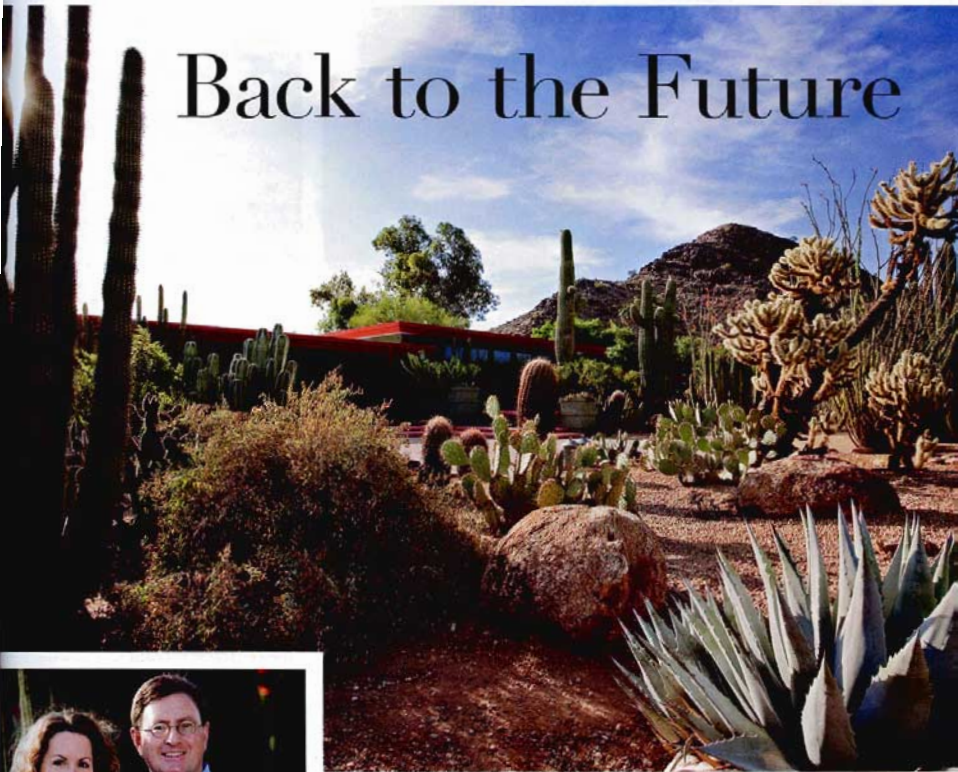


# Back to the Future



## WENDY AND MIKE CUMMISKEY'S LANDSCAPE RENOVATION REFLECTS THEIR HOME'S MODERN ARCHITECTURE

When Wendy and Mike Cummiskey (above) purchased their property, they were captivated by its botanical-garden ambience and Mummy Mountain views. Enhanced over the years, the updated landscape (top) includes majestic plant specimens and drought-tolerant flora.

**W**hile house-hunting in 1992, Wendy and Mike Cummiskey discovered an overlooked Modern gem in Paradise Valley, Arizona. "Built in 1960, it displayed distinct characteristics of Frank Lloyd Wright Usonian design that we admire, and it had unimpeded views of nearby Mummy Mountain," says Mike. An avid gardener, he was equally intrigued by the acre-lot, which was covered with mature cacti worthy of a botanical garden.

Although the couple had made improvements to the home and landscape through the years, they waited until 2005 to undertake a major renovation. "We had magnificent cactus specimens, but overall the landscape appeared old and tired-looking," recalls Wendy.

