

lakefront living

Celebrating the indoor-outdoor
way of life, Sonoran style

BY JOHN ROARK PHOTOGRAPHY BY GARRETT COOK AND STEVE THOMPSON



The home's entry and lakeside front yard are accessed through a gated side wall that was added by interior designer and homeowner Wendy Black Rodgers. The cantilevered fire pit is one of the family's most-used locations for hanging out.

STEVE THOMPSON



"I don't like shoes. I never wear them if I can possibly help it," says homeowner and interior designer Wendy Black Rodgers as she ponders her brightly manicured toes. Her barefoot bias is shared by her husband, Will, and three grown sons, Hunter, Wyatt and Rhett. Their McCormick Ranch home, which the boys have dubbed Chateau du Lac, embraces easygoing living. The decor is an eclectic mix of found objects, antiques and delightful details; doors are always open to breezes; airy rooms transition seamlessly to outdoor spaces where pillowed lounges inspire total relaxation and a green lawn meanders down to the water's edge. Grab a cold drink, put your feet up, and stay awhile.

If this abode sounds comfortably casual, it is. At the same time, it exudes sophistication, order and efficiency, befitting the home office of an interior designer.

Wendy happened upon the property accidentally. "Our boys were grown and gone, and we thought we were ready for the townhome lifestyle, but we weren't," she recalls. "I was walking my dog and discovered this strange house that didn't appear to have a front door." Inside, she found a time capsule straight out of the 1970s. The original owner had had a penchant for green, which manifested in shag carpet, flocked wallpaper and exposed ceiling beams which were painted a vibrant chartreuse. "But I was grateful that structurally they hadn't done anything to mess it up. It truly was a diamond in the rough."

Will, who has a degree in architecture, was equally enamored, but some feared that the couple had taken leave of their senses. "My whole family has to weigh in on everything," Wendy says. "My mom and brother both said, 'You do know that this is an ugly

TOP LEFT The charming arched entry gate provides complete privacy. **TOP RIGHT** A patio adjacent to the home's front door includes a pair of comfy chaises optimally positioned for the lakeside view. Nearby, a grouping of chairs provides another inviting spot for conversation. **LEFT** Under the covered patio, an outdoor dining table seats 10. French doors open to let in breezes during mild weather, while an overhead flush-mounted heater keeps the space cozy during cooler months.

“We always talk about good bones, and this house had them.” —WILL RODGERS, homeowner



For a family whose love of the outdoors is equaled by their passion for cooking, creating a seamless transition from kitchen to patio was essential.

house, right?’ My response? ‘Are you kidding me? Can’t you see this is an unbelievable opportunity?’”

For the interior designer—who is recognized for her prowess in Spanish colonial style—the structure represented a welcome change of pace. “A house will tell you what it wants,” she says. “With the sharp pitch to its roof, leaded glass windows and architectural embellishments, this one was trying very hard to be French. So I let it.”



DAWN KISCH

The first order of business for the new homeowners was to rethink the compartmentalized floor plan, an attribute typical of ’70s-era homes.

“Every design decision that we ourselves would never make had been done. But they built a good solid house,” says Will. “We always talk about good bones, and this house had them. We just needed to open everything up and give the rooms the chance to breathe.”

Illogical bathrooms were reconfigured for greater efficiency. Walls that caged the dining room into a pie shape were eliminated



TOP RIGHT The Rodgers brothers (from left to right): Wyatt, Rhett and Hunter. **ABOVE** Originally enclosed, the dining room is now open and airy. In the adjacent kitchen, air-conditioning ductwork was relocated to the rooftop, adding vertical space for cabinetry. A flush ceiling-mount range hood above the induction cooktop further opens up the room.



CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT Overlooking lawn and lake, the covered patio is where the family spends the most time. When guests outnumber beds, they snuggle under blankets and sleep al fresco. • Wendy and her son Rhett share a moment. • The sharp pitch of the roof and leaded-glass front door emphasize the home's French vibe.



DAWN KISCH

to integrate the area into the kitchen, where vertical space for cabinetry was added by moving air-conditioning ductwork to the roof. Sliding doors and archaic windows were replaced with bifold window doors on both the front and rear of the home. The new opening welcomes natural light and also enables cross ventilation.

Low ceilings—a staple of homes built 40 years ago—presented another challenge for the interior designer. “My husband and sons are all taller than 6 feet. They’d hit their heads on any ceiling-mounted lighting fixtures,” she says. Eight-foot ceilings, such as those in the kitchen and baths remained unaltered, but a claustrophobic hallway was transformed by arching the ceiling.

“I learned this trick years ago,” Wendy explains. “If you arch a low clearance it becomes architecturally interesting, which totally changes the feeling of a narrow hallway. You don’t even think of it as small.”

The revised, less-compartmentalized floor plan perfectly couples the family’s passion for cooking and entertaining with their love of fresh air and open spaces. Easily transitioning from kitchen to patio, outdoor grill and dining table makes gathering, partying—even working at home—effortless.

