

CLOSE TO THE

# Heart

*After spending most of her adult years away from her home state, an Arizona native returns and creates a home that celebrates desert living.*

BY NANCY ERDMANN PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WOODALL



# FROM AN EARLY AGE, CYNTHIA STOE REALIZED SHE LIVED SOMEWHERE SPECIAL.

## "I GREW UP ON A WORKING RANCH

**IN THE SMALL TOWN** of Congress, where my family reared cattle and produced crops for market. It was a wonderful way to be raised," she says. But when she was in her 20s, Cynthia ventured out of state. She wouldn't return to the Southwest permanently until just a few years ago with her husband, George, a native of Pennsylvania.

"When I retired, we built a home in the mountains of North Carolina, but my wife wanted to be closer to her family," George says. "She has two sisters who live in Arizona, and her parents have a home in Scottsdale. Cynthia followed my business career as we made numerous moves over the years, so now it was my time to follow her."

The couple decided to build a home in Desert Mountain while still living on the East Coast. Situated at an elevation of 3,400 feet, the lot the couple purchased is nearly 2,200 feet above most of the Valley. "The temperatures really are cooler up here, and there's always a nice breeze. Last year, we had 9 inches of snow," George recalls. Despite the unexpected precipitation, or perhaps because of it, the Stoës knew the secluded lot had everything they were looking for: the perfect balance of privacy, space and a footprint to build the style of house they envisioned.

"We wanted a three-bedroom home and a separate casita with a Tuscan feel on the exterior but more open interior spaces, elegance and amenities that would be conducive to our lifestyle," remarks Cynthia. In order to meld the natural desert site with the design of the residence, builder Tony Calvis and architectural designer Gary Wyant sited the house to take advantage of the 360-degree mountain and city views.

With such an ideal location, indoor/outdoor living was essential to the couple, Wyant notes. "In order to make the most of the setting and the climate and provide access to as many outside spaces as possible, we incorporated individual balconies for the secondary bedrooms, a separate patio off the dining room and direct access to the main patio, pool and spa from the master bedroom suite," he explains. Bi-folding doors and stacking windows that "disappear" provide flow between the great room and wet bar and the pool and patio areas. The Stoës also wanted a detached casita where guests could enjoy privacy and direct access to the outdoors.

