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This page and opposite: Alfresco dining is a sensory experience at this Scottsdale residence, which hugs a center courtyard. "When we design houses we see shadow and light," says architect Michael Higgins. "We want to manipulate those two, and this house does it well." In the courtyard, light and shadow play off the ample overhangs, planters, desert vegetation and slate steppingstones. Soothing sounds are created by several water features, including a burbling ball fountain and a trough set into a wall painted the color of a prickly pear bloom.



IN PLANE VIEW

Clean lines, light and sound connect the interior and exterior of a Modern home

TEXT BY PAM HAIT ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRISTIAAN BLOK







his house was all about linking the inside and outside," says remodel architect Michael Higgins. Along with homeowner/designer Beth Solem and landscape architect Greg Trutza, Higgins transformed the Scottsdale residence largely through the use of windows, doors and indoor/outdoor materials.

When Solem and her husband, Bob, originally visited the 5,000-square-foot property, it had been on the market for three years. The Contemporary design had traditional finishes and featured a swimming pool that nearly touched the back of the house.

"When I saw it, I had a vision of planes and wanted to make it crisp and clean," recalls Solem, an artist who is trained as an architectural and interior designer. "My mantra to the design team was shifting planes." She wanted her home to be "easy to look at and easy to navigate."

Opposite: In the living room, a cozy art-filled conversational grouping is set around the fireplace. "I've been collecting Mid-century furniture for 10 years," says Beth Solem. Works by several artists are displayed, including a painting by Richard Serra that hangs over the fireplace. **This page:** "In many houses when you are sitting at a breakfast bar, there is no focal point behind that bar,"

Michael Higgins observes. "We opened up the wall with a window that frames views of the horizon and sunset." The curved breakfast bar is Higgins' design. Solem says she loves its expanse and shape.

The savvy team embraced that vision, and the house was transformed over two-and-a-half years. "A lot of good architecture was there already. We just made it better," remarks Higgins.

Among changes: An aluminum storefront window became a pivot entry door that makes a Modernist statement. Soffits in the living room were replaced with

floating rectangular planes suspended from the ceiling. Exterior columns that emphasize the linear lines of the residence were squared off and, in some cases, repositioned to maximize mountain and desert views.

New windows also capture views, like the kitchen window that frames a nearby saguaro. Existing wood-framed windows were replaced with sliding glass walls in the dining room, while new pocketing sliding doors in the master suite open to the outside.

Many changes were subtle, such as extending a wall to provide an entry for the master suite and adding a low "yoga window" here that offers views of the courtyard. Clay flues were exchanged for steel rain scuppers that, as Higgins says, "celebrate the rain." Other alterations were more obvious, including suspending metal grid shade screens on the garage doors that play with light and shadow, and replacing the swimming pool with a courtyard. With its water features and floating slate surfaces, the courtyard can be seen and splashing water heard from all the public areas, thanks to the new windows and sliding doors. "The whole house spins around the fountain," Higgins points out.

Serving as focal points are the couple's Mid-century Modern furniture and works of art by established and emerging artists and Solem herself. "I collect photographs that look like paintings," says the homeowner, whose passion is sponsoring new artists.

While the Solems love the added light and expanded views created by their home's re-do, the renovation resulted in less wall space for art. But the inventive twosome found the answer—create more walls.

"Typically, I get itchy for a new project," Solem confesses. "So we bought the lot behind us to allow us to expand the gallery and studio. That will keep me busy for a while." □





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In the dining room, Beth Solem paired a Contemporary glass and steel table with vintage Milo Baughman dining chairs. She repeated the color of the upholstery in several rooms throughout the house to link the spaces together. A minimalist-style chandelier echoes the sleek lines of the table. *Spanish Bath*, a photograph by James Casebere that looks like a painting, is an example of the type of artwork the homeowner says she loves. The rug consists of individual “tiles” that can be arranged in different configurations to form floor coverings in various sizes.



This page, clockwise from top left: Like the rest of the house, the interior courtyard emphasizes geometric shapes. Here, shifting squares of slate are accented by thin rectangular ribbons of water, while the roundness of the fountain is repeated in the raised garden bed planted with golden barrel cacti. The branchlike sculptures are by Jeff Loehmann. ■ The new powder room is full of surprises. Beth Solem designed the glass block that holds the faucet set for the chiseled-granite sink. The sink rests on a slab of limestone. Red squares of spaghetti-like acrylic were connected and hung from the ceiling to screen the toilet area. The homeowner often replaces this panel with different materials to create unique effects. Artwork by Yoon Lee titled *Untitled #2* is reflected in the mirror. ■ A careful juxtaposition of materials—wood against limestone, metal and glass—helps to establish the Zen feel in the master bath. Solem designed the maple vanity to hold a collection of art jewelry, some of which she designed. The vanity's inch-thick glass top floats above pull-out Plexiglas drawers. **Opposite:** The courtyard's cooling water features include a koi pond, which provides a roomy habitat for the family's pet koi. Wavelike chaise lounges dressed in crisp-white outdoor fabric offer a relaxing place for the Solems to wind down.





This page: A parade of columns and skylights produces interesting shadows in the courtyard. **Opposite:** This space doubles as an office and art studio. "I schedule play dates regularly with other artists here," says Beth Solem. The encaustic paintings and mixed-media artwork are by Solem.

See Sources.

