

PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

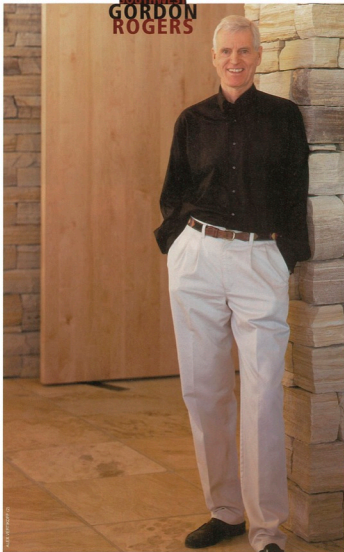
THE MAGAZINE OF SOUTHWEST LIVING

**10 MASTERS
of the
SOUTHWEST**

**17 EMERGING
ARTISTS**



MASTER
of the
SOUTHWEST
GORDON
ROGERS



ALAN AYER/PHOTO 123

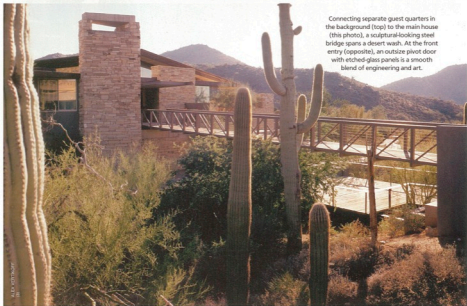
Sombreros and Sailboats

Text by Pam Hait

From every angle, Gordon Rogers' architecture reveals the dramatic geometric relationship between earth and sky. Roofs float, ceilings soar, and bridges appear like magic, linking living spaces. Bold but never flamboyant, Rogers' style of organic architecture reflects the man himself. It takes the measure of the earth and rejoices in it.



Precise geometry and zenlike simplicity merge in this 2001 AIA Homes of the Year award-winning residence designed by architect Gordon Rogers (pictured opposite). Its distinctive pavilion roof, or "sombbrero," as Rogers calls it, seems to float above the desert residence, shading it from the sun. The house is featured on Pages 126-133.



Connecting separate guest quarters in the background (top) to the main house (this photo), a sculptural-looking steel bridge spans a desert wash. At the front entry (opposite), an outside pivot door with etched-glass panels is a smooth blend of engineering and art.

**"BUT THE MATERIALS ARE NOT AS IMPORTANT
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PEACEFUL. CALM. ZENLIKE."**



Rogers has much to celebrate. He was raised on a farm in Michigan and always loved making things. He assumed he'd be a commercial artist or a carpenter. Fate intervened when he was hitchhiking home from Western Michigan University and stopped to look in a shoe store window. While there, he started talking to an old man in a long coat and told him of his love for bridges and his fascination with how they are built. At the end of their conversation, the perceptive stranger advised him to become an architectural engineer. "So I transferred from commercial art to the School of Architecture at the University of Michigan, thinking I'd learn to design bridges there," Rogers recalls. To this day, he says he has no idea who that man was, but owes him a lot.

In architecture school, Rogers discovered the poetry of structure, a quality that would unfold later in his designs of buildings with lyrical lines and soaring rooftops. After graduation, he apprenticed with Robert Metcalf, who later became the dean of the University of Michigan School of Architecture. He credits Metcalf as his mentor and a major source of inspiration.

Rogers' work also is influenced by other architects, including Frank Lloyd Wright, E. Fay Jones and John Lautner. But most of all, he is influenced by his wife, Lee. "She's the one to put balance in my life," this husband of 41 years says unequivocally. "Without Lee, I'd become more boring than I am. She makes my architecture much better."

Following college, Rogers apprenticed in Tucson and Phoenix, but moved to Kalamazoo, Mich., in 1965 to build his practice. Eighteen years later, burned out on running his large and successful architectural firm, Rogers returned to Arizona. Now he spends nine months a year in Phoenix, where he works out of an unpretentious 380-square-foot garden studio, and three months in Pentwater, Mich., where he often sketches at a lakeside beach, producing elegant pen-and-ink renderings worthy of framing.

"My architecture is driven by my choice of lifestyle," says Rogers, who loves splitting his time but recognizes this schedule precludes him from doing much commercial work.

His Arizona break came in 1990, when he was asked to design

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a studio for artists Fran and Hal Larsen. Friends of their owned property in Desert Mountain, and Fran suggested they call Rogers. The home he designed for them won an American Institute of Architects (AIA) award in 1991. Its publication generated a following that prizes Rogers' bold geometry. That first award was followed by other honors (including Arizona Homes of the Year awards for the two north Scottsdale homes featured on these pages).

Asked to describe his style, the lanky ex-college basketball player replies that he is largely unimpressed with materials that

are not natural. "But the materials are not as important as the feeling of the spaces created by them," he emphasizes. Pressed to elaborate, he describes those feelings: "Peaceful. Calm. Zenlike."

