

AT HOME

# inside,

A TUCSON COUPLE ENVISIONED AN OUTDOOR OASIS WHERE FAMILY  
OUTDOORS YEAR-ROUND. **SAM MITTELSTEADT** ADMIRES THE

AND FRIENDS COULD ENJOY THE  
COLORFUL SPACE AND DESERT MOUNTAIN VIEWS

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#### RED, RED LINES

The pool and spa at this Tucson home are positioned to maximize the view of the Catalina Mountains — especially from the ledge lounge chairs that seem to float in a dreamy “lagoon.”

PHOTOGRAPHY BY MATT VACCA



THE VIEW CERTAINLY DIDN'T HURT.

Beyond an expansive arroyo, the Santa Catalina Mountains loom impressively and imposingly at Tucson's north perimeter, and toward sundown their saw-toothed westernmost point, Pusch Ridge, burns bright with shades of cinnamon and fiery sienna.

But for the owners of this home in Oro Valley, another major selling point was its backyard, which, at the time of purchase, was just a contractor-grade blank canvas. "There was a large perimeter wall, a couple of desert plants and then a lot of granite," says Tim. "For a guy who's all about doing projects, that was irresistible."

A job relocation brought the couple from the Midwest to Tucson, where they quickly found themselves enchanted by the area's character and high-desert climate. "There's a sense of relaxation in north Tucson — and in the Southwest in general," Tim says. "You're truly connected to the outdoors. We love the fact that you can be outside and do something 365 days of the year here."

To maximize that principle at home, the couple embarked upon an ambitious outdoor project with local landscape and interior designer Kathryn Prideaux. The lot would be regraded and scraped of its decorative gravel to accommodate a pool and ramada, creating linked spaces where family and friends could swim, cook, dine and socialize. "The environment is fantastic eight months of the year," Tim says. "Why would we want to be indoors? I'd rather stand outside with a glass of wine or a beer, cooking a steak and looking at the views."

The pool and spa are positioned to maximize the sight of the Catalinas — and not just from the ledge lounge chairs that sit half-submerged in the pool's "lagoon" section, where Sara likes to relax while reading. Thanks to three large living room windows, "even when you walk in the front door of the house, the first thing you see is this beautiful pool framing the mountain vista," Tim says. "And when you walk out the back door, you have a full 270-degree view."

Prideaux wedged rows of colorful tiles against the pool stair risers, and their motif of stripes recurs throughout other elements of the ramada



### "WE PREFER THE TRADITION

— flanking the cooktops and grill in the cooking area, poised atop the steel mantel of the massive fireplace in the lounge area. "I love that little band of color, but it was important to use it in a way that's not expected or obvious," she says.

It's also one of the few uses of vivid color in a "rustic modern" palette that otherwise accentuates seasoned hues and elements: An oxidized woven-steel screen serves as both privacy screen and backdrop to the cooking area; rustic doors above the fireplace mantel conceal a wall-mounted flat-screen television. "We prefer the tradition behind weathered materials, the character they bring," Tim says. "There's a sterility that can come with straight modern."

In each of its tableaux, the Pusch Ridge project balances the graphic and modern with the weathered and rustic. Encaustic cement tiles on the base of the fireplace are emblazoned with a starburst

### BEHIND WEATHERED MATERIALS, THE CHARACTER THEY BRING.

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pattern in charcoal and white — a palette that's repeated in soft goods such as pillows and seating poufs, as well as the umbrellas that shade the pool lounges.

The gridding of the tiles, meanwhile, is writ large in the pavers that form the floors of the kitchen, lounge and dining areas. "There's an expanse of hardscaping in the whole structure, but I didn't want it to feel commercial, like a sea of concrete," says Prideaux. "The etched-finish pavers also offer a lot of traction, which is important when you've got kids running back and forth."

At such a grand scale, a typically solid-roofed ramada would be overwhelming, Prideaux says, effectively contradicting the purpose and pleasures of an outdoor experience. Her unexpected alternative offers a semi-exposed dining area that's covered

**TAKE IT OUTSIDE**  
In southern Arizona, residents love to live outside year-round. This backyard provides ample space for swimming, cooking and entertaining.





**STARS AND STRIPES**  
The cozy ramada and dining area epitomize the backyard's "rustic modern" palette, with bold pops of color, graphic patterns and natural materials such as the wooden doors above the fireplace mantel that conceal a flat-screen TV.

by oversized slats of weathered redwood. "It really harks back to a Southwest tradition of having a center courtyard," she says. "As you leave the house, you first experience this area that's partially open."

For the material, "we first considered slats of steel, and even old ocotillo branches," says Tim. "But the redwood provides such good texture and good shade." Additionally, the solid portion of the ramada faces east, which means the dining room benefits from afternoon shade — a welcome respite from Tucson's routinely sunny climate.

"We're out here year-round," says Sara. "In triple-digit summertime, we're in the swimming pool. Last Thanksgiving, we hosted a dinner with 10 guests and did the whole thing outside. When we



have work dinners for Tim's colleagues, everyone's out here the entire time, using the different areas — people around the dining table, people on the couches, people gabbing on the grass."

Prideaux, a landscape architect as well as an interior designer, was careful to maximize the outdoor space, using desert plants such as agaves and ocotillos minimally and purposefully. The project also contains a strong turf element that begins with ribbons of Bermuda framing pavers near the pool, then spills and expands as it wends its way down the grade toward the wash.

"We have two young boys who have friends running around, and dogs, and we wanted an area that was natural, even if it takes a little more maintenance than typical desert landscaping," says Tim, who grew up working on golf courses. "If you know what you're doing with grass in the Southwest, it's not difficult to do something wisely."

Near the house, the watering system eschews sprinklers in favor of a network of underground tubes that minimize evaporation and maximize the hydration of the lush Bermuda grass. (The subterranean system also eliminates slippery overspray on the pavers that serve as a walkway from the ramada to the pool.)

Eventually, soft plantings of brittlebush will grow to visually break the fence line that separates the home from the arroyo just steps away. "It's important to realize what's beyond your own space, to make it flow," Prideaux says.

"If you walk out our back gate and into the wash, you'll see something new every day," Tim agrees. "We love the wildlife — quail, bobcats, javelinas and coyotes. You're surrounded by nature." 🌵