

## First Place on the Second Green in Fountain Hills, Arizona

Written by Written by David M. Brown

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**George and Dorothy Critchley and their four-legged companion, Wallace, have easily bettered par with their Fountain Hills home.**



Wallace is the couple's white Scottish terrier. He doesn't golf but likes to tee off at other dogs as their owners walk them along the sidewalks abutting the Critchleys' home over the second green at Eagle Mountain Golf Club. "She's named for the great Scottish warrior—you know, Braveheart, from the movie," Dorothy says.

This is a territory, and a lifestyle, very worth protecting. The Critchleys' two-level 4,284-sq.-ft. home is etched into a half-acre lot of one of the foothills that characterize the golf club community. East of Scottsdale, Fountain Hills offers residents a bedroom-community option with its undulating desert topography set against nearby Four Peaks and the distant Mazatzal Mountains.

The Critchleys moved into the three-bedroom home three years ago, following two and a half years of design by architect Nick Tsontakis, AIA, and construction by Tom Derryberry's Scottsdale-based Ultimo Custom Homes. This is the couple's ninth home, and, as with most of the others, this was built with a focus on innovation and trends-setting.

A former owner of a company serving the hydro-electric dam industry, George has worked in California, Washington and Wyoming as well as in Australia, Brazil and China and in Canada on Vancouver Island. Five years ago, the couple moved to the Valley to semi-retire. Dorothy didn't like the Vancouver cold. "We saw Scottsdale on television, so I suggested we try here," George recalls. "So we got a realtor and started looking." They found a town home just across the Eagle Mountain golf course and bought it. Then, George, always the builder, got the building urge again: "I looked at this lot for a while and knew it was just right, so we bought it."

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They found Tsontakis through a brochure they noticed at nearby Mayo Clinic Scottsdale. "This is what I like, I told Dorothy," George recalls.

Within a short time, the Scottsdale architect had devised a custom plan that fit the lot, their taste and their budget. "We didn't want the garages to be prominent, and we didn't want Tuscan," George says. "We wanted comfortable and contemporary—and Nick got it just right."

The Critchley home features a main level including a den, which serves as their much-used television room; a great room with radiused window walls that look beyond the lap pool into the golf course; and a master bedroom abutting an exercise room that Dorothy has brushstroked into an artist's studio. Both she, and their daughter, Whitney, are artists. (The latter is an art director in New York.) The Critchleys' home proudly celebrates both women's work throughout in the rooms and corridors, which are finished in neutral colors for that purpose. The artistic theme begins at the foyer with a "Blue Nude" pattern that has been cut into the polished porcelain tiles, which appear throughout the home.

With two large bedroom suites connected by a sitting room, the 781-sq.-ft. lower level sits below the pool and required extensive excavation into the hillside; both rooms open to quiet patios across from a small putting area with artificial grass. The green for the golf course is about 50 yards away, just far enough on the other side of a sloping desert common area to maintain privacy. True Scots both, they are golfers—one reason they chose Eagle Mountain and this lot.

A large stairway leads down from the main level, which is one of the many features George and Dorothy asked Tsontakis to incorporate into the design. "I really like the wide stairway," George says. "Keeping it narrow, we could have gained a little more room in one of the guest bedrooms, but I like this. How many places do you see with those narrow, cramped corridors?" The wide stairwell and the two-level configuration mesh perfectly with the Critchleys' changing lifestyle, explains the architect, whose Tsontakis Architecture & Interiors offices are in North Scottsdale. "They live on the upper level with the views and garage access, and the lower level is for guests and family," he says.

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The Critchleys have established many relationships through their business travels and enjoy entertaining, but the lower level was specifically designed for their expanding family. Their son, Roman, and his wife, Anna, both computer professionals, have recently had a son, Malcolm. They live in Reno but enjoy coming out of the hills to spend time in the Valley. The lower level provides an almost casita-like privacy for the young family and reaffirms that pleasing separation between parenting and grandparenting that only grandparents know.

The Critchleys have always gone the road less traveled—with their life and their homes. They've known each other since childhood in Glasgow: In 1962, George asked her to marry him: "Will you go with me to Australia?" he asked me," Dorothy recalls. They were married in Lancastershire in England, where she had moved to live with her brother.

The first eight years of their lives were in Perth where they built an ultramodern home that annoyed some and inspired others. Moving to California, they lived in various homes during the next 26 years; they lost a San Bernardino home to a forest fire 15 years ago. On Vancouver Island, they built a castle-inspired home in part from stones salvaged from an old museum in nearby Victoria.

Here in Scottsdale, they've chosen the crisp simplicity of Tsontakis' design: "They like contemporary style, with openness and views and well-proportioned and unique geometric spaces," he says. In addition to the emphasis on glass and light, the architect has also incorporated many signature details like tubular "Tsontakis columns" on the rear façade and stepped-back ceilings in the foyer and great room. "They are both very simple people and they have exquisite taste," Tsontakis adds.

Their crisp kitchen illustrates this discrimination and their contemporary bent. They've purchased the best appliances: An Asko dishwasher, a Franke sink, a Wolf range and a Sub-Zero refrigerator. Fleetwood dual-pane gas-filled storefront windows here and throughout the home ensure comfort even in the summer months; Fountain Hills is a little cooler than most parts of the Valley as well.

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The countertops are custom textured glass by Thinkglass. They are triple-laminated with the serving counter carrying a colorful signed design by an artist that rests inside the laminates. "I still don't know how they did it," George says. He, in fact, designed the solid aluminum bases that hold the weight of the glass. He also used his construction experience to design the rail separating the pool from the drop to the golf-course level. Cabinetry in the kitchen is custom Poggenpohl with zebrawood laminates. They added white IKEA cabinets in the adjacent laundry room to ensure that their, and Wallace's, belongings are kept in the same clean contemporary space.

The Critchley home suits all of its residents— the hydro-dam builder, the artist and the security patrol recompensed with doggie bones. "Everything is where it should be," Dorothy says. "It just feels good."



**Architect:** Tsontakis Architecture & Interiors

**Builder:** Ultimo Custom Homes