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Reaching Middle Ground

At Odds Over Different Styles, a Couple Goes Custom to
Create a House That Exceeds Even Their Wildest Dreams

BY TERESA ESQUIVEL PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARRETT COOK

Cantilevered roofs provide passive solar shading, creating shade and shadow for the house, notes architect Mike Higgins. The ledgerstone wall begins in the front yard, continues on through the house and ends as a support for the patio. The infinity-edge pool was designed with the homeowners' dogs in mind. The trenches keep them from "getting in deep water," and the beach entry ensures that the most they can do is get in up to their bellies.



"I really wanted a chef's kitchen, so this was the most important room for me," notes homeowner Steve Samitt. The multilevel island provides prep space as well as a place to congregate; and the clerestory windows in the rectangular cupola bring in light and add drama. Perimeter cabinets are wenge, and the base of the island is painted birch.



WHEN IT COMES TO BUILDING A DREAM HOME, it helps if everyone's dreams are the same. For Craig Samitt and Steve Hart, that was not the case.

"Steve wanted warm and cozy, and I wanted Contemporary and bright," Samitt explains. "We tried to find a home that had a style we both liked, but we would visit a home and either Steve would love it and I would be horrified, or the reverse. We actually stopped looking because there was nothing on the market that met both of our needs." Eventually, they decided to build a custom residence. "The lot offers the best of the desert and amazing views, plus proximity to the city and all the things we love about Phoenix," Hart says.

To bring their dream to fruition, the pair met with several builders and architects before connecting with builder Howie Haynie and architect Mike Higgins. For interior inspiration, they turned to Laurel Brown, a designer and friend who had helped with their home in the Midwest. However, despite having an ideal site and a solid team in place, the issue of reconciling the couple's starkly different styles remained.

"Mike asked us to find pictures of houses that we liked so he could get a better sense of what we were looking for," Samitt recalls. "He helped us realize there was actually a lot of compatibility behind what we each wanted."

For his "warm Contemporary" design, Higgins drew architectural inspiration from the Mid-Century homes in the neighborhood, as well as the Kaufmann House in Palm Springs, California, which was designed by Richard Neutra. "The extensive use of window walls and the low, horizontal nature of the house is all in response to that Palm Springs house," Higgins notes. "I tried to capture the views from as many rooms as possible, and there's a strong interior/exterior play in the living spaces."

Brown's task was to help merge the couple's visions and create interiors that were sophisticated yet welcoming, with earthy, natural materials that still looked modern and cool, she says. "It's possible to find solutions that are broad enough to satisfy all different tastes," the designer adds. "And there are also compromises. Each person usually brings a bottom line to the table—things they're really not willing to budge on—so you determine what those bottom line issues are for each person first, and negotiate from there."

With this give-and-take approach, the project was completed in just under two years. "It was finished on October 19, 2013," Samitt interjects. "We remember the date because we planned to have our wedding reception at the house that day, and it wasn't done." Hart likens the day to an "episode on HGTV" where the couple goes out to dinner while someone does some remodeling, but they start coming home before it's done." Thanks to some hurried unpacking and strategic closet stuffing, the celebration went off "without a hitch."

One year later, the couple is settled in and happier than ever. "We pinch ourselves every time we're here," Samitt says. "It's very much everything we had hoped for and more." ■



Top: Textured with a stacked-stone wall, this appealing sitting area serves as a quiet spot to relax at the front of the house. The hair-on-hide chairs add regional sophistication.

Above: The dining room is an almost exact replica of the one in the homeowners' Wisconsin residence, right down to the stone wall. Sliding doors open to the front courtyard.



Oak plank flooring, wood ceiling beams and stone wall elements bring warmth to the spacious great room. Punches of color and pattern, as well as a mix of furniture styles, enliven the neutral color scheme. "I think it's important to have bits and pieces from a lot of different styles," notes interior designer Laurel Brown. "You want a cohesive feel, but you don't want it to look like you bought it all at once."





Above: Under a box-beam ceiling, the master bedroom features a headboard composed of stone tiles in a wood frame resting against walls covered in grasscloth. Corner windows pocket open for easy access to the adjacent patio.

Right: In the master bathroom, an S-shaped stone wall begins as an enclosure for the indoor shower, then extends outdoors to create a privacy wall for an alfresco shower. Flooring is tile that replicates the look of wood; cabinets are reconstituted oak topped with granite.





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Right: The home’s warm Contemporary look continues in the guest casita, which includes a sitting room, mini-kitchen, bedroom and this stylish bathroom. Repeating the organic sensibility found in the main house, it features a stacked-stone wall and a wood vanity topped with quartz.

See Sources.

