

Written by Story by Elizabeth Exline

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Gracefully curving along the mountainous backdrop of Silverleaf, this rural Mediterranean home embraces its many aesthetic inspirations as robustly as it does its many admirers.

May 16 was a special day for this home's owners: They just purchased their 48th lithograph by Alphonse Mucha, making their collection one of the largest (if not the largest) in the country. They love every poster, whether it hangs in the living room on one end of the house, the master suite's gallerylike hallway on the other or somewhere in between—and they spent years culling the perfect pieces for their collection. Similarly, when it came time to build their Scottsdale home, they spent three years poring over every detail and decision, determined that the home would meet their exacting standards. "I'm the kind of person who doesn't know how to settle," the wife admits.

Ironically, it all began with a false start. The couple, originally based in Long Island, N.Y., with a second home in Gainey Ranch, moved to the Valley full time when they retired. Before long, the husband, as he wryly recalls, "finally convinced" his wife to build a house, and they located an ideal golf-course lot in DC Ranch. It would have been theirs but for their would-be neighbor, who ultimately exercised his first right of refusal on the parcel. But like the airline passenger who gets a first-class seat when his economy ticket has been double booked, the couple was invited to view what was at the time a new division of DC Ranch: Silverleaf. The owners gamely bumped along unpaved paths, trying to get a feel for which lot would afford them privacy as well as city, mountain and golf-course views. Finally, they happened upon a particular "signature lot" that seemed to meet all of their requirements, leaving the couple with only the community's fearsome infancy to contend with. (They were the first to build there.) "We were nervous, because it was a lot of money, and there was nothing here, so you can't visualize anything," the husband admits.

His wife, however, offered him prescient consolation. "It wasn't advertised to the public at that point," she says. "Nobody knew what was coming, and I said, 'Do you see how successful DC Ranch is? Have no fear. This is going to be very successful, too. It's a great location.'"

One person who also experienced some fear was their architect, Erik Peterson of Peterson Architecture & Associates. Peterson came highly recommended to the couple, and he'd just started out on his own after working for the renowned firm H&S International. "They came in," he recalls, smiling, "and [the husband] gave me the hard sale. He was real tough, I mean, he had me shaking, so scared. I really wanted to do this project."

"Well you're dealing with a New York car dealer," the husband rejoins, but he and his wife were sold. Soon Peterson was tromping around their site, figuring out how to reconcile several conflicting design parameters. For starters, the home had to capture mountain views in the back and city views in the front, which meant it would need to be thin, linear and curve along an arc. To that, Peterson added the couple's own preferences about layout and style, while trying to fuse all of it with Silverleaf's requisite rural Mediterranean flavor. "I had the problem that those things start to look sort of contemporary," Peterson says, "because it had this curved shape, and it really didn't have this Old World, Mediterranean look, and it certainly wasn't Southwestern design, which is what [the homeowners] were looking for."

Peterson persevered, however, outfitting the home's exterior in Mediterranean-inspired stucco and stone while creating soft, rounded walls inside to create the Southwestern nuance the owners desired. But then the Hydra of home design reared up with two new challenges. The first was the responsibility of building on a signature lot, which required Peterson to engage with the street, despite the homeowners' desire for privacy. Peterson's solution was to create a long driveway to the front door and place a handsome stone casita in the back. From the street, you'll see the length of the home and the cozy guest house, but the main house remains conveniently cloistered away from curious passersby. "That's actually one of the most interesting views now," Peterson says, "coming across that bridge and seeing the house and all the different chimney details and the curve of the house [and] the guest house."

The second challenge came from the owners, who wanted an open, airy home where the rooms connected to each other but who also disdained traditional square shapes and cumbersome doorways. Conveniently, the house's curved shape allowed Peterson to design a series of intimate spaces that were connected but "open," with the curve providing the privacy of traditional doorways. Peterson, the wife says, "made it so you really don't know what's beyond the curve...It makes it very interesting."

The shape's functionality is echoed outside, where patios trace the contour of the home but are separated and defined by markers like the casita and the pool. In this way, the area outside the living room serves as a "cocktail patio," while the space between the house and casita, shaded by vigas overhead, is designated for outdoor dining. Inside, the hickory floor's chevron pattern, the kitchen island that gently fans out and the countless curved baseboards carry out the home's curvaceous motif. (Those features also earned Peterson the enmity of more than a few tradesmen, the wife jokes, since they were the ones grappling with the asymmetrical, undulating architecture.)

But clever as Peterson's design is, it was up to the owners to personalize it.

To that end, they installed their beloved Mucha lithographs with careful consideration. In the living room, for example, the art depicts dining, Champagne, dancing and flowers, for a meticulously edited theme that suits the space. In the enticing alder-paneled library with coffered ceilings, collectors' items like an antique cash register, a handmade French music box and an old stove-base-turned-coffee-table speak to the owners' mutual passion for antiques. Indeed, they collect everything from cookbooks (stored in the library) to Swarovski pieces (housed in the powder room). "Whenever I can put things out that are beautiful, I will," the wife says.

That goes for the finishes, too. In the master suite's bathroom and water closet, for example, slabs of Sea Foam granite line the floors, counters and shower (the water closet alone required 18 slabs), while coordinating tile work forms a mosaic wainscot. Crystal pulls and a free-standing tub in the bathroom create an elegance that harmonizes with the granite's gleam. Ceilings throughout the house, meanwhile, come coffered, beamed and covered entirely in wood in an effort to balance the home's sweeping heights.

Even if you never set foot in the house, there is plenty to admire. Passersby from golfers to those just driving past it have remarked on the home's unusual appeal, including, the husband says, Silverleaf's golf-course designer, Tom Weiskopf. "I always tell him, 'I love your course,'" he quips. "And he tells me, 'I love your house.'" The compliments, it seems, are becoming the owners' biggest collection.

Collector's Edition Home

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Architect: Erik B. Peterson, Peterson Architecture & Associates; 480.477.1111.Builder: John Gurley, R.J. Gurley Custom Homes; 480.473.7300.Landscape Designer: Pascale Sucato,Desert Foothills Gardens Nursery; 480.488.9455.

Total Square Footage: 8,609 (6,500 livable).