

Design Behind Historic Mesa Home

Written by Written by David M. Brown

Location, Location, Citrus: Janis and Charles Breed have restated the truism with their Mesa home.



The Breeds' 5,571-sq.-ft. home, including an attached casita, complements the historic citrus fields in Spyglass Estates, a built-out community of The Groves in Northeast Mesa.

"We wanted a spacious, functional home that could be used for social gatherings for family and friends, as well as having a beautiful home to enjoy in private," Janis says. To accomplish this, they tabbed Nick Tsontakis, AIA, a Scottsdale architect who for the past 15 years has been eliciting residential "wows" from Valley homeowners.

Tsontakis designed a five-bathroom, three-bedroom home, including the casita. A hefty game room, large enough for an 8-foot pool table, can also serve as a bedroom. "We had no major design challenges, because the lot was flat with plenty of space," says Tsontakis, who calls the style Contemporary Santa Barbara. The acre-plus lot is typical of the 66 lots in the community, which, beginning in 1985, was developed by Antigua Construction for luxury homes on no less than 35,000-sq.-ft. lots.

The major challenge: Integrate the home in the citrus grove, maximizing both the frontage and the back yard by keeping north-south depth as tight as possible. To do this, Tsontakis devised an "L"-shaped plan, with the 833-square-foot guest quarters connected on the west side by the home's almost 2,000-square-foot covered patio, which minimizes the sting of the summer desert sun. "We told Nick that we wanted space, not to feel boxed in, and that we would like a lot of curves in the house," Charles says.

The expansive, curvaceous design incorporates an extensive porte-cochere, which welcomes family and guests as well as screens from the sun. He repeats the vee-jointed stained-wood soffit in the rear covered patios — one of a number of design themes that individualize the home. Connecting the three areas of the home — main, casita, and garage — are the patios and driveway, which are finished with tumbled travertine pavers from Turkey, supplied by Scottsdale's Mexi-Tile.

An Arizona Home that States and Restates Arizona

The roof of the porte-cochere is conical — a detail Tsontakis repeats elsewhere on the roofline, which also incorporates contrasting pitched and flat areas. Following the Breeds' requests, he called for standing seam copper on the conical areas, with flat concrete roof tile elsewhere.

Copper also appears in fascia features over the bay windows and four-car garage. The porte-cochere includes a wood-stained ceiling and stucco cornice moldings and is supported by copper- patina-painted steel columns. These Tsontakis Columns, one of the architect's signatures, include two space-age horizontal plates welded parallel to each other near the pinnacle. Between these plates, Tsontakis has suspended cylindrical down lights, also in copper.

The Breeds specified the copper as part of their overall vision of an Arizona home incorporating indigenous materials and local history. "We wanted copper features to express the 'Copper State' theme," Charles says. Until contemporary times, Arizona based a significant part of its economy on copper mining. Tsontakis also uses copper on the master bedroom closet and the living room conical roof.

Forming the base of the columns is Apache stone, quarried about 90 miles away in Mayer, Yavapai County, and supplied by Apache Stone in Mesa.



"We liked their signature stone because of the many colors it comes in and because it was a natural material from Arizona," Janis explains. This stone also creates the skirt around the house — a contrast to the stucco, copper and wood elsewhere. This is carried as well on the garage side of the house and, inside at full height, at the master closet and bath area on the east side of the home and the two fireplace fascias.

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The Breed home also celebrates water, precious in The Sonoran desert, which typically receives a scant seven inches annually. Both the front and back yards have water features that visually cool the home during the summer. In the front, under the porte-cochere, a copper water feature of Calla lilies, purchased from Suma Art in Payson, welcomes guests.

In the rear of the home, amidst the citrus, a pool and a spa beckon; these are heated for cool-weather swimming. A fire pit in this area also provides winter warmth. At the patio, Tsontakis also added a misting system on the patio for additional summer comfort.

The pool is a centerpiece inside as well as out. From the entry hall, it's first seen through the living room, where Tsontakis has placed floor-to-ceiling butt-glazing that forms a wide-angle viewing arc. The semi-circular short sides of the pool repeat this pattern. In addition, the exterior landscaping — the arrangement of the trees — also follows the circular theme. In other parts of the home, the curvature and location of windows allows views of the pool from almost every room, including the casita.

