

Blurring the Boundaries

Natural surroundings take root in a Paradise Valley landscape

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Charmed by views of the McDowell Mountains and the area's resemblance to Tucson, the owners of this 2-acre Paradise Valley property updated their 1950s house and landscape with one goal in mind: to make it look as if both had been there "forever."

They added some modern conveniences (air conditioning, for one) but remodeled within the boundaries of the existing foundation in order to avoid disturbing the surrounding desert. "We wanted to save all the great old vegetation that was there," says the homeowner. This includes mature palo verde and mesquite, as well as several organ pipe cacti, a species not often seen in this area.

Chad Robert of Landscaping by André designed the new outdoor spaces. One of the first modifications was changing the path of the driveway. "It used to come bombing straight at the house," explains the homeowner. "Now it weaves in at a different angle." The new drive, covered with small bits of granite, encourages a slow approach to the house and looks more like a well-worn path than a road.

The front courtyard, also new, welcomes with Old World charm. "With the fountain, fireplace and seating area, there's a backyard feel here," says Steven Bollinger of Landscaping by André, the company also responsible for installing and maintaining the landscape. "We brought the desert right in-

to the courtyard as well." Among the pavers, planting beds filled with native and non-native species look like small plots of natural desert.

In back, an existing wall was knocked down to open up the mountain views. In its place, positioned at the far reaches of the property, an iron fence was installed and painted to match the desert floor. The fence defines the yard yet allows the desert to flow uninterrupted toward the house. The pool, which was "shot anyway," according to the homeowner, was redone, and the deck and enlarged patio area were resurfaced with pavers. A raised spa, bar, fireplace, *banco* and barbecue, all finished to match the exterior of the house, offer a variety of gathering spots.

A trio of trees—mesquite, palo verde and ironwood—anchors the back yard. Groups of cacti were planted to look as if Mother Nature put them there herself. "To make a statement with cacti, use a family of three or five of the same



species," Bollinger recommends. "Play around with their placement, spacing them irregularly for a more natural look."

Other plants include Joshua, ebony and bottlebrush trees, barrel cacti, agave, bougainvillea, primrose, ruellia, silver cloud sage, several species of *cereus* cacti, and a variety of succulents. Annuals in pots provide splashes of color.

"We wanted the landscape to look like it was flowing in from outside the fence," concludes Bollinger. In keeping with this concept of blurring the boundaries, his instructions to the maintenance crew have been to *not* clean up every stick and every leaf. "It's not about keeping the property sterile," Bollinger says. "In this landscape, the overgrowth and natural debris add a comfortable, lived-in feel."

"We wanted total desert," agrees the homeowner. "We 'un-enclosed' everything." 🌵

See Resource Guide for details.



Opposite: Careful planning resulted in a seamless transition between the man-made landscape and nature's own design.

Top: The guest quarters are situated a few steps lower than the back yard, providing a sense of privacy.

Above: A burst of color from an orange bougainvillea livens up a corner of the back yard.

Right: In a planting bed in the front courtyard, rocks of various sizes mimic the desert floor. A mass planting of *cereus* cacti gives the illusion of one large specimen.



A LANDSCAPER'S TIPS

- Succulents provide a native look, even though many are not native. They grow well in pots, tolerate heat and low light, and have few, if any, spines. This makes them an especially smart choice for high-traffic areas.
- Don't be too quick to cut off new shoots on trees, as they are a sign of healthy growth and help with photosynthesis.
- Use a sunscreen protectant to help non-native cacti become acclimated. Bollinger recommends a product called Snow (made by Wilbur-Ellis). Mix with water until it's the consistency of 2-percent milk, and then spray on two light coats.