To help accommodate an extended family of more than 50, a steady stream of visiting friends and those who Will refers



“We need a comfortable home. But as a designer, I have to have a great-looking house, too.”

—WENDY BLACK RODGERS, homeowner and interior designer



OPPOSITE A table painted in the style of Columbian artist Fernando Botero is a whimsical focal point near the front entry. The master bedroom can be seen through the door to the right. **ABOVE** The living room's vaulted ceiling was original to the house. Throughout the home, sliding doors were replaced by bifold windowed doors, which open to let the outdoors in.

to as “strays and drop-ins,” the couple designed and built a driveway-adjacent 480-square-foot detached guest house at the rear of the property. The designer is well-versed in tight spaces after re-decorating an out-of-state client’s 90-foot-long by 10-foot-wide vintage railroad cars. “Those homes-on-wheels taught me a lot about making the most of what you have to work with. I think of it as putting together a huge puzzle,” she says.

Although Wendy splurged on a unique desert-scene toile wall paper—she insists that there are some things you just can’t resist—she is happy to economize wherever she sees an opportunity. The casita bathroom’s bold black-and-white striped walls are clad in inexpensive porcelain floor tiles found at a local home-

improvement outlet. “They were dirt cheap, and I thought, let’s do the whole room,” she says. “Everything doesn’t have to be high-end to look spectacular.”

The addition includes a petite kitchen with a 24-inch-wide dishwasher, microwave and two-burner cooktop, a full bath, queen-size bed and sofa bed. “This is always the party house. When our sons are in town, we never know how many people we’re going to find when we wake up,” Wendy laughs. “There have been mornings when I’ve discovered six people sleeping in the guest house and a few more snuggled under blankets on the patio.”

While she had an instantaneous vision of how to transform the interiors of Chateau du Lac, Wendy recalls that the exteriors were





an evolution. "We moved in and wanted to get a feeling for what we needed to do outside," she recalls. After filling in the existing backyard swimming pool to create more room for natural grass, the couple extended the covered back patio from the standard 10 feet to 22 feet deep. "Most patios are too small," she observes. "If you're going to design a room outside, people should be able to look at each other and engage in conversation."

One of the family's much-loved backyard amenities is a fire pit accessed from the lawn by stone steps. The idea came from the couple's eldest son, Hunter. "He suggested we remove a couple of trees that were blocking the view of the lake and cantilever the fire pit over the water. We did it just as he envisioned, and it was a great idea." Adorning the stairs are a quartet of antique

wooden columns originally intended for a pergola. "Will thought they'd make the area look like ancient Rome," Wendy laughs. "It was a big family controversy; for a long time the boys hated those columns there, but now they admit that they've grown to love them."

For a family that embraces outside living, the house by the water has brought great contentment. Morning coffee on the patio is a favorite ritual. Weekends bring evening cocktail cruises around the lake on the couple's pontoon.

"We live in a chaotic world where peace and comfort are a luxury," says Wendy. "I used to have migraine headaches, and I'd try to visualize myself in a spot of complete peace and tranquility. This is that place." □

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FAR LEFT The master bedroom opens to an outdoor sleeping porch. **LEFT** "The ceiling was low, but I think of the guest bathroom as a beautiful jewel box," says Wendy. **BELOW LEFT** A master-bath vignette includes charming details that typify the home's interiors, including a pair of wall-mounted angel's wings, which Wendy enjoys collecting.

WENDY'S WISDOM

SMALL HOUSE, BIG POTENTIAL

Many homeowners are transitioning from large houses to less square footage for a simplified lifestyle, Wendy believes. "Invest in high-end finishes and luxe surfaces. Just because you have a small home doesn't mean it can't be exquisite."

CHANGING PERSPECTIVE

Try staging your accessories in a separate space, such as on the garage floor. Then "go shopping." "Seeing things in another environment eliminates preconceived notions of where they should be. Often you can find a better spot for a lot of items."

MAKE USE OF WHAT YOU HAVE

If you have classic pieces of furniture with a lot of miles on them, consider giving them a face-lift. "Reinvent the things you love. Reupholster a big sofa in a solid color, then dress it up with colorful throws and pillows."

ARRANGING THE ARTWORK

When designing a wall with multiple pieces of art, Wendy recommends beginning with a theme, color or style. "Put the most important or largest piece in the center and place smaller items alternately on each side, one at a time, for balance."





The 450-square-foot casita was added by the homeowners to accommodate frequent visitors. While she economized wherever possible, the interior designer splurged on the bedroom's desert-themed toile wallpaper. "Once I saw it, how could I pass it up?" she asks.



TOP LEFT Outside the lakeside casita, firewood is stacked and ready for the grill, fire pit and interior fireplaces. **TOP RIGHT** The casita's bathroom walls are clad in inexpensive porcelain tiles found at a discount flooring store. **ABOVE** The compact casita includes a small kitchen, bathroom, living room with a sleeper sofa, and a queen-size bed.