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Taking Shapes

Asymmetrical lines, intersecting planes, and a dazzling open-air design set a sophisticated tone for this mountaintop residence in the California desert, making it *Robb Report's* Ultimate Home 2009.

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BY SAMANTHA BROOKS
PHOTOGRAPHY BY ERHARD PFEIFFER

OpenArchitecture | From the beginning of the 32-month design-and-build process for this 32,000-square-foot home in Palm Desert, Calif., the primary goal of the homeowners—a couple in their 70s who divide their time between Coeur d’Alene, Idaho, and California’s Coachella Valley—was to create a structure that would meld into its mountainous surroundings.

Prominently situated on one of the few buildable hill-top sites within the Bighorn Golf Club, the home had the potential to mar the otherwise untouched landscape. “The husband told me that he wanted to be able to be on the golf

course down below and have to point out the home to his friends in order for them to find it within the mountains,” says architect Guy Dreier, who designed the home, most of its furnishings, and the grounds. “The last thing he wanted to do was put a big white monument up there.”

Dreier’s solution to this challenge is a dramatic orchestration of overlapping planes and serpentine walls that form a series of asymmetrical pavilions. “The home has 16 automated sliding-glass window walls that open up to the outdoors,” he says. “There’s no real line between indoor and outdoor space—it completely merges with the desert.”



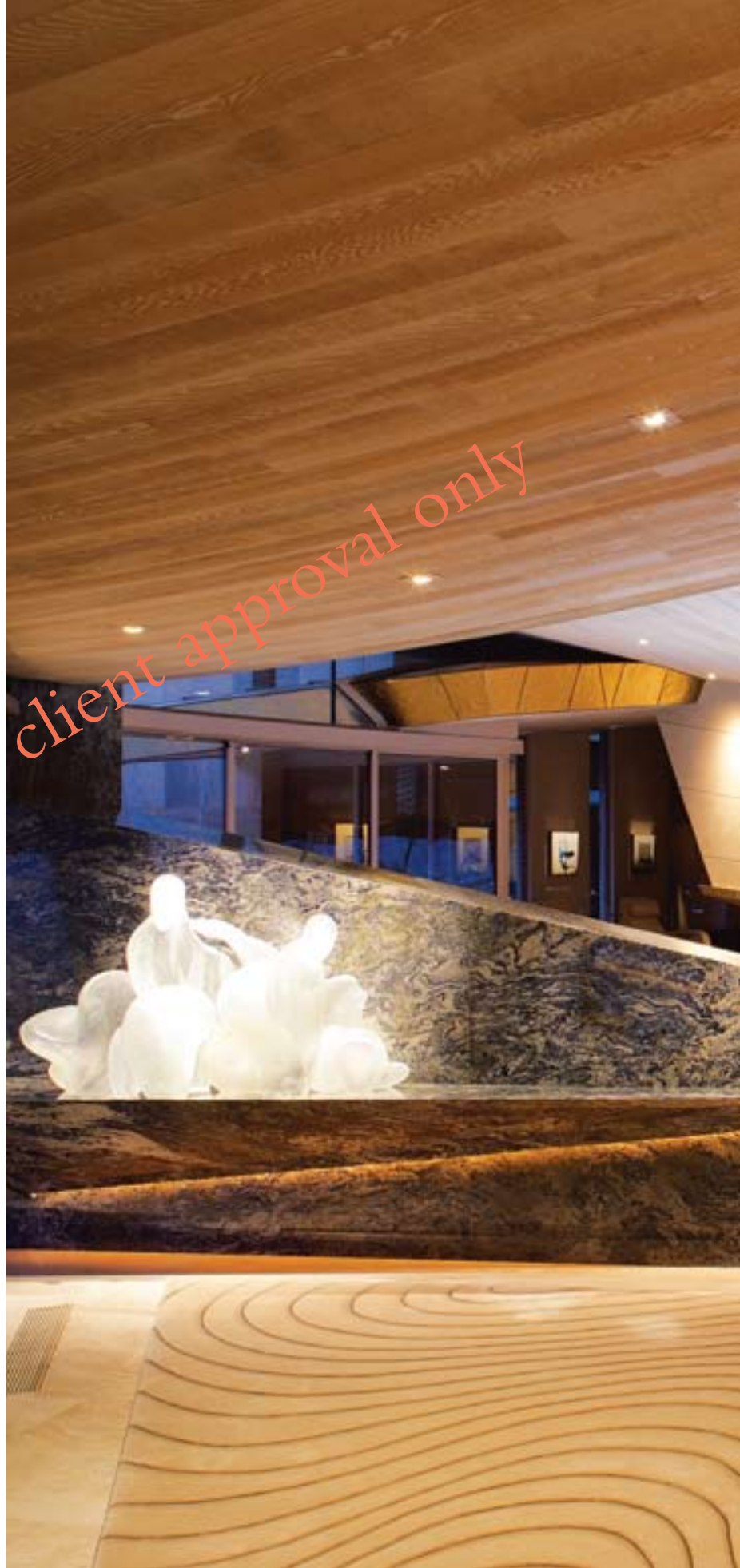




Livable Scale | The residence does not have a traditional front door and foyer; instead, guests park at a lower-level porte cochere and ride a glass elevator up to the main level, where they cross a bridge to the living room (these pages). A commanding 9-foot-long blue glass sculpture by Dale Chihuly immediately greets the eye, as does an illuminated glass work by Martin Blank; the latter's ghostlike forms seem to bow as if in welcome.

