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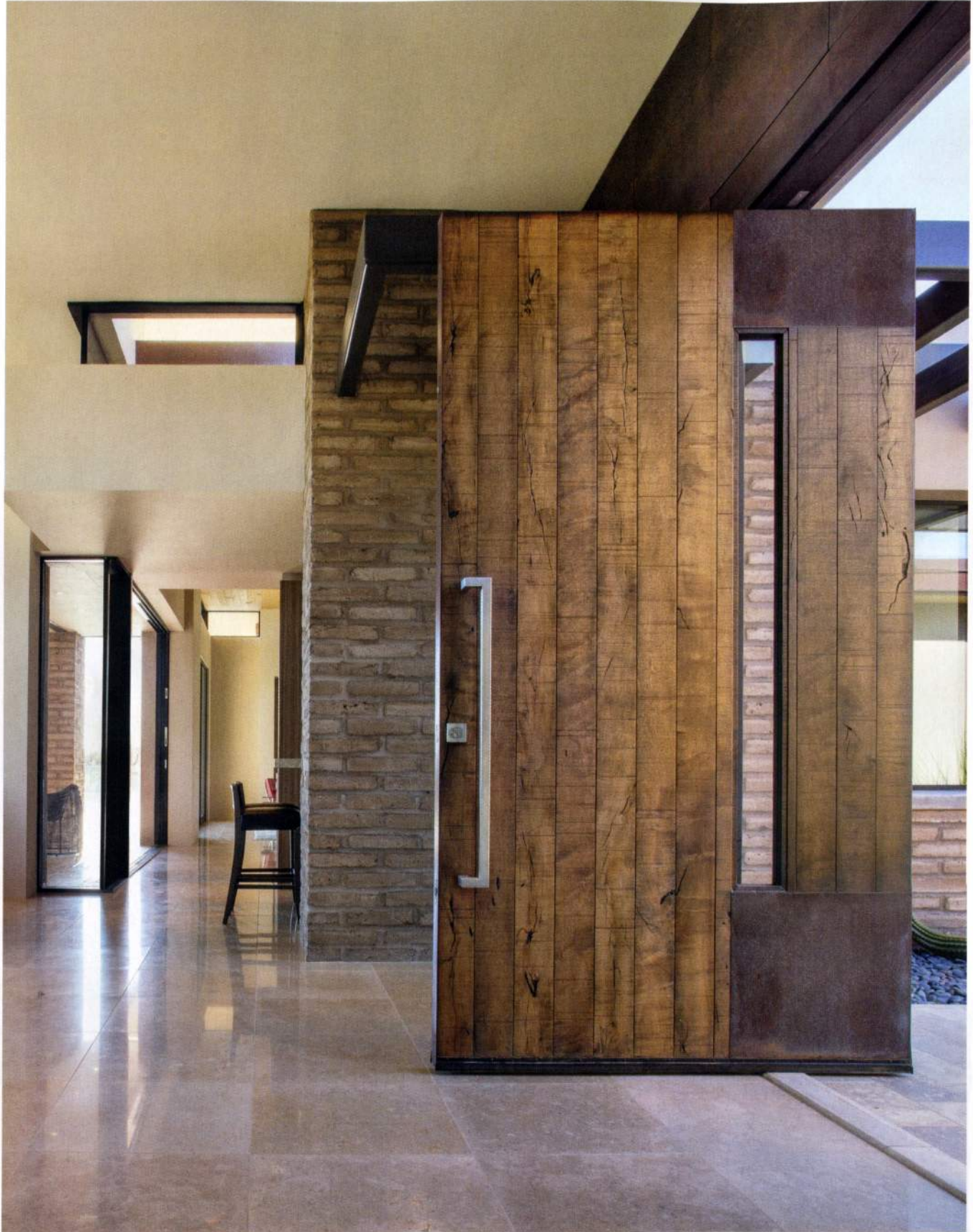
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DESERT MERGER

AN ARCHITECT SEAMLESSLY BLENDS AN ANCIENT MATERIAL WITH MODERN ELEMENTS TO CREATE A WELCOMING CONTEMPORARY HOME.

WRITTEN BY **MINDY PANTIEL** / PHOTOGRAPHY BY **WINQUIST PHOTOGRAPHY**

Architect Kevin Howard designed the entry to be emblematic of the entire house, where adobe material merges with contemporary design. The custom door by Craftsmen in Wood is composed of local mesquite, glass and steel, and the mud brick walls intersect with sleek Egyptian limestone floors.





Architect Kevin Howard admits to having a long-term fascination with the idea of fashioning a contemporary residence utilizing mud adobe as a central element. "I've often asked myself if it would be possible to take an ancient material like adobe and construct a modern house," he says. Thanks to a Michigan couple with an appreciation for the organic materials that define Arizona's aesthetic, the answer turned out to be a resounding yes.

