

OUTDOOR LIVING

Magic from Morning to Moonlight

In the heart of the city, a lush patio sanctuary brings wonderment to the art of relaxation

BY CARLY SCHOLL PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WOODALL

There is something undeniably enigmatic about the wide blue skies and warm sunshine of the Arizona desert that beckons to those looking for their own slice of heaven. This magic offers up a chance to leave troubles behind and relax into a breezy lifestyle filled with serenity, leisure and even a little childlike wonder.

Perhaps spellbound by the allure of the Sonoran Desert, “magical” was the key word that inspired homeowners Robert and Laura Kec during the planning process for their charming modern backyard in Phoenix’s Biltmore neighborhood. Their goal was a haven for personal relaxation, but they weren’t



EVENING GLOW

In the side yard, a low fire pit adds an earthy focal point to the fanciful setting. Smooth boulders piled atop the structure’s contemporary-style, rusted metal base echo the color and texture of the precast concrete paving slabs. Nearby, angular green arms support suspended wicker chairs while doubling as poles for strands of overhead lighting. Statuesque golden fox agaves, purple heart plants and sprays of coral fountain pop beneath the Anacacho orchid tree, which will add more privacy as it grows.

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interested in the stuffiness that can often accompany an adult's vision of tranquility. "I love the fact that I can sit outside 90 percent of the year, so it was important to create a space that was comfortable and beautiful," says Laura.

After seeing work by landscape architect Chad Robert in *Phoenix Home & Garden*, the couple knew that he was the perfect man for a job that required not

only a keen eye for design, but also a solid sense of fun. Robert worked closely with the couple to create a relaxing space with overtones of whimsy and charm. The result is a patio that finds its character in contrast. Tranquil Japanese-style garden elements, such as traditional bamboo, are given a playful and colorful update when strategically juxtaposed with electric green sculptural beams. Organic shapes



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GRAPHIC DESIGN

A sculptural structure supporting hanging chairs—along with a network of bistro-style bulb lighting above—is a towering special feature at the edge of the patio. "It's a more contemporary way of gesturing to a sculpture," says landscape architect Chad Robert, and indeed the inviting swing chairs and jaunty lighting evaporate any stiffness a courtyard sculpture might exude. The striking steel beams were custom-designed to subtly evoke the shape of a house, and the sunny green color was inspired by the golden bamboo clustered in the background.



AN OUTDOOR OASIS

On the covered back patio, an arrangement of wicker furnishings complete with plum-colored cushions and vibrant pillows, as well as a built-in barbecue, offers an intimate space for entertaining or peacefully enjoying the delights of nature. "I love to grill outdoors and hang out while cooking, and Laura enjoys sitting outside with the dogs, reading and relaxing," says homeowner Robert Kec.

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created by soft bubbles of lighting and luxuriant flora harmonize with geometric angles formed by the sculptural structures and streamlined paving stones. And perhaps most noticeably, the calm serenity observed in the daytime gives way to luminous surrealism at night.

Regardless of the diversity that lends its charm to this patio oasis, the space created by Robert and the Kec is always—day or night, peaceful or lively—undeniably magical. ■

MIXING HARD AND SOFT

Cape aloes, fortnight lily and pale-leaf yuccas reinforce the structural themes of the space, while bushy wormwood and creeping fig climbing the surrounding walls evoke a fresh, organic ambiance. Rough boulders paired with smooth, charcoal-grey river rocks further the dramatic contrasts throughout the unique backyard.



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NIGHT LIGHTS

"Catching and releasing fireflies played a big part of my childhood," says homeowner Laura Kec. Chad Robert was able to re-create the critters' wonder through creative lighting. Dotted along the edges of the landscape are staked bulbs internally lit by fiber-optic lights that fluctuate in brightness and color. Influenced by the light-based installations of British artist Bruce Munro, Robert had the stakes custom made to encourage the "modern, zen feeling that had a sense of this 'magic' Laura wanted."

See Sources.

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