

# PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

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**Art and  
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## Behind Red Doors

Asian aesthetic meets mid-century modern

Text by Roberta Landman

When she gives directions, Ann Townsend tells people they can't miss the house she shares with husband Jim: Its bright-red doors are emblazoned with outsize pulls in the shape of Chinese Shou symbols.

Raw steel crusher screening, used in the construction industry, has a new life mounted in shoji doors located between the Zen courtyard garden and covered entry walkway of a Valley home. Allowed to rust, the screen's mesh is sturdy enough to keep family pets enclosed yet doesn't block light. Hanging above the bamboo bench is a kanban, an old wooden sign from a Japanese sake shop.





Clockwise from this photo: Asian-inspired red doors open to a screened-off garden area and a stone pathway leading to the home's entry. • Sophie, a seated fiberglass sculpture by Allen Wynn, was homeowner Ann Townsend's birthday gift to her art-loving husband, Jim. • Lush greenery adds to the home's indoor/outdoor feel. • A Japanese bill and an old ironwood tree create a serene vignette. • As in Zen gardens of Japan, sand is raked to simulate the flow of water.

"Shou means good health and happiness," Ann explains, and these sentiments are what welcome visitors to this unique home in the shadow of Camelback Mountain.

The residence is a blending of uncluttered modern design and the serene ambience of dwellings in Japan. The look was dictated in part by a house the couple saw in California. That landmark modernistic structure was conceived by famed architect R.M. Schindler in the early 1920s. Its timeless clean lines and tranquil spaces were just what the Townsends envisioned for the early-1970s home they had bought with renovation in mind.

They engaged architect David Dick, builder Joe Costello and landscape designer Jeff Berghoff to carry out their vision. The

result is a home filled with creature comforts and a palette for their collection of art and mid-century modern furnishings.

"My husband and I have always appreciated the aesthetics and simplicity of Japanese houses, and this one is a 21st-century interpretation of those homes," Ann says. Having a garden that merges with indoor areas is as important to the Townsends as the house itself, and this became a guiding force for the design team.

Toward that end, just past the big red doors and off to the side, an enclosed Zen garden is reminiscent of those seen in Japan. This spot of green is a setting for reflection and for the enjoyment of nature's beauty and the collected works of sculpture that are sprinkled about. Walkways here ramble in and out and



CHRISTIAN BUCK



wind around the back of the house, where a Japanese-style sand and boulder garden mimics the look of landforms and water. "The stone paths here are crooked because evil follows a straight line," Ann explains, acknowledging a fascination with a centuries-old Asian philosophy.

Also beyond those striking red doors, down a long stone path, are the large glass sliding doors that allow access to the home. The red doors function as a "threshold" from which there is a clear line of sight through the glass to interior spaces, notes architect Dick. No accident, this is in keeping with Japanese architecture and its focus on "how you move through space," he says. Shoji screens just inside the foyer separate the area from a

well-appointed Asian-themed media room. That the panels can be opened and closed is further evidence of the Japanese concern with space, according to Dick; the sliders "let you develop control over what you see and when."

What you see as you move from one bamboo-floored area to the next is an intriguing mix of Japanese accessories and *toku* cabinetry, modern furniture, custom-made pieces, and well-placed art in great variety. A gallery hallway, for example, is a mini-museum; it is lined with paintings and contains a large glass showcase filled with items ranging from a translucent wooden bowl made by an artist in Hawaii, to a little Japanese shop sign pitching footwear, to early-20th-century American cut glass.

BILL SAMANTHAYAN



**Above:** A study in elegant simplicity, the dining room features a mid-century teak dining table and custom cherry chairs that balance on triads of powder-coated steel legs. The dual-sided fireplace also serves the living room. Flooring, as in most spaces, is of bamboo. The painting over the fireplace, titled *Santa Inez Mountains*, is by Rod Goebel.



**Left:** In the living room, an antique screen from Japan hangs above Isamu Noguchi's mid-century Cloud sofa. The ottoman and glass-top coffee table also are Noguchi pieces. An antique Japanese hibachi sits atop the coffee table. The large landscape painting on the far wall is by Michael Bradley. The slatted Peacock Chair is by Hans J. Wegner.

