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LANDSCAPE DESIGN / RUSSELL GREEY, GREEY | PICKETT

ON THE EDGE

THE RUGGED DESERT LANDSCAPE FORMS
THE IDEAL BACKDROP FOR AN ESTANCIA HOME
DISTINGUISHED BY ITS MODERNIST LINES.

WRITTEN BY LAURA FISHER KAISER / PHOTOGRAPHY BY WERNER SEGARRA



In the living room of this Scottsdale home, designer David Michael Miller and architect C.P. Drewett clad the walls in Italian travertine from Stockett Tile & Granite Company. The Randolph sofas and Pocket lounge chairs are all from Coraggio in Los Angeles, and the Holly Hunt coffee table is from John Brooks Incorporated.

Some people call it kismet—that illusive moment when things come together as if they were just meant to be. Such was the case for a real estate developer and his wife, a retired special education teacher, when they interviewed David Michael Miller as the potential interior designer for a residence they planned to build in the Scottsdale golf resort community of Estancia. “The wife rifled through a sheaf of magazine clippings she’d been collecting, and we just had to laugh because half of the projects came right out of our studio,” recalls Miller. “We immediately had a sense that it would be easy to find an alignment aesthetically between their tastes and mine and the natural beauty of the building site.”

The couple had been coming to Arizona to escape Minnesota winters for years and were ready to make a major shift. Their previous Territorial-style house, with its classic Southwestern décor, was already in the same community and had served themselves and their two boys well, but they had always been intrigued with the idea of building a home that was a little more modern. “When we learned that there was a wonderful lot nearby for sale, we decided to buy it and move forward with designing a contemporary home,” says the husband.

The homeowners then brought on architect C.P. Drewett, who nestled the three-bedroom house into the landscape so that it hugged the distinctive boulders that jut up from the desert floor. With the 3,169-foot-high granite summit of Pinnacle Peak looming to the southwest and the Sonoran Desert fanning out in every direction, the home embraced both the couple’s new leanings and the site’s spectacular locale. “C.P. placed it just right,” says the wife. “He took advantage of the views from every room.”

The contemporary 5,500-square-foot design consists of a series of stacked boxes with cantilevered flat roofs. Among the many tasks builder Mark Laidlaw handled, maneuvering the steel roof beams into place was a challenging one. “There wasn’t enough room to bring in a large crane for the 35-foot-long beams,” says Laidlaw. “So we had to use a small forklift, which was kind of tricky.”

But what really gives the house its modernist edge and makes it gleam like a jewel from afar are the large vertical expanses of Italian travertine complemented by greige stucco. When Miller brought a sample of the luxurious stone to an early meeting, everyone agreed it would be the perfect wallcovering, not only for the exterior but for



The recessed vestibule signals the shift from the public to private spaces. Chinese Dropa stones are displayed atop a Holly Hunt console table with an ebonized-walnut base and high-polish ivory lacquer top from John Brooks Incorporated. The Kevin Reilly lamp is also from John Brooks Incorporated.



One side of the dining room is defined by the dynamic staircase. Dakota Jackson's Calypso chairs and the Gear ceiling fixture by McEwen Lighting Studio are all from Thomas Lavin in West Hollywood, California. The custom Quinn table by Joseph Jeup is from John Brooks Incorporated, and the rug is from Atelier Lapchl in West Hollywood.



Motorized door panels on one corner of the living room retract to turn the patio and living room into one big indoor-outdoor space. The Royal Botania table and brushed marine-grade stainless-steel chairs were selected to blend in with the palette. Landscape architect Russell Greey installed a fence of vertical metal pickets to preserve the view of Pinnacle Peak.

"THE PALETTE SPUN OFF THE TRAVERTINE'S SILVERY GREIGE COLOR, WHICH IS BOTH WARM AND SERENE."

—DAVID MICHAEL MILLER

The modernist-style home features a cantilevered roof and multiple levels of stone so that it feels like a continuation of the surrounding boulder-strewn hills. The architect persuaded the owners to include a 15-by-40-foot infinity lap pool, which adds sculptural value.



A custom banquette fashioned with Holly Hunt leather from John Brooks Incorporated separates the kitchen from the living room. Jiun Ho chairs from Thomas Lavin, upholstered in woven Donghia leather, surround a custom table by the designer. The hanging lights are by glass artist Alison Berger for Holly Hunt.



the interior, as well. The travertine forms one continuous surface when the glazed wall of windows in the rear is retracted to create a large indoor-outdoor room for entertaining. “We kept the interior and exterior finishes the same as much as possible,” says Miller. “The color palette spun off the travertine’s silvery greige color, which is both warm and serene.”

For the floors both inside and out, Miller used planks of honed gray limestone and then smaller modules for the bathrooms. “The floors needed to be static, not competing with the vertical travertine cladding,” he says. The lighter-toned interior plaster takes its cues from the exterior’s gray stucco, and the hues of the custom-upholstered furnishings further play off the travertine’s veins of taupe and gray. In addition, millwork for built-in desks and dressers, as well as the wood-clad underside of the cantilevered roof, is gray-stained European white oak.

The covered patio leads to a fire pit and a 15-by-40-foot swimming pool. The couple had intended to build only a water feature, but Drewett persuaded them to go bigger. “The infinity pool integrates so tightly to the house that it helps create this microclimate and adds great sculptural value as the house pulls away from desert,” he explains.

After assessing the overall terrain, landscape architect Russell Greey began saving and relocating about 20 native specimens, including palo verde and ironwood trees, as well as saguaro, barrel and cholla cacti. In the rear, he planted a garden containing many native and exotic desert succulents. The stars of the landscape, however, are several mature specimens salvaged from a resort that was being demolished—a euphorbia cactus, an enormous blue yucca and a Joshua tree—all of which were placed along the driveway leading to the front door to look as if they’ve been there forever. “These plants survived hundreds of years,” says Greey. “The aged specimen cacti have so much character that they appear to be sculpture when lit up at night.”

Inside, there is no clutter—not even a television—to detract from the views, and every sofa, chair and table is thoughtfully designed and arranged to enhance the main purpose of the house, which is to be relaxing for casual entertaining. “The owners are very cerebral people who love golf and good conversation; the house was meant for them to engage with their friends,” says Drewett, who designed the building to embrace its inhabitants despite its strong lines. “Modern architecture can resonate to many as harsh and cold, but this house is warm and elegant.”

The Bulthaup cabinetry and stove hood establish the kitchen’s clean lines. The island is topped in concrete fabricated by Buddy Rhodes Concrete Products; Jiun Ho counter stools, from Thomas Lavin, are upholstered in a Townsend Leather material. The floors are fumed, rift-cut European white oak by Exquisite Surfaces.



Above: The master bathroom was designed as a Zen-like space, which was visually embedded in nature and the topography of the home's site. Ann Sacks glass tile provides the serene backdrop for a Duravit tub with a Dornbracht filler, both from Clyde Hardware Co.

Left: In the master bedroom, a Christian Liaigre bed—upholstered in Holly Hunt leather—and a pair of Mattaliano swivel chairs and side table are all from John Brooks Incorporated. The Orestes Suarez floor lamp is from Thomas Lavin. A Marie Navarre artwork from Lisa Sette Gallery hangs above the bed and epitomizes the mood of the room with its ethereal imagery of birds in flight.