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into the WILD

SET IN THE FOOTHILLS OF THE SANTA CATALINA MOUNTAINS, A STRIKING MODERN HOUSE IS AT ONE WITH ITS DESERT LANDSCAPE.

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For a couple's Arizona retreat, architect Ron Robinette designed a modern steel-framed abode on a site sculpted into the Santa Catalina Mountains. A floating ramada roof inset with vertical-grain fir shields both indoor and outdoor areas from the desert sun.



The beauty and grandeur of the American West has long been the backdrop to countless ambitious engineering feats, like the Hoover Dam and the breathtaking hiking trails carved into the earth by the Work Projects Administration in the 1930s. And today, the formidable, rocky terrain continues to inspire modern projects, including the contemporary abode architect Ron Robinette designed and built on 75 acres bordering the Sabino Canyon Recreation Area in the foothills of the Santa Catalina Mountains. "Our goal was for this house to blend in with the desert," says Robinette, who, for privacy, sited the house in a saddle between two large land peninsulas.

Concealed from view despite its lofty perch, the one-level home clad in stucco and porcelain tile certainly blends into the earthy mix of browns and reds of the surrounding

rocks. Cantilevered "eyebrows" over the windows softly filter the light during the summer months, when the sun is higher, while allowing it to penetrate far into the home during the winter. Likewise, a towering 16-foot steel ramada with a wood lattice shades the house and makes use of the desert breeze. "The structure is a giant umbrella," Robinette explains. "It also captures the wind going through the canyon and brings it into the house."

The residence, which includes a guesthouse in a similar style, is the latest in a long line of projects the owners—entrepreneurs who recently sold their technology company—have taken on over the years, and this is their most ambitious one yet. "People come up and ask how we found this lot, and the answer is that we created it," the wife says, "making it look like the house was just airdropped into its place."

The arrival area, which features a long covered walkway, showcases the materials Robinette chose for the exterior: stucco, glass, porcelain tile and split-face stone. Flanking the path are specimen cacti arranged by landscape designer John Stropko, who also ensured the surrounding desert appeared untouched.

Interior designer Lynn Boutross carried the contemporary feel of the architecture to the interiors. In the great room, a wall sculpture by Christian Burchard is illuminated by the skylight over the fireplace, which is clad with porcelain tile from Artistic Tile in Chicago.



Above: To add texture, color and pattern to the great room's neutral palette, Boutross selected a rug by Tufenkian Carpets from David E. Adler Inc. Fine Rugs. A Hudson Furniture wall sconce from David Sutherland in Chicago plays off the lines of the sculptural metal fireplace insert by Rudy Hodgers. The patio beyond can be accessed through multi-slide doors from Vitrocsa in Culver City, California.

Left: The great room's comfortable seating arrangement includes a Coraggio sofa covered in Perennials fabric, a pair of lounge chairs by A. Rudin and a cocktail table also by Coraggio. The state-of-the-art project includes a home automation system from Lutron by David Brown.

In the kitchen of the main residence, walnut Cottonwood cabinets from Cooper Pacific Kitchens in West Hollywood, California, add warmth while complementing the tongue-in-groove ceiling. The Angulo suspension light by McEwen Lighting Studio is from Thomas Lavin in West Hollywood, California.



Floor-to-ceiling windows bring views and light to the guesthouse dining area, outfitted with a teak-and-zinc table and matching chairs by Henry Hall Designs. Boutross chose the Black Cat pendant by Holly Hunt to match the dark hues in the furnishings.

Near the fireplace on the rear patio of the main residence, a set of Tosca lounge chairs from Janus et Cie in Chicago ensure the outdoor living area is as stylish and comfortable as the interior. A wood ceiling from Tom White Carpentry continues into the house, reinforcing the link between inside and out.



Before construction could commence, landscape designer John Stropko had to carve a flat building site out of the hillside. “The beautiful setting you see today was created by removing up to 30 feet of solid rock,” he says. Yet despite shifting the terrain, he took careful steps to make the site appear as if it had never been touched. To blend the freshly cut rocks with the reddish undisturbed ones, Stropko carefully stained the harsh white surfaces, even duplicating the veining and cracks on parts of the granite to match its surroundings. Mature trees, transplanted giant saguaros and camouflaged retaining walls veneered with excavated rubble complete the illusion of a natural environment. “The extraordinary thing here is that anyone who visits the home would have no idea the site was originally a hillside,” Stropko says. “It’s a magical place.”

Christening him the “land whisperer,” Chicago interior designer Lynn Boutross was inspired by Stropko’s exterior work for the interiors. “I used his knowledge of Arizona and the Southwest to select materials that would look good in the harsh desert sunlight,” she says. Most of the year, the rock reflects the sun’s red tones into the house. During the summer monsoons, however, the entire valley blooms, casting a greenish hue into the interior. To make the home feel part of the land, as requested by the wife, Boutross selected travertine flooring with a range of browns and silvery grays, a neutral base that complements the natural exterior palette.

In the great room, a comfortable sofa and a pair of mohair-covered lounge chairs create a cozy place for conversation, while custom walnut kitchen cabinetry

The kitchen of the main residence boasts a quartz backsplash from Granite Specialists with a pass-through window that opens to the pantry. The Cottonwood cabinetry is from Cooper Pacific Kitchens; the counter stools are by A. Rudin.



Stropko, who landscaped the grounds with low-water plants, designed concrete walkways with irregular borders that meander from the patio through the property. Guided by game trails that already existed in the foothills, he carved out new hiking loops, one of which he mapped using a drone.



and a tongue-in-groove ceiling add extra warmth. Like the one that anchors the outdoor living area, the massive fireplace surround extends through the roofline and includes a concealed skylight that allows light to wash down. "Penetrating the roof makes it feel lightweight," Robinette says, "like it's hovering over us."

Throughout the house, natural light sets off the many metallic accents Boutross incorporated. "Some of the metals are raw and super textured, while some are smooth and polished," she says. "I like that interplay." The thread in the drapery has a metallic sheen, while

the shagreen leather panels that clad the floating feature wall in the master bedroom have a subtle gleam.

True to the goal, the contemporary residence perfectly complements its desert surroundings—as well as its owners, who can be found hiking with their white golden retrievers on the newly created trails or relaxing on one of the home's many patios. "You can see almost all the way to the mountains in Mexico," the wife says. "This project stretched all of our abilities as far as anything could stretch them, but it turned out so well. This is the perfect house for us." ■

Opposite: In the master bathroom, valley views are seen from a window backing an Ironies make-up vanity with a silver-leaf frame by Holly Hunt, positioned with a Hellman-Chang white-lacquered chair from Bright Chair in Chicago. The satin-nickel-and-white-glass pendants are also by Holly Hunt.

Below: A floating wall in the master bedroom acts as a backdrop for an Altura Furniture upholstered headboard. The console table by Harris Rubin is from the deAurora Showroom in Chicago, and the sculptural metal-and-fabric chandelier by Phoenix Day is from Thomas Lavin.

