

## DESERT COOL

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photography by Scott Sandler

One of the most striking features of this new contemporary home is the large expanses of glass that open up the interiors to the outside. "You've got to be the right person to live here," says architect C.P. Drewett. "It's pretty avant-garde to live that open and available." The house sits on a corner lot, with views of Mummy Mountain behind it.

### **INSPIRED BY MOUNTAIN VIEWS AND MIDCENTURY SENSIBILITIES, A STATE-OF-THE-ART SPEC HOME IS JUST WHAT THE LAWYER ORDERED**

Charlie Surrano had just about given up on finding the physical representation of the contemporary house that frequented his thoughts. After years spent living in an English Country-style estate complete with dark wood floors and mouldings, heavy stone chimneys and a verdant, lush garden in Phoenix's Arcadia neighborhood, the lawyer was ready for a change—a drastic one.

"I was fed up with the green look," he says. "I wanted a desert-friendly house. But I couldn't find one to my liking, and I didn't want to go through the time, energy and cost of building from scratch. I wanted something that I could just buy and walk into."

While driving through Paradise Valley one day, Charlie noticed a vacant lot with a builder's sign on it. Next to the sign was a large rendering of a spec house—in exactly the style he had been looking for. "The architecture caught me. I knew that if it was done right, and being on this lot with these views, it was going to be a really nice place."

He called builder Rich Brock, and the pair came up with a hybrid agreement that would allow Charlie to purchase the lot and home from Brock, but let Brock build the house he envisioned, designed by architect C.P. Drewett, with minimal changes from Charlie.



Pocketed glass doors open up the great room to the front patio and stunning views of Camelback Mountain to the south. Interior designer Elaine Alexander furnished the space with a low-profile orange sofa and chartreuse Platner Easy Chair. Homeowner Charlie Surrano added his own touches, including the light fixture, sculpture, shag pillows and table lamps with cork shades.

The home is located on a corner lot, with views of Camelback Mountain to the south and Mummy Mountain to the north. "It's seldom that we get a site that's two-sided. It was a blessing but also a difficulty because we essentially wanted to have a one-room-deep home that maximized the views from each side," says Drewett. "That was the genesis for this design—how to handle the views and how to take advantage of the southern exposure and get all of the southern light. What we ended up with, and what the intention was, was less of a traditional enclosed housing structure and more of a big pavilion.

Embodying the clean lines and minimalist vibe of the Modernist era, the house amplifies the indoor-outdoor lifestyle so coveted by Valley homeowners. Oversized pocketed glass doors on both the south-facing frontage and north-facing rear facade open the main living space to the outdoors, creating a seamless flow from the front deck through to the backyard patio. White porcelain floor tiles throughout tie the areas together. "I wanted to make sure that the back patio was an outdoor living area," notes Brock. "It has the same flooring, and I even used drywall on the ceiling. It feels like an indoor space but outside." Additional materials, including hand-cut sandstone-quartz facings and wood paneling, also flow from exterior to interior surfaces, adding organic texture and softening the home's graphic angles.

"This house was a series of panels and groupings of materials," says Drewett. "The glass is the connective tissue that bridges the different materials and how they're incorporated. I love to penetrate architecture with materials. It's really dynamic. Once the doors are pocketed, having those materials pass through really emphasizes the desert pavilion feel."

Such bold design gestures require subtle and elegant decor that complements the architecture and defines spaces without being obtrusive or detracting from the views. Interior designer Elaine Alexander drew inspiration from the midcentury Modern movement, choosing simple, sleek furnishings with organic textures and soft, nature-inspired colors. Iconic pieces, such as a Platner Easy Chair in the living room, Saarinen Tulip chairs and table in the kitchen and a mod ball chair in the upstairs game room, mingle with modern-day elements and artwork, adding sophistication that matches the style of the home without looking dated or clichéd.



The great room is furnished with pieces that are indicative of midcentury design without being clichéd.

"I tried to pick pieces that were typical of the time period but that had longevity," says Alexander. For example, the chartreuse Platner chair; a low-profile, linear orange sofa; and a pair of simple taupe-colored side chairs with wood frames are indicative of the era when post-and-beam construction gave way to open spaces and pops of color were highlights of interiors. And while the dining table isn't a Nakashima piece, its undulating top and base are reminiscent of the renowned furniture-maker's work. "I think these pieces will still be in style 20 years from now," she adds.

Besides the views, a focal point of the main living space is a glass-enclosed wine room that separates the dining area from the living area. Visible from outside the front entry, the eye-catching element defines the spaces without blocking light or enclosing rooms. "Because you want all of the primary spaces to take in the big views, you need to find certain vehicles to give you degrees of separation," says Drewett. "The wine room provides maybe a 70 percent degree of separation. You can still see through it, but it gives the dining room and great room autonomy."

For Charlie, the room is a piece of art. "At night, it lights up and is kind of dramatic," he says, adding with a laugh, "It also screams, 'Come on in, I'm a drunk and proud of it.'"

One thing Charlie doesn't joke about, however, is something that's not visible to the casual visitor: the home's automation and security systems. "While it may be referred to as midcentury in design, this is a 21st-century home," he says. "Why shouldn't it be automated? Why shouldn't it be run by a computer?"



Both the furniture and artwork pop against the home's calm interior architecture and neutral palette.

Every item in the house that runs on electricity—from the interior and exterior lights to those in the pool, from the HVAC system to the window coverings to the multiple 4D TVs—can be controlled from an iPad at home or remotely. The system is one of the few upgrades Charlie required during the building process. "When building a spec house, we usually don't automate everything," explains Brock. "I prewire for everything, and if the buyer wants to add something later, it's already set up."

Charlie also wanted a top-of-the-line yet discrete security system that covered both the home's interiors and exterior. Outdoor infrared cameras enable him to see the property at night, while portable indoor cameras allow him to monitor different areas based on need, without guests focusing on obvious fixed cameras. "The indoor cameras are only for when I'm not here. When I'm not using them, I can pick them up and hide them in a cabinet," he says. "This house is monitored, and if someone tries to get in, alarms will go off."

"I don't use all of the features of the automated system," he adds. "Who would, right? But it's nice to know that I can."

He continues: "This all goes back to the labeling of the house. When I first saw the rendering, it said 'midcentury Modern.' Well, you can refer to it that way—I prefer to call it desert contemporary—and you can reminisce about the way things were in the '50s. Here, though, you're remembering it in a state-of-the-art 6,200-square-foot home. If you think this is midcentury, you're living in a different century."

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Dramatic yet functional, a glass-walled wine room separates the living and dining areas. Charlie often enjoys relaxing in one of the metal-framed leather chairs while savoring a glass of wine and looking out at the views.



Chairs and a buffet with Danish Modern styling bring a '50s vibe to the great room's dining area. A wire-brushed oak staircase leads to the kids' bedrooms, a game room and an outdoor patio.



The large, airy kitchen, with wire-brushed oak cabinets topped with Caesarstone, is home to a Saarinen Tulip table and chairs and a quartet of Bertoia bar stools. A bank of oversized windows overlooks the backyard and pool.



A pass-through fireplace in the master suite separates the sleeping area, complete with a custom-made wood and chenille bed frame with attached side tables, from the bathroom where a freestanding tub rests on a Caesarstone platform in front of a large picture window.