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# Desert BLOOM

*By Amanda Fier*

IN ADDITION TO BEING A PLACE WHERE LIFE'S BEAUTIFUL MOMENTS HAPPEN, A HOME IS A PLACE THAT'S BEAUTIFUL IN AND OF ITSELF. THAT'S WHY THESE ARIZONA RESIDENTS INVESTED TIME AND CARE IN MAKING THEIR DESERT HOME THE RUSTIC AND REFINED RETREAT IT IS TODAY.

WHEN ASKED WHAT HE LIKES BEST about his gorgeous house, George Gourlay replies, "My wife." He isn't kidding, but that's not to say he doesn't love his house, too. In fact, both he and his wife, Catherine, adore it.

They also adore Arizona, and that's why they chose to build their dream retreat in Arizona rather than anywhere else. The Scottish couple, who also maintains a residence in Atlanta, has seen the world over thanks to George's international career. That same career brought them to the Grand Canyon State years ago, and in a matter of days and scenic drives, they fell in love with the region.

In the years following their inaugural visit, Catherine and George returned several times to ensure their affections for Arizona were unconditional—meaning they could love it in spite of the sweltering summers. Once they decided

they could, they bought land upon which to build the kind of retirement refuge others only dream about.

The conception of the Gourlays' stunning Arizona residence took root in the minds of several people and then took shape on the side of a mountain. The fact that the home appears indigenous to the terrain is no accident. "We deliberately wanted [the home] to be unobtrusive," George says. He and Catherine worked closely with their architect Lee Hutchison and master builder Ken Madden and his team at Shiloh Custom Homes to come up with a structure that looks native to the landscape.

Before drawing up plans, Hutchison consulted with the Gourlays over dinner to learn how they live so he could create a suitable house. Next, he consulted the land and studied its views, rock croppings and terrain to then create

DESPITE ITS SIZEABLE DIMENSIONS, THE HOME'S  
**café-au-lait** COLORING AND CURVING  
CONTOURS MAKE IT A QUIET ADDITION TO THE SITE.

a suitable setup and structure. "The site has a whole lot to say about how you're going to build on it. It is steep, rocky, has several significant washes and flood plains and a lot of vegetation," Hutchison says. "It also has beautiful views worth capturing. It was a multi-dimensional jigsaw puzzle [the project team solved] based on site constraints and the Gourlays' lifestyle."

Being new to the Southwest, Catherine and George were unfamiliar with the regional style but wanted their home to respectfully reflect the area's aesthetics. They toured the Sonoran Desert and Santa Fe, New Mexico with Hutchison, builders at Shiloh, and interior designer Bess Jones in order to learn which design elements appealed to their tastes. In the end, the style they settled on is something Hutchison dubs "organic pueblo."

Overall, it took about five years of collaboration, research, planning, site preparation and construction to build this 9,500-sq.-ft. dwelling, which is surrounded by 5,000 square feet of outdoor living space. Ken Madden of Shiloh says, "The house is more than 200 feet long and probably falls 80 feet in slope. Getting the house to work on the site was the most challenging." But the result of tackling such a challenge is what proved most rewarding for all involved. "What makes this home great is how it fits the personality of the clients and the land," Madden says.

Despite its sizeable dimensions, the home's café-au-lait coloring and curving contours make it a quiet addition to the site. Inside, a snaking floor plan subdues its undeniable spaciousness. Jones adds, "The size and shape of the rooms have a lot to do with the rooms' functions. In

some rooms, there are lower ceilings with more texture and wood and materials so to create a smaller, more intimate feeling."

Upon entering the home, guests hang a left to enter into the public spaces. (A right turn leads to George's study and the couple's sequestered master suite.) When standing in the first of side-by-side living rooms, eyes are drawn to the soaring windows, then the beam ceiling and finally, the two-sided fireplace. The remarkable fireplace is just one of 11 on the property. George says he didn't realize they'd specified so many fireplaces until he counted them when walking through the site during early construction phases. Coming from Europe, he says that he and Catherine love fireplaces and simply requested them where they "seemed right." Hutchison adds, "The fireplaces are there as much for aesthetics as they are for function. They're there to create a feeling."

