

Arizona Foothills

THE LIFESTYLE MAGAZINE FOR AFFLUENT DESERT LIVING



The Definitive **DESIGN ISSUE**

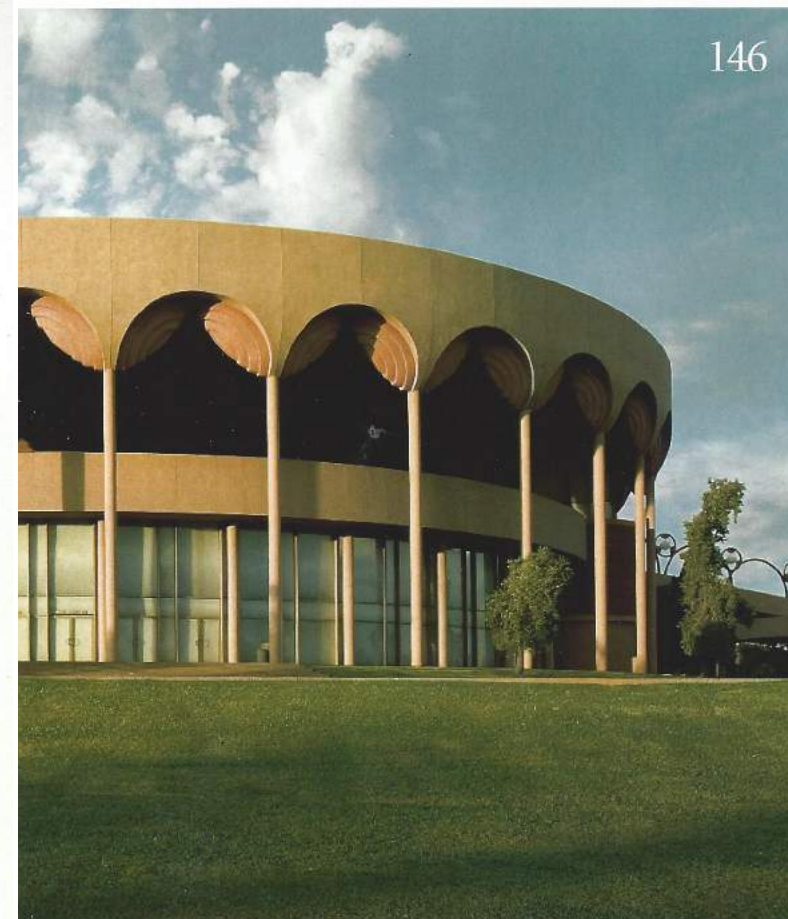
52 Pages of the Best in Art,
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Wright or Wrong?: 146

The Frank Lloyd Wright-designed Gammage Auditorium and the new, illuminated spire at Scottsdale's Promenade shopping center were originally planned for entirely different sites. Are these relocated masterworks still what Wright wanted?

BY DAVID M. BROWN

Razing Arizona?: 152

With today's vaulted ceilings and four-car garages, most homeowners have scant interest in the previous generations' intimate abodes. But for a few Valley owners of architecturally significant homes, it's all about restoration.

BY DAWSON FEARNOW



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RAZING ARIZONA?

Valley owners of architecturally significant homes—masterpieces by greats such as Frank Lloyd Wright, Al Beadle and Will Bruder—face a daunting dilemma: preserve it or knock it down? Here are two very good reasons to take the road less traveled.

“These homes are little works of art indicating our place in time,” says realtor Scott Jarson, a longtime resident and specialist in Arizona’s architecturally significant properties. “They can’t be replicated. They represent a cherished time in Valley history when you could get a custom, architect-designed home without being a multimillionaire. And that’s really cool.”

So how can the aesthetically aware homeowner bring a landmark home into the 21st century without destroying its unique heritage? There are two options: Use new materials and technologies to restore the home to its original glory, or carefully rethink and rework the residence, modernizing the home without destroying the original design.

BY DAWSON FEARNOW PHOTOGRAPHY BY TONY HERNANDEZ

Ren·o·vate (Ren'e vat) 1. To restore to an earlier condition, as by repairing or remodeling.

Opposite page: This hallway, leading past the kitchen and into the guest wing, demonstrates the home's unique under-floor air conditioning system as chilled air bubbles out of a stainless steel column. Previous spread: The soaring, nearly detached roof offsets the bulky, rock-strewn walls and the '70s-fantastic sunken living room.

