

# Western Interiors

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## AND DESIGN

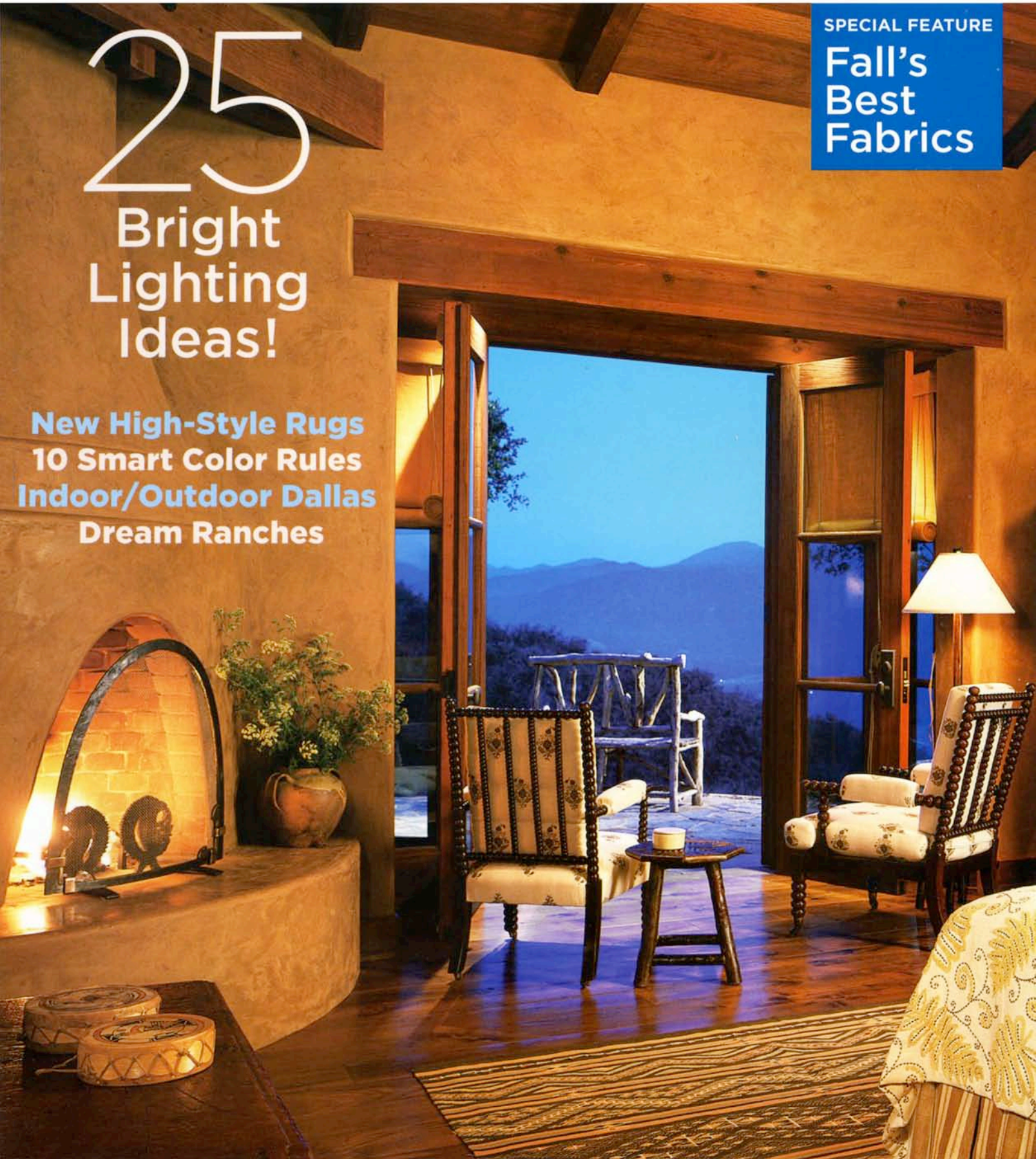
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photography by Dominique Vorillon / text by Nora Burba Trulsson



David Michael Miller's design  
for his own condominium in  
a landmark Scottsdale, Arizona,  
complex radiates spare beauty

# Moroccan Revival







**Before first-time visitors** get to see the inside of interior designer David Michael Miller's new Scottsdale digs, he will often lead them outdoors, down a sidewalk and through a breezeway. "This," he says, gesturing around him, "is why I bought here. It reminds me of a more gracious time in Arizona's history."

The spot is an old-fashioned rose garden, marked by a manicured lawn, a gurgling fountain and hundreds of fragrant blooms. It's at the heart of what was once the whitewashed winter compound of New York industrialist Donald Kellogg, who came to the desert surrounding Camelback Mountain to take some sun and wait out the nasty weather back home. Built in 1936, the residence was acquired several years later by George W. Borg of BorgWarner aviation fame, who added a private runway and, on one of the structures, a distinctive Moroccan-influenced onion dome that, according to legend, served as a beacon for Mrs. Borg and other incoming pilots. By the 1950s, the property was expanded into a resort called the Casa Blanca Inn. So it remained until 1982, when Phoenix architect George W. Christensen (1930-2004), known for his expertise in historic regional styles, spearheaded the inn's conversion into a complex of town houses.

