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# *New Horizons*

In Scottsdale, a desert dwelling distills midcentury modern sensibilities from the landscape.

WRITTEN BY MONIQUE MCINTOSH | PHOTOGRAPHY BY COREY GAFFER

**Architecture:** Charles R. Stinson, Charles R. Stinson Architecture + Design **Interior Design:** David Michael Miller, David Michael Miller Associates  
**Home Builder:** Jim and Chris Manship, Manship Builders **Landscape Architecture:** Leslie Fahringer, American Desert Landscape

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here's something about desert living that feels innately suited to midcentury modern design. The style's signature broad expanses of glass and swaths of natural stone and wood embrace the landscape in all its arid beauty. One Minneapolis-based couple

wanted this seamless marriage of architecture and place for their vacation retreat in Scottsdale—the city itself a cradle for visionaries like Frank Lloyd Wright.

To shape their own oasis, they recruited architect Charles R. Stinson and designer David Michael Miller. Honoring the couple's love of the midcentury modern perspective, together they composed a home that “was definitely contemporary,” Miller says, but with “echoes of that aesthetic through the house.”

The legacy of this design movement feels most present in the abode's integration into the site. Located at the base of Pinnacle Peak, the hillside lot is flanked by golden granite boulders and unfolding views of the city below. Stinson preserved these vistas by carving a serpentine driveway that curves upward to the elevated main structure, creating “this wonderful balance of being really connected to the site, but also soaring above the landscape,” the architect explains.

On the ground, general contractors Jim and Chris Manship underscored the home's communion with nature by blending it into the existing topography. They constructed rock outcroppings by mixing imported stone with salvaged boulders, and carefully replanted the existing 100-year-old ironwood trees. Landscape designer Leslie Fahringer completed the scene with a plethora of native plantings like yucca rostrata, agave and golden barrel cactus. The result “creates the effect of the desert coming right up to your back door,” notes Jim.

True to what Stinson refers to as midcentury modern's “methodology of composition,” the home itself is all right angles. The architect engineered hidden structural supports to make room for “horizontal planes of glass that define the view,” he explains. This permeable connection to nature owes much to the desert modernist tenet of “opening up the interior to the outside, so there's natural light coming into each space,” he adds. The intense desert radiance, however, must be focused, so the architect diffused the exposure with a cantilevered roofline that shades the interior from the abundant

sunlight. In turn, sight lines become “so much more panoramic,” he notes, “because you're cutting away a bunch of the sky.”

For the interiors, Miller channeled Wright's affinity for “a quiet honesty in materials.” This faithful approach to finishes is tangible throughout, from the exterior limestone walls that seamlessly slip inside to the plethora of linen, wool and cotton upholstery.

In particular, wood in all its natural grains and tones takes center stage. See the wire-brushed Douglas fir ceilings, the blond-hued rift-cut white oak floors and the plain-sliced walnut millwork. The warm material also harmonizes custom built-in furnishings with the surrounding architecture, like the primary bedroom's integrated platform bed and nightstands, and the home office's floating bookcases. Creating functional pieces that mesh into the home's structure felt vital to Miller, as “we always want the interiors to become part of the building and not feel foreign to the space,” he explains.

With this in mind, every interior element emphasized the same “strong horizontal line of Stinson's design,” Miller says. In the kitchen, for example, the team decided to forgo typical upper cabinets to maintain the clear views of the rear boulder garden, “so you're seeing these beautiful natural forms instead of big chunks of kitchen,” adds Stinson. Furniture is low-profile, from the living room's sectional to the entry's rectilinear credenza.

Color in general remains neutral. The key exceptions belong to pieces inspired by iconic midcentury modern shapes, like the sunshine yellow dining chairs. And of course from the homeowners' contemporary Western paintings by artists like Duke Beardsley, Thom Ross and Arizona's own Ed Mell, the latter known for his breathtaking rendering of the Sonoran Desert. The couple collected each piece over time, long before their dream of a modern desert escape became concrete. “They had such an organic, palpable attraction and excitement for this work that made an impression on us early on,” Miller notes.

One of Mell's paintings crowns the living room's hearth, a geometric, neon-tinged echo of the landscape visible just beyond the sliding glass doors. Merging modern architecture and art, this moment is a palpable reminder of the debt both owe to the desert, and how generations past and present continue to pull newfound inspiration from its ancient grandeur. ■



In the entry of this desert oasis by architect Charles R. Stinson and designer David Michael Miller, the exterior's sawn-cut limestone veneer from Southwest Stone & Brick runs inside. Atop the rosewood-and-polished-lacquer Troscan console is an Alexander Lamont lamp.

