

# Built to **Bloom**



This landscape went from tired to terrific, thanks to the homeowners' detailed "want list," and the dedicated efforts of a design/build company that created colorful, year-round gardens.

PHOTOGRAPHY BY KRIS HANNING

**ABOVE** Blooming hedgehog cacti provide a colorful accent. **RIGHT** A repaved driveway and flagstone path were part of the hardscape remodel. The original pruned shrubs were replaced with selected arid-adapted plant species.





When a couple from upstate New York bought a winter home in the Old Pueblo, they were faced with the Herculean (yet exciting) task of redoing the space — inside and out — to meet their needs.

In particular, they wanted patios and gardens that would be low-maintenance, but provide visual interest, as well as accommodate family and friends when they entertained. They turned to Great Gardens, LLC, a local landscape design/build firm with designations for the “landscape intervention,” including privacy, dramatic outdoor lighting and the resurfacing of the rough exposed aggregate walkways, patios and porch. Included in their “to-do” list were: dress up the plain front courtyard; add a striking new front door; replace the courtyard gate; substitute the worn wooden ramada with something durable yet snazzy; and enlarge the front patio to accommodate more seating. Ultimately, the homeowners wanted a “garden that could be enjoyed day and night.”

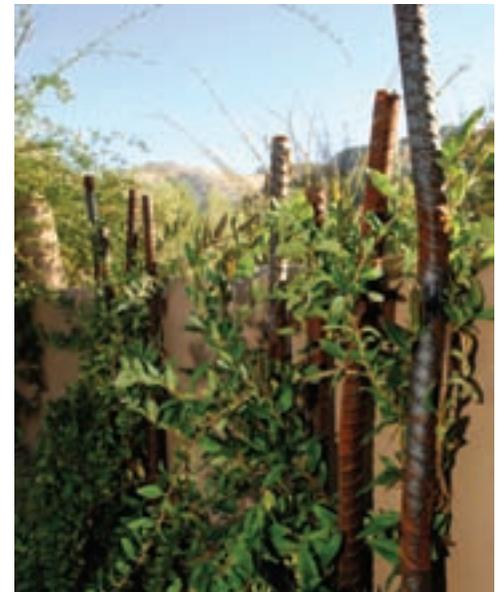
Soon after the new owners left Tucson to return to New York for the summer, demolition started on the front of the property.

Most of the plants had been sheared into unnatural shapes, but the ones that could be reused were transferred to a temporary nursery on site, and those that could not were donated or taken out. Part of the courtyard wall and most of the exposed aggregate walkways were removed. While the masons were putting up the new courtyard walls and entry pillars, Great Gardens shipped samples of garden paving materials (flagstone, slate and travertine) to the homeowners for approval.



Mounding soil was brought in and contoured, bordering the walkway from the gate to the front door, while also creating a separate space for the newly enlarged patio off the kitchen. Beautiful native site rock and boulders in shades of gold, tan, rust and black were used to line the new drainage swales, and slow down the rain water from the scuppers, allowing for passive water harvesting.

The patio and porch were veneered with Desert Sunset slate, and the new flagstone walkway led to the Frank Lloyd Wright-inspired glass front door, which framed a view through the house to the Catalinas. The new



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT The existing wall was raised several feet. Additional plantings add privacy to the spa area; A creative use of rebar gave a new look and replaced the wrought-iron fencing; A small rock wall adds depth to the transition zone between the natural surroundings and the pool below.





courtyard gate and metal ramada echoed the front door design.

One large original Desert Spoon remained in the courtyard. It was joined by an eclectic assortment of arid-adapted shrubs — “Valentine” emu bush, pineapple guava, chuparosa, variegated myrtle, orange bulbine, damianita, and gopher plant, plus succulents, cactus and accent plants, such as Parry’s agave, “Medio picta” agave, aloe vera, golden barrel cactus, deergrass, senita, Mexican fencepost, lady slipper, hybrid trichocereus and totem pole cactus. This mix provided an intriguing combination of textures, shapes and foliage colors.

To maximize enjoyment of the gardens, something is always in bloom from fall through winter and into spring; this also serves to invite hummingbirds and butterflies in profusion, and give the homeowners plenty to photograph. On the patio, Great Gardens added a container with a kumquat tree, which in the Chinese tradition signifies “good luck in your new home.”

The wish-list for the back yard included: changing the plain beehive-type fireplace and generating more seating; adding an outdoor cooking area with a gas grill, sink and plenty of counter space; removing an unattractive wooden fence and enlarging the space around the pool, spa and deck; resurfacing the huge exposed-aggregate back patio; and creating a sitting area and garden outside the master bedroom.

Along with the hardscape improvements, the plant palette was enlivened. The final plan utilized many of the varieties from the front yard, and more than 40 trees were planted for privacy, screening and shade.

The landscape retrofit met the new homeowners’ requirements ... and then some. The design/build team created a natural-looking yet elegant arrangement of patios and plants. The homeowners can enjoy a parade of colors as something new comes into bloom almost daily. “We take a lot of photos around here,” they’ve told their guests, “because this is a joy to behold.” **HG**



**TOP** An outdoor kitchen was added for casual poolside dining. A rock stairway was replaced for safety and the exposed aggregate surface was given a facelift with large limestone pavers, which unified the outdoor spaces.

**ABOVE** Several species of bulbine grow in the swales created to catch rainwater.