

VIEW *from* THE TOP

Embracing his home's breathtaking vistas, an architect turns the traditional floor plan upside down.

BY MICHELLE JACOBY PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARRETT COOK



WESTERN WINDOW SYSTEMS

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THIS PAGE A dramatic floor-to-ceiling glass entry door opens to the first floor foyer. **OPPOSITE** Dale and Mary Gardon's contemporary DC Ranch home features a unique inverted format in which the guest quarters and recreation room are downstairs and the main living areas are upstairs.





HIGH RES MEDIA

Respected Valley architect Dale Gardon is known for his classic and traditional style, oftentimes inspired by historic and regional influences from such worldly places as Spain, Italy and the Mediterranean. He is responsible for numerous award-winning residences in prestigious communities, including DC Ranch, Silverleaf and Verrado. But when it came to designing his own house, he may have outdone himself.

The *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner decided to turn his work on its head—literally.

Dale, his wife, Mary, and sons Tyler and Trevor have been long-time residents of DC Ranch, where they lived for 19 years in a beautiful traditional home perfect for their growing family. But as the boys grew older and eventually moved out, the Gardons decided it was time for a change.

Always wanting to challenge himself, Dale began designing a contemporary home with modern lines, refined living areas and tranquil outdoor spaces. One day, as he was painting the eaves on the roof of his previous house, he stopped, looked around and, as if

RIGHT Clean lines, minimalist furnishings and a palette of white, blue and gray evoke a beach-house-meets-urban-loft feel in the living room. Printed on metal, the photo of a rainy night in London is by one of the Gardons' sons. **ABOVE** A balcony at the front of the house connects to the second-story living room and overlooks a water-wise landscape filled with desert plants.





THIS PAGE A dramatic metal diptych of a horse peeks from the stairway into the dining room, which features a custom table for eight—made from two slabs connected with bow-tie splines. The hall on the left—a bridge over the first-floor entry—leads to the master suite. **RIGHT** The dark, contemporary fireplace helps conceal the TV while adding visual contrast and weight to the white room.

THIS PHOTO AND ABOVE HIGH RES MEDIA



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—DALE GARDON, architect and homeowner

for the first time, took in the amazing view. That's when he had his a-ha moment.

"As I stood on the roof, I became more aware of what was around me: the cars driving by, the people walking down the street, the wildlife in the desert. The mountains even felt closer," Dale says. "I already had started designing our new home, but then I thought, 'Why don't I just flip it upside down?' I really wanted to enjoy the view, so what better way than to put the main living spaces upstairs?"

While the idea wasn't particularly novel—you can find inverted homes in beach communities and city dwellings—a home like this in a suburban neighborhood, Dale says, was certainly unique. "People thought it was kind of crazy," he laughs.

Crazy or not, he decided to move forward, and after four years of planning and design, and more than a year of construction, the end result is a modern marvel that takes full advantage of its scenic surroundings.

Sleek and stylish, the home also exudes a sense of warmth and welcome. But what makes the home truly unique is its near-perfect position in relation to the surrounding mountain ranges. "I twisted the house so McDowell Peak (the highest peak in the McDowell Mountains) is 90 degrees to Pinnacle Peak, and then at 180 degrees are Camelback and Mummy mountains," Dale explains. "Orientation-wise, everything seemed to fall in place."

Staying true to its progressive style, the home is constructed with environmentally friendly structural insulated panels (SIPs); waferboard, a recycled product made from wood chips and flakes; and extruded aluminum siding that resembles wood.

CLOCKWISE Sliding glass doors open the main living spaces to a large west-facing patio, ideal for entertaining or simply enjoying a morning coffee. • Windows and black glass beneath the upper cabinets ensure that every corner of the kitchen is filled with natural light. • A cozy seating arrangement and fire feature allow the Gardons to enjoy the patio year-round.



“It’s very durable for a desert environment. Plus, it gives the home a warm feel, not one that’s cold and sterile,” Dale says.

Not only are the materials durable, their application in a residential home may be a first. “We used some materials on this house that we haven’t used before,” says Dale’s longtime friend and colleague, builder Anthony Salcito. The pair has worked on more than 100 projects together over the past 25 years. “We used an insulated metal siding that to me looks like it will have a 10- to 20-year finish,” he adds. “We also used SIP panels, which we’ve used multiple times in commercial construction, but this is the first time we built a home entirely out of it. The walls and roof structure are all SIP.”