The immense, open room is divided into smaller, more intimate spaces that facilitate conversation through the careful groupings of furniture near the piano, around the fireplaces, and in proximity to the views. Many of the furnishings are oversize, including an angular sofa measuring 5 feet deep and 20 feet long that occupies a larger area. "A lot of what makes this home successful is the attention to scale," says Dreier. "You couldn't hang a 20-inch-by-30-inch piece of art on a wall in this home, or put in a regular L-shaped sofa—it wouldn't fit in."

The home's size and open design called for a subdued color palette in earth tones throughout. Textured materials—such as the natural wood ceilings, panther-slate walls, limestone floors, crystal-titanium fasciae, and blue-wave granite surrounding many of the fireplaces—enliven the otherwise neutral backdrop.





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Dining with Sharks | “Between the main dining room (above) and the outdoor dining room, we can easily seat 24,” says the husband, “and another eight people can sit at the morning table.” The home offers several spacious dining areas, but the husband says that he and his wife prefer small, informal dinner parties. “We’re actually pretty private people,” he adds. “We didn’t design this house to entertain 300 or 400 of our ‘closest friends.’ It’s a large house, but you can walk into any room and feel warm.”

Featuring a 22-foot-long glass table and a sideboard that displays glass works by Toots Zynsky, the main dining room lies at the center of the primary living area, where the main kitchen and the living room are also located. These three spaces meet at an 80-foot-long fireplace that runs perpendicular to the aquarium tunnel (left). Filled with 4,000 gallons of water and more than 100 fish, the walk-through aquarium comprises three separate acrylic-lined tanks, one of which—the shark tank—forms the tunnel’s ceiling. “The system is big enough that a young man has to put on a diving suit to clean it,” notes the husband.

The aquarium not only balances the dramatic fireplace, but also adds color and life to the area. “It’s in a central location,” says Dreier. “It’s not something confined to a corner that you’d have to force yourself to go and look at. Every inch of the home is designed to be lived in and used.”



Daily Dish | “Years ago, when I first met my husband, I told him, ‘Forget about diamonds, give me dishes,’” recalls the wife, whose extensive china collection ranges from formal dinnerware to holiday snowman mugs. Her husband has the same breakfast of sliced banana each morning at the counter in the main kitchen (above) or at the morning-room table (opposite), so she makes sure it is always served with a different table setting. “Life is so serious,” she says, “but I have the opportunity to start and end the day on a lighthearted note.”

Six culinary facilities—including a kitchen within the main kitchen, an outdoor kitchen, a guest kitchen, a catering kitchen, and a caretaker’s kitchen—are situated throughout the home. The main kitchen is used for everyday needs, while the lower-level, commercial-style catering kitchen, complete

with a dumbwaiter, comes in handy for entertaining friends and family. “Even though 70 percent of our entertaining is for groups of eight people or less,” says the husband, “the catering kitchen allows us to keep the commotion away from our guests, so that we can keep things relaxed.”

When the homeowners dine alone, they prefer to sit in the morning room, which looks out on the residence’s central water features. A wood-reed artwork by David Ward hangs to the left of the table; to the right hangs a painting by San Francisco-based artist Eric Zener, commissioned specifically for the space.

Immediately off the kitchen, a cozy media room (following spread) invites guests to relax in one of three Antigo recliners from American Leather that face three built-in televisions and a fireplace.



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*“We did not want an enclosed media room.
We wanted to enjoy the views as much
as possible and make every space in
the home feel light and open.”*

—HOMEOWNER

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Suite Dreams | Because their four children are fully grown and living in different parts of the country, the homeowners did not require an abundance of bedrooms. Dreier therefore designed a two-bedroom main house with a detached four-bedroom guesthouse for visiting friends and family. “It was very important to us that we have our own private wing,” says the husband. “And we wanted to be able to sit in bed and have great views of the golf course and mountains.”

The expansive master suite is accessible by a hallway just off the living room or by a private elevator from the lower-level garage. The main sleeping area (above and left) includes a bed and indoor lounge, as well as a 24-foot-long glass wall that opens completely onto an outdoor lounge area with a private hot tub. Dreier created all of the furnishings especially for the space. An installation of leaves in metal and glass by artist Daniel Clayman hangs behind the bed; a painting of stones and water by Connie Jenkins adorns the wall to the right.