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—DAVID MICHAEL MILLER

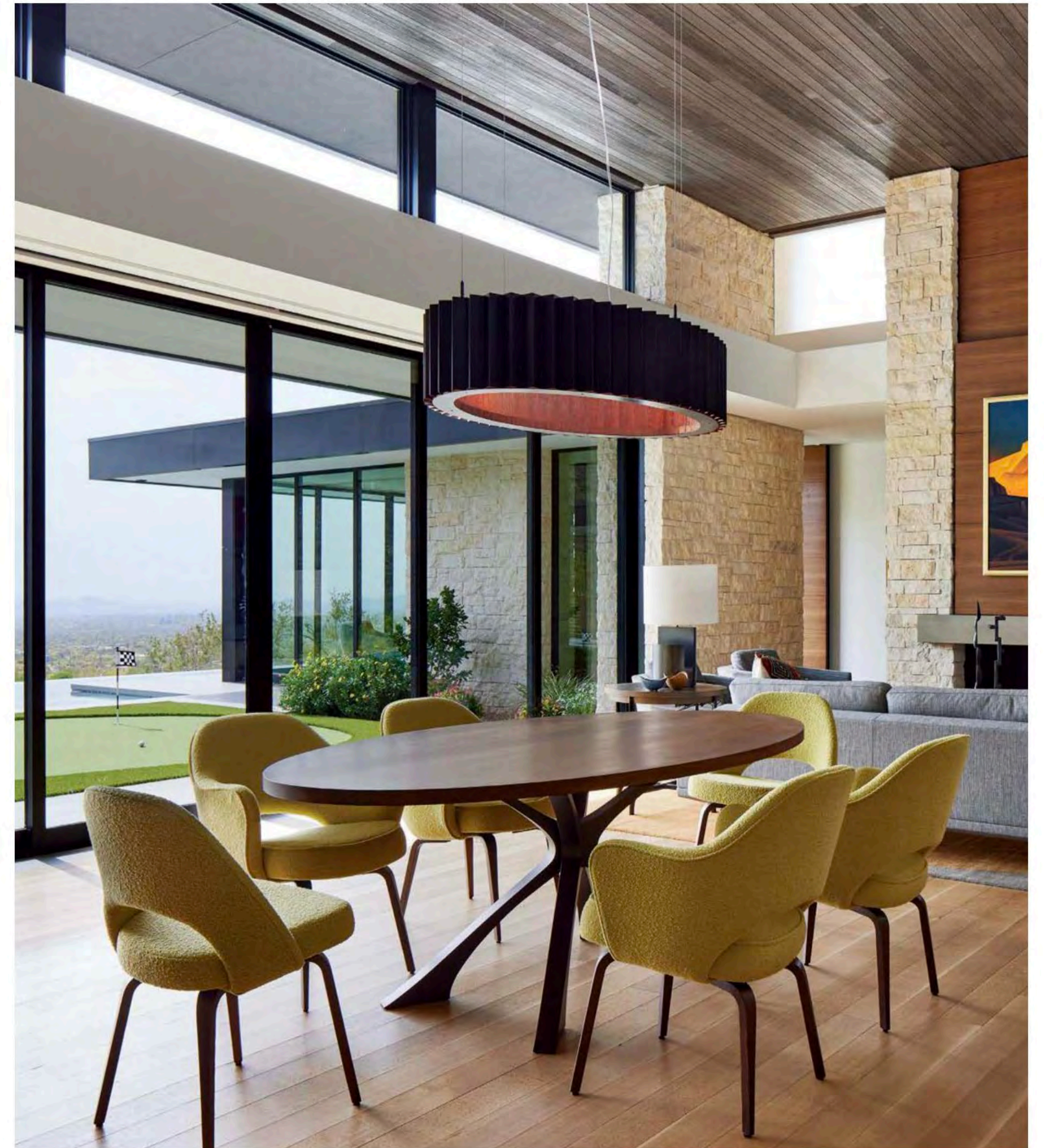


Surrounding a Joseph Jeup cocktail table, a Holly Hunt custom Playa sectional and Jett swivel lounge chairs carve out inviting seating by the fireplace in the living room. Above the hearth hangs a prismatic Ed Mell landscape painting.



**Above:** Overlooking the desert garden, the kitchen exudes modular efficiency with its custom satin-lacquer cabinets and island, the latter encased by Calacatta Belgia marble from Arizona Tile. The slim profile of the Wolf Cooktop Island Hood complements the sleek space.

**Opposite:** The dining area channels the home's midcentury modern sensibilities with pieces inspired by the era. See the Saarinen Executive side chairs from Design Within Reach, surrounding a walnut-and-bronze Tom Faulkner dining table. Above hangs a custom McEwen Lighting Studio pendant.





Artwork by Duke Beardsley (left), Thom Ross (center) and Robert McCauley (right) surround the home office, complete with built-in shelving lined in a Phillip Jeffries horsehair-inspired wallcovering. A Bodil Kjær writing desk and Saarinen Executive side chair anchor the space.



**Above:** Through the walls of glass, the stunning desert landscape surrounds a serene bathroom suite. A Charism freestanding air jet bathtub from BainUltra outfitted with a floor-mounted Dornbracht tub filler provides a picturesque vantage point to enjoy the scenery.

**Left:** Thanks to the platform bed designed by Miller and built by Allaire, Inc., as well as the classic Vladimir Kagan swivel chairs, the primary bedroom is grounded in midcentury modern style. Underfoot is a Christopher Farr wool-and-silk rug.