

Adobe, Updated

A newly built contemporary home draws inspiration from the life and work of Southwest artist Georgia O'Keeffe.

BY REBECCA L. RHOADES PHOTOGRAPHY BY SCOTT SANDLER

The simplistic facade, with its latilla-influenced wood soffit, built-in benches and few windows recalls the iconic adobe homes found in Georgia O'Keeffe's paintings.





ON FIRST GLANCE, the boxy house that sits on an infill lot in Uptown Phoenix could easily be mistaken for just another contemporary structure. But look closer, and you'll start to notice features that recall traditional adobe homes of the early 1900s. The recessed entry's woven wood soffit is a modern interpretation of latillas and vigas. Built-in benches flank the front door, a nod to classic bancos. And the stark facade, broken by a trio of small windows, hides an open and airy interior that wraps around a central courtyard.

"We were trying to come up with a way to reinvigorate the Southwest vernacular—to use some of the history and elements that are traditional to the area in a fresh, new way," says architect Cavin Costello. The design was influenced by artworks by Georgia O'Keeffe, the iconic artist who lived and painted in an adobe home in New Mexico.

"She did modern depictions of the Southwest—traditional subjects but with a completely distinctive aesthetic," Costello explains. "So we looked to her work as inspiration for using light, form, texture and color in different ways that are unique to our area."

For homeowner Sharon Lewis, this 21st-century take on the historic style was the perfect compromise between the romantic visions of the Old West and modern-day urban living. "I love Arizona and its adobe homes," she says. Sharon and her husband, Bob, are in the process of downsizing their home in Vancouver, Washington, and



OPPOSITE Floor-to-ceiling cabinets create plenty of storage space in the narrow kitchen, which opens to the great room. The floors here and throughout are exposed aggregate concrete for easy maintenance. A niche is the perfect place to display artworks by *Phoenix Home & Garden Masters* of the Southwest award winner Gennaro Garcia. **TOP LEFT** The woven wood soffit was made from Douglas fir that came from the homeowners' sawmill in Washington. "This was our reinterpretation of a latilla ceiling," says architect Cavin Costello. The same wood was used on the custom pivoting front door, which is flanked by bancos with sun-friendly cushions. "Front patios are important in a historic district," he adds. **BOTTOM LEFT** White oak cabinetry, a custom steel hood cover and marble countertops give the kitchen an organic vibe.





RIGHT The east-facing courtyard is a private oasis in the busy Uptown Phoenix neighborhood. Window walls on each end of the great room bifold open, connecting the exterior space to the home's interiors. The outdoor fireplace is crafted of multiple sheets of steel that combine for a woven effect.

ABOVE A guest room opens to the center courtyard and pool. Costello added a narrow strip of river rocks to the concrete patio. "It sits directly below the line of the roof, and you can use it to tell the time of day," he explains. "When the shadow falls under the roof, it's morning. When it crosses the line, it's afternoon."

moving to Phoenix. "If we lived here full-time, we probably would have found an old one to remodel."

The couple fell in love with Costello's work after seeing a similar courtyard house design of his in the Willo Historic District. With their northwest home situated in the middle of a cedar grove along the Columbia River, they wanted their new residence to be centrally located and within easy walking distance to public transportation, restaurants and markets.

Costello found the empty land, which used to be a parking lot. "We were out of the country, and Cavin sent us an email saying that there was a lot available," Sharon recalls. "I got on Google and walked the streets online and thought, 'What am I getting myself into.' But then I looked beyond the age of the area and realized that the location and walkability were what we were looking for." The Lewises bought the property sight unseen. "It's all pretty comical now. We have lovely neighbors up and down the street, and we really enjoy living here."

Their 2,500-square-foot, three-bedroom abode is simple and clean-lined. Douglas fir accents throughout, such as those woven soffits at the entry and courtyard, soften the hard stucco walls and concrete floors. All of the wood came from a sawmill that the Lewises owned at the time. As it ages, the timber will take on a warm orange hue.