Of course, the citrus trees figure prominently in the design and spirit of the home. The trees represent a significant part of Mesa's pioneer history, as the early Mormon farmers began planting and digging agricultural canals from the Salt River more than a century ago. The neutral stucco color highlights the green of the citrus, and green tones appear in the Apache stone.

The Breeds must follow community guidelines regarding the trees. Janis explains that all homesites must retain a minimum of one row of citrus trees on the perimeter of the yards. What's more, all homeowners are required to secure approval from the homeowner's association before removing any citrus tree.

Prior to building, the Breeds had 88 citrus trees. To accommodate the home and landscaping and to remove dead or dying trees, the Breeds reduced this to 40 citrus trees — the original naval and mandarin oranges and tangelos.

"We enjoy gardening and wanted enough room for harvesting fresh fruits and vegetables," she says. As a result, they have planted Mexican lime, lemon, Valencia and Arizona sweet oranges, pummelo, apricot, peach, and pecan trees. In addition, they are planning a vegetable and herb garden behind the pool — as both Janis and Charles enjoy cooking with the freshest ingredients.

Inside: A Tale of Details

If the exterior is lush with citrus, the interior is luxurious in detail. Typical of this is the kitchen, which showcases 4-inch-wide Brazilian cherry wood floors, meticulously installed by Kevin McMahon, owner of Scottsdale's Fiesta Wood Floors. This flooring repeats in the bedrooms, den and great room, which, as with the kitchen, feature 5-inch alder baseboards. Also alder are all of the raised-panel doors in the home.

The kitchen cabinets, also raised panel, are maple — as is the other cabinetry in the home. The Breeds called for a variety of stain colors in the different rooms to provide unique atmospheres throughout.

"Designing the custom cabinets was a tedious but rewarding effort, but we wanted special features such as hidden spice racks on either side of the range hood, for example," says Chuck, who devised the idea for the racks. That range hood, the kitchen focal point, is an ABBAKA Cylindra customized for corner installation in Denmark. The Breeds' other kitchen appliances include a Jenn Air refrigerator, a Fisher & Paykel five-burner gas stove and convection oven, a Bosch dishwasher, and a GE Monogram 50-bottle wine cooler.

All of the counter tops in the house, including that in the casita kitchen, are granite, marble or travertine, with 1-inch bullnose edging, handcrafted by Jeff Hill, owner of Gilbert's Granite Marble Works. The kitchen granite is Sand Castle, and, in the adjacent dining room, the built-in is Rain Forest marble with a matching 10-person dining table. The garage entry and the game room repeat this marble to great effect.

On the floors and the ceilings, Tsontakis has created equally attractive details. In the front entry, for example, 18-by-18-inch travertine features edging of dark Emperador marble, installed by Robert Fagan of Stone Design & Tile.



The ceiling and rope lighting initially mimic the floor design and curvature and then ascend to tiered lighted domes. The unique swirl design of the front door was designed by Janis and inspired by the curvature of the Fanimation Enigma single-blade ceiling fan in the kitchen nook. Phoenix' Valencia Iron Doors manufactured the inviting copper patina door.

Another Tsontakis signature: varying ceiling heights, often concentrically stepped back. In the Breed home, he provides this in the great room, kitchen and breakfast area. In other areas, the dropped ceilings reflect floor patterns.

Finally, the Breeds called on Jason Cook of Art FX Faux Finishing in Peoria to finish the living room ceiling with a copper paint to match that of

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the chandelier.

When the Breeds aren't looking up at their ceilings, or down at their floors, or resting their home-cooked meals on their beautifully veined countertops, they're extolling Tsontakis: "How can you not be happy in this home?" Janis asks.

"We're elated at Nick's use of light, both naturally as well as with ceiling lights and skylights. Multiple moods can be felt with the flip of a switch." She adds: "It is impossible to enter the living areas without looking up and subconsciously or consciously saying 'Wow.'"

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