

Serendipity Realized

*A Couple Embraces Chance
and the Southwest*

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Opposite: In a Tucson home's guest bedroom, architect Allen F. Tafoya carved out a generous window niche to serve as a sleeping alcove for a visiting child or "just a cozy place to read a book on a cloudy day."

Left: A Navajo rug at the end of the entry hall is one of several in the couple's collection. "The rugs make the interiors spiritual feeling," says interior designer Christy Martin. "They're awe-inspiring and they lend a sense of quiet to the house."

A CHANCE CONVERSATION WITH A GUY

on an airplane prompted a Connecticut couple to visit Tucson, a city they hadn't considered in their hunt for a warm, golf-friendly place to retire. It only took a visit or two to convince them that this was where they wanted to be. Soon after, they found a property in the lush desert north of the city, within chipping distance of a manicured fairway.

While the couple waited 10 years to put home-building plans into motion, they envisioned a specific type of residence. "We wanted something that was designed like it belonged in the desert," the husband remarks. "We wanted something that looked like it had been here a while."

Architect Allen F. Tafoya interpreted his clients' wishes to be a Contemporary Santa Fe-style home, with hand-adzed beams and corbels, vertical posts, classic beehive fireplaces, wood-framed windows, stone accents and Saltillo tile floors. He added thick walls with highly recessed windows that give the appearance of adobe, exterior bullnose corners, rounded parapets and coved interior corners reminiscent of adobes in New Mexico.

The architect made the most of the site by framing views of the golf course, designing a large back patio for catching sunsets and a smaller front patio for sipping morning coffee while watching sunrises. "There was a wash that went across the property, so we accented it by creating a bridge entry to allow the natural drainage to run right under the house, which makes it kind of exciting," Tafoya says. "It was an artistic solution to a practical problem."

Included in the couple's specifications was a special room for the husband. "I've been woodworking since I was a kid, but I've never had as much time

to do it as I do now," he points out. "Allen's joke was that I wanted a woodworking shop with a house attached to it."

All in all, the East-Coast homeowners were happy with their new desert home, but they were stumped by what to do with the interiors. This prompted them to do something they had never done before.

"This is my first time hiring an interior designer," says the wife. "The style of the home is so different than what I'm used to. I needed someone to keep me on the straight and narrow."

The couple hired Christy Martin of Studio Encanto for her casual, low-key personality and timeless designs. "The scale of this house, with its soaring ceilings, large windows and massive tree-trunk posts, demanded that the interiors be simple, unpretentious and down-to-earth, and at the same time, very elegant," says Martin. "We started by painting the walls white to evoke the serene beauty of an old mission or a contemporary art gallery."

The clean approach to interiors aligned with the homeowners' sensibilities. "I don't like clutter, so I like to have a lot of storage," states the wife. "Christy measured everything and made sure there was enough storage space in the kitchen and closets. She also had a TV-concealing cabinet made for the great room."

In keeping with the homeowners' less-is-more aesthetic, art and accessories were chosen carefully, and included pieces the husband made in his new workshop. "It's good feng shui to put your own work in a space," Martin says. "It was fun to feature his work in the house." He made bowls and lazy Susans for the kitchen, and retrofitted the interior

A Burmese cabinet once used to store monk's robes now serves as a wet bar. The deliberate symmetry and overall simplicity of the furnishings balance the strong architectural details.



of an old Burmese cabinet with shelves and a sink to serve as a wet bar. The piece he is most proud of is a sideboard.

"I had old pieces of chestnut from a house in Connecticut that dated back to the 1700s, so the wood is at least from 1730," says the husband. "The house was torn down and I had part of the beams from beneath the house." He used the vintage wood for the top of the sideboard, then made the rest of it look like the kitchen cabinets.

Equally important to the homeowners and to the design of their new home was incorporating

regional items from here. "They really embraced the Southwest style," Martin says. "Before we bought anything, whether it was a rug or a basket or pottery, we did a little learning along the way, about what the value of the piece was, its provenance and its essence. Then they could really appreciate what it was, and it could have meaning for them."

While the conversation that brought the homeowners to Tucson may have been random, the results are anything but: a beautiful new home with a bit of the past and the present, but a whole lot more of the future. ■

"The furniture pieces are subtle but very beautiful," says Christy Martin. "They're not ostentatious, but when you look a little closer you see there's a subtle inlay or some other subtle detail going on." Allen Tafoya placed the pool close to the window so "as water's moving and the sunlight's reflecting off the surface of the pool, it makes little light patterns dancing around the ceiling of the great room," he states. Flooring is reclaimed oak.