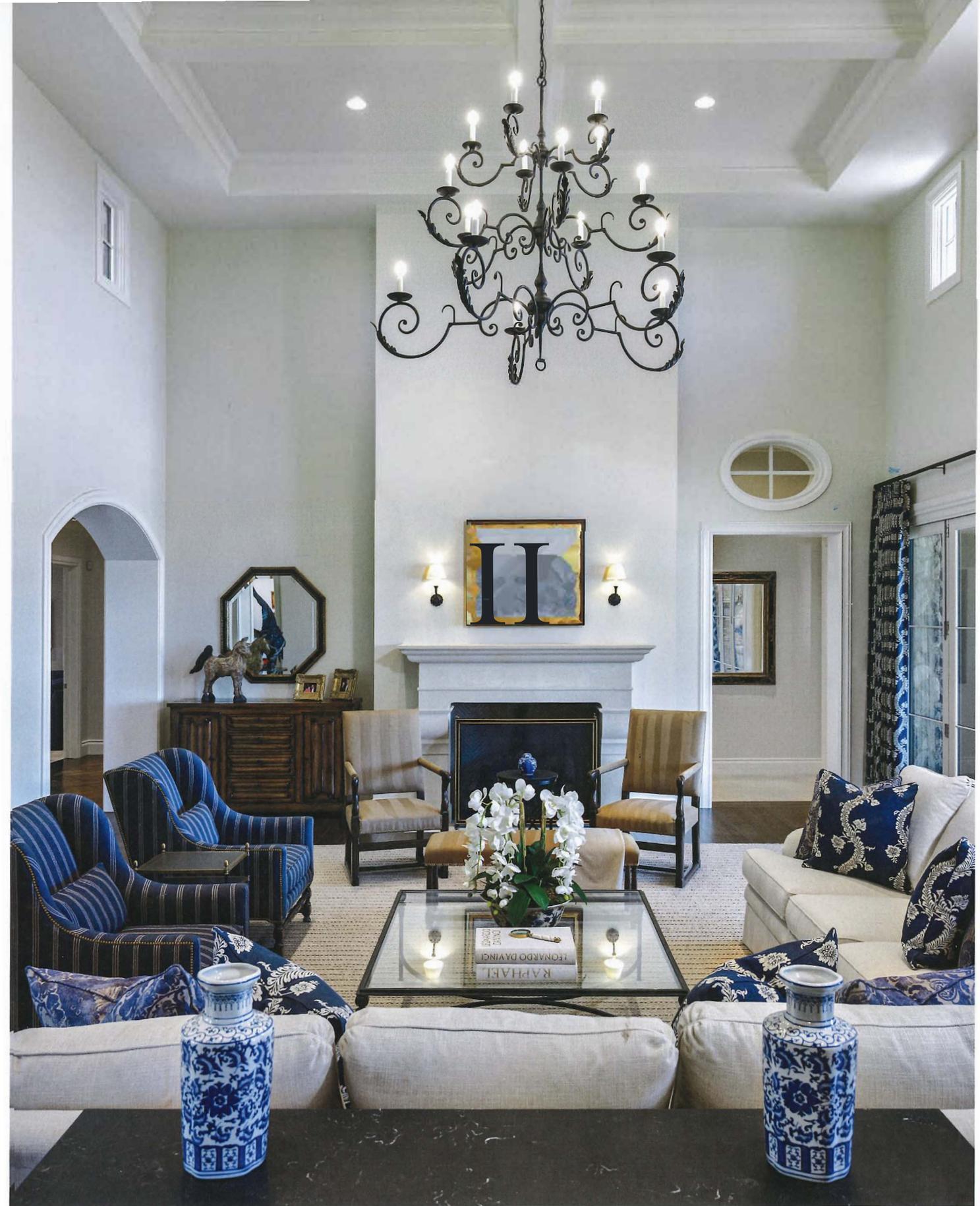
Indoors, everything is light and bright. "We worked with interior designer Lissa Lee Hickman, who was an integral part of the entire process," George explains. "Cynthia and I tend to be very decisive, so we asked her to present only two or three choices for all the selec-



