

## Two by Tsontakis

Written by Written by David M. Brown / Photographed by Scott Sandler

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Explore the homes of two Valley families, both by Nick Tsontakis.



Eight years ago, Dan Klein and Karen Lugosi purchased a 2,892-sq.-ft. home next to the Phoenix Mountain Preserve. About four years later, they wanted to expand this 30-year-old semi-custom abode to accommodate their changing lifestyle.

Five years ago, Kristin and Randy Wojtysiak decided they wanted a move-up property in the Fountain Hills area. They had outgrown their home in the Val Vista Lakes community in Gilbert and wanted a custom golf course home.

Both couples turned to Scottsdale architect, Nick Tsontakis, whose Nick Tsontakis Architecture & Interiors has honed a double-edged reputation for innovative contemporary design for newbuilds, such as the Wojtysiaks' home, and rebuilds, à la Klein and Lugosi.

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For Klein and Lugosi, Tsontakis started by retaining only the three-car garage of their four-bedroom north Phoenix home. The redesigned residence would expand the square footage and maximize the one-of-a-kind location. On a large, three-quarter acre lot, the home features a pyramidal foothill rising just beyond it—a natural monument for the owners and their three children.

"I knew, from the first time that I saw [the property], that the mountain and the desert had to be significantly displayed to the owners and their guests," says Tsontakis, who has demonstrated unique insights with hillside homes during his dozen years practicing in the Valley. "I've been fortunate in so many of my projects to have these spectacular panoramas to work with—and Karen and Dan's backyard view was just that," he says.



"We wanted a design that opened the house to the preserve and one that provided an open feel with a very contemporary yet warm style, integrating both straight and circular lines," says Lugosi, a Chicago-born attorney. Klein is an IT manager for Honeywell International who grew up in Iowa. The two moved to Arizona independently more than 30 years ago and met here, where they now have two children in their 20's and a toddler.

Tsontakis and longtime friend and associate, Tom Derryberry, founder of Scottsdale-based Ultimo Custom Homes, walked the site with the couple and coordinated on a spacious, 4,812-sq.-ft. remodel. By working with the couple from the beginning, both architect and builder were able to value-engineer the project, providing an initial project budget before creating expensive construction drawings.

"The depth of the lot allowed the design of the added space to push into the rear of the property, somewhat wrapping around the rear court area," Tsontakis explains. That area includes a covered patio, a small grass island and desert landscaping. The additional square footage provided for a great master suite, an expansive great room with a contemporary Glulam ceiling and a home theater. They also plan for a pool and, perhaps, additional square footage.

To emphasize the views into the rear yard from inside the home, Tsontakis installed eight tall glass panels. Four of these slide—when deployed, they create a 16-foot opening in the wall. To further improve views, Tsontakis staggered the steel columns supporting the roof overhang. The result: an attractive roof line and ceiling that dominates the exterior elevation and the interior great room without impeding views. For support and eye appeal, the architect implemented his "Tsontakis columns," with their signature orbital designs.

Klein and Lugosi call their interior design "Contemporary Deco," meaning "clean, straight lines with warm and inviting features," Lugosi explains. "Dan and I are looking forward to completing the interior and starting the pool—and enjoying every minute of our beautiful home."

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The Wojtysiak home is a bit larger, at 6,086 square feet, but mountain views also drove the design of the five-bedroom, five-and-a-half-bath custom house, also built by Ultimo Custom Homes. Overlooking the start of the Sunrise Trail at the base of the McDowell Mountains, the Desert Contemporary home includes a 1,000-sq.-ft. walk-out basement with a game and bar room, guest quarters, a four-car garage and lifestyle components such as a backyard sports court.

“Kris and I did very little with the design of this house,” Randy says, noting that Tsontakis also designed their former three-level Val Vista Lakes home, so they were familiar with his style and work ethic. Randy moved to the Valley from the Chicago area in 1988 and married Kris four years later. She’s from Roseville, Minn., near Minneapolis, and wanted to attend college in the warmest spot of the country—hence her decision to attend Arizona State University in 1984. The couple has three children—three reasons for the larger home.



Tsontakis first walked the hillside site and studied the views: Camelback Mountain and city lights to the southwest; Four Peaks to the northeast; the McDowell Mountains to the west; Red Mountain and the town’s signature fountain to the east; and Weaver’s Needle to the southeast. To frame the McDowells at the rear, Tsontakis used an automated five-panel sliding glass door system—20 feet wide by 10 feet high. In addition, he framed Red Mountain with the front entry door.

To embrace these views, Tsontakis’s design stressed circularity. At the rear, a trio of semicircular overhangs forms the patio. They are supported by a version of the Tsontakis columns: three steel posts rising from the ground and triangulating at the soffits, where the semicircular theme is repeated.

Builder and architect were challenged by the rolling hillside lot, which falls off behind the negative-edge pool into a picturesque wash. The house and its two-tiered backyard took up nearly the entire building envelope, so there wasn’t much room to stage materials and equipment. To resolve this, the men coordinated phased-in deliveries. Cleverly, they used the excavated rock for the stone-veneer work at the rear of the home’s lower level and barbeque areas.

Inside, the circular theme is reaffirmed in the living and great rooms as well as the game room. The ceiling in the large great room is an open wheel-spoke design, with nine clerestory windows for light. Roman-style columns also support archways throughout. “In many ways, this home seems to swirl and to move,” Tsontaki says. “The result is a constantly shifting experience depending where you are in the house and in a particular room.”

Tsontakis had help from Kris’s longtime friend, Joy Robichaud, a partner in Minneapolis interior design firm Rauscher & Robichaud. She selected the furnishings and some finishes and colors, taking cues from Tsontakis’s clean lines, high ceilings and open spaces. One of the home’s focal-point pieces is the Wojtysiaks’ large, tropical aquarium in the kitchen.

This is a very high-tech home as well. Scottsdale’s Active Security and Sound Services installed a multiple-zone audio and visual entertainment system and a structured wiring system, with several television, phone and data outlets in every room. This services a variety of electronic components, Internet connections, outside security cameras and a doorbell intercom that rings into the phone system. Finally, a high-efficiency central vacuum system makes cleaning almost effortless.

The Wojtysiaks love their high-view, high-tech home. “It’s a fun home to entertain in, especially with the great room that opens up into the back patio during our beautiful weather months,” Randy says. “Nick did such a terrific job with our first two homes, we’re already talking to him about our next place—probably in this same neighborhood in a few years.”