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Sitting on Top of the WORLD

At the top of Camelback Mountain, a unique house reveals the panorama of the city of Phoenix and a horizon of the mountains from every room.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRS COMMERCIAL PHOTOGRAPHY



From a distance, it could be an oddly geometric rock formation, an organic part of the mountainside—until the Arizona sun sparks off an enormous wall of glass or dusk falls and the interior lights transform the house into a glowing contemporary sculpture. From the deck, one can see all of Phoenix, from the downtown high-rises to the international airport with its silent parabolas of planes flying in and out of the city.

When Bob Pazderka first purchased the property, he set out to remodel the existing 40-year-old ranch. Then an unusual pool in a neighbor's house brought the work of Kurt Holland of Incline to his attention. "Bob asked me what kind of pool design I would suggest for a small house that he was remodeling," Holland recalls. "I told him

my vision of the pool, which was a full negative-edge triangle rather than a boulder pool, since the whole site was already boulders. And he liked that idea so much that he asked if I'd consider doing the whole house design for him."

What began as a remodeling job morphed into a much larger project. "We folded in around the existing structure and made that the nucleus of the project," Holland explains. "From that point, we demoed and reattached and reblended, and by the time we finished, only 30 percent of the original structure remained."

They were ready to begin building, but Pazderka didn't like the boxy design prevalent in Phoenix. "I like wide-open rooms with high ceilings and views, but I wanted it to be inviting," he says. "We set out to build a contemporary home, but with a warm, homey feeling."

Pazderka loves entertaining with large parties for lots of people. Today, guests are greeted with a waterfall in the entryway that flows out of an overhang into a sheer descent. Marbella stone, a volcanic derivative stone, is cool underfoot. "It's durable, and it does not need a finish on it, which is good because finishes do not stand up in Arizona," Holland says.

Guests enter the house through a substantial 6-by-12-foot door designed by James Douglass of Different By Design. Constructed of ribbon-stripe Sapele wood, a species of African mahogany, it is set with vertical ribbons of stainless steel and a custom-made stainless handle. The door seems to float in a three-sided glass frame, which changes hue as the light changes, moving from day to dusk. From the entryway, one can see all five fireplaces when they are lit as well as a panoramic view of the city of Phoenix.

Beata Mizsak of Beata Winius Interiors collaborated on the interior design. "The great room, to give you some idea of size, is two stories high," Mizsak explains. "When you approach a house of this size, you have to balance everything on a grand scale. So even though the room is really large, it actually feels inviting. A room with so much glass and hard surfaces could have the danger of feeling cold and hard."

The walls of the great room, kitchen, and dining room are painted an earthy yellow to form the core of the main house. "The colors I chose are colors that are found in the desert," Mizsak says. "There's a lot of color in the desert and in the plants that are indigenous to the area. The purple color in the house is the color of a Jacaranda tree.



The massive front door, framed on three sides by glass, is composed of ribbon-stripe Sapele wood with vertical strips of stainless steel.





The red is the color of a flower we have here called Hibiscus Brilliant. There's a lot of orange in the house, and they're the kind of oranges that you find in a Mexican Bird of Paradise."

The ceiling panels of the great room, designed by Douglass in a grid of suspended metal squares, appear to float over the grid of the polished limestone floor below. Mizsak painted the ceiling background purple; at night, overhead light glows down around the panels, transforming the ceiling into a work of art.

One of the most striking features of the great room is the sculptural fireplace, designed by Douglass, which rises up to the full height of the room. Constructed of metal and treated with a chemical formula to create a rust patina, it is the earthy focus of the room. "To me, it's reminiscent of stalactites and stalagmites," Holland comments. The metal patina also was used on the exterior of the house, which strengthened the continuity between indoor and outdoor living.

Many builders in Arizona work with rounded walls, but this house stands out for the prevalence of geometric shapes and linear lines. In order to soften that geometric quality, Mizsak chose furnishing with soft curves. The red leather curved sectional couch and the round yellow chairs in the great room soften the angularity of the walls. The rug, designed by Mizsak and custom-made, uses both geometric and circular shapes in colors that also are used throughout the house.

Below:

The curved shapes of the living room furnishings balance the angularity of the two-story metal fireplace and the square ceiling panels, both designed by James Douglass of Different By Design.





The house is designed with different wood and stone in almost every room. “We use a wider palette of materials,” Douglass explains. “We use a lot more color and texture and a lot more variety in woods, but we keep the clean lines and the simple geometric shape.”

Large houses often have a consistency in the wood and stone used as a common design element throughout the house, but Mizsak says they deliberately broke all those rules.

For example, in the main kitchen, the island and the cabinets, designed by Douglas, are English Sycamore that has been dyed red—not stained—to achieve a richer color. The top of the island is Statuario Vein marble. The butcher’s block is solid maple, weighing around 800 pounds; a special lathe had to be made to turn it.

A slab of Carrera marble with a sink set into it is suspended from the butcher’s block and supported on the other end by a stainless steel cylinder. In contrast, the butler’s kitchen is Honduras Mahogany and Brazilian Black granite.

“It’s almost like a kitchen within a kitchen,” Pazderka says.

“The butler’s kitchen has two entrances: one from the garage and one from the backyard. If I have catered parties, they’re able to come in, prepare everything, and set up the food, all behind the scenes without messing up the main kitchen.”

The wet bar, created by Holland and Douglass, is Birdseye Maple and Figured Maple, and the sides slant. The veneer wraps up the face, across the top, and down the back as one continual grain match for the entire piece, while stainless strips serve to float the glass top. The shelves at the back of the bar are stainless steel suspended by cables, and the countertop is Brazilian Black granite.

The library, the media room, and the powder room complete the lower floor. Details such as the extraordinary glass sink in the powder room add to the unique quality the design team achieved. Handcrafted by Gravity Glass, the one-of-a-kind glass sink sits on a glass pedestal base like an exotic, translucent flower.

A stainless steel circular staircase leads to the master bedroom suite. This room encompasses an office; a breakfast bar with a small refrigerator, dishwasher, and microwave; and a three-sided fireplace that divides the sitting area from the sleeping area. The bed and furniture are custom-built by Douglass using figured anigre, a subtle, light-colored wood. From the master soaking tub, made of Breccia De Vandon marble, there is a view of the city and of the fireplace. The vanities in the master bath are constructed of mappa burl wood and Blue Pearl granite, while the floor is Alhambra limestone. The closets, designed by Douglass, are a separate room, constructed of natural cherry wood with stretched leather countertops.

The guesthouse, located on the second floor, cantilevers 35 feet off the edge of the mountain. It can be used as part of the main house or as a separate two-bedroom, two-bathroom, full-kitchen private retreat. The guesthouse can be reached from the main house through a long galleria or through a separate entrance.

Guests who are lucky enough to be invited may find the stay truly transforming. Pazderka’s house is an extremely private place, yet it also is wide open. The patio, comfortably equipped with recliners, drops off the edge a hundred feet or more. Immersed in the apex of the pool’s turquoise spa—the edges of the pool dropping off into nothingness and the city of Phoenix spread out in the distance like a crazy quilt—it may seem as if anything in the world is possible. ■

