

Superstition Mountain Home

Written by Story by David M. Brown

The result of years of meticulous planning and coordination, this 6,600-sq.-ft. single-level realizes Mel and Peg Babcock's retirement dreams for a sophisticated Spanish farmhouse-theme hacienda. Backed by the chiseled Superstition Mountains, where legend says German émigré Jacob Waltz once protected a fabulous gold mine, their Western desert refuge abuts the sixth fairway of the Prospector golf course at the 927-acre gated community in Gold Canyon.



"Superstition Mountain Golf and Country Club offers a relaxed and active lifestyle with a very active social network," says Peg, who like Mel, is a native of Angola, Ind., in the northern part of the state. "Our home offers us the best of what this community has to offer. We have spectacular mountain views, large outdoor entertaining areas where we can enjoy the wonderful climate and an interior that invites people to gather around for good food and good conversation."

The Babcocks began meticulously planning their three-bedroom, six-bath home in February 2005 with Mesa-based Encore Design Group, whose affiliated Landmark Building Construction began work in May 2006 and delivered it in November 2007. Carol Buto Designs of Scottsdale completed the texturally rich Spanish Colonial/Old World interior a year later. "Our goal was a home that was comfortable and inviting," explains Mel, a retired nuclear-weapons engineer. "We also wanted to create a home that was well laid out for entertaining local and out-of-town guests." The couple worked most of their adult lives in Ohio—27 years in Dayton and 10 in Cleveland—before moving to Superstition Mountain.

Looking out over their pool and spa across the golf course and into the Superstitions, their home, on just less than an acre, has more than 11,000 square feet under roof, including a four-car garage and a large rear-yard entertaining area they designed to enjoy the winter months you can't in Cleveland. Off the family room, the lifestyle patio has a fireplace and ceiling heaters for winter use, fans for the summer and a kitchen-rivaling barbecue ensemble. "One of our favorite moments was sitting outside on the patio on Christmas morning with our family who had just left a snowstorm in Indiana," says Peg, who prefers the sun to snowflakes on the Superstition foothills. So, too, at night, she and Mel sit there or on the rooftop observation deck and watch the mountains, as the desert sky burns red at sunset. Often, they stay for the stars and city lights.



In the morning, they enjoy coffee in the Spanish-inspired front courtyard, entered through French doors from their elegant dining room. Outside, they can listen to the fountain and watch roadrunners, finches, cactus wrens, quail and hovering red-tailed hawks. For the remainder of the day, they can golf or visit the community's mesa-propped Tuscan-style clubhouse with its many amenities. Or, they remain at home in any number of uniquely configured spaces. The home appears, in the most sophisticated manner, as if areas have been added over the years, offering rusticity, instant aging, privacy and a sense of passage from one to another. They often, for instance, retreat to the study, which doubles as a guest bedroom with a sleep sofa, or the adjacent his-and-hers home offices and the library. "We each have our own 'space' in our offices, but we meet in the library to chat or watch a little TV," Peg says.

Frequent meetings, in fact, keyed the success of their home. The Babcocks collaborated with the design/build team to achieve their dream home as well as meet the community's architectural guidelines. They even first walked the lot with Encore's Jason Lofgreen to determine optimum siting, so that views of the Superstitions would be achievable from as many rooms as possible. "We had fairly defined ideas of what we wanted from a design viewpoint," Mel says. They selected, for example, the plumbing and lighting fixtures and the artwork, which they had acquired during their travels, including a Guy Buffet original watercolor in the dining room foyer. "However, coming from the Midwest, we were unfamiliar with some of the finishing details for this home style."

Fellow Ohioan, Carol Buto, ASID, helped with the overall design as well as many details like tile design, paint finishes, countertop-edge treatments, window treatments, furnishings, fireplace options and fabrics. "They were very hands-on and had definite ideas as to what they wanted, yet allowed me to utilize my design expertise and guide them along the way," Buto recalls. "The Babcocks were wonderful to work with, and there was a tremendous amount of synergy from everyone," adds Eric Choules, Landmark's principal. "Fortunately, that is what makes a project like this so wonderful."

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To achieve their vision for a highly crafted home with well-meshed stylistic influences, the design team specified a rich palette of materials, including rough-sawn timbers, saltillo tiles, noce stone, tumbled travertine, cantera, mortar-washed stone and sand-cast roof tile. To complement these, and the desert and mountain colors, Buto provided a color palette of golds, rusts, browns and neutrals.



Four exposed Douglas fir beams support the ceiling of the formal living room—Buto's favorite space, with its expansive view window of the Superstitions. Centering the room is a carved cantera stone fireplace flanked by built-in shelves designed by Buto. To the shelf faces, she applied intricate moldings. On the floor are handmade Mexican saltillo tiles inset with custom-designed Mexican ceramic accent tiles from Handcrafted Tile in Phoenix. The saltillo also appears on the rear patio. In the family room and kitchen, the saltillo is banded into large squares juxtaposed with oak.

The home also incorporates hand-painted medallions set with the saltillo in numerous rooms. These replicate Malibu tiles produced in the 1930's and 40's. In addition, herringbone patterns using saltillo provide a transition from room to room. For warmth and further contrast, the master bedroom is carpeted, and the study, living and great rooms all have Oriental rugs selected by Buto. Similarly, in the kitchen, between the sink and stove, is a long runner.

Buto furthered this color and materials richness in the wall finishes, window treatments and furniture. The walls of the major rooms have faux finishes in varying colors, hue and depth, like russet in the study, antiqued copper on Venetian plaster in the powder room and a soft gold in the living and great rooms and the kitchen. To provide sun protection and privacy, Buto called for woven grass shades from Asia in the kitchen, and, in the dining room, layered draperies comprising stenciled silk-stripe stationary panels, raw silk-look traverse draperies and a sheer to soften the glare while affording views to the courtyard.

In the great room, in particular, Buto displays her talent for interweaving furnishings, colors and textures. A handmade sofa in chenille holds custom pillows. The hand-carved console is from Peru, the coffee table carries a slate inset top and built-in cabinetry conceals a large-screen television. A woven Oriental rug in brown and cream offsets the colors of the upholstery.

One of the Babcocks' favorite areas, the adjacent kitchen, reveals equally rich finishes and furnishings. The large center island with alder wood cabinetry features a popcorn-colored glaze, a honed granite countertop and swivel stools. Granite countertops mimic the island countertop. A coffee bar offers one kind of relaxation, while the nearby wet bar another. "The kitchen and great room afford Mel and Peg a large integrated space to entertain large groups or have a casual meal with family and friends in the nook adjacent to both rooms," Buto says. "The traffic flow allows them easy access to the wet bar and French doors to the outside patio."

She adds: "For a successful project, egos have to be set aside, and flexibility steps in. In the end, it is the homeowners' residence. We worked together from the ground up, down to the last pillow trim. With our Ohio/Indiana roots, we've remained friends—even after completion."