

THE BEFORE & AFTER ISSUE

# PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN



*Home  
Sweet Haver*

Updating a Phoenix Classic

REMEMBERING  
DESIGNER  
BILLI SPRINGER



A close-up photograph of a wooden cabinet with intricate carvings and a hanging plant. The cabinet is made of dark wood and features a large, ornate carved panel on the right side. The carvings are detailed, showing floral and leaf patterns. To the left of the cabinet, a hanging plant with long, thin, green leaves is visible. The lighting is warm, highlighting the textures of the wood and the plant.

# Good *for the*

Amid Remodeling, a Couple Discovers Their Home's History—and Starts a Journey With a Beloved Design Visionary on Her Final Project

—JOHN EDAM

—JULIA MICHELLI, PHOTOS

An intricately carved, weathered Moroccan door greets visitors at the front courtyard's entry and provides a few glimpses of the home's organic, rustic aesthetic.

# Soul





**F**OR MANY, THE SONORAN Desert has an almost mystical allure. When a Chicago-based couple purchased a ranch here, their visit brought them a tranquility that they could feel even after they had returned to the Midwest. The subtle seductiveness of the landscape, the warm hues and the uniquely southwestern sense of calm lingered within them, calling them back.

"The desert is a very spiritual place," says the wife. "We find a peace here that we don't find elsewhere. There's a serenity that you don't have to go looking for, it's just there. You feel more connected to what matters. We know we had to be here."

The couple began looking for a home to call a permanent home. An avid collector of Native American and Southwestern art, they wanted a place that spoke of the region and would house their collection of paintings, sculptures and pottery, ceramic and glass.

The answer came in the form of a 20-year-old Desert Mountain organic pueblo-style home designed by architect and Phoenix House of Garden Master of the Southwest award winner Len Blotzkoski, who took his inspiration from original structures of the Southwest. The studio is a study in curves both inside and out, with a shaded courtyard in front and a backyard that opens to a 180-degree valley view.

**ABOVE:** Landscape architect Chad Harris cleared nonnative vegetation, raised the hill's elevation and added boulders and desert plants, including tall cacti that serve as vertical focal points leading to the house. "It's important to add items that are established so you can't tell what's old and what's new," he says.



**RIGHT** Home replaced the entry courtyard's tropical plant palette with shade-tolerant, xeric and succulents. Boulders were added to the existing water feature to extend the front yard's natural desert contours.





**LEFT:** The original "reading closet," designed by interior designer and Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest award winner Bill Springer, would become her most requested addition to homes throughout the Southwest and beyond. "We had a niche there but Bill turned it into something much better," says architect Lee Hutchison, also a Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest award winner.

**OPPOSITE:** Adjacent to the entry and great room, with the "reading closet" peeking through, the circular dining area is open but also intimate. The rustic chandelier can be raised or lowered by its rope pull, which is configured into a loop as a playful wink at the home's Western design elements.

Thanks to Hutchison's timeless design, the house had lived well. After she requested repairs to the 20-year-old structure, including a new pool pump and a fresh coat of paint, the new homeowners defined their main areas they wanted to update: the kitchen, pantry and a large TV cabinet in the great room that did not suit their needs.

In a chance meeting with furniture designer and Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest award winner John Tabor (who was part of the house's initial design team), the couple learned that their house's interiors were the creation of Bill Springer—also a Masters of the Southwest recipient and one of Arizona's most respected interior designers.

The house blends in with the natural landscape. It's a place to really get away—and find yourself in the process.

—The homeowners





The humanists are avid collectors of Southwestern and Native American art. Above, a detail of "Hidden Power" by Preston Singletary. Below, "Inspiration" by Adas Houser was found at auction in Santa Fe.







The area great room is a blend of traditional and modern design. The built-in wall and dark wood shelves are a nod to traditional Southern home and interior design. The modern touch is the sleek, minimalist lines of the chairs and the contemporary lighting fixtures. The overall aesthetic is a harmonious blend of old and new, creating a warm and inviting atmosphere.



**LEFT:** "This home is an organic study in curves," says interior designer Victoria King. "There are no hard edges, everything blends together, which contributes to the overall stability of the house." Behind the curved wall hangs a colorful wall hanging woven by Marilyn Evans and William Evans complements other elements, including a Navajo genuine basket and a doll created by Santa Fe artist Gregory Lutzgans.

