The Wright Place

A modern Prairie-style estate echoes the timeless beauty and grandeur of its neighboring resort.

BY **LAUREN TYDA** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **MICHAEL WOODALL**



LEFT "The filtered shade afforded by the palo brea and mature Texas ebony trees provides the ideal microclimate for spots of color," says landscape architect Greg Trutza of the front courtyard, which is lined with various desert plantings, including bright coral fountain (*Russelia equisetiformis*) and blue elf aloe. **ABOVE** Sour orange hedges and a grouping of Acacia aneura trees create a barrier between the front of the property and the bustle of neighborhood traffic. The basalt fountain in the private courtyard adds a serene touch and filters out noise.



LEFT The ramada provides a shaded space for relaxing and entertaining poolside. **BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT** "This is a rare pink trumpet tree (*Tabebuia heterophylla*) that I wanted to one day tower, so the owners can see it from their bedroom," Trutza says. "It's covered in beautiful pink blossoms."







The ramada, which previously occupied a space in the corner of the yard, was redesigned to align with the pool and house and reflect the Biltmore-inspired architecture.



The design team swapped the home's canvas shade structure for a trellis and added a contemporary outdoor kitchen. Trutza designed a new pool to better complement the modern architecture and added custom cascade fountains, along with a striking display of totem pole cacti. "I like those around the pool because they do not have thorns, and they're so sculptural," he says.







LEFT Chaise lounges in the pool provide a relaxing place to soak up the sun. **BELOW LEFT AND OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP LEFT** Oversized urns brimming with Rosenka bougainvillea (*Bougainvillea rostrate,* 'Rosenka'), yucca and *Verbena rigida* add a dramatic display and focal point throughout the backyard. **OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP RIGHT AND BOTTOM LEFT AND RIGHT** Says Trutza: "Another magic area is along the north side garden, which is shaded by a mature grove of palo blanco and where pittosporum, rhaphiolepis and carissa 'Boxwood Beauty' thrive. The trees also shade a firepit off the billiards room ideal for conversation and drinks."

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"The overall goal was to seamlessly blend the existing building with the new while updating the overall connectivity to the exterior," Carson recalls. "We worked together to create a seamless extension into the outdoor living spaces, gardens and pool."

Trutza adds: "Cool contemporary with a Zen sensibility was the tone that guided my overall design. The use of overscale custom pots, the minimal, sleek lines of the pool fountains and many areas for contemplation were just some of the design devices that yielded this sense of visual calm."

Today, the owners enjoy entertaining guests and taking in their homage to the Arizona Biltmore and Desert Botanical Garden.

"Greg really is an artist. I'm just the patron here," states the husband, who cites the profusion of hummingbirds that flutter about the yard as an unexpected delight. "I come from Chicago, where you only see one every two years. Here, they're all over."

Higgins points to a photo of the stone masons who erected the block columns that would become the exceptional framework of the house and a foundation for the sprawling landscape.

"You look at it, and the men are standing in this sea of columns," he says proudly. "Le Corbusier once said that 'great buildings make great ruins.' Like the Biltmore, I hope this home is enjoyed long after I'm gone."

ARCHITECT: Michael Higgins, Higgins Architects, **BUILDER:** Anthony Salcito, Salcito Custom Homes. **LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Greg Trutza, New Directions in Landscape Architecture Inc.

For more information, see Sources.



An expansive lawn used as a retention basin and the poolscape are surrounded by mature trees. "The composition reflects a xerophytic goal with the use of ironwood, palo brea, Texas ebony, palo blanco, Texas olive and sophora," Trutza says.

SITUATED AT THE THRESHOLD OF THE ARIZONA BILTMORE IS A CHICAGO-BASED COUPLE'S PRIVATE PROTOTYPE OF THE ICONIC Albert Chase McArthur-designed hotel.

Enveloped in a rich composition of mature trees, desert plantings and playful jolts of color, the dwelling exudes the spirit of Frank Lloyd Wright's principle of designing with nature.

"Wright's influence was all over this place—especially with its proximity to the resort," says landscape architect Greg Trutza, who along with fellow *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest architect Michael Higgins, envisioned the exterior nearly 20 years ago. "I wanted the landscape to have resonance with the beautiful, boldly designed home."

Pointed roof overhangs and steel trellises jut out from the honed blocks that comprise the edifice—like needles on a saguaro. "Just as the ribs and spines on a cactus shield and protect its skin from the sun, the elongated piers shade the house as the sun moves around it," Higgins says. "It's a plant metaphor that ties the home in with the garden."

But it was not always like this. After a series of owners, the once lush landscapes in the original build began to deteriorate. "It had good bones, but the grounds were in trouble," says the current resident, who insisted Trutza give the gardens his original Midas touch. "I said to Greg, 'look, obviously you felt inspired here; you had a plan and a design. You can fill it back in. You can fix it.' And he said, 'Yes… yes, I can.'"

Trutza replaced hundreds of dead or dying plants with a new palette of native trees, shrubs and floral embellishments, while builder Anthony Salcito and architect Scott Carson reworked the patio to add a covered space and an outdoor kitchen. They also redesigned the pool and ramada to align with the abode.



"I fell in love with the location, the house and the grounds," the owner says. "The plants were magnificent, and the home had great bones." Adds architect Mike Higgins: "It definitely has that Frank Lloyd Wright spirit of interior and exterior connection."



Silver peso (*Dermatophyllum secundiflorum*, 'Silver Peso') adds color and sweet fragrance to the side yard. "They have a unique scent," Higgins notes. "Like grape bubblegum."



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A porcelain-clad raised firepit is nestled among a colorful composition of dragon wing begonia and cyclamen.



"This is my favorite place in the whole yard," Trutza remarks of a garden between the dwelling and the guest casita. "The color plays into the home and draws you right out." Cyclamen provide the playful pop of pink.

"It's rare to get a house that you can have so many decades with. To get the maturity of all of this after all of this time... it's pretty special."

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The landscape architect left the shafts of the towering yucca rostrata around the guest casita untouched. "They give it a prehistoric, Jurassic-like aesthetic," he says. "And the plants are actually much happier that way."