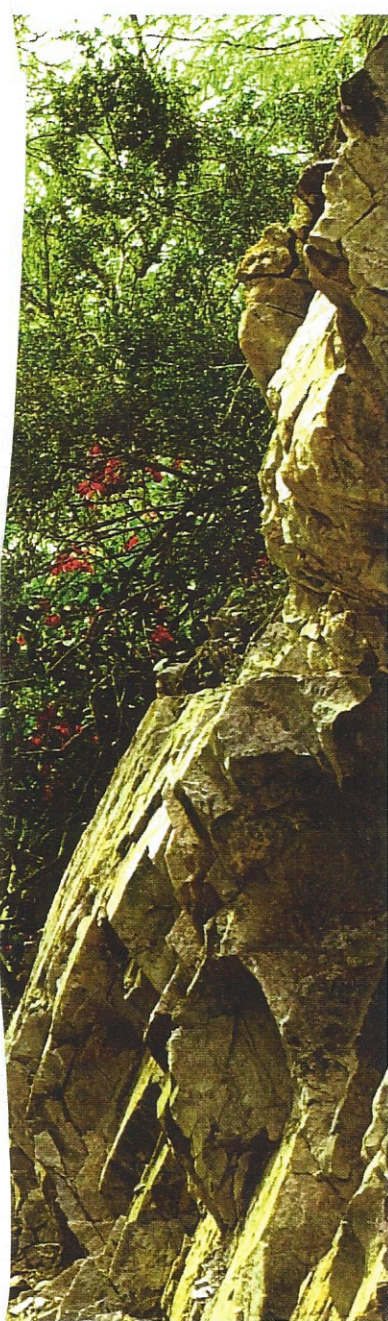


Mummy Mountain Retreat

Desert flora enhances a hillside garden

Text by Suzanne Pickett Martinson • Photography by Alex Vertikoff

Nestled against the south side of Mummy Mountain, the hillside property seemed destined to become another victim of the tear-down syndrome so common in the Valley. But as luck would have it, an Ohio couple came along, fell in love with the property, and, having bought it, put their trust in a savvy landscaping professional. The result is an Arizona-style home surrounded by a profusion of color and texture.



Opposite: Breathtaking vistas helped convince an Ohio couple to purchase a Paradise Valley property in need of attention.

Top, right: A view from the pool toward the house offers a dramatic display of low-water-use plantings.

Right: Extensive desert vegetation lines the rock wall along the driveway.



"We had been visiting the Valley for years, and my husband just fell in love with this place," the wife says of the home purchased in 1995. "The house was small, and the landscape was in dire need of help, but something just called to him."

The homeowners, who split their time between Paradise Valley and Ohio, credit Steve Bollinger and his team at Landscaping by André Inc. with the vision and successful implementation of what is now an exceptional outdoor environment.

Bollinger says that working with the homeowners was a "great experience in teamwork. They were really involved yet were very receptive to our ideas. Those are usually the most fun and rewarding projects for everyone."

One of the homeowners' requests was to save some of the existing plants. "When we bought the home, it had one of the largest, most gorgeous bougainvilleas I have ever seen," says the wife. "I knew that I wanted to keep that and even add more. We also wanted to concentrate on Southwestern plants, nothing like the petunias, daffodils or geraniums that I use in Ohio. Overall, we wanted a colorful, lush desert feel that was easy to maintain."

Bollinger and his design/build team spent six months working on the project. "One of our goals was to soften the existing hardscape," he notes. "In the most visible area—the front of the

home—a huge wall nearly 18 feet high stood out like a fortress. And in other places the spectacular view of the Valley was blocked."

The large wall, which faces the entrance to the property, serves as a retention barrier and holds up most of the outdoor terrace; so removing it was not an option. To create a dense yet verdant planting to mask the curved wall, Bollinger installed ebony trees as a focal point, with cactus, bougainvillea and a host of native plants as companions. The result is a blending of foliage that effectively hides the wall in a pleasing manner.