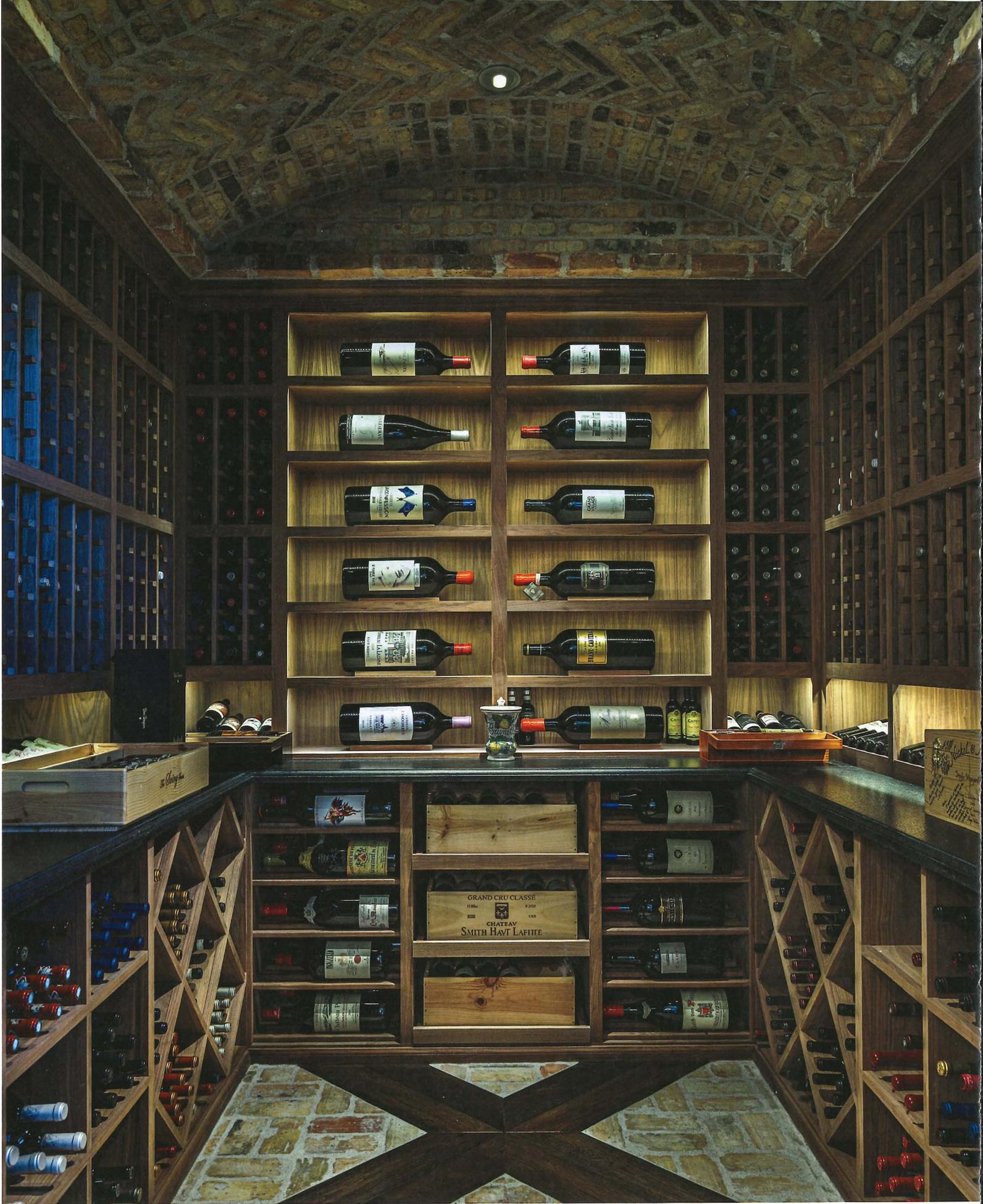
tions." The designer opted for a monochromatic scheme with pops of coloration that would complement a tailored look. "The homeowners definitely did not want a completely white house, so I showed color options early on," notes Hickman. "They love navy and red tones, so I incorporated those in the fabrics and brickwork."

Several spaces were designed with entertaining in mind. "We wanted a large round table in our dining room to encourage socializing," says Cynthia. A custom wine cellar that houses their 1,800-bottle collection is a noteworthy feature in and of its own. "This specialty room was built with temperature- and humidity-controlled storage, a vaulted brick ceiling and glass doors that provide a clear view inside from the dining area, making it an impressive focal point," says project manager Scott Edwards. Just as notable is how the couple keep their wine inventory cataloged: with an all-in-one hardware-and-software management service. "This system prints a barcode label for each bottle that identifies its location, name of the vineyard, the region, its drinking window, the rating of the wine and its original cost and current value," George says. "There is a handheld barcode reader that automatically deducts the bottle from the inventory when it is consumed."

Another highlight of the home is the ceiling work. "It is definitely special," says Cynthia. The dining room and wine cellar, for instance, share similar vaulted brick ceilings, while the kitchen, great room and master bedroom were designed with identical coffered styles. Groin vault, barrel vault and box beams can also be found throughout.



**ABOVE** Navy blue is the theme of the great room, where a box beam ceiling and an ornate chandelier visually lift the space. The painting is by Taiwanese contemporary artist Li Ancheng. **OPPOSITE** Elements used to express the historic character of the architecture and that are regionally appropriate include carved stone surrounds and a barrel-style clay tile roof.