### LANDSCAPE UPGRADE

"Our goal was to integrate the landscape with the home's Contemporary architecture, keeping and enhancing the original



## RENOVATION TIPS

- **Rejuvenate existing plants**—Mike Cummiskey trims branches of native creosote bushes on the perimeter of his property to create airy shrubs that provide protective shade for small cacti, such as *Mammillaria*. "Creosote shrubs do not require regular watering and smell wonderful when it rains," he comments. Remove the brown, dead centers of overgrown sprawling prickly pear cacti. If desired, transplant new pads elsewhere in the landscape.
- **Include lighting in your design**—Run electrical lines during hardscape installation, even if you wait to install lights at a later date.
- **Reuse materials**—The original flagstone patio at Wendy and Mike's home was in poor condition and had to be removed. Mike stockpiled serviceable flagstone chunks and has since reused them to define a new pathway through a renovated perimeter area in the backyard.
- **Rethink soil requirements**—Desert-adapted plants do not require soil amendments when planted in the ground. "I don't improve the soil, except for a little bonemeal," says Mike. "Just dig a good-sized hole to allow roots to expand." Holes should be as deep as the root ball and three to five times as wide.



integrity of the design, as well as maintaining the mountain views," explains Mike. "I enjoy landscaping, but ease-of-maintenance was important, and I wanted to better display many of our cactus specimens."

Beyond that, the home's entrance needed an overhaul. Initially, a dirt path meandered through desert plantings to a nondescript Saltillo tile landing at the front door. "Visitors couldn't find their way to the door, and the Saltillo didn't match the home's style," Mike says. "We wanted an entrance that would meld with the archi-

ture, and a place to sit and read the mail while enjoying the view."

To help achieve their landscape goals, Wendy and Mike consulted with landscape architect Chad Robert. "Chad listened to our ideas and turned them into something spectacular," says Mike. Robert, a Phoenix Home & Garden Master of the Southwest, transformed the home's entrance.

He used poured-in-place red concrete for an entryway platform that highlights the front of the house and accentuates the home's roofline. Nearby, the landscape

Counterclockwise from top: To match the home's colors, red concrete slabs and green raised planters were added near the entry. ■ In front of a wall of creeping fig vines, a red torch cactus (*Echinopsis huascha*) puts on a floral display. ■ An *Echinopsis* hybrid bears a striking pink flower.





Taking a cue from Frank Lloyd Wright's philosophy, the home melds with its natural setting, which includes cow's tongue prickly pears and mesquite trees.

architect added a low concrete wall, replicating the house's unusual horizontal block pattern, and he incorporated raised planters along with a cantilevered seating area. "Guests sometimes can't tell where the original house ends and renovated parts begin," Wendy observes. "That was a main objective in the entire project."

"I liked the idea of red concrete because it's a design element that I recall seeing around Phoenix when I was a kid, and it blends with the era the house was built," Mike comments. "As an added bonus, the red concrete's pinkish color intensifies to a deep red when it rains, which to me mimics the idea of desert plants responding to rainfall."

In the backyard, Robert reconfigured the patio, two lawn areas and planting beds. Individually poured rectangular red concrete pavers create a botanical garden

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# garden talks



For a variety of colors, the homeowner combined (front to back) *Opuntia rufida* 'Desert Gem', Argentine giant, tree aloe, angelita daisy, purple verbena, an *Echinopsis* hybrid, and red justicia.

walk, and their placement forms numerous planting niches that now hold such favorites as crested golden barrel and crested blue candle cacti.

Mike collaborated with Brent Bartsch, who coordinated the hardscape installation, to create a fountain that enhanced the Frank Lloyd Wright feel. Water spills over cantilevered rectangular slabs of red concrete stacked at right angles. "Not only does the fountain meld with the materials of the walkway, but to me, the overall shape evokes Wright's famous Falling-water house in Pennsylvania," Mike remarks.

To complete the renovation, Mike filled planting beds with select cacti and agaves, as well as desert shrubs and ground covers, to add softness and color. The beds showcase dozens of *Echinopsis* cacti, which he favors for their stunning blooms.



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# garden talks



Above: A stacked-concrete fountain "is always busy with finches and hummingbirds," says Wendy Cummiskey. Above right: Inspired by the work of Frank Lloyd Wright, Mike Cummiskey designed this geometric red metal gate.



While Mike maintains the landscape, Wendy and daughters Claren and Hannah appreciate the fruits of his labors. "We're outside every day, walking around to see what's in bloom. And when we aren't outdoors, we enjoy a beautiful view from every window in the house," says Wendy. "Of all the renovations we implemented," she adds, "the landscape has made the greatest impact." □

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