Although not too steep, the driveway was narrow and barely wide enough to turn a car around at the top. Bollinger widened the driveway in areas and replaced the deteriorated asphalt with neutral-tone paving stone. With ebony trees lining the east side of the driveway, the western border is softly defined by volunteer plantings, such as creosote bushes, palo verde and sweet acacia trees, as well as the ruellia, sage, ocotillo and agave chosen to complement them.

On the upward slope toward the house, imported stone was formed into a terraced planter, creating an interesting yet subtle barrier between the driveway and the mountain, and serving as a channel for one of the washes. Citrus trees placed in planters pro-



Opposite: Keeping with the look of the home's architecture, the pool was retiled, and the garden terrace that surrounds it was replanted.

Right: Along the face of Mummy Mountain, where the house and garage meet, an enormous bougainvillea forms a graceful canopy over a walkway. The vine fosters the illusion that there is a secret garden beyond the opening.



“When it rains, water from the mountain can become very strong

vide the color, texture and fruit the homeowners desired. Paired with specimen cacti and existing mesquite trees, the citrus look right at home and produce a heavenly scent when in bloom.

The courtyard leading to the front door is cozily ensconced between the mountain and an angle of the home. A bright-pink bougainvillea bridges the gap between the house and a mountain boulder, and seems to invite the viewer into a small tunnel-like pathway. The front door is flanked by a multitude of sago palms.

Boulders were placed throughout the landscape to “bring the mountain down” and create a natural transition. “Since there are quite a few natural washes, we needed to be careful of drainage, as well as plant placement,” Bollinger explains. “When it rains, water from the mountain can become very strong and easily take the vegetation along with it.”

Placing boulders on a sloping mountain was another challenge. “The crane that moved the boulders had to remain on the street and lift all of those rocks over the wall and up the mountain,” Bollinger recalls. “That is a factor to consider when working with a hillside landscape.”

To continue the natural Southwestern theme, various types of cereus cacti were used in abundance in both the front and back yards. “When you use one plant in quantity, it makes the space look larger and less cluttered,” says Bollinger. “*Cereus* are individually unique and have intriguing textures and shapes.” Other plants used in mass are golden barrel and totem pole cacti.

In the back yard, the celebrated bougainvillea has now reached an unimaginable size. “This incredible plant anchors the back yard and is approximately 18 to 20 feet high and about 45 to

Left: A stand of cactus marks the descent from the balcony to the pool. Each level of the terraced property offers clear views of the dense desert vegetation that characterizes this landscape.

and easily take the vegetation along with it.”

50 feet long,” confirms Bollinger. “It stands out from wherever you are and can be seen from far down the street.” Other groupings of bougainvillea and cape honeysuckle placed throughout the yard lend warmth and color to the mountainside retreat.

An existing lawn was replaced by a permanent canvas tent structure positioned to the east side of the pool, to allow unobstructed views of Camelback Mountain from the upper terrace. The tent, which provides cover for a grill and built-in bar, offers ample space for entertaining even the largest parties. The pool was redone with Pebble Tec® and decorative tile, and the glaring pool equipment was relocated. Assorted succulents, agaves, ocotillos and large boulders create a sense of privacy yet allow views of the city, sky and mountains to be admired from this vantage point.

Maintaining the landscape is easy due to a newly installed drip-irrigation system, a palette of plants that doesn't require an abundance of water, and bimonthly maintenance visits. “It's easy to catch little problems before they turn into big ones when there are scheduled visits,” says Bollinger.

The homeowners also purchased the vacant land next to their home, increasing the size of their property and protecting the natural desert from future development.

They say they thoroughly enjoy spending time at their Mummy Mountain sanctuary. With views that sweep the Valley, from the east to the skyline of downtown Phoenix, the property offers a clear picture of Camelback Mountain.

“The inside and outside of the home flow so well,” concludes the wife. “It is livable, easy to maintain, and completely captivating.” 🌵

See Resource Guide.

Right: Boulders were placed throughout the grounds to provide a smooth transition from the mountain to the house and the land beyond. Totem pole cacti and bougainvillea flourish in this rocky environment.

