

Southwest Magic in an Ahwatukee Home • Jewelry: Bold and Beautiful

PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

DECEMBER 1992

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Glory in the Details

*An Eminently
Livable Family Home
Designed by Architect
George Christensen*

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Story by Reed Kroloff

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Photography by Reddie Henderson

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hen an architect and

clients have a meeting of the minds, the results can be extraordinary. Little wonder the Grady, Jr., and Karen Gammage house in Ahwatukee is such a success. A handsome, contemporary spin on Santa Fe style, the home exhibits strong design presence without resorting to either decorative kitsch or architectural gymnastics. "Everything's honest," says architect George Christensen. "We had what I call a cheerful historical view. We wanted to honor history without becoming a slave to it."





In all seasons, the family room is the hub of the Gammages' activities. Sofas from Roche-Bobois; rug, equipale chairs and mantel decorations from Qué Pasa.



Like Spanish and pueblo architecture, the Gammage house is a true bearing-wall, masonry building. This means the stucco-over-block walls are thicker (up to two feet in places), and more solid to the hand and ear, than typical stucco-over-wood framing. Moving into the traditional walled entry court is an act of passage, not simply a threshold crossing.

The home's foyer is part of an extended gallery connecting the master bedroom wing to the central living areas. The gallery displays some of the Gammages' growing

Signaling the Gammages' love for plants, a greenhouse offers unexpected interest at the entrance to the master bedroom. The artwork over the bed is by Thomas McKnight. The dog sculpture is from Qué Pasa.

collection of Southwestern art. But it also walls off the living room and its majestic mountain views. This is not a mistake. "I like to not show the view right away," Christensen says mischievously. "I want people to zig and zag a little before they

come upon the view. I'm known for zigging and zagging."

The zigzags are not pure mischief, though. They are a deliberate method of revealing the home and its attributes at a pace that allows them to be appreciated. The mountain view is spectacular, so Christensen holds it in abeyance. This allows guests to discover the house, its subtleties, and the spirited collection of furniture, art, and Southwestern objects Karen and Grady Gammage have collected. "It's been a slow process," says Karen. "But the



nice thing is that Grady and I agree on virtually everything. We have fun." Through the easy co-existence of the architecture and the furnishings, we are reminded that this home is a collaborative effort between knowledgeable, enthusiastic clients, and a distinguished architect who has learned the value of timing and nuance in design.

Following the gallery to the right leads to the public rooms—and the wonderful view. These spaces array themselves around a dynamic shift in the geometry of

At the far end of the living room, the house plan shifts 20 degrees off the main axis to accommodate the site and views. Vigas and latillas form one of many interesting coillings in the house. Painting by John Nieto from the Joy Tash Gallery. High-backed chair by Arata Isozaki. Wood bench from Santa Fe Style. Tree decorations from Qué Pasa.

the house. Responding to the site, the view, and the clients, Christensen's plan bends the family wing of the house about 20 degrees off the main axis. This creates a

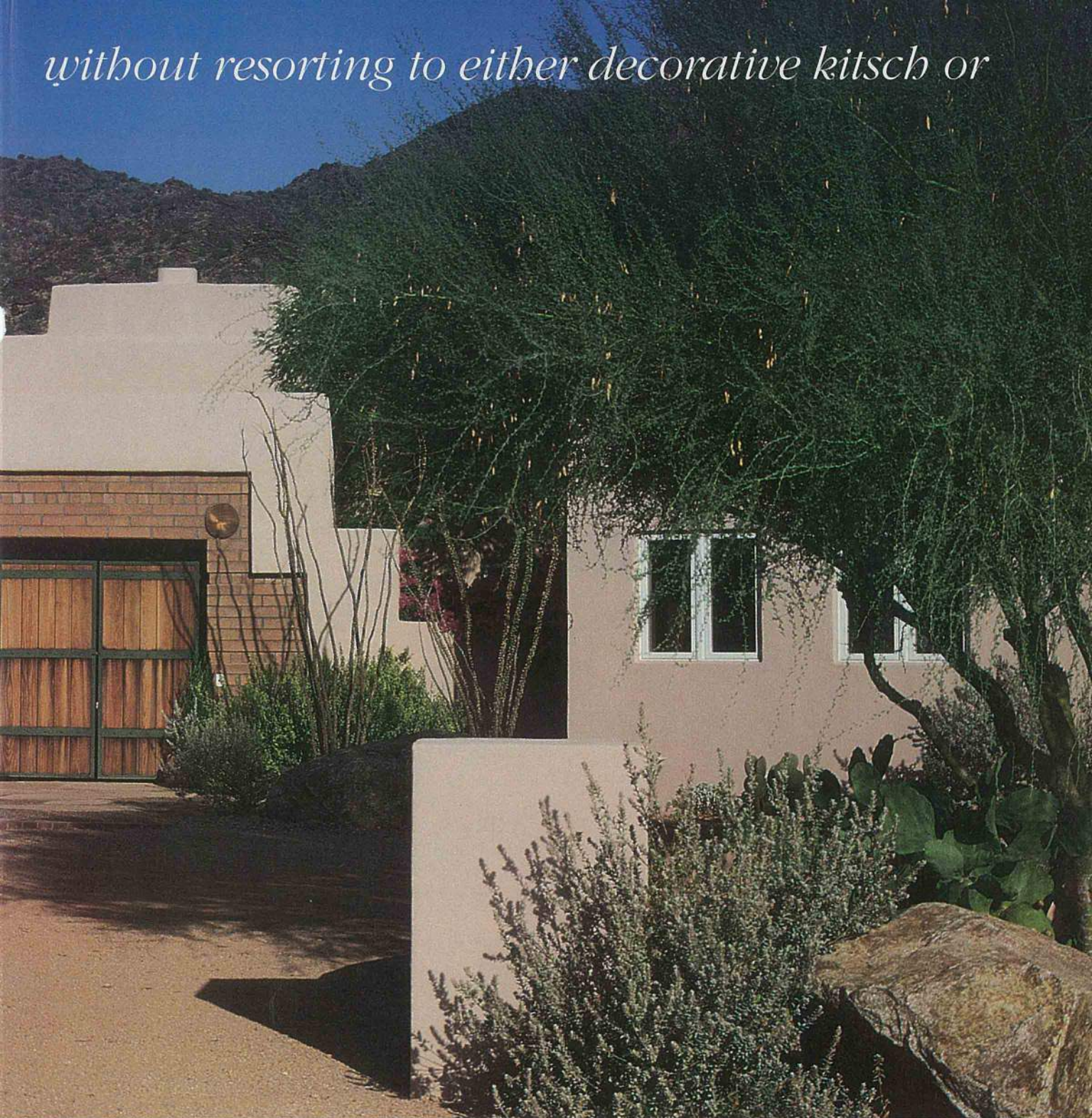
generous triangular space, which becomes the banco-edged dining room. It is also the entrance to the living room, and the passage to the kitchen and family rooms. Christensen transforms what can be a static space into a hub of activity.

