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MODERN LOVE

A TOP INTERIOR DESIGNER RENOVATES HIS WARM MINIMALIST HOUSE ON A STUNNING PARADISE VALLEY HILLSIDE.

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Opposite: In the renovated 1980s Paradise Valley home of interior designer David Michael Miller, a naturally illuminated foyer offers ideal spaces to hang art, including early paintings by artist Angela Ellsworth. "The house was beautifully teed up for me, because it was originally built for collectors," the homeowner says.

Below: Miller aimed to reconnect the structure, tonally and materially, to its natural surroundings. The entryway, decorated with a Berman Rosetti Tansu cabinet and art by Mark Pomilio, was formerly an outdoor walkway. The Fleetwood glass door is from Sienna Custom Window and Door; the hardware by Elmes Door Hardware is from Clyde Hardware.



Scottsdale interior designer David Michael Miller first heard about the mid-1980s house, sited inconspicuously on a Paradise Valley hillside, through the grapevine. An industry friend urged him to drive out and take a look at it—"It was architecturally interesting," he was told—even if it might not turn out to be the right house for him.

"So I did," Miller says. And the views were stunning. "But it needed a lot of work," he recalls. "I didn't know if I was up for it. And I had never really thought of myself as a hillside person."

Even so, the interior designer couldn't stop thinking about the structure and its adjacent guesthouse. "I kept finding myself driving onto that street again and again," Miller recalls. During one of those times, he visited the house just as a massive desert rainstorm was making its

way over the hills. "It was so dramatic to be up there and see that view from that vantage point," he says, describing the moment that swayed him to purchase the property. "I think that's what did it."

Thus committed, Miller then had to get down to the far-less-romantic business of rehabilitating the home. "The original bones of the house were just so... *right*," he emphasizes. "Still, I knew going into it I wanted to take out all of the finishes, replace the glass system and play around with the floor plan."

But before he began the process, Miller wanted someone to come and see the place: Edward "Ned" Sawyer, the residence's original architect, who had worked for decades with famed modernist Al Beadle and still practices in the Phoenix area. "I wanted to understand what his thinking had been in designing the house so I



"The original architect, Ned Sawyer, had a minimalist international-style house in mind," Miller notes. "What's so compelling is how clean and restrained it is." In keeping with that ethos, the new owner decorated the living room with a streamlined A. Rudin sofa upholstered in Theo fabric from J.W. Harris Inc. and a Michael S. Smith Inc. armchair from John Brooks Incorporated. With the addition of trays, a Liaigre Galet ottoman, also from John Brooks Incorporated, becomes a cocktail table.

"The kitchen layout was substantially revised in the remodel," says Miller, who worked with builder Stephan Mackos and architect Susan Biegner on the overall renovation and Robert Moric, of Bulthaup Scottsdale, on the kitchen design. To maximize views of the city and the mountains, a solid wall of cabinetry was gutted and replaced with glazing. The range is Gaggenau.



didn't betray his intentions—or wander too far from them—without at least knowing why he did things the way he did them," Miller explains. Sawyer, who's well-known in the region for a brand of desert minimalism indebted to one of his chief inspirations, Louis Kahn, told Miller that "the original language of the house is very Kahn-like in that it's organized in 24-square-foot modules," which confer an essential harmonious logic on its layout and flow. "During the redesign, I tried to stick with that plan—at least as much as I could," Miller says.

The homeowner brought on builder Stephan Mackos and architect Susan Biegner, and soon everyone found themselves getting into the spirit of giving this unique house a fresh life through new finishes, treatments, features and

flows. Outside, Mackos replaced the north-facing wooden decks with stone, and Biegner designed an element the original owners had decided to forgo: a pool. Inside, the north wall of the kitchen had consisted almost entirely of cabinetry, but the mountain views demanded more. Now the wall is essentially all glass, and appliances and kitchen storage have been relocated to keep the space as clean, unbroken and unbothered as possible.

Elsewhere, Miller was able to preserve much of the rest of the layout, including the house's unifying element: the elegant concrete cinder blocks with integral color—original to its construction—that define its exterior and interior appearance in equal measure. "It's a locally made block from a company called Superlite," says Miller, who matched

100xBetter's RT stools pull up to a bar illuminated with lamps by Alison Berger for Holly Hunt purchased at John Brooks Incorporated. Visible through the glass of the atrium are a set of leather-upholstered Liaigre dining chairs from John Brooks Incorporated and a walnut-slab Cisco Home dining table and bench.



Associate designer Brian Weilberg converted Miller's sketches into formal design drawings for elements throughout the house, including the living room's wood-plank-clad fireplace. Superlite Block—which provided the original concrete blocks—fabricated identical blocks for repairs Pioneer Masonry made throughout the home. The room's rug is from Bellbridge in Benicia, California, while the striped pillow material is Ralph Lauren Home and the organic-form print is by Brenda Antin.

“THE COLOR OF THE CONCRETE BLOCKS WRAPS ITSELF AROUND YOU AND FEELS WARM, COZY AND COMFORTABLE.”

—DAVID MICHAEL MILLER



A bedroom's cantilevered "floating" shelves were designed by David Michael Miller Studio and built by Woodesign, which hollowed out plain-sliced fumed white oak to slide over steel supports. On them, Miller arranged his collection of birds and bronzes from his travels. The paintings of koi by David Kroll are from Lisa Sette Gallery.

Floating panels in the guesthouse bedroom hide insulation and provide another optimal place to hang art—in this case, paintings by Jake Fischer from the Bentley Gallery. A Blu Dot bed from Hive in Portland, Oregon, is flanked by a custom wall-mount headboard and nightstand designed by David Michael Miller Studio and fabricated by Rob Rubin of AK Studio.





and used it liberally throughout the renovation. “It’s such a central part of the fabric of the original house that I knew it had to be a central part of what the house would become.”

The blocks’ taupe-and-gray tones drove Miller’s other palette decisions, such as the living room’s gray sofa and bentwood armchair with striped russet cushion. “The predictable route to furnishing a house in this minimalist style is to aim for modern classics, like black leather and polished silver and chrome,” he says. “But I wanted something warmer, softer, more organic and more rich materially.” His approach has resulted in decor that perfectly complements the enveloping brick walls. “The color wraps itself around you and feels warm, cozy and comfortable,” the interior designer says. “Its coloration, relative to the

hillside and the natural rock terrain, means it melts into the landscape beautifully.” As a result, Miller says, “you can drive by this house and almost miss it”—which is very much the idea. “It isn’t pretending to be one thing on the outside and another thing on the inside.”

Where other desert designers may have fallen back on tried-and-true regional tropes to broadcast the idea of the Southwest, Miller believes he’s found a better way. “This home’s sense of place comes from its location; it has nothing to do with the style of the house, per se,” he explains. “All of that glass presents the desert and the distant views so beautifully that the sense of place is literally all around you. It doesn’t need to be expressed stylistically beyond that.” ■

A photograph of a saguaro by Mark Klett from the Lisa Sette Gallery hangs over a walnut-and-black-lacquer credenza from Design Within Reach in the living room of the guesthouse. The LeavittWeaver floor lamp is from Design Alliance LA in Los Angeles, the upholstered chair is Dessin-Fournir, and the rattan ottomans are by Brenda Antin. The B&B Italia cocktail table is from Lumature.

The north wall of the master bathroom was torn down and replaced with floor-to-ceiling glass to capitalize on natural sunlight and evoke an open-air setting. The Duravit tub and Vola faucets are all from Clyde Hardware.

