

Home Sweet Second Home

A Collaborative Effort

It didn't quite take a village to help this Wisconsin couple create their ideal getaway in Tucson, but it did require some key players and lots of inspiration.

PHOTO BY ROBIN STANCLIFF

When Steve and Laurel Brown first saw the property that would become their second home, what grabbed them was on the other side of the glass.

"Literally, the minute we walked five steps inside the front door, we were overwhelmed by the spectacular views of the mountains and small canyon out the back, and the city views from the front patio," recalls Laurel. "I said to Steve, 'I don't care what the décor looks like, we can make it into anything we want. Let's buy this house!'"

The purchase was the culmination of a lengthy process to find the perfect home to escape brutal winters in their hometown of Madison, Wisconsin. Steve and Laurel enlisted the aid of Realtors Anne Ferro and Bryan Durkin of Long Realty to help in their quest.

"Nothing we looked at met Laurel's tough design standards, as she is a renowned interior designer/architect," Anne remembers. "We suggested the Browns take a look at one home in particular that was above their price point, but had everything they had described to us on their wish list. Laurel loved the idea of a remodel project and the 7,742 square feet, 4-bedroom house was absolutely perfect for her to re-work inside and out!"

Rework it, she did, with a very definite plan to the process. "We decided to use beautiful and exotic materials from all over the world. We are avid travelers, and wanted the home to reflect our collective world taste. One of my specialties is designing millwork, so I was able to create many details I've only dreamed about. This house was kind of my ultimate expression of things I've

RIGHT Laurel and Steve Brown of Madison Wisconsin (from left), enjoy their second home here in Tucson. With them are Bryan Durkin and Anne Ferro of Long Realty, the Realtors who turned them into snowbirds.





always wanted to design, but never had the right client for.”

Those details, which appear all around the home, include hand-carved ceiling panels from India; antique wood parquet floors from France; custom-made doors from Pakistan; a 17th century stone mantel from Italy; carved accent panels from the Middle East; and handmade clay tiles from Spain.

It wasn't just the interior that underwent a startling transformation. “The biggest change was the re-invention of the outdoor living space,” observes Laurel. “We had bulldozers in the backyard and completely razed and redefined the contours of the yard. We went from approximately 200 square feet of living and entertaining area, to almost 2000 square feet. We built a new casita that has a bar, outdoor TV, a wood-burning fireplace, seating for about 10, and wonderful, giant, handmade tin star lights. We also installed a lovely three-tiered fountain at the front of the house.”

Though the components for the home came from all over, the man heading up the projects was from Tucson. “We interviewed and vetted several local contractors until we trusted our gut with our selection. We selected Eli Benita for the remodeling job, and we believe it was because of our relationship with him that the job was so successful and satisfying. He has become one of our best friends.”

Though it is a second home, Laurel admits that she enjoys living in the Old Pueblo more than their place in the Midwest, and their foothills home gets a lot of varied use. “We do have a steady stream of visitors throughout the winter, so entertaining is important. The house is perfectly designed to provide privacy to our guests, and has enough space to find a quiet place to read or watch a sporting event. I designed a ‘man cave’ in the lower level. It has all the requirements for ‘guy stuff’: custom wood bar, big screen TV with state-of-the-art technology, a cigar smoking porch, and a climate-controlled wine room. Our Midwestern friends and family especially love the outdoor area. I created a section called the ‘beach’ on the far side of the swimming pool for sun bathing. We also love the sound of running water, so several water features were incorporated in the outdoor living area. We find the sound very relaxing.” **TL**

To see more of the Brown house, flip over to Tucson Lifestyle Home & Garden and start on page 20 for a spectacular pictorial.