

West Side (Two)-Story

Written by Story by David M. Brown

Hillside Glendale homes are rare. Unique among these is this two-story contemporary built for a young family around a traditional Southwestern courtyard carved from granite.

Nick Tsontakis, AIA, principal of Scottsdale's Nick Tsontakis Architecture & Interiors, designed this 8,449-livable-sq.-ft. home for a professional couple with three boys. The five-bedroom home in the West Valley Arrowhead area includes a four-car garage and workroom, an attached casita with another bedroom and a 268-sq.-ft. air-conditioned pool ramada.

The central design focus: the children. "The main thing that my clients asked for was a flat sheltered area at the rear where their boys can play and not be on the front street," says Tsontakis, who has been designing innovative homes Valleywide for more than a decade. "They also wanted the pool a higher level away from the children."

A private courtyard surrounded by living and entertaining spaces was the ideal solution: The children play; mom and dad monitor behind large windows. However, a mountain abutting city-preserve land ascends at the back of the home. This required excavation for the courtyard and casita areas as well as retaining walls for the pool and spa, which rest against the upper slope. In addition, the homeowner's association for the gated community highly scrutinized Tsontakis's innovative plan for deviations from the H.O.A.'s covenants, conditions and restrictions—requiring everyone's patience and perseverance.

In addition to topographical and review challenges, there were human hurdles as well. Another architect considered what the couple wanted and what Tsontakis wanted to create for them, and concluded the project wouldn't work on the site—the excavation would be too expensive. Concerned friends echoed the exorbitant cost estimates.

Determined, Tsontakis asked the couple to speak with Tom Derryberry of Scottsdale's Ultimo Custom Homes; he and his crew finished the painstaking six-month excavation at a cost significantly lower than others. Ultimo filled in the cavity under the pool and created the flat courtyard space from the mountain. The stone excavated from that site now clads the steel-reinforced retaining walls against which a waterfall splashes some 20 feet from the pool level above.

Etched into the hillside, Tsontakis's design captures views from every room and level. To the east and west shine the lights of the booming West Valley. Moonlit preserve views are to the north and south. And mom and dad have great views of the boys playing soccer and riding their bikes in the courtyard, which wraps around to the front driveway.

Tsontakis's contemporary look protects against datedness. Balancing clean lines with curves, the home reaches out to the mountain site with covered patios downstairs and up. To provide day lighting and also protect against excessive heat gain, large butt-glazed window walls upstairs and downstairs preserve the views but protect the windows.

Further tying the home to the hillside, Tsontakis clad the front and side walls with ancient stone concrete tile and used stacked stone around the front entry walls. For highlighting, his signature two-story columns carry diamond-shape horizontal plates; the roof and beam cladding is copper. Lightening the massing, he placed transparent glass railings on the upper covered balconies, which face the city-light views.

"The children love it," says the husband, a doctor at one of the local hospitals. "They always want to have their friends over because now they have enough space to run around." A basketball court on the driveway also keeps the group occupied.

This is a kid-friendly house inside, too. On the second floor, adjacent to the two bedrooms the three boys now share, is the play area. In this room, the youngest also takes piano lessons. Because the home is large, there's a lot of room (and rooms) for activities. In fact, it's the hands-down favorite among the kids' friends for hide-and-seek; and once a year, on their birthdays, the celebrant gets to ride the elevator, which opens up to a bridge over the two-story dining room. "The children fill up the home and make it feel warm and cozy," mom says.

Despite its size, practicality, warmth and comfort for family and friends of all ages guided the home's visioning. "Between our careers and raising our boys, we lead hectic and busy lives, so we wanted our home to be our refuge and source of relaxation," the husband says. "We built the home with the premise that this is our 'final' home in which we would raise our boys, so [we] tried to think long-term to accommodate both their needs and ours."

They also considered their parents, who might need to move in with them: Hence the guest house, which, although attached to the home, is still on the preserve end of the courtyard, offering privacy.

For everyday living, the family wanted a split-level great room with a sturdy sofa able to withstand the antics of young boys, a home theater, a study, a kitchen with a built-in breakfast area with dinette seating, a laundry area and an auxiliary butler's kitchen. The latter kitchen is great for entertaining and the special requirements for heavy-duty specialty cooking, as the family enjoys preparing ethnic foods from India and elsewhere. It's equipped with warming ovens and a wine refrigerator for large groups.

Also for entertaining, the formal living and dining rooms provide ample space for the adults to isolate themselves yet still monitor the children. A dual fireplace between the family and formal dining room makes these rooms particularly inviting in winter. Just outside, the adults can break out to two small covered courtyard patios, which rest under the two-story courtyard overhang. They can also enjoy a water feature and fire pit.

"This home has the space, amenities and comfort to allow us to enjoy quality family time," the husband says. "It's wonderful and gratifying to be able to comfortably accommodate our family and friends that visit us often from out of town. He adds: "As a family, it's hard for us to go to the movies, so we all love snuggling up together in our home theater to watch a good movie, football game or show." In the summer, the family is up on the mountain: "We love hanging out with the kids at the pool, grilling and relaxing," he says.

On the upper level are the four bedrooms, two guest rooms (one with a covered balcony), the children's family room, a game room, an exercise

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area and a bar. "The kids love having their own wing where they hang out with their friends or each other," mom says. "When they're hungry, they come running down to the kitchen."

The large master bedroom features a raised sitting room and gas fireplace behind the bed, his and hers walk-ins, a luxurious bath and laundry area, and a private covered balcony. "That's my place," says the husband, referring to the sitting area. "I can relax there before sleep, warm up, wind down and watch some television."

The second-floor game room also accesses a walk deck over the garages; this leads to the negative-edge pool deck area, the adjacent putting green and a pool house. Access stairs from this also connect conveniently to the courtyard below. This area provides expansive break-out space for large parties. From this level, there's a ladder to the top level—which dad has plans for. "When the boys are older, I see kites flying up there—or telescopes looking at the stars."

Architect: Nick Tsontakis, AIA, Tsontakis Architecture & Interiors; 480.874.2288.

Builder: Tom Derryberry, Ultimo Custom Homes; 480.797.9422.

Total Square Footage: 8,449 (livable).