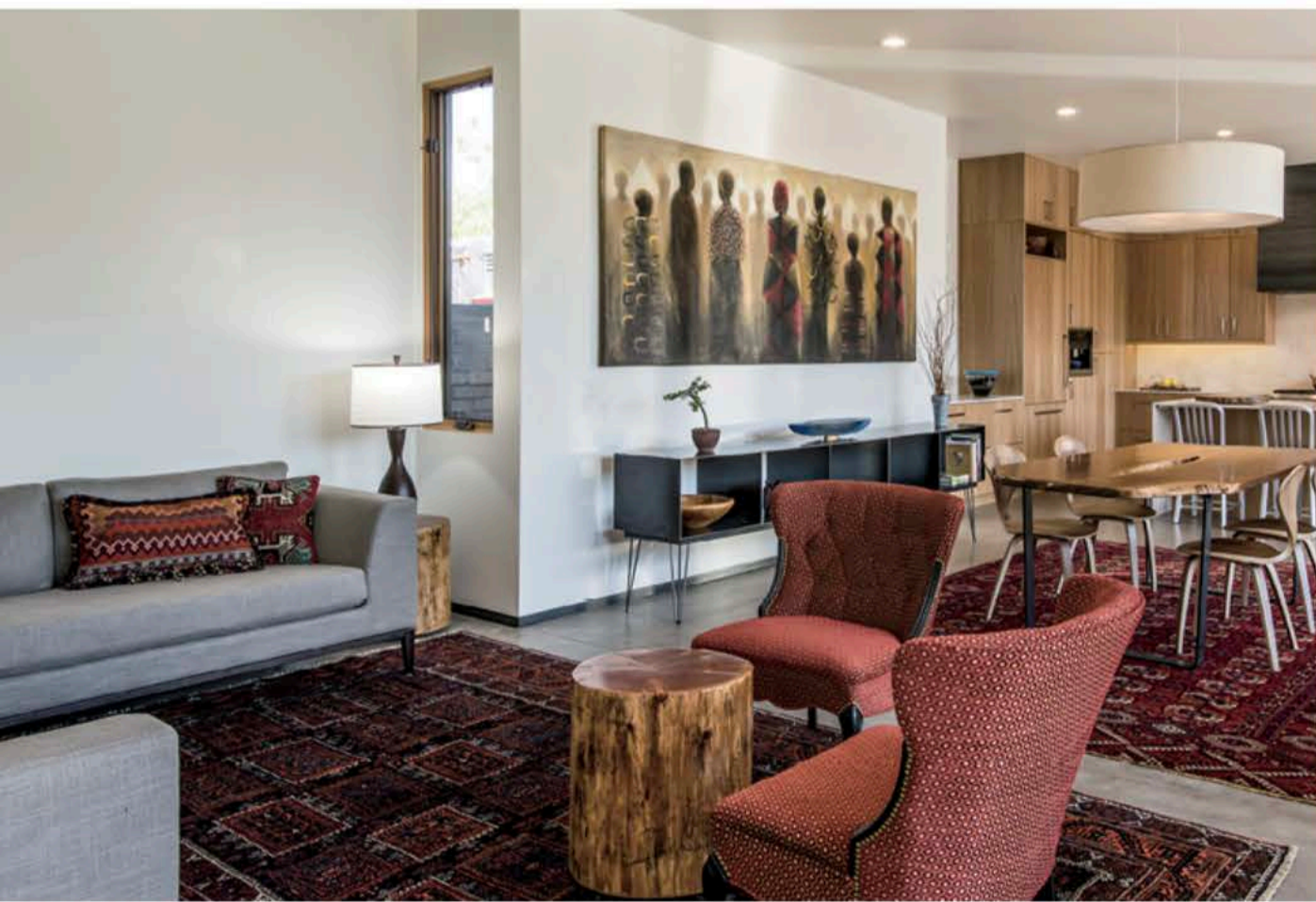
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“They shipped all the lumber to us, which is a bit outside the norm,” says builder Jason Smith. “But it’s pretty cool to say that their house in Phoenix was built with wood from their business in Washington. It’s a neat little Easter egg.”

Notes Sharon, “We knew we were going to be selling the sawmill eventually, so it is nice to have a piece of our past with our future.”

An open-plan kitchen, dining area and living room comprise the central volume of the house, with bedrooms and bathrooms branching off of each end and forming a C around the east-facing courtyard. On the western side of the great room, a bump out serves dual purposes: It provides definition between the kitchen and living space, allowing the cabinets to recede into the wall, and a pair of narrow windows on each side aid in cross-ventilation while maintaining privacy from nearby neighbors.



A bump out in the great room separates the kitchen from the living space. Narrow rectangular windows on each side of the architectural element allow natural light to come through while blocking views of nearby houses. The midcentury-influenced decor features rich, earthy colors and organic materials, such as wood and steel.

“The peekaboo windows were a great architectural move,” says Smith. “It’s a little thing that probably goes unnoticed, but it lets the sun in without having to look at the house next door.”

Floor-to-ceiling bifold doors open the interiors to the outdoors. “A courtyard is a very traditional element of old adobe homes,” says Costello. “Typically, there would be a water fountain in the middle of it for sound and evaporative cooling.” Here, a long rectangular pool that runs the length of the courtyard offers a similar soothing sensation. “It’s our favorite spot,” says Sharon. “We were at the house just a few days ago, and at 5 a.m., I was swimming in the pool.”

All but one room have direct outside access, a design feature that is especially notable in the master bath. “Sharon and Bob wanted the potential of an outdoor shower, but in the middle of the city, that’s very difficult to do, particularly when the neighbors are about 5 feet away,” remarks Costello. Smith designed a 6-foot-wide steel-and-Douglas fir pivot door that swings outward, resulting in an indoor-out ambience.