While Rogers' homes are as individual as his clients, themes repeat. Open kitchens act as magnets near the center of the house. Bridges are functional and sculptural. Steel, concrete, wood, glass and stone combine in elegantly surprising ways that appear deceptively simple.

"It is hard to make things look simple," the architect acknowledges with a smile.



Left: With a clear view to the kitchen and breakfast nook beyond, the great room is emblematic of Rogers' use of well-defined open spaces and natural materials. Rising above stacked-stone walls, the cedar-lined ceiling and angular clerestory windows seem to float upon triangular steel "fins." • Top: Mimicking the sculptural shape of the roof's overhang, the sleek negative-edge pool appears to melt into the desert. • Above: The stone sink and undulating counter in the powder room likewise have a sculptural quality.

More Rogers trademarks include cedar-lined ceilings (he loves cedar), stacked-stone interior walls, and steel used both as a decorative element and structural support. And his front doors are engineering marvels as well as works of art.

Rogers comments that when he designs a home, he thinks of two disparate images: a sombrero and a sailboat. "The roof, or sombrero, acts like a giant hat to shade the desert structure," he says. The sailboat is his icon for sleek functionality.

The 2002 AIA Homes of the Year award-winner shown here is illustrative of this Master of the Southwest's design philosophy.

Like all his works, it is site-driven, allowing the lyrical geometry to soar and soothe. The sombrero, or pavilion roof, is an engineering masterpiece, floating on just six points. Because the property is bisected by a deep natural arroyo, Rogers positioned the guest house and main residence on opposite sides of the wash, connecting them by a steel ribbon of bridge that was fabricated in Minnesota and shipped in one piece to Arizona. A horizontal steel truss, another repeat motif, extends from the roof of the main house to shade the bridge and announce the main residence.



Above: Creating a dramatic effect, triangular steel supports seem to pierce their way through the free-standing kitchen's clerestory windows. Low walls here separate the room from other spaces, but do not isolate it from the rest of the house.

Left: In this cozy setting, a stacked-stone fireplace rises upward, then outward in a magical geometric interplay of stone meeting glass.

Opposite, top and bottom: Clean lines and simplicity unify the master bedroom and bath, giving both a feeling of calm.

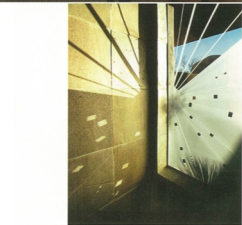


Inside, Rogers' intricate simplicity is everywhere: in the cedar ceilings, the slim triangular steel "fins" that support the roof, the etched-glass pattern accenting the massive pivot front door, and the sculptural steel countertop in the powder room. In the great room, a grand rounded overhang, like a ship's "prow," directs the eye to city lights and also builds tension and excitement juxtaposed against the triangular glass wall and trapezoid-shape edgeless pool.

His inventive use of rock evokes other places and times, adding permanence to a new structure. The long driveway, lined by a wall of stacked Utah sandstone, is reminiscent of English countryside walls, while the same stacked rock on interior walls adds timelessness not often felt in contemporary designs. Concrete lintels embedded over doorways suggest antiquity.

Rogers emphasizes that while he built his Arizona reputation on high-end homes, he likes designing residences of all sizes—from small ones to grand estates. And the carpenter in him enjoys doing remodels.





Above: Rogers says the low ceiling in the dining room of this 1997 AIA award-winning home gives the space its intimate feeling. The glass window wall is without support, "so the garden and dining room are one and the same space," adds the architect. • **Top, left:** The home's great room is a "serene and peaceful space—dramatic yet cozy, what the owners asked for," notes Rogers. The fireplace wall is a single piece of sandstone, while the hearth is crafted of Raja stacked stone. Raja flooring runs through the entire house. A radius-pattern front door can be seen in the background. • **Left:** Rogers designed the artistic privacy window located in the master bath shower.




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One such project, featured here, earned him a 1997 AIA award. Rogers' challenge was to rid the residence of a major distraction, a neighboring house that stood in the way of a beautiful view. In a spectacular reorientation of his clients' home, this master architect captured lovely vistas, magically bringing the outdoors in. In the dining room, for example, a dramatic sweep of glass is butt-glazed, blurring the line between indoor space and desert garden.

Asked about his favorite project, Rogers replies, "They are all my favorites, including those I did 25 years ago." He is especially

proud of a YMCA camp he recently completed in Michigan.

Taking measure of his life, this master of geometry offers his own theorem. "I am fortunate my work is my hobby," he says. During those rare times when he is not designing, he and Lee share a passion for travel, hiking Arizona, and touring Italy and Spain.

But, he reiterates, "I really like working. I have the most wonderful clients. My personal pleasure is seeing their hopes and dreams and my own merge into something we all respond to with wonder and excitement. It's why I will never retire." 

See Resource Guide.

March 2002 155