Homeowners Linda and Bill Damon, who were looking to build their home in The Residences at The Ritz-Carlton, Dove Mountain, envisioned a modern structure that respected and merged with the desert. "We wanted to disturb as little as possible and keep the desert's beauty around us," says Linda, who, thanks to her parents owning a small independent hotel and restaurant, developed a discerning eye for architecture and design. "For this

house, I knew I wanted color consistency and a strong emphasis on texture." The word texture was music to Howard's ears, and he wasted no time introducing a series of coarse adobe walls as the structural jumping-off point for his design. "I used adobe in places you'd expect, such as in columns and fireplace masses, and then selected everything else to contrast with it," says the architect. He then added rusted-steel panels, burnished for a weathered look, and large horizontal panes of glass for balance.

But introducing expanses of glass in the desert can be tricky: too much and the interiors get too hot or things start to feel austere. To counter this, Howard used overhangs on the south side of the home, integrated exterior blinds to cover all the windows when needed, and relied on the mud bricks to serve as a counterpoint. "Using vertical adobe walls breaks up the horizontal expanses," he says. "It's really the adobe that gives the house its visual quality."

In the living room, designer Kimberly Weder created a conversation area with a pair of VW lounge chairs and a sofa and chair by B&B Italia. The coffee table is from Suite NY in New York, and the side table is from Room & Board.



Above: The edges and boundaries of the house are intentionally softened with seamless interior glass corners that, while blurring the public and private spaces, also reveal elements of the desert. Beds of polished-black Mexican river rock flow from a hallway inside to outside.

Right: In the dining room a Holly Hunt table and chairs take in the views, while the Ochre Light Drizzle chandelier, from David Sutherland in Chicago, hangs above. The credenza and mirror are both from Robert Kuo in New York.