# "We are really just enjoying all that Arizona has to offer."

-GEORGE STOE, homeowner



OPPOSITE This distinctive wine room, visible from the dining area, provides storage for 1,800 bottles, including those ranging from 1,500 to 6,000 ml in size, as well as full wooden cases. "The entire collection is monitored by a computer system and controlled to maintain a constant 56-degree temperature," notes homeowner George Stoe. Reclaimed brick on the barrel-vault ceiling is repeated in the floor. **LEFT** "The natural red/rust tones in the dining room were chosen to complement the Old Chicago brick groin-vault ceiling," notes interior designer Lissa Lee Hickman. The traditional furnishings enhance the timeless look of the interiors.



"The home was designed as a perfect entertaining place for family and friends," says Hickman. In the butler's pantry, black cabinetry provides plenty of storage for the couple's china and crystal. "It has a sink, second dishwasher and our freezer and is connected to a large walk-in pantry," says homeowner Cynthia Sloe. The counters are Neolith quartz.



A crystal chandelier hangs from a groin-vault ceiling in the elegant master bathroom, where views of the desert landscape can be enjoyed when the curtains are pulled back. The room also includes a standard shower and a steam shower.

Because Cynthia and George are pet lovers, they requested areas specifically for their two German shepherds. "Probably the most unique space in the home is Max and Xea's room," says Edwards. This comfy hideaway, located between the kitchen and garage, is outfitted with custom built-in kennels, plus a refrigerator and sink for the dogs' food, medicine and water. Running throughout most of the house, durable walnut flooring was selected for its ability to hold up to both human and pet traffic. And outside, the couple's furry friends have a grassy place to play ball and another with its own umbrella to ward off the harsh desert sun.

"The dogs were definitely a topic of conversation every time we discussed the outdoor spaces," says landscape designer Brandon LaCombe. "Cynthia and George wanted the yard to be elegant, simple and pet-friendly." Blending the new build into the indigenous environment was key to the design of the front yard, where LaCombe installed a sophisticated native landscape. Closer to the residence, he created simplicity through repeated plant and hardscape elements.



An electrical outlet is hidden behind a panel in the kitchen island to keep it out of sight.



"George loves to cook. He's the chef in our family," Cynthia says. "We wanted a large kitchen with two islands, one for doing prep and the other for family and guests to hang out at while the meal is being prepared." The pristine space is outfitted with a wine refrigerator set between two full-size refrigerators, plus three ovens, a steam oven and a warming drawer. Paneled cabinetry mimics the box beam ceiling.



**BELOW** German shepherds Max and Xea have it made with their own feeding and kennel room. The framed photo is of the Stoe's first two dogs and was a gift from George to Cynthia. **LEFT** The Stoes were going for a tailored look in their house, which is evident in the master bedroom. "We wanted it to be spacious but not overpowering," notes Cynthia. The box beam ceiling is the same design as in the great room.

"The most important part of the job was to have the backyard pool and landscape enhance, not detract from, the already beautiful surroundings," LaCombe explains. "We didn't introduce too many new materials, if any." The most standout elements of his design are the pool, spa and fire pit, as well as the brick-and-grass paving composition made up of strips of synthetic turf separating blocks of herringbone-placed bricks. "Cynthia saw this in a photo and I loved the idea, so we ran with it." The challenging part, he admits, was the math. "Making all of the turf joints and bricks the correct size for usability as well as aesthetics so that you don't end up with awkward slivers of material definitely took some doing."

Cynthia and George both agree that they achieved exactly what they intended—a house that is timeless and elegant while also being comfortable. George is adapting quickly to desert living, and Cynthia visits with her family on a regular basis. "We are really just enjoying all that Arizona has to offer, including golf, daily swims and sunshine," says George. "Life in the Southwest is definitely a pleasant change of pace." □

ARCHITECTURAL DESIGNER: Gary Wyant, Calvis Wyant Luxury Homes.  
 BUILDER: Tony Calvis, Calvis Wyant Luxury Homes. INTERIOR DESIGNER:  
 Lissa Lee Hickman, Lissa Lee Hickman Inc. LANDSCAPE DESIGNER: Brandon  
 LaCombe, Desert Springs Outdoor Environments.

**For more information, see Sources.**