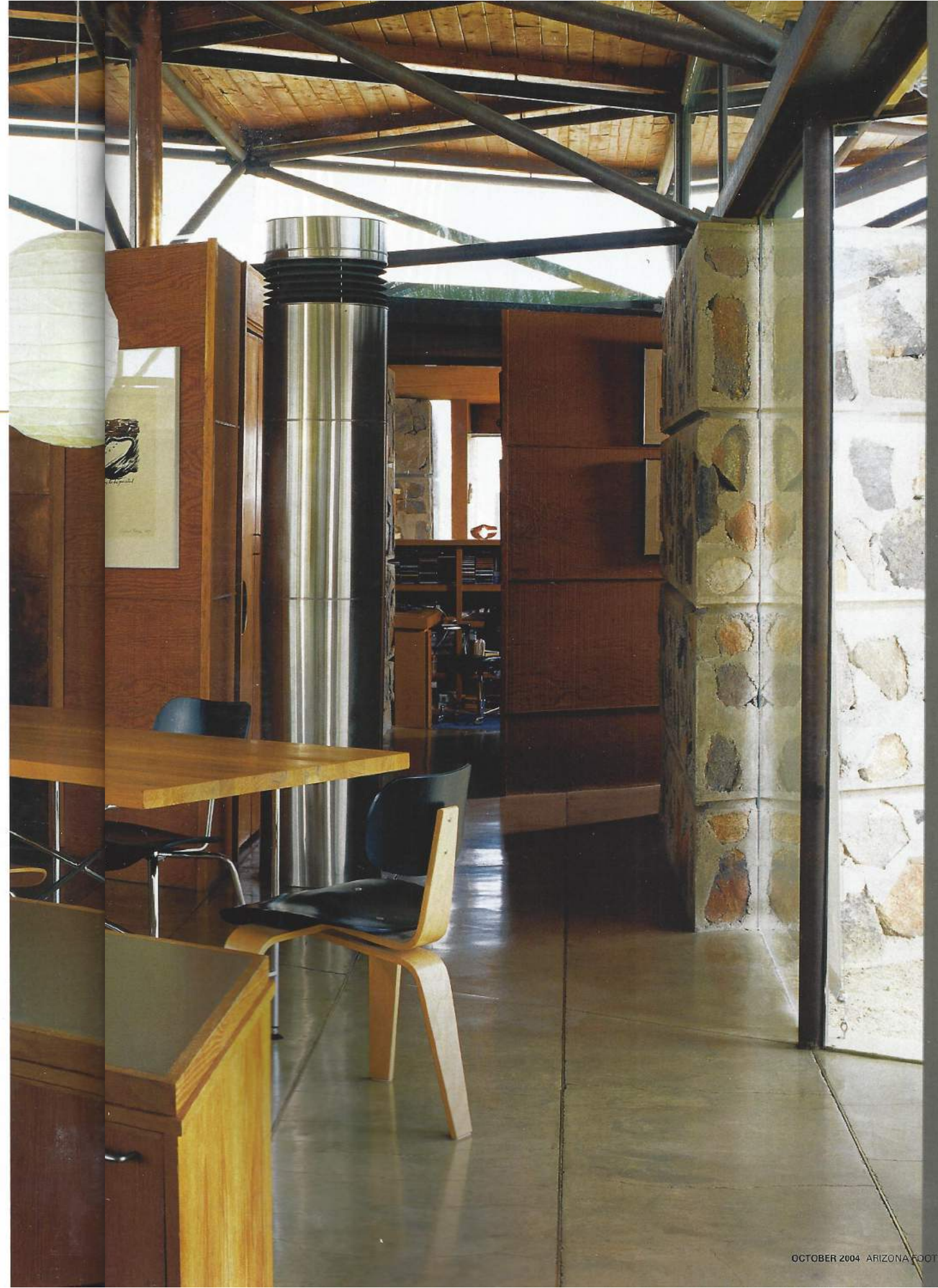
Ulrich Hauser's life is steeped in design. A German importer of contemporary European furniture, Hauser relocated to the Valley from Philadelphia in late 2002. "My wife had just given birth to our twins and I did not want to raise them in an [urban setting]," Hauser says. "I had visited the Valley and it seemed a nice place to raise a family. And it's certainly warmer than Philly."