#### PROJECT PROS

**ARCHITECT:**

Lee Hutchison, Urban Design Associates, Ltd.;  
480.905.1212 or 866.905.3169; [www.udaltd.com](http://www.udaltd.com)

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:**

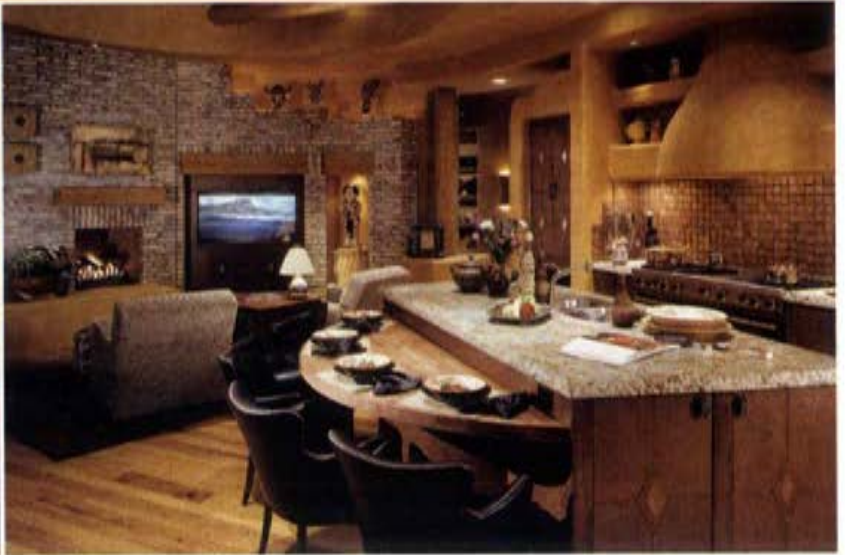
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INSIDE AND OUT, THIS ARIZONA DWELLING  
ECHOES THE BEAUTY OF ITS DESERT SETTING.





BEYOND THE LIVING ROOMS THERE IS AN **elegant** YET UNDERSTATED  
DINING SPACE. THE CUSTOM DINING TABLE SUITS THE ROOM'S SHAPE PERFECTLY.

Between the living areas and the kitchen, there's an understated dining room with a round table for 10. The custom table's curvature mimics that of the neighboring wall and fits the space perfectly.

The nearby kitchen serves as the hub of the home, which is where the couple spends the majority of their time. The cooking area is sizable, stylish and packed with all the entertaining amenities Catherine and George might need. Top-tier appliances include a 60-inch range, a wine cooler, dishwasher drawers, sizeable refrigerators and more. An island floats in the center of the room, capped in a combination of butcher block and granite. A half-circle breakfast bar hangs from the island, surrounded by four black-leather club chairs that invite guests to have a seat.

At the far end of the kitchen, a living area caters to the couple's need for R&R. Two chairs partner with ottomans facing a large television screen, one of the home's 14. "You only see two or three of the televisions," Catherine notes.

Unlike this particular unit, most of the other TVs—as well as the other high-tech controls—are cleverly concealed by closets, cabinets or one-way mirrors. "Above all, you want that [technology] to be as invisible as possible," George says. Reminiscent of the mirror on the wall in "Snow White," the televisions hidden behind mirrors only answer to the (programming) wishes of the onlooker.

The kitchen and sitting area transition to the front outdoor living spaces, which include cushioned chairs, a table, a fireplace and Catherine's favorite feature—

a negative-edge pool. From these seating areas, it's possible to soak up sunrises, sunsets, canyon and city views.

The backyard living spaces feature additional open-air nooks, including a ramada on the top edge of the property. Snug seating setups and lush landscaping hem the portion closest to the home. "[The setup] takes the outside and brings it into the house," Madden says. "You really live inside and out."

Stepping back inside, a hallway off the kitchen leads to the home's guest areas. Three guest suites fill this wing, and the level beneath it lodges a home theater, powder room, small fitness room and a four-car garage.

The opposite end of the house is dedicated to the couple's private spaces, one of which is George's study. Equipped with a king-size desk, a piano and fireplace, the study has sound-proof doors that imprison the sounds of tickled ivories. (Catherine doesn't like listening to the piano as much as George likes playing it.)

The master suite down the hall is one of the home's most stunning areas, and it's the builder's favorite. "The master bedroom was originally going to be an exercise room but was repurposed as a bedroom," Madden says. "With its dome ceiling, the sleeping area is very sensuous." Of course, the lavish retreat hosts a pair of fireplaces, one in the sitting room and another in the marble-draped bath. There are also two walk-in closets, one and a half of which are Catherine's. But given the fact Catherine is what George likes best about his house, having to share his closet with her probably isn't too much of a problem. ✨