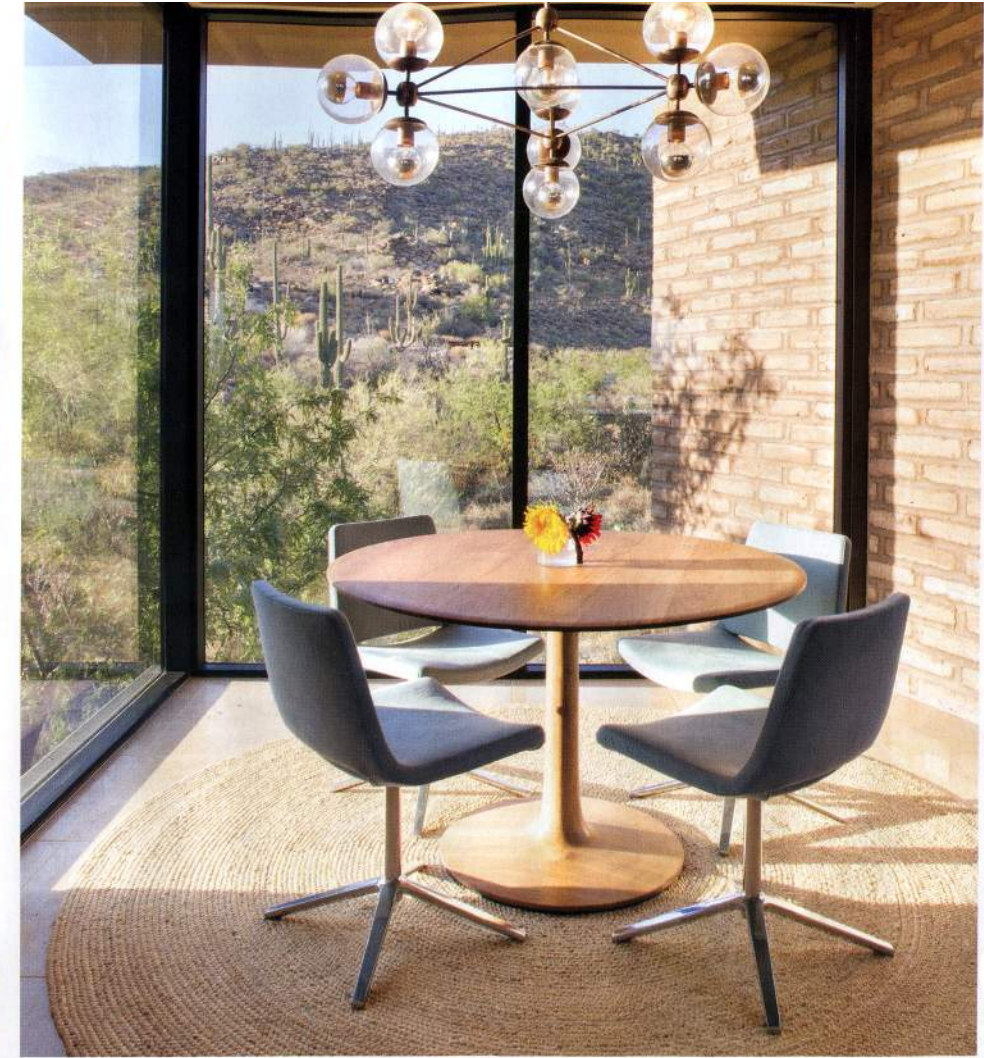


On cool desert nights, the owners enjoy the warmth of the fireplace in the outdoor living room, which is tucked under the rooftop deck. The teak sofa by Henry Hall Designs and the pair of Janus et Cie Lulu chairs offer various seating options. The trio of cast-concrete planters is by Konegay Design.

“I’M VERY PROUD THAT I WAS ABLE TO BUILD SOMETHING IMPACTFUL USING THIS ANCIENT RENEWABLE MATERIAL”

-KEVIN HOWARD

A waterfall of Calacatta gold marble drapes the kitchen island, which is lined with a wall of cabinets by Homeworks Cabinetry + Design featuring Top Knobs pulls. The sink and faucet are both from Kohler, and the Oriental runner is an existing piece from the homeowners' collection.



In the breakfast room, a round rug and similarly shaped Zeitraum table from Suite NY provide a soft contrast to the local landscape. The Metropolitan chairs are by Jeffrey Bernett for B&B Italia, and the Modo chandelier is from Roll & Hill in New York.

The job of translating the plan into reality fell to builder Berner Loftfield, who oversaw all the structural demands, including securing a glass railing to the observation deck. "For the railing, we bolted an aluminum shoe channel into the floor to support the 1/2-inch glass panels that met building code requirements without the use of a supporting top rail," says Loftfield. In addition, he also executed the architect's design by creating the look of an unsupported floating roof. "It took some imagination and structural engineering to make it look like there's nothing holding the roof up," he adds. "You know how the wings of an aircraft are so thin and stick out so far that you wonder how they can stay up? These rooflines with their thin profiles and no posts or beams are like that."

According to the architect, these cantilevers pay homage to Frank Lloyd Wright, who "relished the strength and the agility of the concept." Similarly, the way the building inhabits rather than sits on the landscape recalls Wright's work as well. "I wanted to disturb as little as possible, but I did draw a line in the sand to say where the Sonoran Desert ends and the courtyard begins," says Howard, who introduced retaining walls along the desert edge to make his point.

Meanwhile, landscape designer Tray Gers sought to merge the natural and man-made environments, planting organ pipe cactus, ironwood trees and other native plants within the hardscape. "In keeping with the contemporary



The spine of the house is bolstered by heavy walls and wide glass panes, which open up to the vast space of the valley beyond. Locally sourced adobe harks back to the desert vernacular. The Sutherland poolside lounge chairs are from John Brooks Incorporated.

Sited in the desert foothills, the residence is meant to be evocative of the modernism of Frank Lloyd Wright's work, refreshed for a contemporary family. Cantilevering over the preserved desert, the residence minimizes its footprint while maximizing living space. When not lit by the reflected and diffused skylights outside, the interiors employ photovoltaic panels for electricity.





design, I planted repeating elements in a linear way rather than in curves," says Gers. "Kevin wanted the home to look like it sprouted from the desert, so things get more refined as you get closer to the house."

When it came to the furnishings, the homeowners collaborated with designer Kimberly Weder to assist her in selecting such pieces as the brown leather sectional for the family room and a walnut dining room table, which both meld perfectly with the tans, cappuccinos and hints of blue that define the overall palette. "I'd define Linda's style as classic contemporary with a twist, and she also likes to mix in ethnic accents," says Weder, who also worked on the couple's Ann Arbor home. Upon entry, it's a pair of Indonesian doors carefully hung on mounting brackets above the living room fireplace that catches the eye. "They were found in the jungle, and are carefully preserved and extremely fragile," says Linda.

With Weder advising them from Michigan, the couple asked local designer David Michael Miller to assist them in pulling the final look together. So, when the couple brought out a large Kuba cloth from their travels, Miller suggested having it set in a museum-type mount and hanging it above the master bed. "They had built a great foundation and were wanting help in presenting some of their exotic textiles as art," says Miller. "It was just what the room needed."

Thinking back on the project, Howard says he sometimes likes to imagine what the house would look like stripped of everything but the adobe walls. "You'd have one magnificent-looking ruin," says Howard. "I'm so glad that I had this opportunity, and I'm very proud I was able to build something impactful using this ancient renewable material." ■

In the master bedroom, a framed Kuba cloth hangs above a bed from Usona in Philadelphia. The chairs are by B&B Italia, and the floorcovering is from Unique Carpets in Riverside, California. Draperies add softness to the space.