

Crossing THE Border

A Canadian Couple
Finds Their Bliss in a
Reimagined Southwest
Home and Garden

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This newly renovated backyard was terraced to better utilize its space and make room for such amenities as an acrylic hot tub and putting green. Situated below the infinity edge pool, the spa was designed to feel built in, says landscape architect Chad Robert. Around it, he constructed a stacked-stone veneer retaining wall topped with composite decking.

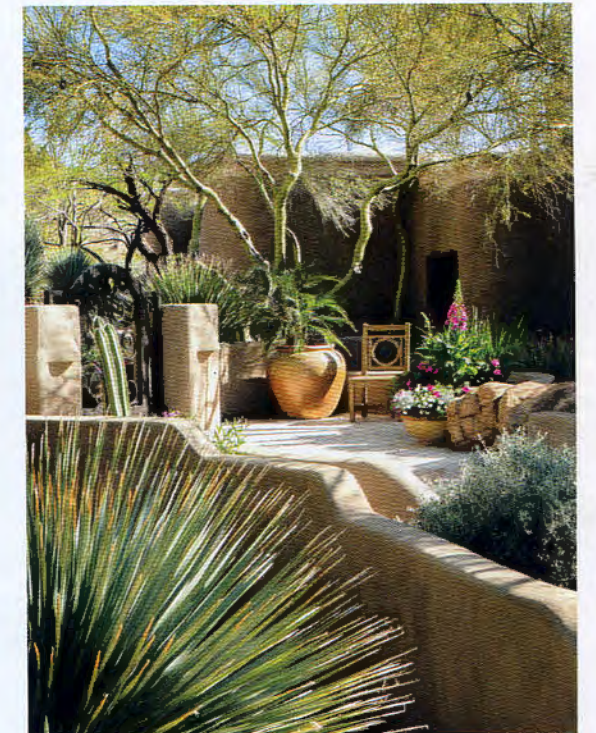
Pool designer Kevin Rondeau says he wanted to create a unique shape for the pool, which is situated in a tight space between the main house and the guest quarters. "It needed a long, linear design with the focal point being at the end of the pool toward the beautiful views," he explains.



PHOENIX MAY BE THE FIFTH LARGEST CITY in America, but there are still places within a short distance that offer up some of the Old West charm that so many newcomers to our state want to experience. Two such neighboring towns—Cave Creek and Carefree—were a big draw for Canadian residents Sheri Ng and Eric Strachan when they began searching for a second home a few years back. The couple found what they were looking for in picturesque Carefree.

"We were drawn to its small Western-town atmosphere," Sheri recalls. "It's a stark contrast from the urban sprawl of Phoenix and reminds us of the prairies of Canada where we're both from."

They bought a property on Black Mountain, which is the centerpiece of town. Soaring 3,339 feet, the mountain has a unique geological makeup that is especially appealing to Eric, who is a geologist. The two spent 18 months transforming the existing Southwest-style home into their version



The home's entry is all about the desert, with plantings of desert spoon (foreground), silver sage, a potted pigmy date palm and a palo verde.



The homeowners wanted a large outdoor kitchen where guests could gather day or night. The oversized island was custom fabricated with a linear gas fire feature cut into a slab of fossilized stone. To take advantage of the views and allow for air circulation, architect Eric Spry opened up the space with a window cutout.

of a modern/Tuscan design that features cantera pillars and plenty of travertine. Once complete, they began work on the landscape.

Located on a hillside, the lot had a nondescript backyard with a concrete patio and a pool edged with large boulders that blocked views. "We wanted to give the yard a resortlike feel with plenty of options for outdoor living," says Sheri. She and Eric, who are avid golfers, also wanted a putting green, spa, outdoor kitchen and a yard that would gradually incorporate elements of the natural desert back into the landscape.

It often takes a team to make dreams come true, and this one included architect Eric Spry, interior designer Martin McIlvenna, general contractor Craig Eckhardt and landscape architect Chad Robert. "Everyone had input," notes Robert, who says that the homeowners were deeply involved in the process.

During the course of the remodel, the existing pool was removed to make way for a new one, the backyard was terraced to create more useable space, and square footage was added with a detached guest house. "The guest house was designed in such a



A patio planting pocket between the main house and guest quarters was designed with a more tropical flair than the rest of the yard, where desertlike vegetation was installed. Softening up the hardscape are sago palms, bougainvilleas and a potted kumquat tree.



A curved banco/planting area situated above the spa forms an intimate space for relaxing and offers 270-degree views, says Spry. An antique kettle filled with ceramic spheres and lava rock serves as a contemporary fire pit.

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—Sheri Ng, homeowner



Located off the indoor living room, the outdoor living area offers resortlike ambience with its teak sofas, cantera columns and hearth, and limestone flooring, which flows from inside to out. The spiral bronze chandelier is wired for electricity; faux candle covers were added for authenticity.

way as to create new outdoor living spaces simply by its geometry and location,” explains Spry. The new structure became the perfect backdrop for an alfresco kitchen with a large dining island and a covered living room that McIlvenna filled with elegant furnishings.

For Robert, a *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner, “Keeping the view open was the most important part of my job,” he says. Sometimes, this meant tucking elements out of sight, such as the putting green and a spa that the homeowners had previously purchased. Situated at different levels, neither is visible from the patio. Robert also designed a spiral banco, added a stone bridge that connects one area of the yard to the other, and updated the plantscape to

include vegetation that attracts hummingbirds, quail and other birds year-round.

The renovated property now offers multiple areas for entertaining. “Our guests can relax by the pool, gather in the shaded outdoor living room, enjoy a barbecue at the large kitchen island or huddle around the fire bowl on a chilly evening,” says Sheri. “Practicing on our putting green seems to be a favorite activity when we aren’t actually out on a golf course. And the pool is definitely very popular, but this may be due to the fact that in Canada, most of us do not swim outdoors very often!”

With its gorgeous mountain vistas, towering saguaros and breathtaking sunsets, Sheri and Eric’s Arizona home has just enough of the Old West flavor to keep them coming back year after year. ■

The backyard faces southeast and offers dramatic views of Black Mountain. The homeowners often practice putting on the lower green and can enjoy a soothing soak in the spa after a long game of golf on nearby links.

See Sources.

