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All the Small Things

By Elizabeth Exline

RARELY DOES AN 8,300-SQ.-FT. RESIDENCE CALL TO MIND COZY ROOMS WHOSE CEILING HEIGHTS AND DIMENSIONS GIVE WAY TO INTIMATE SETTINGS. BUT IN THIS STONE-AND-STUCCO ARIZONA RETREAT, EACH TIDY AND MODESTLY-SIZED SPACE BELIES THE HOME'S SQUARE FOOTAGE AND WRAPS YOU IN A BEAR HUG OF A WELCOME.

WHEN A HOUSE MAKES such a strong impression on its creators that both the builder and the interior designer easily count it among their favorite projects, it's enough to whet one's design appetite. Such was the case with this rural Mediterranean-style home nestled inside Scottsdale's upscale DC Ranch community. Anthony Salcito, vice president of Salcito Custom Homes, and Bess Jones, owner of Bess Jones Interiors, readily admitted this particular dwelling's pet status without prompting or knowing each other's preferences. "We've built more than 250 [homes]," Salcito says of his company, "and there's no question that this house is in my top five. It is absolutely one of the best we have ever done."

Happily, the house lives up to its reputation. As it snakes its way along a steep, mountainous site, it bows to European architecture in a way that resonates with the homeowners' approach to life. "The casual way they live lends itself to practical spaces," Salcito observes, "which [in turn] lends itself well to the architecture that they picked."

Salcito has had ample opportunity to become acquainted with the homeowners' joie de vivre. Not only did he collaborate on the three-year design/build process of this

house, but he'd worked with the husband beforehand to construct a Tuscan-style spec home on a golf course lot, also in DC Ranch. "[My wife and I] used that house to learn a lot about how to build a home out here," says the husband, who came to Arizona by way of Michigan. "From looking at that house, we decided [we] wanted to build a house that would have small-scale rooms rather than large-scale rooms, and we wanted a house with color."

They also wanted simplicity. Given that their Tudor home in Michigan celebrates all things shiny and high-maintenance, the wife especially was ready for a home requiring less upkeep. So instead of covering the floors in marble, the couple opted for rich, textural sycamore that was reclaimed from an 1800's Illinois barn. Also, they selected heavy, reclaimed Michigan timber for mantles in the husband's office and the master bedroom. Even the custom-designed furniture features carving and distressing for an easygoing yet impressive look. "The [homeowners] have children, and they wanted the house to be very child-friendly," Jones says. "So this spectacular furniture can basically just live through this family's life without ever looking any different than it does." The furniture's painted



Center of Attention

From California to Hawaii, contemporary to Old World styles, custom to tract homes, courtyards are increasingly fusing the great outdoors with the even greater indoors. "Courtyards are not style-dependant," says architect Dale Gardon, principal of Dale Gardon Design, "but they're climate-dependant."

Fireplaces, water features, seating, painted walls, murals and sculpture are just a few of the elements to include in a courtyard, and because it serves as an extension of the home, each of its components should adhere to an aesthetic similar to that behind the surrounding walls. Here, courtyard design specialist Joan Grabel, president of Park Slope Design, breaks down the must-have pieces for three different courtyard styles.

CONTEMPORARY

- **Walls:** Smooth stucco, slate, stone or a combination of stainless steel and wood.
- **Floor:** Slate or concrete cut into oversize squares or rectangles, or smooth or salted concrete.
- **Fountain:** Geometric shapes in stainless steel, wood or stone.
- **Trees:** Bamboo, palo verde, fruitless olive.
- **Plants:** Those used in mass quantities—

horsetail, kangaroo paws, papyrus, Irish moss, liriopé—work best.

SPANISH

- **Walls:** Smooth or textured stucco, depending on the home's exterior stucco.
- **Floor:** Saltillo tile interspersed with talavera tiles or flagstone, or flagstone with brick patterns or brick planting spaces.
- **Fountain:** Spanish/Mediterranean wall-mounted designs or a freestanding version with an old stone feel.
- **Trees:** Fruitless olive or potted dwarf olive, magnolia "little gem," dwarf lemon or dwarf lime.
- **Plants:** Either drought-tolerant types like bougainvillea, lavenders, flax and santolina, or those of a tropical persuasion (think cannas, hibiscus, tupidanthus and red banana).

OLD WORLD/MEDITERRANEAN

- **Walls:** Stone or stucco.
- **Floor:** Stone or brick.
- **Fountain:** Provencal style that can be built into a stone wall.
- **Trees:** Fruitless olive, magnolia soulangeana, citrus, carrotwood, evergreen pear.
- **Plants:** Boxwood, topiary azaleas, topiary privet, climbing rose.

