

Ocotillo Roofs Foothills Home

By Mary Brown

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If ever a home was built to incorporate the needs and interests of one man, the one designed by California architect, Cliff May in the Catalina Foothills for Alvin J. Gordon is that house.

First off the atmosphere or feeling of the motel El Rancho which Mr. Gordon owns and operates in Navajo, Mexico, has been blended into the home.

Mr. Gordon's avocations have been taken into consideration. One portion of the large main room is devoted to a writing area where he may work undisturbed on his books, latest of which is "Inherit The Earth," published by the University of Arizona Press. Since he is quite a gourmet chef and likes to experiment with new dishes, the kitchen has been built for his convenience.

The entire home reflects the personality and the background of its owner. Spanish, Mexican and Indian accents are seen everywhere. Lavish use of glass walls and gables make the visitor wonder whether he is inside or outside so well has the exterior been melded with the interior.

The main room is really three rooms; living, dining and study.

Noteworthy from the construction standpoint are the floors throughout the home and surrounding patios. They, in themselves, cast a sturdy, mannish air. They are of exposed aggregate in a desert shade with a rough grind. They've been sand blasted to give a third dimensional effect and finally sealed to prevent any absorption. Two-by-four redwood feature strips or grids used in the flooring create an interesting pattern.

Such a flooring is so durable and serviceable it could literally be bosed down. The more genteel way utilized by the owner is by a washing vacuum machine.

Utilization of native ocotillo in a stripped topping for the roof creates a spectacular architectural effect. The roof itself is an exposed three-inch thick insulated material developed and made in Austria. It's exposed on the living area side and built up with asbestos sheet roofing on the outside of the living area. This has been furred up to accommodate the ocotillo strips giving greater insulation value and serving an important function in heat and sun control. In the outside patio just the ocotillo is used which makes for fascinating patterns of shadows cast by the sun. The home site is surrounded by an exposed two-foot wide wall serving a duo-purpose of seating and sunning.

The home, in a post adobe and beam type construction, sits at a southeast-northwest angle on the property. Interior walls are of baked adobe random laid and treated by a special plaster texture developed by the architect. Pine doors throughout are finished in a dark tone in a satin hand rubbed finish.

Glass walls and gables are used on either side of the main room and those to the south open first onto a sheltered outdoor dining patio which has the exposed insulated roofing of the living area, and then a patio screened overhead by the ocotillo strips only. Main feature there is the free-form swimming pool. The home is operated by two complete heating and cooling systems.

Ceiling beams in exposed rustic band sawn Douglas fir create a feeling of even more spaciousness. Only paint in the house is in a weathered brown tone.

Natural desert colors appear throughout since both the owner and the architect felt them most functional for this type of desert living.

Indian rugs in hand made, hand spun natural wool colors accent the living area. Furniture there in the traditional Spanish design of dense mahogany with leather backs and seats, is imported from Durango, Mexico. Pieces are studded with brass medallions the size of 50 cent pieces.

Tones of rust, gold and black appear in the master bedroom. Black pottery lamp bases support shades in a rust tone. The box spring and mattress are covered with a spread in a gold tone. Draperies of a hand woven Indian geometrical pattern are matched by the covering on the bed bolsters. A dressing area adjoins.

Cabinet work throughout is walnut stained rubbed birch. A small rock garden nestles in the corner of the shower room. Glass mosaic tile from the vicinity of Cuernavaca is used in the master bath as well as in the guest bath. A fireplace flush with the wall is seen in the master bedroom.

The guest bedroom has a small beehive type fireplace in one corner, a smaller version of that seen in the main room. Tangerine velvet bolsters stand on the black and white hand blocked bedspreads. A wrought iron lamp rests on a black lacquered table. Windows are shuttered. Again a bath and dressing room adjoins.

Hardware throughout the house including the kitchen is in an oil rubbed bronze finish. Birch woodwork in the kitchen also appears on the front of the dishwasher. Appliances are in a brushed steel finish. Light fixtures in walnut match the kitchen woodwork.

Because of its setting, natural desert growth is encouraged around the home. Sahuaros loom up here and there. James Hostetter planned the landscaping and Leonard J. Michels was the builder. To add to the rustic effect pebble bark is used as a cover in all formal planting areas.

Spanish notes accent the outdoor area. Lamps at entry ways are wrought iron from Mexico. Oversized Mexican ollas are utilized as planters on the patios and Mexican baskets filled with flowers and plants also provide colorful accents.

Tucson at night, the Tucson Mountains and a real closeup of the Catalinas may be seen from various vantage points of the home and patio.