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Spanish Colonial-Style *Sanctuary*

Form Meets Function in a Santa Barbara-Influenced Arizona Home

BY MARIA MATSON ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WOODALL



A large, cozy living room with a fireplace, a large sofa, and a built-in cabinet. The room features a high ceiling with exposed wood trusses and a wood floor. The fireplace has a white mantel with a small lantern on top. The built-in cabinet is dark wood with glass-fronted upper sections and solid wood lower sections. The sofa is upholstered in a combination of fabric and leather. A coffee table is in the foreground, and a potted plant is on the left.

"Even though this is the biggest room in the house, the wood trusses, wood floor and wood-framed doors make it feel cozy," says architect Mike Higgins. Other special features include built-in cabinetry, patio doors that telescope open and a draped "kissing nook." Facing sofas are upholstered in a combination of fabric and leather.



Enclosed with a low wall, the front courtyard offers views of nearby Mummy Mountain and provides convenient overflow space during frequent get-togethers. "For parties, we fill the courtyard with tables and open up the doors, and then it's just a big, fun dining room," reports homeowner Tory Curtis. A stone fountain reinforces the area's peaceful, relaxed ambience.

EVEN NOW, SOME FOUR YEARS after Tory Curtis and her family settled into their newly built Phoenix-area house, she walks through bright-eyed, pointing out special elements and favorite details.

For one, "We love the views," Curtis says. "That's why we bought the original house in 1989. It was the first home we bought when we got married."

Curtis and her husband, Scott, remodeled the original Ranch-style residence and then, once they had their two boys, basically "took the roof off and stretched it as much as possible." As their sons grew, the time came to build from scratch. And still loving their views, the couple decided to stay and do so right where they were.

Because Curtis favors Spanish Colonial style, that's what she set her sights on, devouring books, gathering images and traveling to Santa Barbara to photograph architectural details of homes she admired. "I adore the look of homes in Santa Barbara," she says. "The style is just comfortable for me," she notes. "I'm drawn to Old-World design." With a clear

vision in mind and hand, she turned to architect Michael Higgins and interior designer Berkley Vallone to help get the details of her family's new home just right.

"This house is similar to the way a rural Andalusian farmhouse would look," Higgins remarks. "It has a simplicity of form; it's kind of plain and understated, but elegant. The farmhouses were built out of practicality and ease of construction, with materials that were available. The simplicity is what I think makes them so beautiful. They're not pretentious; they're built to serve a function."

For this family, that meant including indoor and outdoor spaces that met all the family members' needs and wants. Curtis and her husband enjoy entertaining. "There always seems to be an occasion," she states. Thus, for the adults, there is a large front courtyard as well as an ample patio out back, and both areas serve as extensions of the interiors when groups gather. For the teens, there's an expanse of green lawn, a pool and a basement rec room where boys can be boys.

Curtis says it was important to her that the home be rich in detail and look authentic. To that end, colorful tiles and scrolling ironwork serve as jewelry throughout.

Vallone agrees that such materials are key to authentic Spanish Colonial style, but she also notes that it's OK to tweak tradition. "Spanish homes can feel a bit serious," she adds. "Typically, you would see dark, stained cabinetry and standard Saltillo tile, but we wanted to use some color in the house. We took the time to find unique tiles and fall in love with them, and not just settle for something neutral and simple, because we wanted it to feel family-friendly and fun."

Ultimately, that was precisely what Curtis envisioned for her most cherished of people. "We wanted a house that was livable, a place where we could enjoy time with our boys throughout high school, before they went off to college," she says. "We wanted a safe haven for them to come home to."

Clearly, they got all this and more. ■



"Tile and wrought-iron details lend authenticity and play up the simple forms of the architecture," Higgins observes. In addition, exterior walls were "thickened up" to add mass typical of the style, and "the windows were recessed into the thick exterior walls, which provides shade to the openings," the architect adds. Outlined with a band of tile, the front door is further embellished with a limestone surround.





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Light and bright, the kitchen and adjacent dining space were designed for casual, less-formal gatherings. The walnut-topped island has a sink on one side and an extended dining bar with a series of drawers on the other. Perimeter countertops are honed black granite, and different tiles were used to create each backsplash.



Right: Centered in the master bath is a freestanding slipper tub that was an anniversary gift from Scott Curtis to his wife. Flooring is antique terra cotta, and tile wainscoting clads the lower walls. The French doors open to a narrow balcony.

Below: The master bedroom has a pitched beamed ceiling and offers views of both Mummy and Camelback mountains. The wood floor is antique French oak.

Opposite: A black and white tile rug by interior designer Berkley Vallone defines the foyer. The staircase features a decorative wrought-iron railing inspired by a photograph in one of many books the homeowner pored over. The wood treads and tiled risers are design elements that are common in Spanish Colonial homes.









Four distinct tile patterns clad the risers of a staircase leading to a terrace off the master bedroom. The stairway wall was stepped to hold potted plants, and blackened roof tiles were brought in to replicate those seen on homes in Santa Barbara.



Top: A window trimmed in a distinctly Mediterranean shade of sage green boasts handmade wood shutters and authentic iron hardware.

Above: Rooflines converge above a tree-shaded dining patio at the back of the house.

See Sources.