Inside, the two-level home is thoughtfully and meticulously designed, with every room and space having a purpose. On the first floor are three guest rooms, two bathrooms, and a large rec room

that leads out to the patio and pool area with a picture-perfect backdrop of the McDowell Mountains. Designed for Trevor and Tyler when they visit, it’s also where guests can stay and relax in the privacy of their own space.

There’s even an elevator, which Dale designed “as a backup option,” he says. “With the inversion, we knew we really had to make things flow smoothly, including ascending to the second floor. But we put in the elevator for older parents and guests. Or one of us could be injured tomorrow and need it.”

With the future in mind, he also designed the home to be flexible, creating rooms and spaces that could transition into something else. The carport, for instance, can house five cars. “But by adding a wall and enclosing the space, we can create a home office or place for parents or in-laws,” he says. “In fact, for my own parents, I



While the Gardons say they adore every room of their home, they admit that the kitchen and breakfast nooks are their favorite spots. Designed as gathering spaces for guests and family, they are set in the middle of the house to take full advantage of the stunning views of the McDowell Mountains. The yellow bench seats add a fun pop of color to the otherwise subdued color palette.



CLOCKWISE The Gardons' dog, Coco, relaxes on the custom master bed. Mirrors above the nightstands reflect the natural light. • The master bath features a slipper tub, flanked by his-and-hers showers. Floor-to-ceiling windows look out to Pinnacle Peak. • A spacious dressing room, complete with double storage islands, separates the master bedroom and bath.

"I wanted the home to be easy to live in and have that Zen-like feeling."

—MARY GARDON, homeowner



thought of doing a bedroom with a sitting area, kitchenette and private entry. It would be the perfect living space."

The top level of the house encompasses the main living areas—living room, kitchen, master suite and home office—all of which ease together effortlessly. Exuding a true penthouse feel, the living room is clean and contemporary, with west-facing windows that frame those magical desert sunsets.

"We have a 270-degree panorama of mountains and city views as far away as Tempe and Mesa," Dale says. "It's spectacular when the monsoon dust storms roll in. You can see the big wall of dust and flashes of lightning, and you feel like you're in another world."

In the kitchen, Dale used a variety of materials and woods to add dimension and layers. For colors, he chose a combination of charcoal gray, white and brown. For dimension, he used glass-front cabinets made from reconstituted wood and a black mirror backsplash.

"Some people have an aversion to glass. But for cabinets, we just love it because it reflects light and textures," Dale says. "And with the black mirrors, you can really see the reflection of the mountains and the desert in the backsplashes."

A bridge, as Dale describes it, that looks down to the front entry and main stairway separates the living area from the master suite. An open dressing area includes his-and-her islands and walls of



COUNTERCLOCKWISE Placing the pool on the side of the house, where it has unobstructed mountain vistas, gives the home a resortlike feel. • A guest bath opens directly to the pool patio. • Located on the first level of the home, a sunny guest bedroom provides privacy and solitude.



floor-to-ceiling closets, while the spa-like bathroom includes equal and opposite sinks, vanities and showers separated by a free-standing tub, and an outdoor shower with a gunslot opening to the mountain views in the distance.

Whereas Dale maintained the design and construction of the home, Mary played a significant role in the interior design.

“It was a very cleansing thing to move into a space that was fresh and uncluttered,” she says. “I wanted the home to be easy to live in and have that Zen-like feeling. I also wanted it to be a place where our family and guests would feel comfortable. But my No. 1 ‘want’ was a space that was quiet and calming, where I could open the windows and a bottle of wine, and relax to those beautiful views.”

Throughout the home, stunning artwork is on display—photographed by Trevor and Tyler during their many travels around the world. One piece shows people walking a London street on a rainy

night, while another was taken on a misty morning atop Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania.

“Both boys have traveled and taken beautiful photographs along the way. We enjoy the meaning and personalization behind this special art,” Dale says.

Dale admits designing and building the home “wore [him and Mary] out.” With most of his work being in the traditional genre, he says he wanted to prove he could do something different and unexpected.

“We just kept pushing boundaries by exploring new materials and processes,” he says. “At the end of the day, however, when the mountains are lit from the setting sun, and the shadows and light show their beauty, I feel more connected to the things that I knew were here but didn’t fully appreciate until now.” □

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