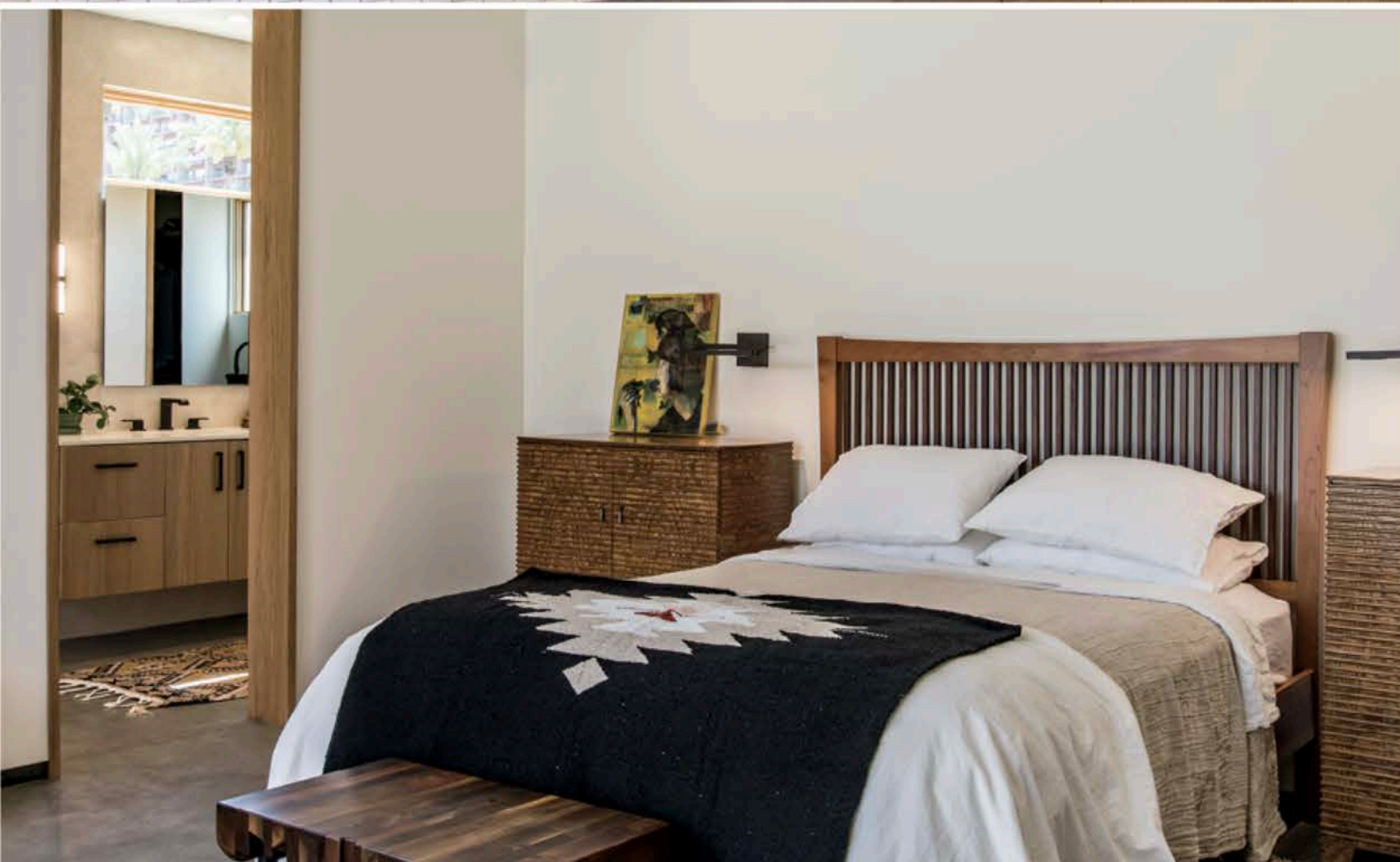
The centerpiece of the serene marble-clad room is a copper soaking tub that rests just inside the doorway. Sharon purchased it after touring another of Costello’s homes and learning about Arizona’s pillars—copper, cattle, cotton, citrus and climate. “I had never heard about the five C’s,” she says. “But afterward, I knew that we needed some copper in the house.”

As with O’Keeffe’s home in Abiquiú, New Mexico, which juxtaposes subdued earthen elements with modernism, the mix of natural materials displayed throughout the Lewises’ home results in a look that is warm and organic, while its minimalist design reinterprets the natural ease of Arizona’s adobe past.

“There are so many places that are trying to do too much, especially in the inner city,” says Costello. “That’s what I love about some of the old Southwest homes—they’re just very simple. They let the sun in, and the light, shadow and sky do most of the work.” □

ARCHITECT AND LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: Cavin Costello, Ranch Mine. BUILDER: Jason Smith, Identity Construction.

For more information, see Sources on Page 190.



ABOVE In lieu of an outdoor shower, Costello gave the couple an airy master bathroom that opens to the courtyard by way of a Douglas fir-accented pivot door. "If you want to rinse off quickly, you can just walk in and turn on the shower," says homeowner Sharon Lewis. The walls of the room are clad in marble. The copper soaking tub is an homage to the homeowners' travels to Japan as well as to Arizona's Five C's.

LEFT The master bedroom is a study in minimalism. Douglas fir frames the entry to the bathroom. "The room is simple and purposefully so," says Costello. "We wanted to let the space and light be the star rather than focus on individual elements."