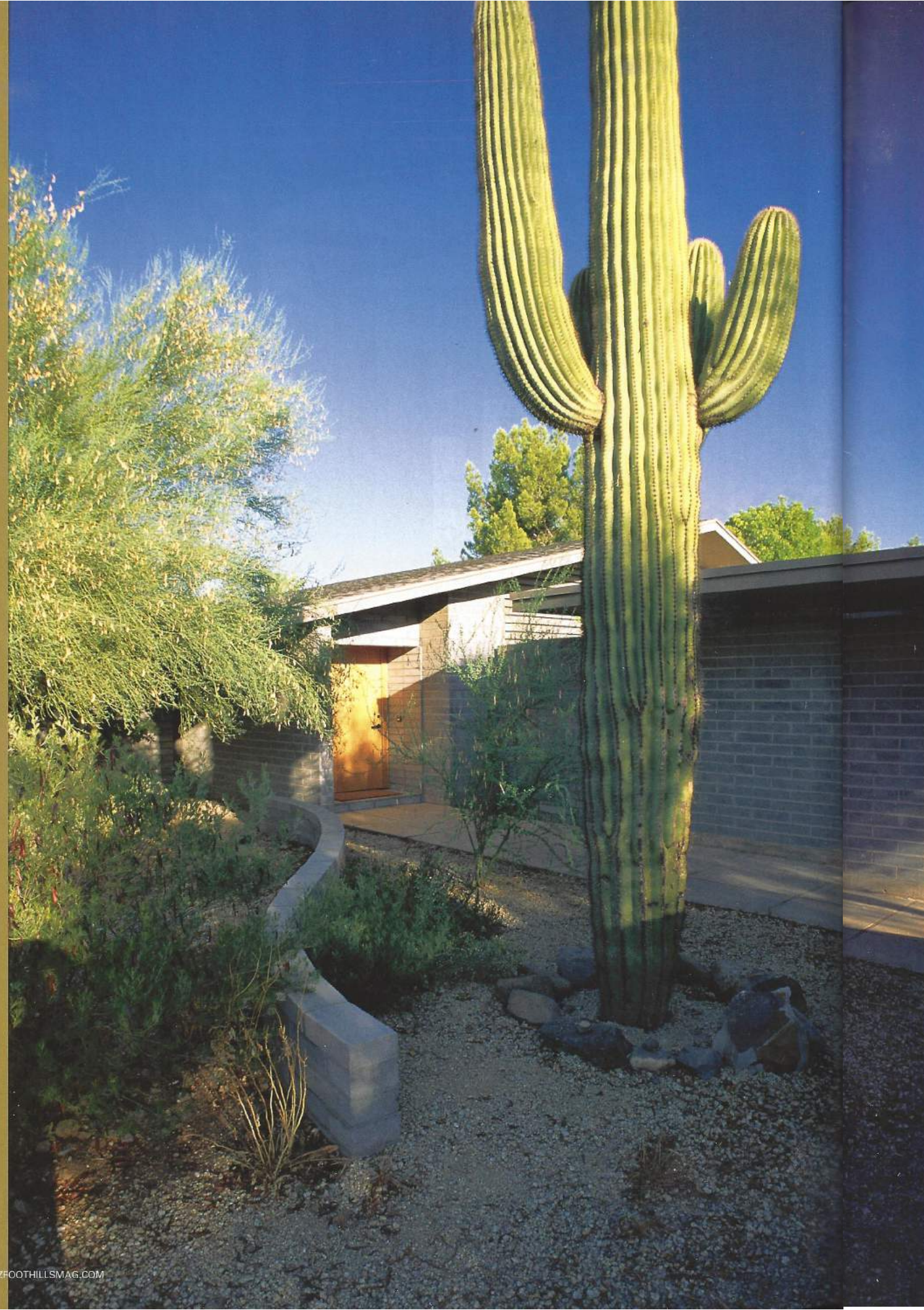
Searching for a design-savvy home, Hauser unearthed the Platt residence, an award-winning Will Bruder-designed home on the outskirts of North Phoenix. "The home was in pretty bad shape," Hauser says, shaking his head, "and I relied a little too much on the home inspector."

Designed for a metalsmith who handbuilt the home over eight years, the house was both completely unique and never completed. "In a 25-year-old house, you'd never expect things to be incomplete," says Hauser. "I spent the first few months simply distinguishing between what was broken and what had never been done in the first place."

Complicating the issue was the fact that Hauser was unable to consult with Bruder. "I called him before I came out but never heard from him," Hauser says. "I actually met him at an event at the Central Phoenix Library (which Bruder co-designed). He said he was happy the home's in good hands, but he doesn't care about his personal history. I guess that's why there's only one book about his work, and that was because the library put it together. It's not good or bad, that's just how he is."

Ten months into the restoration, Hauser had an unexpected visitor. "There was a knock on the door, and there stood a very tall man. He said, 'I'm David Platt, I'm the guy who built this house.'" Platt provided a wealth of information about the unusual home. "David said, 'I finished the outside because the home won an AIA award in 1989 and Will warned me that photographers were coming, but I never finished the inside.'"





