

PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

THE MAGAZINE OF SOUTHWEST LIVING

Holiday Planning

Designer Decorating Tips

Intoxicating Recipes

Garden Gift Ideas

NOVEMBER 1999 \$2.95




0-74470-6310-4 0



Castle in the Woods

Design shines in a Valley couple's
regal Flagstaff retreat

TEXT BY TERESA O'NEIL
PHOTOGRAPHY BY DINO TONN



The combination of stones used for Bert and Dody Pitre's hillside home is called "Desert Mountain Blend," referring to the colors used at the Desert Mountain Clubhouse in north Scottsdale.

Inset: An intimate dinner calls for using just one of two custom-made tables in the dining room. The tables can be pushed together for larger gatherings.

"The lady of the house describes her northern-Arizona retreat as "castle-ish." And that it is.

Commanding a hillside near downtown Flagstaff, Bert and Dody Pitre's 6,500-square-foot home is built of stone and dressed up inside with a regal mix of red and gold. The house, with its curved facade and wall of windows, attracted such attention during construction that a "No Visitors" sign was posted for safety reasons. Even now, four years after completion, the award-winning residence remains an eye-catching castle in the woods.

There is a lineage of sorts among those involved in the project. The architect, Lee Hutchison of Urban Design Associates, designed the Pitres' Phoenix residence and currently is working on a new home for them in the Valley. Custom home builder Dennis Dixon of Dixon Ventures Inc. is the couple's son-in-law. He also had built their previous Flagstaff getaway. After Dixon completed a Flagstaff house for Nancy Hepburn of Hepburn Interiors in the late '80s, he introduced the designer to the Pitres. This project represents Hepburn's fourth for the couple, and she currently is hard at work on a sixth.



This network of professionals produced what Bert calls a "great cabin," where the couple can escape the Valley's summer heat and enjoy holidays with family.

"Flagstaff is a nice, small college town with a lot of young people and a lot going on," says Bert. "We had a home in Forest Highlands but wanted to be more a part of the community and closer to our daughter and her family. Now they're our neighbors."

During a walk-through of the site, the Pitres filled Hutchison in on the views they preferred, the rooms they needed, and their desire to include some architectural elements from Frank Lloyd Wright's early work.

"The Pitres had seen Wright's Fallingwater in Pennsylvania and wanted to incorporate that architectural character in this house," says Hutchison. "The vertical stone elements and horizontal stucco not only fulfill that request, but reflect

the site as well. The stucco follows the natural topography of the land, and the vertical elements reflect the pine trees. I love the way the house fits into the site, into the trees."

Hutchison describes the structure as a radial hillside home, an outward C-shape that wraps around the slope of the mountain. This design minimized the number of trees disturbed on the 2 1/4-acre site. The house, a two-story structure, consists of the main living areas and master bedroom on the top floor, and guest quarters—accessible by stairway or elevator—on the lower level. Floor-to-ceiling windows and the placement of the upper story's floor at treetop level afford 180 degrees of spectacular unobstructed views.

With similar sensitivity to the natural surroundings, Dixon and his crew spent some six months excavating, removing trees and placing footings.



Opposite: Two distinct furniture groupings in the great room create intimate conversation areas. Grand yet inviting, the room features Maitland-Smith stag-head lamps with leather shades, an ornately carved sofa table, and cocktail tables with swan legs.

This page, top: In the kitchen, overstuffed upholstered chairs are gathered around a table that can be raised and lowered.

Below: Like the structure itself, the glass door and sidelights echo the work of Frank Lloyd Wright. The crucifix on the wall was a gift from the Pitres' son.



"We could have come in with a bulldozer and just leveled the lot," he says, "but that would have destroyed the terrain." Dixon places the project among the most complex in his 15 years of custom home building. "There were days when we had 60 tradespeople on site," he says. "Because everything in the house is either round or bent, everything had to be fitted with extreme care." Dixon himself selected each of the countless pallets of stone used for the project.

The efforts of Hutchison and Dixon resulted in spacious, light-filled rooms ready for a designer's touch. The lower-level guest quarters are decorated with items from the couple's previous home. "The downstairs is what I call 'whimsical Southwest,'" says Hepburn. "The Pitres had collected all of this fabulous Indian art, and because the two floors are so separate we were able to use it rather than get rid of it."

For the main level, the couple wanted a whole new look—an Old World feel using golds and deep, rich reds.

"Both of the Pitres were adamant about wanting the interiors to feel comfortable and warm," says Hepburn. "I concentrated on creating an elegant home that feels livable in spite of its size."

Refinement and comfort are evident throughout. Aubusson rugs accent casual, easy-care flagstone floors, and traditionally styled, richly hued furnishings, set among a backdrop of stone and towering panes of glass, beckon the homeowners and their visitors to sit down and relax. Artist Karen Wall used gold and amber glazes to give a warm glow to off-white stucco walls.

To take advantage of unbeatable natural views from every room, the main living space has few window coverings. The master bedroom has privacy shades that retract when not in use, and the kitchen hosts a dramatic swag of fringed fabric to help cozy up a room filled with hard surfaces and practical appliances.

"The views from the windows are spectacular," says Hepburn. "They make you want to be a part of the forest. I wanted to make the inside of the home just as appealing."

Upstairs and down, inside and out, the royal treatment abounds. ❁

See Resource Guide for details.