

Ambitious Restoration

Historic residences across Arizona praise the past with their designs



By Allie Bell



he bustle of downtown Phoenix is left behind as soon as you enter the Encanto-Palmcroft Historic District. Strolling down the streets lined with 12-foot palms and old street lamps, it's easy to transport the mind back in time. Each charming home tells its own story, but one in particular has an interior that gives the exterior a run for its historic significance.

Karen Robertson and her husband Dan have been living in their historic home since 1987. Built in 1937, the high-style period revival has undergone a dramatic transformation. Once modestly decorated with concrete slab floors and simple baseboards lining green and yellow painted walls, the plain interior gave no hint of its historic roots. But Robertson changed all that with one phone call to her best friend Linda Kolesar, founder of design company Vintage House Interiors, Inc.

Kolesar converted the modest, modernized interior into an 18th century-style English inspiration. Everything was torn down to the facade's thick, red brick walls. The top-to-bottom kitchen remodel required the removal of several walls to create a more open floorplan, and every nook and cranny was transformed into usable storage space. White pillars lining both sides of the glass-top stove pull outward to reveal spice racks. The new wine cellar features intricate, hand-carved wooden grapevines that are so realistic, the fruit looks like it can be plucked right off the scrolling vine.

The dining room, living room and master bedroom were all reduced to their bare bones and rebuilt into a vivid vision reminiscent of the English countryside. "The rooms are vibrant and dynamic," says Kolesar. "The English bring in every bit of sun they can through their colors."

Historic homes with interiors that acknowledge history, particularly the time period they're from, exude a nostalgic allure, says Kolesar. "Even if you didn't grow up here, people still drive by and see an old traditional America that everyone likes to be reminded of. It feels good, it feels inherited by the perfect family and neighborhood."

Just outside Phoenix's Copper Square, another building gives a respectful nod to the past and towers above homes sprinkling the Roosevelt Historic District.

Thanks to remodeling done by Vintage House Interiors, Inc., the Robertson's English-inspired kitchen has quaint cabinetry that offers better use of space, including a hidden spice rack. Photography courtesy of Dino Tonn.





Left: "The English bring every bit of sun they can through their colors," says Linda Kolesar of Vintage House Interiors, Inc., who remodeled the Robertson's house located in the Encanto-Palmcroft Historic District in Phoenix.

Right: Like the rest of the house, the Robertson's dining room is reminiscent of the English countryside, exuding elegance.

Photos courtesy of Dino Tonn



The 11-story building now known as Embassy Condominiums was built in 1964 and served as a hotel until it was converted into a condo in 1982. Property Manager Maxine Imdorf has been through several remodels over the past six years. She recalls some of the changes such as the hotel's third-floor restaurant was later converted to an event room for tenant gatherings. The pool is sited over visitor parking (a rare architectural feature during that time). Small commercial businesses like a barber shop and beauty salon originally sat on the first floor.

Despite the multiple changes, its retro-style interior and thick concrete exterior has remained the same.

The board of directors recently hired Schick Design Group for the latest remodel project—the condo lobby. Designers will better integrate the sassy green highlights found in the kitchen and elevator paneling with the building's overall retro look.

With all of the residential development in Phoenix, it's valid to ask why would anyone want to live in an older place, inheriting the wear and tear of time? Embassy tenant and board member Randy Hinkle took this question head on when he considered moving to the downtown area.

"Here you have the ability to do something really custom, unlike newer buildings where you are constrained by costs and codes," Hinkle says. "With limited options, it's buildings like this that make living here great."

With 36 historic neighborhoods in Phoenix listed alone, it seems the city is filled with residential gems, but Phoenix isn't the only municipality rich with this kind of prime real estate.

Nestled in the laid-back artist town of Bisbee, is a historic residence whose walls tell entertaining stories and secrets.