**RIGHT:** A towering 8-foot totem by Myles Whittaker and Veli Grant was discovered by the homeowners during a visit to the artist's gallery. It had been commissioned—and unveiled—by a prospective client. As a stunning focal point it seems to have been custom-made for a main-way landing niche off the great room.

"We discovered that many of the things that made us fall in love with this house were checks to fill," recalls the wife. One of the home's cherished—and charming—elements is a 1930s Bill Springer original: the first "curb-cut closet" she designed, a feature that would become one of her most-requested specialties. Just off the main entry, the nook is a nod to the Southwest. One can envision a cowboy returning home from a day on the range and having the perfect spot to hang his hat and slip off his boots.

Her home recalls that the space was originally designed as a niche, but Springer had an inspiration. "He was very good at using my design as a jumping-off point, expanding upon where I had started," the architect recalls.

Working in tandem with the couple and lead designer Victoria King, Springer planned updates to the kitchen and pantry and designed a custom-made display case to replace the great room's one-model TV cabinet. Work had begun when midway through the project Springer suddenly and unexpectedly passed away.

"I was devastated," says the wife. "I only knew her for a year, but we had such a strong connection. I felt like I lost a family member. She was the ultimate professional, and she cared so much about her clients." The husband adds, "Bill was so charming and engaging. It really kind, great woman."

Reeling from their collective loss, the homeowners, design team and craftsmen gathered at the house for a planning meeting that had been





whisked months in advance. "They gave us every assurance that they were going to see this project through the way Bill would have. And they did," remembers the wife.

Working from Springer's early sketches, King paved together her vision. "Whenever we weren't sure what should happen next, the master became, 'What would Bill do?'" she recalls.

The husband, who is an avid cook, remembers that his original objective was to update the kitchen's appliances and countertops. "That's how it started," he says. "But when Bill came in she knew right away how to make this kitchen more efficient. She was so gracious. Before I knew it, we were doing a full remodel."

Retaining the kitchen's original footprint, Springer reconfigured the room's adjacencies for greater efficiency, shortening the work triangle between the sink, refrigerator and range. Quartz countertops and integrated farmhouse sinks

brighten the room considerably. An original picture window flanked by casements and weighed down with wooden supports was replaced with an expanse of glass glass, which floods the room with light and frames the view of the natural desert landscape. "Twenty years ago you would never have been able to find a piece of glass like that," says Blackstone.

The cloverlike pantry served its purpose well but was out of date. "We wanted to open up the kitchen and make the pantry an extension of it," says King. Utilitarian laminated shelves were replaced with open shelving and custom-cabinetry with pullouts to hold everyday kitchen essentials in style.

"The home's original owners were sports men," recalls Blackstone. The dominant feature in the great room was a scorable cabinet to hold multiple TVs when not in use. Reimagining the area as a showplace for the current residents' art pieces,

The kitchen's inviting breakfast area includes one of the home's nine fireplaces. "To and Fro" by Va Fisher graces the wall behind the table and "Chair in the Dunes Rising" by Linda Carter Hubman brightens the niche.



**ABOVE:** The original plan was to simply replace the appliances and countertops, but Springer envisioned an update for the outdated kitchen that would include new cabinetry and an expanded pantry.

**RIGHT:** The homeowners count a number of personal pieces owned by Springer among their most beloved treasures, including an antique Spanish terracotta pot.



Much of the house is just as it was 20 years ago, which speaks to the timelessness of the design.

—Flora Le King, interior designer



Springer designed a configuration of crossbreded decking boards, each of single boards beamed bound with lap joint join. While the design existed first on a nightstand with notes by Springer, construction was completed after two bronze sculptures were purchased at auction in Santa Fe. "Even without art pieces in it, that display area is a work of art," says the husband.

To celebrate the Arizona desertscape they hold so close to their hearts, the couple enlisted Phoenix Home & Garden Writers of the Southwest award-winning landscape designer Chad Norris to further the creative experience. His priority was to create a sense of arrival for the homeowners.

"When you enter your driveway, you get that pleasure of being home," says Norris, who joined the lot's front elevation, added landscaping and created points of interest with compositions of succis (Pachyramphus rufus) and orange pipe (Dioscorea bulbifera) and cacti, yucca (Yucca sp.) and the occasional golden cholla. "As you follow the driveway's in line, the drama increases as you get closer

to the home. The vegetation becomes more lush with softening elements, such as Texas mountain laurel (Illicium parviflorum) acacia (Acacia sp.) and pops of floral color with salvia, lantana and yellow bells (Glossy star's angustata) during the landscape."