An international mix is also seen in the dining room, which once was a patio. The long teak dining table was crafted by Scandinavian designer Bruno Matheson. "It was our first family heirloom," Jim says. "We got it the second year of our marriage. It folds up to 9 inches wide." This is their first house to have a dining room big enough to allow the 110-inch-long table to remain fully extended, adds the father of four and grandfather of six. The 12 chairs surrounding the table are of light cherry

with backs in the shape of ginkgo leaves. Ann designed them in collaboration with Prescott artisan Warren S. Fenzi. "I have ideas but not the skill or know-how to do them," she says. "Warren is great—very talented."

Admiration for the skills of craftsmen of today and of the past is evident in the Townsends' choice of furnishings. The *faux* pieces, Ann says, were utilitarian items in Japanese everyday life and dwellings of long ago. A cabinet on wheels in the foyer, for

**Right:** An Asian glass-and-alabaster gong (foreground) rests on a Chinese stand. Both are antiques. Beyond the kitchen's 1950s Warren Platner table and chairs, a window is beautified with a hand-blown glass art piece by Michael Higgins. The adjacent *tonsu* is a *cha*, or tea cabinet.

**Far right:** The kitchen's *mizuya* cabinets once stored cookware in a Japanese home.



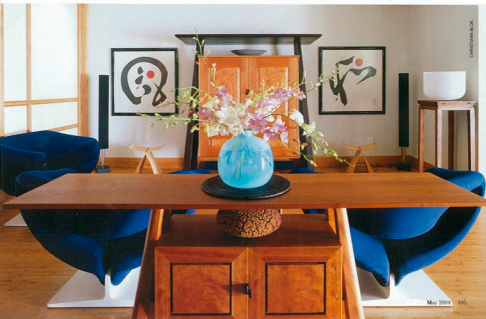
**Below:** In the media room are two custom-crafted pieces by Prescott artisan Warren S. Fentl: the Torii-Gate Table (foreground) in cherry wood, and a large TV cabinet (dubbed Emperor's Closet, in cherry and wenge woods). Shoji screens divide the space from the entry hall. Mid-century Ribbon Chairs are by Pierre Paulin. The paintings are by Haku Maki.

example, once belonged to a landlord who wheeled his portable business through marketplaces collecting rent from merchants in stalls.

Antique *mizuya* cabinets in the kitchen once held cooking utensils in a Japanese household. The streamlined pieces are in harmony with the couple's 1950s Warren Platner-designed table and chairs, and with new Shaker-inspired cherry-stained alder cabinetry.

In the living room, the free-form sofa and ottoman and a coffee table are well-regarded mid-century Isamu Noguchi designs. Providing interesting contrast, at the room's clerestory window a vintage Japanese carved piece filters the light. Such artistry, called a *numa*, was used to accent transoms above shoji doors, Ann says.

The homeowners' enthusiasm for the house, its artistic trappings and the Zen garden was contagious, Dick, Costello



This page: Artwork spills over to the master bath, where *Into*, a painting by Douglas Freed, hangs over a molded-fiberglass La Chaise chair designed by Charles Eames. The ceramic sculpture is by Kansas artist Anita Lehman. • Opposite, clockwise from top left: Under-lit blue glass-bowl sinks in the master bath are in striking contrast with a black slate vanity top. • A hallway takes on the look of an art gallery with *Solitude*, a sculpture by Allan Houser, and paintings by diverse artists. The large painting on the far wall, *Mineral Spirits*, is by Emily Mason. • Shoji screens separate the water closet and shower areas from the main part of the master bath, which features a Japanese-inspired soaking tub. Above the tub is *Agua Caliente*, a painting by Michael Bradley.







CHRISTIAN BLOK



CHRISTIAN BLOK



and Berghoff agree. And the project allowed the three to try new things. Costello found a durable plasticlike material from which to make shoji screens, usually made of rice paper: It was Dick's first experience using bamboo flooring, which was steamed to get a darker color. Berghoff created his first sand garden. He says Jim hand-selected all the boulders for it, and believes they were like sculpture to the art-loving homeowner.

Jim also went out in the desert with him, to where very old ironwood trees were being harvested, Berghoff remembers. "He saw the spirit of this tree." Transplanted in the Japanese garden, the ironwood that was chosen did not survive. It remains in place, however, and holds special appeal for Ann.

"It's now covered with a vine that blooms with purple flowers," she says. "It's almost as if the tree were still alive." 🌿

See Resource Guide.