





The Layered Look

Textural plantings and cultural embellishments transform a vacant lot into an Italian-style garden

TEXT BY ANNE O'BRIEN ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHARLES MANN

A pair of Indonesian Buddhist figures and a blooming actinopus agave stand out against a hedge of greenery. Clay pots atop a wall bring a sense of formality to this Paradise Valley garden.



“It’s the personal touches that



Clockwise from above: The picturesque back yard features a cool blue pool, lush green plants and comfortable seating areas. The bar in back is accented with decorative tiles. • A small patio area contains a tiered fountain and a container planted with lobelia, alyssum, ivy geraniums and kumquat. • Twisted Italian cypress trees rise up from stone pots filled with lobelia. • A meandering path leads visitors to the front door. The shaded space is planted with dichondra, iris, liriope, and a bougainvillea trimmed close to the wall.

separate a garden from a landscape, and you find them everywhere here,” says Dave Jernigan, whose company—The Gardener—maintains the Paradise Valley property of Cynthia and Martin Galbut.

Individualism is reflected in both this landscape’s design and the decorative pieces within it. Since the Galbuts built their home 35 years ago, they have traveled extensively in Italy and Asia. Many of the art objects they’ve acquired are situated outdoors, transforming their garden into a living repository of memories.

Their “souvenirs” are set against backdrops reminiscent of Italy: a formal pool area, stone fountains and Italian cypress trees. Other cultural embellishments include Mediterranean pots, Indonesian sculpture, Chinese porcelain seating and Japanese lanterns. Martin calls this distinctive mix “Marco Polo style,” and says it has taken years to develop.

When the Galbuts built their house on vacant land at the edge of Paradise Valley, “it was a basic dirt lot, with lots of caliche and grease,” according to Jernigan. The ground was so hard, in fact, that dynamite had to be used to make a hole for the pool.

Outdoor spaces were not the couple’s first priority. “We had a landscaper, but let’s just say that we didn’t go all out,” Cynthia remembers. Martin jokes that “a good part of the property remained in its original ‘moon’ state.” The completed effort consisted of small lawn areas shaded by a few boxed bottle trees and palms. When Cynthia got word that someone

was clearing out citrus, she added an “adopted” grove to the property that consists of grapefruit, orange, tangelo, lemon and lime trees.

Thirteen years later, the citrus grove became the center of the garden renovation plans. The Galbuts began by pushing out the perimeter walls and adding a large guest house that Martin, an artist in his spare time, uses as a studio. Landscape architect Chad Robert was then brought on board to help carry out an Italian-influenced architectural theme.

“To create an Italian feel, we decided to add a small pavilion area and a seasonal garden,” Robert explains. “There was no need for a large space for entertaining—that was already in place—but the back corner was still open.”

He designed a “stroll garden” that leads to a gazebo not visible from the main portion of the back yard. To get to the structure, one must follow a path that casually twists and turns past mature, leafy citrus trees. Surprises were part of Robert’s plan. “It’s nice to turn a corner, slow down and marvel at the details,” he says.



Although classical Italian gardens favor shrubs and trees over flowers, Robert integrated a cutting garden into the plan, at Cindy's request. Situated near the gazebo, it offers a vivid array of irises and roses in spring and the purples of desert verbena and ruella in summer. Along with planters at the home's entrance, these blooms satisfy Cindy's desire for living color and fulfill Robert's plan to soften the landscape.

To meet the challenge of maintaining a green landscape in the desert, Robert and Jernigan designed two drip-irrigation systems to accommodate the watering needs of everything from lawns, ironwood trees and palms to Arabian jasmine and roses.

They also developed a soil-management system that utilizes fertilizer injectors hooked into the irrigation lines. Jernigan adjusts its mixture according to soil needs and season. He primarily uses organic products that help buffer soil salts and keep plants healthy year-round. He adds mulch to promote plant vigor. "It enriches the soil and stabilizes root temperatures," he explains.

The combined efforts of the Gallbutts and their consultants have resulted in layers of rounded, spined and leafy greenery contrasting with the silvery textures of olive trees, gopher plants, agaves and a succulent garden near the guest house. The landscape is thriving with plants and memories, and is sure to be enriched by the Gallbutts' next adventure. ❧

See Sources

Mature citrus trees and Italian cypress draw attention to a gazebo at the far end of the garden. The columns, purchased in San Francisco, are decorated in a bas-relief pattern. Landscape designer Chad Robert designed the open iron dome at the top of the structure.