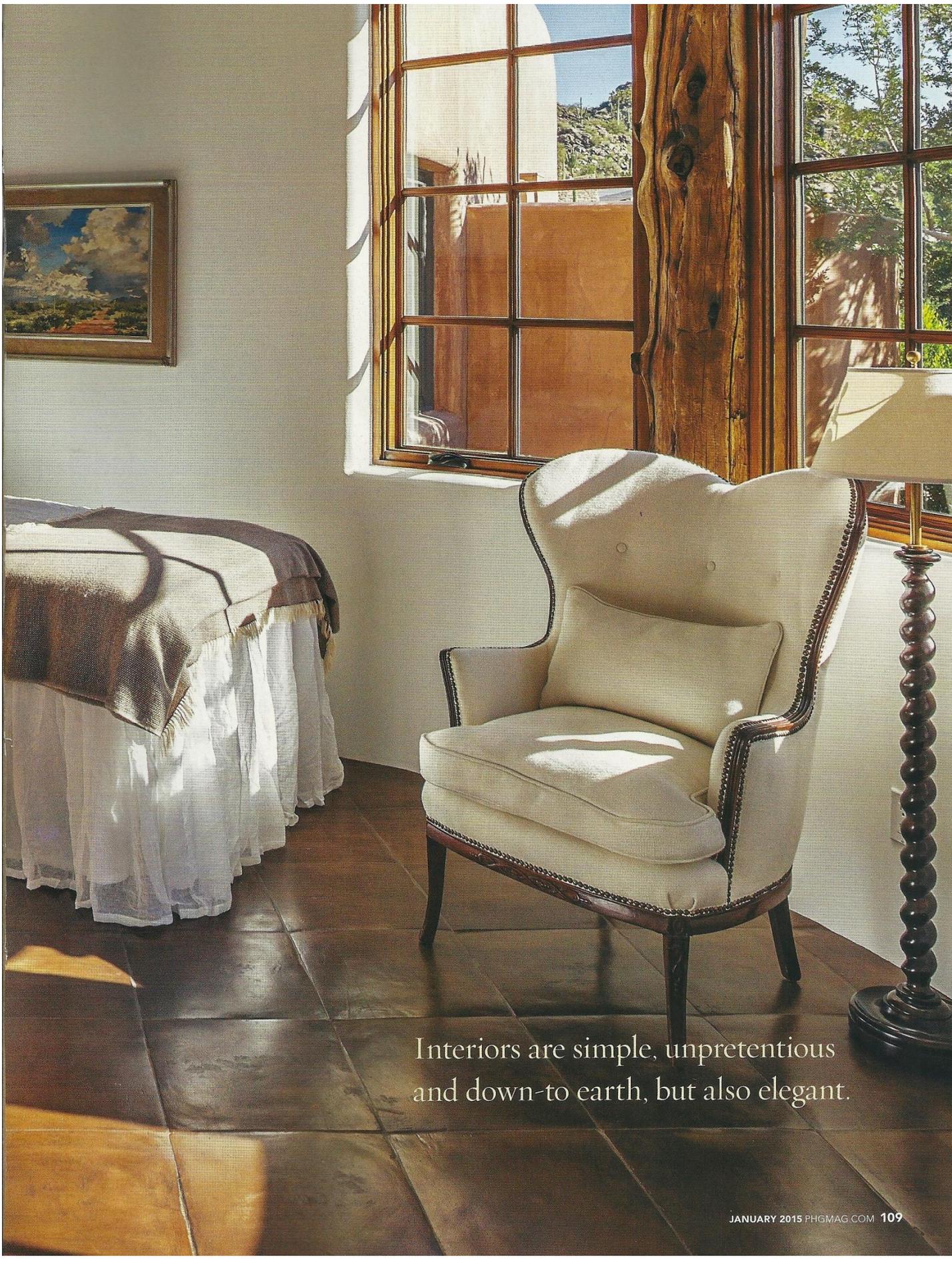


"The dining room pendant fixture, which resembles a large bird's nest, is quite a bold and necessary statement," notes Christy Martin. "It makes things less serious and not too perfect, an important ingredient for the alignment of the house and the homeowners' personalities. Its large scale

meant that all of the other light fixtures in the house would have to be much less of a statement—they simply could not compete with the chandelier—so we used multiples of smaller lantern fixtures, which also reinforced that Franciscan mission feel that we were after."

A subtle hand with furnishings and bedding keeps the focus on a guest room's curved window wall and the view beyond. "The simplicity of the crinkly white linen is a great complement to the bedroom's rustic vibe," says Christy Martin.





Interiors are simple, unpretentious
and down-to earth, but also elegant.

Right: The custom bed frame and nightstand in the master bedroom were handmade using Old World techniques, such as marquetry, turning, carving and parquetry.

Opposite: Stylized archways leading to the master bathroom mimic the look of wood corbels found in other parts of the house. Cabinets are alder. Floors are Manganese Saltillo tiles stained a rich chocolate brown.



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Just beyond the back patio and lush desert plantings is the manicured fairway of a Tucson-area golf course. The beams used here and throughout the interiors are hand-adzed Douglas fir stained using a process that builder Dan Couturier developed to give them an Old World, aged look. The posts are peeled pine hand-selected from trees salvaged from Mt. Lemmon.

See Sources.