No matter how spot-on your finishes and plants are, however, Gardon says the most critical aspect of any courtyard may be its accessibility to the rest of the house. "The secret to making a good courtyard is engaging the internal spaces," he explains. "If all you do is create a hole in the middle of your floor plan and don't allow the rooms to engage it properly [via doors and windows], then you haven't created a great courtyard."

finishes and bright fabrics, like chenille and velvet, also combine two qualities the wife demanded from the house: color, which comes in warm pinks, reds, greens and golds, and durability.

"We really studied each room and tried to think of it as a separate detail," Jones adds. "You get the feeling that each room has been paid close attention." As a result, every space wears its own nuanced personality. The kitchen and dining area (there's no separate or formal dining room) includes honed granite countertops, a scrubbed black island and a bright, raspberry-color china cabinet for beautified functionality. The ceiling in the husband's office features reverse Saltillo tile beneath stained and hand-hewn beams, while the custom furniture was painted, crackled and scraped for a weathered appearance. And then there are spaces like the powder room that are draped in sumptuous elements: slick red Venetian plaster walls, a yellow onyx countertop and handcarved mirror finished in gold leaf.

Few architectural styles could support such a juxtaposition of luxury and family-centeredness as gracefully as this Old World residence does, and the versatility and practicality of the home's style is precisely what won over the homeowners. "We didn't want the house to emanate a lot of opulence," the wife explains, "and that's what's so beautiful about the rural Mediterranean: [The people there] make the houses the way they need to make them."

Accordingly, architect Dale Gardon, principal of Dale Gardon Design, devoted himself to maintaining that authenticity. He started in his conference room, where the walls were decked out with pictures that he and the homeowners found inspiring. Then Gardon began to assemble a palette of materials that rang true to the architectural style while honoring the desert environment. The roof's Roman

Pan tile, for example, looks at first like other roofs throughout the Valley, but its flattened pan cultivates more texture and a distinctly European flavor along the roof plane. The house's exterior brick looks "older and crustier," Gardon notes, than ordinary brick; the mottled stucco mimics the imprint of Father Time. Also, there's the approximately one ton of indigenous stone used on both interior and exterior walls. The rock grounds the house in its community both physically and symbolically, and it adds eight extra inches of insulation to each wall where it is applied. Furthermore, it yields a passive solar element to any window recessed inside it, which is as appropriate for desert dwelling as it is for living in the Mediterranean.

Preserving architectural integrity and responding to the homeowners' desire for privacy also translated to designing an auto court at the entry. "Other times we may discourage bringing the garages so close to a front door area," Gardon observes. "In this case, it's more of a carriage house look, and again, in a rural farmhouse, you may find that [there would] be the stables or other buildings that are in proximity to the house." The architect rounded out the exterior appearance with a flourish—green window shutters that are colorful and architecturally honest.

Muted though its opulence may be, this house is anything but bargain-built. Case in point is the Albertini burned-pine windows that the husband insisted on installing. Made in Italy, every window can tilt, turn or push out. "When clients let you put Albertini windows in a house," Salcito says, "and they ask you to surface the entire swimming pool in a one-inch, mesh-mounted mosaic tile in lieu of PebbleTec or plaster, they really want a house with a rural Mediterranean flavor. [The homeowners] weren't afraid to spend money to make it look the way it



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For all its authenticity, this residence still has a few tricks up its sleeve, like its position on the hillside site. Instead of being benched into the mountain, it enjoys a bit of breathing room. "It really allows the internal rooms to get daylight from multiple directions," Gardon says, "so you can pick and choose when and where you want to sit around this house depending on the seasons [and] the sun angle."

And while the sweeping vistas to the south are captured via terraces and windows, the home doesn't pander to them. Instead, it chooses between exterior and private interior views. "You might expect to walk in the door and immediately see the view," Gardon says. "We didn't do that. There's a little unexpected discovery that happens. When you walk in the foyer, you see a view, but the view is of an internal courtyard. Then you turn left, and you turn right, and you discover your way back to the big vista."

By honing in on interior spaces, privacy and amiable

comfort, this house, which is equal parts fortress and farmhouse, has sidestepped the fate of so many other generously proportioned homes. "[The homeowners] told the architect that they didn't want huge rooms, huge ceilings, huge doors," Jones says. "They wanted the house to feel like each room is hugging you." ✨

PROJECT PROS

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