

Desert Living

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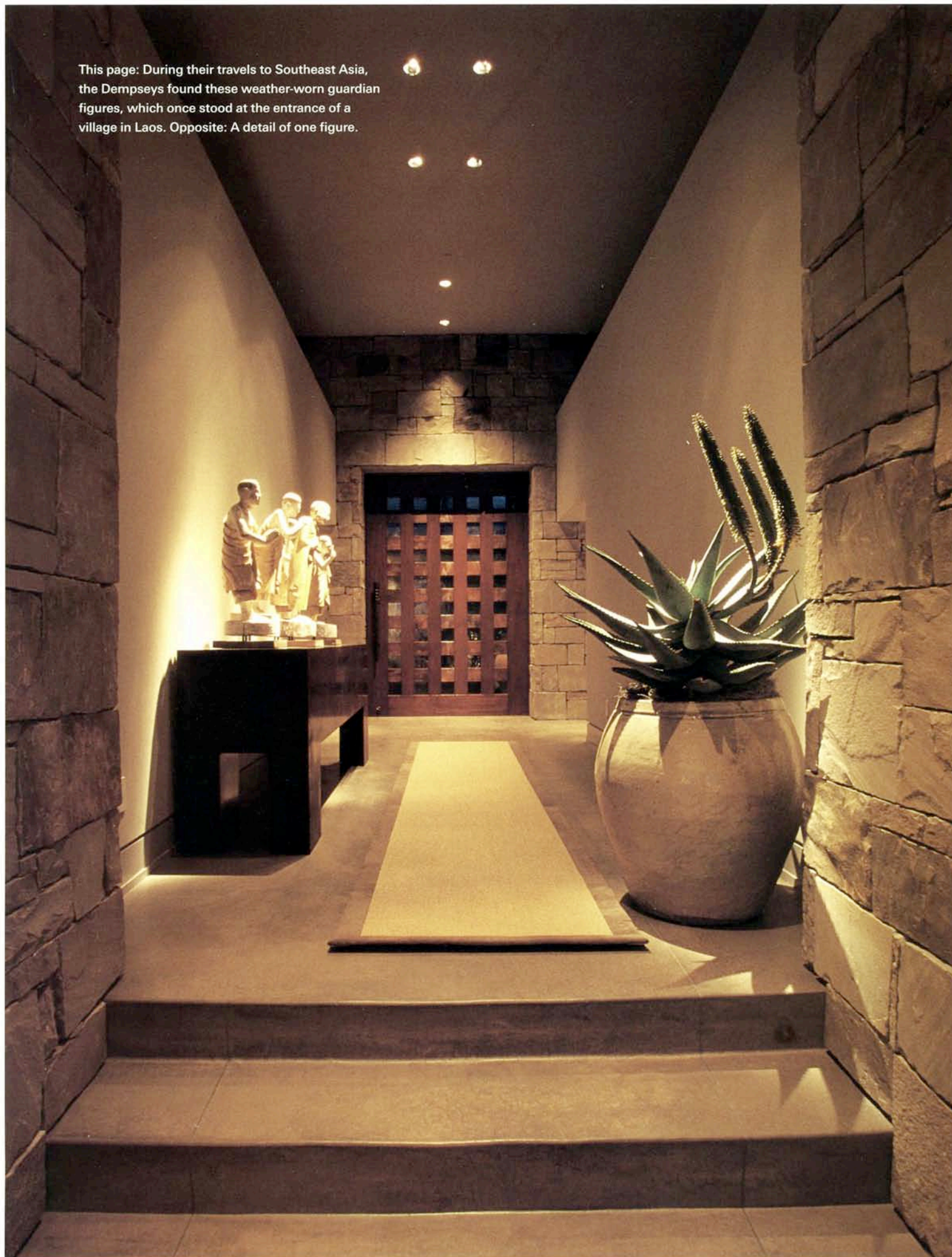
AT HOME IN
ARIZONA

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This page: During their travels to Southeast Asia, the Dempseys found these weather-worn guardian figures, which once stood at the entrance of a village in Laos. Opposite: A detail of one figure.



SONORAN SHANGRI-LA

Fusing a first-rate collection of Asian art with the beauty of the Arizona desert, a Scottsdale couple brings a bit of the East out West. **By Jeff Ficker and photography by Bill Timmerman**