The journey culminated at the entry courtyard's weathered rustic door, another of Springer's original embellishments. "When you cross this threshold, you've entered a completely different experience," says Norris. An oasis enveloped in welcoming shade includes a tropical water feature. The challenge with this area was in the selection of tropical desert plants that can thrive in low light. "The original vegetation was tropical, but that doesn't fit the home or the neighborhood," says Norris. "We needed shade-tolerant cacti and succulents that tie into the exterior but also softened this area visually." The area now thrives with a variety of smaller varieties that can be replaced every few years, as well as orange pipe (cacti), which has well-in-built-dormant and full-shade. "They're the most versatile specimens that are," he adds.

**ABOVE:** The kitchen's original footprint was unchanged, but the floor was reconfigured for greater efficiency.

**RIGHT:** The entry wall of the entry was opened to create a natural extension of the kitchen. Cabinetry provides ample storage for shoes, while open shelving and baskets hold everyday necessities.







Reworking a landscape that had two decades to mature can be tricky, Nissen stresses. "The most important factor is being able to incorporate new items that are equally established so that they look like it was all done at the same time," he says. "You don't want new, tiny plants because it doesn't look right, and it never will. The homeowners specifically told me, 'We want instant gratification. We don't want to wait 10 years for things to grow in and be impactful. This house has been here for 20 years. Make the yard look that way.' So, we incorporated bigger bushes and larger specimens and plant material so you can't tell what's old and what's new."

For King, completing the project that was begun by her mother and friend was cathartic. "The entire team worked through this together; we didn't have any other choices," she says. "It resonated everybody giving their best effort to finish strong for Bill. It was healing for us because we were all so close to her."

The homeowners had planned to include some of Springer's personal items among their collection. Says the wife, "Bill was a very metaphysical person, and she felt that there was a spirit in this house. She was so respectful of honoring that spirit and keeping what was here, but also of enhancing it. Bill is here and not just in spirit. She is definitely here." ■

**LEFT:** The kitchen's original window used a configuration of concrete and wooden support structures. An expanse of plate glass now floods the area with natural light and brings the native desert landscape within reach. Quartzite countertops with an eased edge reflect additional brightness into the area. Next to the farmhouse sink, a 19th-century French linen shelf provides storage without obstructing the view.

—Joe Scarnati

Billi Springer was very good at using my design as a jumping-off point, expanding upon where I had started.

—Lo (Barbina), architect

## BEFORE & AFTER GALLERY





# A Design Visionary

PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN REMEMBERS BILL SPRINGER

**W**ITH A CAREER THAT SPANNED 30 years, interior designer Bill Springer was one of the Southwest design community's most respected and loved members. After holding a strong foundation in architecture and interior design in Colorado and the Pacific Northwest, she settled in Scottsdale in 1990.

"The Southwest is the best area for different exposures in architecture," she tells this magazine in 2008. "This area embraces a variety. It's a melting pot, and it's the most exciting area because of that."

A 2004 Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest award winner, Springer was also recognized nationally with numerous awards throughout her career that celebrated her creative ability to transform houses into homes.

Architect Lee Hamilton collaborated with Springer on a number of projects. "Bill was always on the top of my list," he says. "She was as talented as any interior designer I've ever worked with. She could look at what I had on paper and immediately conceptualize where to take it. She had a great gift for knowing the lines where architecture ended and interior design began."

Although Springer excelled in the areas of traditional Southwestern, old world and eclectic contemporary design, she welcomed all design challenges and was more in her element reimagining spaces to make them better. She will always be remembered as the creator of the iconic "smoking chair" which adds an unforgettable Southwest stamp to countless Arizona homes. Phoenix Home & Garden is honored to have featured her work in more than seven issues and to have relied on her as an advisor of excellence in design.

Springer's legacy has an indelible presence in the Valley. Bill Springer & Associates' principal designer Victoria King has said she learned the impact that her former mentor had on the lives she touched. "Bill had such a way of bringing out the best in people and inspiring them to do their best," she says. "The world that was created when she left us was not empty for long because of all the love that she."

LEFT: Springer photographed for her 2004 Phoenix Home & Garden Masters of the Southwest profile.



ABOVE: Springer's iconic "smoking chair."

BELOW: A feature in the May 2012 issue of Phoenix Home & Garden showcased Springer's contemporary eclectic style.

