "We added architectural plantings to soften the walls and complement the Modern feel of the new pool," explains Chad Robert. Situated behind and below the pool is a tiered wall with rows of plants that include candelilla, weber agave and Caribbean agave. Aloes bloom in the foreground. The homeowners regularly divide and transplant agave and aloe offshoots to additional spots in the landscape.

Left: Butterfly and mushroom sculptures by William A. Hagey suit the natural serenity of this transition area between the Zen garden and the mini golf course.



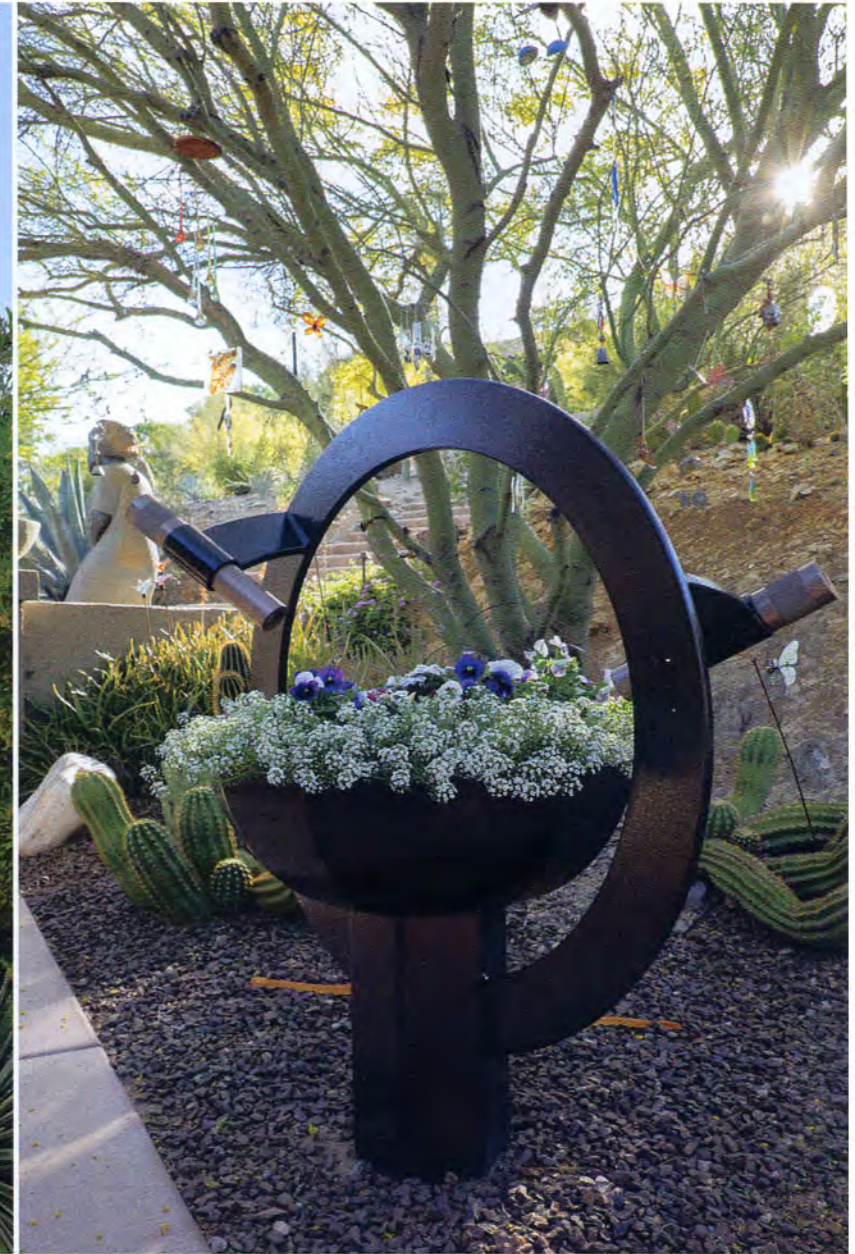
An area along the driveway has been transformed into a desert botanical garden over the years with ongoing additions of trees, statuesque cacti and dramatic blooming *Yucca rostradas* and other plants. The William A. Hagey sculpture represents the flower from a red bird of paradise shrub.



Above: The swimming pool and deck were completely refashioned. The original pool was sited four feet lower than deck level. It was then filled in and a new negative-edge pool was constructed at a higher point, creating a seamless view across the deck to the mountains beyond.

Right: Five basalt columns of varying heights seem to rise out of the earth along this hillside pathway. Despite enduring intense sun and wind, their polished surfaces remain shiny.