"David really helped solve any questions of authenticity," says Hauser. "The home is as much David's as it is Will Bruder's. When David bought the land there was nothing out here—just flat desert. He put up a trailer and started building in 1979. The walls alone took 11 months and nobody moved in until 1985 or '86. After all, great architecture requires both a great designer and a great client."

However, even the most authentic restoration can't overcome inherent design or construction problems. "The walls were bleeding water during heavy rain," Hauser says. After careful analysis, Hauser determined the concrete and natural stone walls, formed and poured on-site Frank Lloyd Wright-style, had been built in four horizontal layers. Now rain was seeping between the layers. Ultimately, Hauser installed unobtrusive metal strips across the tops of the walls to funnel water away.

After more than two years of meticulous restoration, the home is a true showstopper. Some elements of the original design remain unbuilt, including a garage and a solar water heater, and Hauser doubts he'll ever get around to it. But he's proud of all he's accomplished. "I love the combination of materials: glass, rock collected from the desert, rusted steel, wood, copper and bronze. It's great to live in a natural home built with a human touch. It has such a sensual quality."

Ren·o·vate (Ren'e vat) 2. To impart new vigor to; revive.

Sometimes, even homes designed by renowned architects need to be reworked and rethought. In this case, it's critical to enlist the aid of an architect like John Douglas, who's experienced with remodels and renovations.

Several years ago, a client approached Douglas to renovate a small home designed in the early 1960s by native Arizonan Bennie Gonzales for then ASU professor and sculptor Ben Goo. The first graduate of ASU's College of Architecture, Gonzales was a Valley celebrity throughout the 1970s and 80s, designing dozens of significant buildings across the state and around the world, including the Scottsdale Civic Center and his personal residence in Paradise Valley, which was featured in *Life* magazine. Today, Gonzales enjoys semi-retirement in Nogales, Arizona.

This residence features a front door that's invisible from the street, a trademark of Bennie Gonzales-designed homes.



A friend of Gonzales', Douglas has made a career of both artful, clean-lined residential renovations and larger, public commissions like the graceful redesign of the Desert Botanical Garden.


"The home had good qualities, including unpainted concrete block exteriors," says Douglas. "But it also had an addition that was really a filled-in porch or Arizona room, which is the worst thing that happens to a house. People fill in porches to gain cheap space but all it does is reduce natural light coming into the house. We always take that away; get it back to the original."

After studying the home, Douglas decided to take the inside apart, while leaving the exterior more or less as is. "With 30- or 40-year-old houses that have never been touched, we know we're going to have to do a complete system replacement—plumbing, air conditioning, electrical. There's no halfway. And, of course, the kitchen was completely outdated."

Douglas also simplified and expanded the living areas, lifting the eight-foot ceilings right up to the pitched roof and opening up a north-facing wall to bring light back into the home. His team also brought concrete block into the interior to "more strongly connect the inside to the outside." The kitchen remained in place, but was gutted and updated, and two small bedrooms were combined into one large room. Finally, the exterior courtyards and patios were floored with concrete pavers, rooting the home to its site.

"It's a fairly radical redo," Douglas says, "but you can still tell it's a Bennie house from the outside. Bennie's buildings sort of defined Scottsdale in the '70s. This guy was famous. But even in this, his first house, he had wonderful thoughts on how to build a neighborhood, the value of privacy. It's interesting to see his first steps."

In fact, Gonzales' influence is apparent from the first step onto the property. "One of the really nice features Bennie's homes had is a sideways entrance into the house; the front door's not visible from the street. That was such a key piece of the design. We were also able to keep the gravel driveway, which is never allowed under current building codes. I fight this all the time, because a big slab of concrete is just more heat right at your front door. We had to get a special waiver to allow the gravel. It was difficult, but we got it."

And that's the bottom line with any heartfelt restoration or renovation. It's easier to just scrape a lot and start over, but the payoff for taking the road less traveled is significant. "I love my house. The natural light, the desert setting and the home's interaction and harmony with it," says Ulrich Hauser. "In great architecture, every single detail has a purpose. If you change one piece, it affects the whole house." 

Combining concrete block, extensive glazing and natural ash woodwork, Architect John Douglas devised a clean, contemporary décor to complement the home's existing design (above). He also raised the ceiling right up to the pitched roof, expanding the home without adding square footage. Outside, Douglas added concrete pavers to seamlessly root the home to the site (below).