From the living room, the house spreads comfortably to the east and west, one room looking through a doorway into another, then another and another. This technique of visually expanding space was perfected in the French chateaux of the 17th century, but Christensen notes that

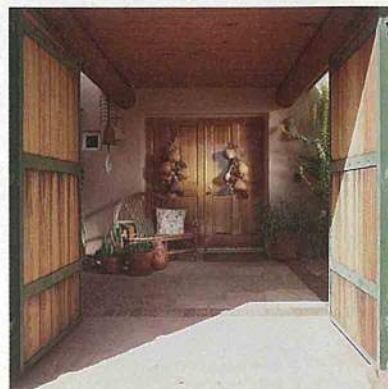
The house exhibits strong design presence



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Above: Gracefully attuned to its setting by architect George Christensen, the house exterior blends Santa Fe and contemporary influences. Thick walls of stucco over block take their cue from Spanish and pueblo architecture. **Right:** A Solari bell and gourd ristras adorn the entrance courtyard.



architectural gymnastics.





Unusual paving of flagstone and aggregate, designed by San Diego landscape architect Andy Spurlock, animates the pool cabana—one of the home's most inviting outdoor areas. Karen Gammage consulted with interior designer Shannon Van Zutphen of Qué Pasa regarding the furnishings here and in some other parts of the house.

Native Americans employed the same technique in building pueblos. The Indians used it as an efficient system for connecting their spaces, the French for purposes of grandeur. Christensen borrows from both traditions to endow what is actually a quite efficient home with the grace and comfort of a much larger structure. "Every time you turn around, there's something happening to make the space feel bigger," he comments.

Each of the rooms is designed for a purpose and is therefore distinctive. The living room is high, bright, and airy. Vigas and latillas on the ceiling are traditional Santa Fe, but their fan-shaped disposition reflects the plan shift, and Christensen's playful take on history. Interesting ceilings also are critical for Grady, a lawyer who has co-taught a class in historic preservation at ASU. "They are the difference between ordinary houses and really interesting houses," he says.

The living room leads into Grady's study, which is intimate, lower-ceilinged, and lined with bookshelves. This, in turn, flanks the greenhouse, the one architectural departure from the overall composition. Looking very much like a wood-trimmed, glass-and-metal plant hospital, poked bluntly into the master sitting area, this is the green-thumbed Gammages' *sanctum florealis*. It also serves as the informal entry

to the master suite, where the ceiling again lifts, and the lighting is dimmed to more personal levels.

At the other end of the house, the kitchen commands views in all directions—through the entire master wing, across the dining and living rooms to the mountains, and over the family room and childrens' study. It is the pivot point for the family and the home, a status implied by its high ceiling and critical positioning. The family room (with another interesting ceiling—of wood planking) is flanked by the childrens' bedrooms and study. And just outside, separated from the house by a small, inviting courtyard, is the recently added guest house.

Entertainment is made easy by the home's comfortable plan, especially in the extensive covered patio areas that define the backyard. One is ceilinged and traditional, the other almost an outside room floating in the swimming pool. The ensemble encourages the kind of outside living the Gammages enjoy, and looks out to beautiful views of South Mountain Park, with its elegant army of blinking antennae.

"We hired George because of his attention to detail," concludes Grady. "Everything had a reason." The Gammages' house is ample proof that, at least where Christensen is concerned, the most important detail is the clients themselves. ■