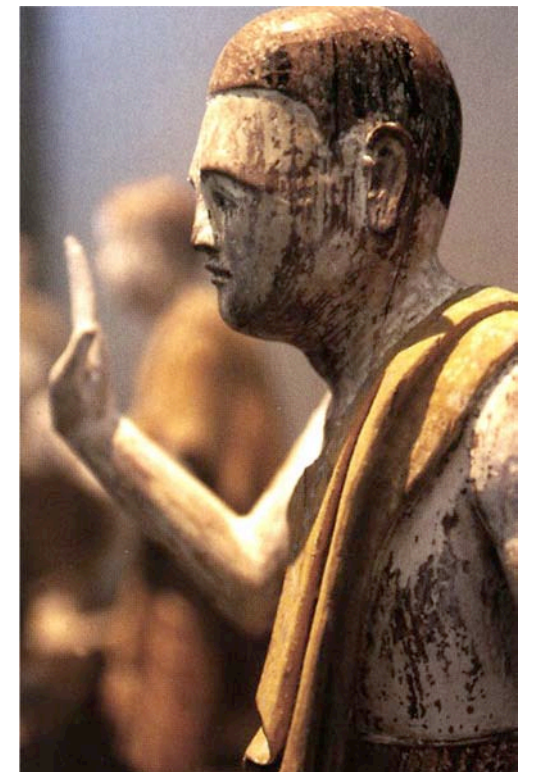
DESIGNING A HOME TO SHOWCASE A world-class collection of art can be difficult, especially when it comprises priceless artworks and artifacts from around the world. Collectors Jill and Ray Dempsey had such a challenge, as they have amassed an impressive array of collections: from ancient Greek Tangara figurines to obsidian hand tools once used by prehistoric man in Africa and individually labeled by noted-paleoanthropologist Louis Leakey.

"The inspiration for the whole house, including the architecture, was our collection of 19th-century Japanese woodblock prints," Jill Dempsey says of her home in North Scottsdale's Desert Mountain. "The art and the design were supposed to be integrated completely."

To do so, Scottsdale-based interior designer David Michael Miller worked with the Dempseys to create a modern, yet neutral, backdrop for their extraordinary collection of Asian art, which includes 274 woodblock prints by famed Japanese artist Utagawa Hiroshige (1797-1858). Renowned for his *100 Famous Views of Edo*—which offers a glimpse of 1850s Tokyo—Hiroshige influenced a number of artists, including the Post-Impressionist Vincent Van Gogh. Jill Dempsey inherited the collection from her grandfather, who began collecting the prints in the 1930s.

"We have the *36 Views of Edo*. That particular series is about the idealization of nature and about the specific views that people would see while walking on pilgrimages," Dempsey says. "(Hiroshige) would frame them in a certain way, and my idea was to have every room in the house have these sort of framed views of the mountains that surrounded us."

The Dempseys are not alone in incorporating Hiroshige's influence into their home. "Frank Lloyd Wright used Japanese woodblock prints as his intellectual starting point when he designed the two Taliesins (East and West)," Jill Dempsey says. "My instructions to the architect were to borrow from different architectural traditions, but not to let any of them define the structure. I



didn't want it to be identified with any particular ethnicity or period."

The hilltop home is entered through a serene inner courtyard. Three glass-walled galleries—lined with Hiroshige's prints—surround the courtyard, allowing visitors to view the Dempseys' extraordinary collection before even entering the home. Contemplative and oasis-like, the courtyard also features a small water garden, which Dempsey calls her "idealized version of an Arizona streambed." Inspired by a lush stream she visited near Cave Creek, the water garden is filled with indigenous plants, as well as koi fish in keeping with the Asian motif.

"First you are in this sort of man's interpretation of nature when you are in the courtyard, and then when you look through the glass, you see Hiroshige's interpretation of nature,"



This page: The couple's collection of art includes a set of small red priest figures from Vietnam. Opposite: (Left) The Dempseys' collections of Hiroshige prints and ancient Greek Tangara sculpture are prominently displayed in the great room. (Right) Avid readers, the Dempseys' library of books have been incorporated throughout the home.



Dempsey says. "I wanted it to be a sort of tranquil place to sit and see some green."

"For the interior design, we agreed upon touchstones—organic and restrained," designer David Michael Miller says. To give the residence a cohesive look, Miller selected a family of neutral tones, natural materials, and matte finishes. "It doesn't seem very organic to have bleached white walls and high contrast finishes. I think you need warmth and texture to feel safe and at home."

Even the choosing of the right stone required exacting detail and thought.

"The selection of the stone, which is such a strong presence both inside and outside the house, was really hard," Dempsey says. "It needed to be massive enough to be structural, but since it was going to be carried inside, it had to have a soft quality."

In the end, the stonework set the tone for the entire interior design. "The stone dictated both the color palette and the texture for the interiors because it is such a strong presence," Dempsey says. "The stone is sort of this khaki-cream-gray, very neutral. Because the art work is so delicate, I wanted the palette to be very monochromatic and soft and not to conflict with it in any way."

When choosing the flooring, Miller also looked to the 20th-century architectural giant for guidance. "Frank Lloyd Wright had a motto, 'truth in materials.' I don't think putting stone over a concrete floor is truthful." As a result, Miller advised the Dempseys to incorporate a taupe-colored concrete floor throughout the home, rather than using more traditional materials such as stone or hardwood flooring. The finished look is sophisticated, yet easily blends with the home's stone elements and desert surroundings.

Further blurring the line between interior and exterior, a large glass wall in the great room can be opened for entertaining, adding an additional 1,600 square feet of covered patio space. Delicately aligned, the multi-functional space also takes advantage of the breathtaking mountains views.

"We're New Yorkers," Jill Dempsey says. "The desert has just revealed itself to us. It's so subtle and so beautiful. The light in Scottsdale reminds us of some of the light that Hiroshige uses in his prints—it's sort of a layered-looking light." The house itself is surrounded on all sides by mountains. "We have these wonderful views of mountains that are just incredible. It's spectacular."