Other highlights of the master suite include his-and-hers closets; a workout room for the husband; an office for the wife; and a large bathroom area (opposite) featuring onyx walls, a lacquered acrylic artwork mounted above a sofa, and wool-and-silk carpeting with a custom pattern that follows the curves of the walls.



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Guest Privileges | The self-contained guesthouse functions as a separate home for the owners' four children, some of whom have children of their own. "It's great," the husband says, "because the kids can come and go as they like. They have total privacy. But it's also easy for them to connect with us in the main house. We love having our family come and visit. There's a head on every pillow during Thanksgiving."

When the guesthouse's bedrooms are full, or when a guest wishes to be closer to the homeowners, the main home's one guest suite (above) provides ideal accommodations. Flecks of red in the granite surrounding the fireplace inspired the room's red accents, which include the plush chenille-upholstered headboard, bench, and armchair with ottoman—all designed by Dreier. The taupe chaise by Donghia near the fireplace and the cream-colored, tile-patterned custom carpet keep the room light and balanced.

The expanse of glass walls in the connecting bathroom (left) required that the two circular mirrors be suspended from the ceiling. The countertops are made of the same red-flecked granite used in the bedroom, and the tone-on-tone wallpaper, a silk-cotton moiré that also covers the bedroom walls, is by Lori Weitzner.



Inside Out | Nearly every room opens to outdoor space, so “you don’t always know whether you’re inside or outside,” says Dreier. “There are no doorknobs on the exterior doors. Instead, there’s a Crestron system that controls the entire house and opens up every exterior wall with the touch of a button.”

Given that their home rests nearly 1,000 feet above the desert floor, the homeowners did not have to worry about sand or insects, but they did consider wind. “We bought a sophisticated weather station and recorded the weather for one full year,” says the husband. “Then we worked with the same Colorado-based firm that did the wind study for the Olympic track stadium in Beijing.” The firm built a model of the house, connected it to 135 sensors, and subjected it to the rigors of a wind tunnel. These findings enabled Dreier to devise a plan that allows the homeowners to keep at least half of the home open, no matter what direction the wind is blowing.

The study also helped determine the placement of the dark blue, glass-tiled pools. Holding a total of 194,000 gallons of water, the pools offer shallow-water features in the interior courtyard (top) and, near the lounge areas (left), deeper basins for swimming.



Park Place | The Bighorn Golf Club does not allow parking on its roads, so each homeowner's property must accommodate all of the vehicles belonging to that home's guests and employees. The large porte cochere at the end of the driveway (above) can shelter approximately 15 cars, while the lower-level garage (left) houses the homeowners' four cars and two golf carts. (Additional rooms just off of the garage include the catering kitchen, storage closets, and large utility rooms.)

"I'm a blue guy," says the husband. "My Lamborghini [Murciélago], helicopter, and golf carts are all custom shades of blue, and in Coeur d'Alene we have a wooden sailboat with a blue hull. If my wife didn't corral me, the entire house would be blue." The other cars—a Mercedes-Benz SL500, a Rolls-Royce Phantom, and a Chevrolet Suburban—are also in shades of blue.

Despite their fleet of vehicles, the homeowners say they seldom leave the house. "It's almost embarrassing how little we go out," says the husband. "We have a great private chef, and we make an effort to use a different part of the home each night. We could leave more, but there's not a better place to go."

By the Numbers

- 12:** Size of the property in acres
- 32,000:** Area of the home in square feet
- 8:** Months architect Guy Dreier spent drafting plans
- 25:** Months required to construct the home
- 200:** Workers required to build the home
- 1:** Mile of titanium used to line the fasciae
- 55,000:** Pounds of copper manufactured in Germany to top the roofs
- 750:** Tons of steel
- 1,500:** Cubic yards of concrete
- 10:** Miles of insulation
- 23:** Heating/cooling mechanisms
- 16:** Automated sliding-glass window walls
- 90,000:** Pounds of glass
- 4.5 million:** One-inch-square Bisazza glass tiles lining the water features
- 194,000:** Gallons of water in the outdoor swimming pools and water features



- 4,000:** Gallons of water in the aquarium
- 100:** Fish in the aquarium
- 43,000:** Weight of the aquarium in pounds when filled with fish and water
- 19:** Crestron Electronics touchscreens
- 1,000:** Light fixtures
- 76:** Light projectors
- 119:** Doors
- 0:** Light switches, thermostats, door locks, or exterior doorknobs on the main level (everything is controlled by the Crestron system)
- 21:** Fireplaces
- 43:** Televisions
- 6:** Kitchens
- 20,000:** Approximate number of plants on-site
- 8:** Staff members required to maintain the home

Guy Dreier Designs, 760.568.3670, www.guydreierdesigns.com
Bighorn Properties, 800.551.5578, www.bighornmgolf.com

The husband's office (left), a detached space located across from the master suite, offers 300-degree views of the valley and Bighorn golf course. A glass floor in the guest wing (above) breaks up the expanse of stone flooring. For more images of the house, visit www.robbsreport.com/uh2009.