Miller bought a two-bedroom condominium at Casa Blanca in 2003 and began renovating its interior so that it would better reflect the architecture. This wasn't the first time that Miller, who launched his own firm in 1989 and is known for sophisticated and meticulously edited residential interiors, had remodeled a living space for himself. A self-described "restless spirit and experimenter," Miller estimates he has done seven houses for himself, ranging from a Craftsman-

**previous pages:** Designer David Michael Miller remodeled the interiors of his Scottsdale, Arizona, condominium so that they better reflected the distinctive architecture. The archway in the guest bedroom (right) echoes the compound's Moroccan-influenced onion dome (left). A Chippendale-style armchair is paired with a custom writing desk, both from Rose Tarlow. **above:** "I wanted a relaxed quality to the space," says Miller. "I wasn't interested in color here." In the living room a Dennis & Leen sofa is coupled with two armchairs from Dessin Fournir. A Charles Fradin ottoman covered in a Rose Tarlow leather doubles as a low table, **opposite:** Miller designed the dining table and surrounded it with armchairs covered in Rogers & Goffigon fabric. A glass pendant from Paul Ferrante hangs above an antique wood staircase model.







**clockwise from top left:** Miller selected *Woman in Hat* (left) by Angela Ellsworth for the entry to the master bedroom, while a mixed-media work by Kathryn Dunlevie hangs in the hallway. For the dining terrace he replaced flagstone with reclaimed French tiles and chose a cast-concrete-and-metal table with Regency-style chairs. At the base of the stairway he topped an eighteenth-century pine dresser with terracotta planters. David Michael Miller. A collection of antique magnifying glasses sits on the master bedroom's dresser; a Lance Letscher collage hangs nearby. A resin twig chair is near an antique clay pot on the terrace off the living room.



"Using stainless-steel appliances would eat up space visually," notes Miller. "I used enamel jackets on the appliances to make them seem more passive." Custom cabinets, with leaded glass in the cupboard doors, and Mexican concrete tiles on the backsplash anchor the bright space. A Rohl farmhouse sink is set in the concrete countertop.

style bungalow to a modernist, Case Study-inspired apartment. For the Casa Blanca town house, the designer chose to channel the 1930s-adobe-meets-Moroccan spirit of the complex and to be true to Christensen's architectural vision, using traditional materials and detailing as well as a neutral color palette. "I just didn't want anything too contemporary for this space," he explains.

On the first floor of Miller's two-story, 1,750-square-foot town house are a living room, a dining alcove, a kitchen and two terraces. Upstairs there are two bedrooms and a balcony. The designer began his ten-month-long renovation by removing 1980s-vintage Saltillo tile flooring, oak-framed French doors and generic kitchen cabinetry. Throughout the residence, Miller installed pickled white oak flooring, done in a herringbone pattern. He chose steel-framed glass doors to match the existing old-fashioned crank casement windows and replaced modern metal air-conditioning registers with painted cream-colored punched-steel grilles.

Tearing out a coat closet near the front door, Miller made the void into a niche for art and framed it with a plaster surround that's shaped like the Casa Blanca's signature onion dome. He repeated the form for a doorway to the upstairs guest bedroom and bath. Architect Christensen's arched cutout at the bottom of the stairs was left untouched, as was the living room fireplace.

For the kitchen the designer installed painted wood cabinetry, done in a modified Shaker style and topped with concrete counters. "I wanted the kitchen to be nostalgic but not a literal historic re-creation." The appliance fronts are enamel, colored to match the cabinetry.

Miller furnished the interior with a collection of pieces that might have had a place at the





Casa Blanca during its heyday as a winter retreat. A deep sofa with a high back is in front of the living room's fireplace, along with a Louis XIV-style armchair and a traditional tufted leather ottoman used as a low table. The dining room's custom glazed and gessoed table is matched with substantial chairs that reference Italian design. Upstairs, the master suite's television armoire, while traditional in shape, has a desert-hued distressed surface.

Art and accessories were chosen for their look—and stories. In the guest bedroom, Miller displays a collection of shoe-cobbling forms and a series of handmade birdhouses. Above the daybed there's a framed grouping of hand-colored botanical engravings of foliage fossils. "I really didn't bring much with me from my previous place," says Miller. "I like to reinvent myself with each new environment."

While he redid the town house's interior, he also reshaped the exterior, working with Phoenix landscape architect Christy Ten Eyck on both terraces—one off the living room and one off the dining room. Ten Eyck and Miller changed the paving material to smooth reclaimed French roof tiles and planted surrounding soil with a monochromatic palette of aloe, agave and kalanchoe. On the dining-room terrace, Miller asked Ten Eyck to replace several overgrown ficus trees with a mature sculptural desert ironwood. "My neighbors loved me when I craned that tree over the garden wall," says Miller dryly.

Miller has settled into his new space, enjoying the haven it provides from his busy career. "I love the history and the charm here, the way it's quiet and how you can see Camelback Mountain from the balcony. Maybe I'll stay here for a while." +

above: "I wanted the master bedroom to be soothing and have a little bit of color," explains Miller. The Rogers & Goffigon fabric used for the draperies is echoed in the bed pillows. Antique shutters double as a headboard, opposite: An Asian garden stool rests near the tub in the master bath. The floor-mounted fixtures are from Kallista.

