

Magic at Superstition Mountain Golf and Country Club

Written by Written by David M. Brown

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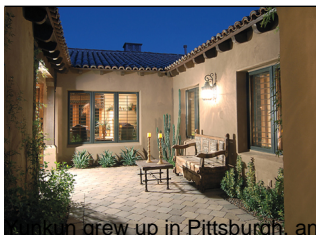
This Superstition Mountain dwelling dishes out Old World charm thanks to rich tones and plenty of wrought iron and woods.



Dawn Yunkun and Karen Dobbins met in the mid 90's as Chicago neighbors—and they've been more than meeting clients' interior design visions in the decade since. One of their recent successes is Yunkun and husband Chris's semi-custom home in Prospector Village at Superstition Mountain Golf and Country Club, the luxe 890-acre golf community in the High Sonoran Desert of the East Valley. Deftly combining their talents, the women, as Villa Bella Designs, coordinated structural changes and then collaborated on colors and finishes, furnishings and artwork. The result was a home of crisply articulated individual spaces and unity of vision. Designed by BBG Architects of Aspen, Colo., the 2,419-sq.-ft. single-level was completed in October 2009 by Superstition Mountain Builders. "The generous homesite in Prospector Village is positioned between the first and ninth fairways of the Prospector golf course and features exhilarating views of the Superstition Mountain Range, golf course and clubhouse," says Rod Luker, executive vice president of operations for the company. "One challenge was positioning the home to capture the overwhelming and abundant views."

Prospector is one of the community's two Nicklaus-designed courses, and the Tuscan-style 50,000-sq.-ft. clubhouse, propped on a mesa, provides the Yunkuns and their neighbors amenities like a golf center and dining room. Somewhere in the Superstition Mountains, legend says, the Lost Dutchman Gold Mine was rediscovered in the 1870's by German immigrant Jacob Waltz and has remained undiscovered since. The Yunkuns' Old World-style home includes three bedrooms and three baths as well as a kitchenette-equipped casita accessed through a Spanish-style courtyard. The second bedroom is a combination guest room and office.

In completing the interior in just under a year, Yunkun and Dobbins attained the three words they like all of their interiors to describe: warm, welcoming and wow. "We strive in all of our projects to create areas of visual interest throughout the home," Yunkun says. "We like to exude a very welcoming style." She explains: "We are laidback and enjoy our family and friends visiting and feeling like they can put their feet up and make themselves at home. The outdoor space here was just as important as the inside, so the physical changes we made to the house almost doubled our entertaining space there."



Yunkun grew up in Pittsburgh, and in 1975 she married Chris—"the love of my life." They have a son, Christopher, and daughter, Allison. The two have moved 17 times throughout his career—and look forward to the last move to Arizona. They have a primary home in Texas. Now a getaway and seasonal retreat, the Superstition Mountain home will be their retirement refuge.

While they intersect today like yin and yang, Dobbins and Yunkun's business began spontaneously on their doorsteps. Dobbins, who grew up in Indiana before moving to Illinois in 1998, bought the home next door to Yunkun. They began Chicago-based Villa Bella Designs that year: "We swiftly became friends and formed a creative bond that developed into our design firm," Dobbins recalls. "We found that we shared a love of decorating and a desire to create something special for all of our clients—unique living spaces that reflect more than a design but their lifestyles." Their partnership is one body: "Karen is the bones, such as the structural work, and I am the skin, providing the finishing touches," Yunkun explains. Together, they've also completed projects in Florida, California and Chicago.

"The original model, although quite nice, did not allow us to take full advantage of the beauty of the view from this lot," Yunkun explains. Accordingly, the women worked with Luker and his team to make structural changes to the already-framed home. They replaced the window in the dining room with a 10-foot double door that matched the existing one in the adjacent great room area. "This opened up another walkway to the loggia and allowed us to maximize the gorgeous views of the golf course and Superstition Mountain."

The solution in the great and dining rooms would also work in the master bedroom, which promised the same spectacular view. They removed the side door and replaced the windows with glass doors—replicating the look of the adjacent great room and dining area. "I love waking up to the sunrise over the mountains," Yunkun says.

She also likes to enjoy morning coffee under the trellised section of the patio, just outside the master bedroom. "With the great weather year-round and the amazing views, we wanted to create and utilize as much outdoor living space as possible," she says.

As a result, the team worked on the exterior spaces so that they could maximize entertaining options. Just outside the dining area is an outdoor kitchen with a grill, sink and refrigerator. Here, too, are couches, ceiling fans and an outdoor television ensconced in a decorative wood cabinet. They even installed a spool, designed by Chris—a large jetted spa with seating all around that allows lap swimming. On one side of the spool is a fire pit with glass crystals and seating for enjoying crisp desert nights. (It's typically about five degrees cooler at Superstition Mountain than in the lower Valley elevations.) Opposite the spool there is an intimate seating area: "We refer to it as the 'cocktail room' where we often sit and relax with friends or family," Yunkun says.

Inside, the tile the designers ultimately selected for the main house is Capadocia in a Versailles layout. But it wasn't that easy. Earlier, they had selected two travertine designs, but their contact at Scottsdale's Old World Tile and Marble told them that each had been discontinued.

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Their choice of a rough-cut natural stone with terra cotta and earth tones—diverged from what either had envisioned. “It resulted in the most extraordinary color and texture you could imagine,” Yunkun notes. “To this day, the subcontractors who worked on the project come into the home and refer to it as ‘The House with the Floor.’”

Colors followed: warm bronzes and coppers with black accents. “Color is always a driving force for Karen and me when we’re decorating,” Yunkun explains. “It sets the tone for the project.” For the lead color in the main house, the designers painted sample swatches on the only wall that was primed: “After numerous attempts, all we had was a wall of ‘not-quite-there yets,’” Dobbins recalls.

They were running out of unwatched walls. The painter told them that a neighbor’s garage was primed and ready for paint, so, with paint brushes and buckets, they visited the empty house and filled a wall with different colors until the final one appeared— all this during a 100-plus degree day. “We were hoping that the owners wouldn’t make a surprise house inspection,” Dobbins notes.

That final color, complementing the tile, is a terra cotta base with two coats of burnt umber. For various accents, the women used a black rub and stained the European-style kitchen cabinets walnut, balancing the three-inch chiseled-edge Mascarello granite countertops. The baseboards in the main house are chestnut. The women set off the casita with a contrasting travertine floor and cherry finishes.

Artwork and accessories provide eclectic focal-point touches. These include the wrought-iron and crystal chandeliers in the kitchen and dining room; an onyx sink in the lush powder room; the custom valances with draperies in the dining and great rooms; the black hand-carved screen, flanked by forged-iron candleholders, in the wall behind the foyer door; and in the great room, the distinctive metal wall art.

In this space, the Yunkuns entertain and stay entertained just by themselves. “The kitchen and great room are the heart of the home, the center of all our social gatherings, no matter the size,” she says. “The open floor plan and inviting nature of the layout allow us to stay connected to our guests, and the spectacular view of the mountains provides an awesome backdrop for any occasion—at any time of the day or night.”

Interior Design: Villa Bella Designs

Architect: BBG Architects

Builder: Superstition Mountain Builders