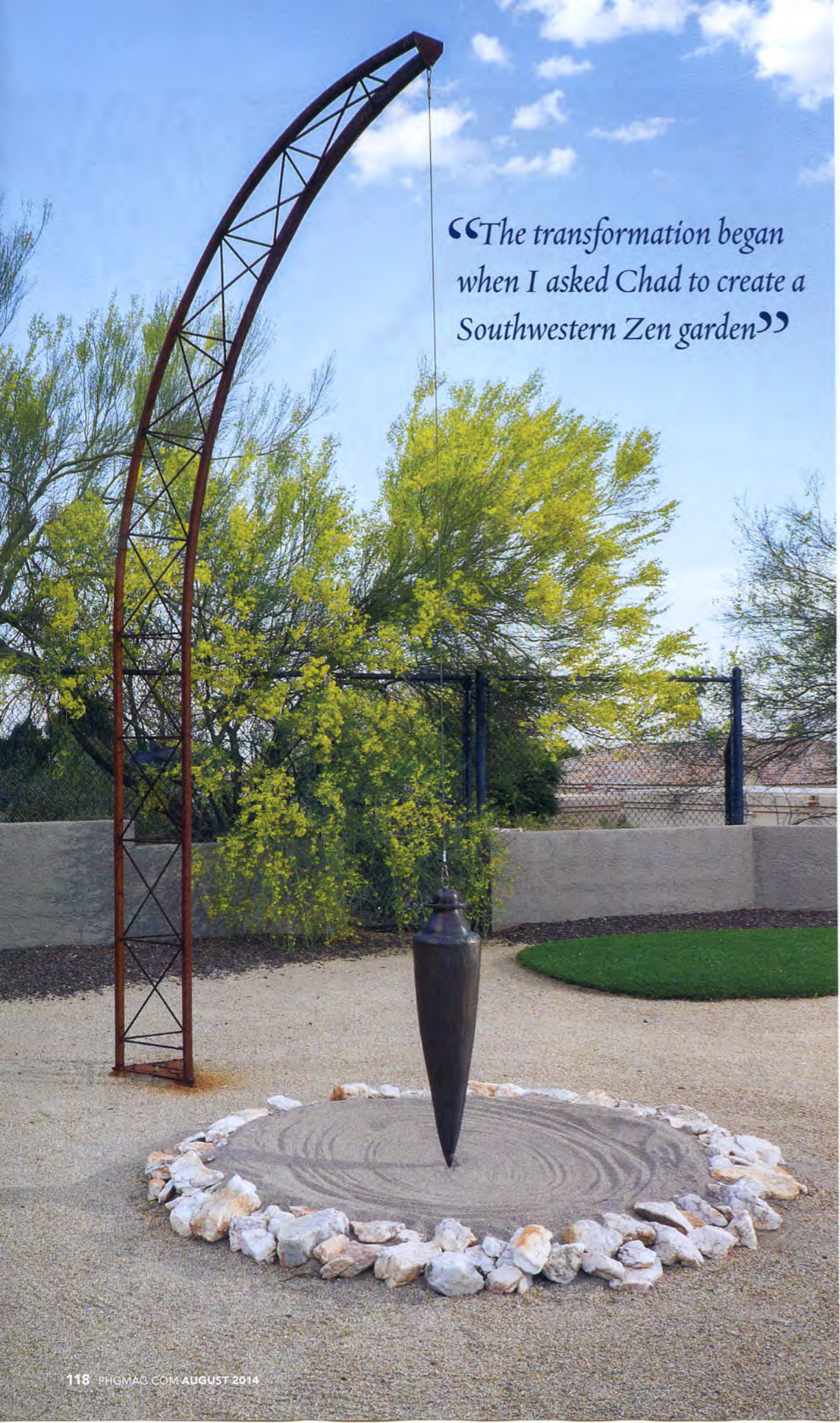
Left: A handful of aloes from elsewhere in the yard were divided and transplanted in this raised planter, which includes walls constructed from rocks on the property. The aloes thrived beneath the tree canopies and multiplied within a few years, providing a dense bed of growth. Blown-glass curlicues on stakes add fanciful color when the plants are not in bloom.

Above: *Glassinator*, a kinetic sculpture by Seattle artist Andrew Carson, moves with the breeze. Because it is one of the homeowners' favorite pieces of art, its base was raised so that the sculpture is visible from indoors and from the pool deck and other outdoor locations; a spotlight was added for night viewing. Lush hopseed bushes were transplanted to provide screening and separation from an area once occupied by a tennis court.

Top right: Gazing at the flower bowl through a kaleidoscope—a sculpture by Bob Anderson titled *Botanica*—is a swirl of colors and patterns. Wind chimes and nature-themed souvenirs from the couple's travels swing from the branches of a palo verde, which the homeowners dubbed their "memory tree." An Argentine giant cactus sprawls in the background.

DESERT GARDENING TIPS

- Desert-adapted plants that are easy to propagate through division or offshoots, such as agaves and aloes, provide an inexpensive method for filling planting areas. "Agave bloom stalks are covered with hundreds of bulbils (tiny plantlets) that can be removed and rooted in water," remarks the lady of the house. "They sprout roots within days and I pot them up."
- Ongoing gardening tasks should be convenient to perform. The homeowners installed hose bibs around the property for easy water access. They also designed a potting area with a salvaged sink, shelves and handy storage. To conserve water, the sink drains into a nearby planting area.
- It is not necessary to renovate an entire landscape at once. "As you live with a space for a while, ideas that work for your lifestyle can be implemented over time," states the husband.



“The transformation began when I asked Chad to create a Southwestern Zen garden”

Left: The couple's ongoing involvement with their landscape's evolution encouraged them to tackle renovation projects on their own, such as an aging tennis court. Neither played the sport, so they decided to replace it with a 10-hole golf course and bocce ball lawn with artificial turf. The remodeled play space features this distinctive 12-foot-high pendulum titled *Infinity* by artist Kyle Ashley.

Opposite top: Fascinated by the appearance of rock-filled gabion walls installed during the renovation of the front yard, the man of the house placed multiple gabion wire cages to create his own artistic hillside monument. Spring-blooming palo verde trees add bursts of yellow to the scene.

Opposite bottom: This hillside respite offers expansive views of the property and city beyond. The flat-topped boulder was craned into place and serves as a table. The homeowners continue to add plants and artwork along winding paths throughout the landscape.

See Sources.

