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before



In a tract of about 30 homes near the Phoenix Mountain Preserve, the 1960 house is tucked into a quiet neighborhood full of ocotillo, Joshua trees and native desert plantings instead of thirsty lawns. "Al Beadle did a number of variations of tract homes here trying to get away from custom homes and bring architecture to the masses," Bankord explains about his three-bedroom, two-bath modernist ranch. "Now there is a surge of renovations among architects trying to save these houses. As soon as one comes on the market there are three or four offers." Bankord has become a bit of a Beadle wonk and hopes to start an architectural preservation group in

after



"I feel the house is more connected to the landscape now."



before

after



Phoenix: Modernism for the Masses

text Michelle Gringeri-Brown

photography Jeff Green

Alfred Beadle, Arizona's most modernist architect, designed Troy Bankord's tract house. "They call his works 'Beadle boxes' because they really are boxes, sometimes a cantilevered series or zigzagged off of one another," says Bankord, a Phoenix landscape contractor. Beadle, who participated in *Arts and Architecture* magazine's Case Study Program, has work that is part of the permanent collection at NYC's MOMA. He died in 1998 at age 71.

Artist Jeff Cochran painted the triptych that hangs over the custom walnut cabinet built by Chuck Long immediately inside the entry.



before



after



Bankord's penchant for lighting is evident in the guest bedroom, above and below, which is a far cry from its former self. The bed bolster is covered in vintage fabric from a housecoat.

Phoenix. "I've been talking with the Palm Springs Modern Committee and Chicago Bauhaus and Beyond, groups that are bringing people together and creating awareness. I'm kind of on a mission to promote Modernism in Phoenix so we can save some of the architecture before it's leveled," Bankord says. "The more [renovation] projects, the more awareness. Even though these houses have such different lines and angles, and things like the stacked cement block walls extending from the interior to the outside, they were considered just standard ranch houses."

There are some great examples of '50s and '60s architecture in the city, Bankord says, but "it feels like in Palm Springs the whole city is about that architecture; in Phoenix it's more bits and pieces. Unfortunately, in some areas of town people are looking at these low, streamlined homes that don't have views per se, and leveling them and building what I call 'big pink elephants'—Tuscan styling, stacked stone, etc. Of course once that happens, if you did have a view, it's no longer there. It becomes a snowball effect: when it happens all





“I love how the plants play off of the decomposed granite.”

around you, neighbors don't really have a choice but to do the same thing.”

His own 1,700-square-foot ranch had white ceramic tile in the entry, green asbestos tiles on the rest of the floors and an artificial brick wall in the kitchen. The moment he bought it Bankord began what turned into a 6 1/2 year restoration.

“As soon as I got the keys, the wall [dividing the living and dining rooms] came down, the flooring came up and the old kitchen came out. We moved that kitchen out to the patio so we could cook, but it was an El Niño year. The ceiling was open, the doors were on order but not in yet, and we're looking up at plywood saturated with rain,” he remembers. Other early moves were to tear out the old wood fencing and dead plants, put up a block wall, plant an oleander hedge for privacy and put in trees.

The elimination of the load-bearing wall necessitated installing a steel I-beam that tied into the roof trusses, but it allowed him to open up the claustrophobic dining room, expand the galley kitchen and create a wall in the entry for large-scale artwork. He hired an electrician and plumber, and the cabinetry was custom-made, but much of the project was done intra-Bankord. “I come from a family of interior designers and contractors. My father dove in and



did a lot of the work. He spearheaded the electrical work, the doors and windows and the flooring,” he says.

One challenge was the realization that with the ceiling open for the I-beam installation, this was the time to install any recessed lighting. Without having purchased any furniture Bankord had to “come up with where I wanted the dining room table to be, whether it would be square or circular, where the sofa and the coffee table would be, where artwork would go—and lay out my lighting accordingly. That didn't go exactly as I wanted of course; when you're doing a remodel there's always a beam in the ceiling exactly where you want a light.”

The umpteen jillion coats of paint on a cement block wall were sandblasted off with copious amounts of copper slag, but the daylong process chiseled away at the mortar, too, and in some places you could see sunlight coming through. They went through 13 gray grouts looking for one that matched the original. “I had to be true to the architecture,” Bankord says.

before



The master bath, right and top, has a Corian counter on a custom walnut cabinet built by Chuck Long and a wall Bankord terms a "rag-rolled, daubed, dimensional chocolate brown kind of Ralph Lauren" treatment—don't think about calling it a faux finish.

"A lot of homes from this era I see being redone with no window treatments, and I'm a warmer person than that," Bankord says. "I did the drapes and sheers to warm up the space a tad—I didn't want it too cold or industrial. It's amazing what a simple paneling of wood, like behind the bed, or drapery treatment on both sides of a window do for a room; the master bedroom looks five feet taller now."



after



before



after

In the new kitchen, Bankord wanted a terrazzo look on the counters and chose Corian. "I get more compliments on it," he says. "I'm not an artificial materials person, but I'm very pleased with it." However, the UltraCraft maple veneer cabinets, stainless steel appliances and the light counters caused a disconnect with the dark brown and black living room. The solution: a black Corian backsplash and a new pocket door leading to the laundry room faced with a stainless steel panel and a black painted edge.



"I knew that Beadle envisioned it to be exposed block, so off the paint came and away we went."

There was a simple decorative drywall detail, a flat eight-inch cornice at the ceiling that was original to the living/dining area. Bankord decided to bring that into other areas as well, and has also assiduously skim coated the "chicken foot" textured walls that weren't to his taste. "I wanted them gallery-like, perfect," he says. He also put down slate in the public rooms and redid both baths and the bedrooms.

Outside, the cement block house has a new galvanized aluminum fascia board in the same style as Beadle's original T-111 plywood version, which solved warping and blistering problems. A foam roof and a gutter system keep water from pouring down over the front door and near some windows.

For Bankord, the first time he sees a property he knows what he'd do with the landscape. This house was no exception. Standing out front he eyeballed where he'd like the trees and got them in right away so they could put on some growth. He also created rainwater retention areas in the yard to harvest the scant precipitation the area gets, instead of having it run off into the street. Decomposed granite in a

color complementary to the nearby mountain—cinnamon brown—contrasts with the white and pink gravel look popular in his area. "I love how the plants play off of the d.g.," he says. "They look more lush and pronounced."

The house came with a wide cement driveway that was in good condition, but Bankord chose to trim the hardscape to just inside the carport and to sweep decomposed granite clear across the front facade. "I feel the house is now more connected into the landscape with that big slab gone."

Recessed up-lights subtly guide visitors to the carport and front door. "When you have a home like this with walls of glass, and every plant and walkway and pot and tree is lit, it feels like the garden is coming in. There's this real connection with lighting at night. I'm all about lighting."

"When I bought the house, my life did evolve a little," he says. "I wanted to do something edgy, something interesting and different. I feel the house is very special and I didn't want it to look like all of the other homes in the neighborhood. At the same time, while I have a passion for the '60s, I want to live in the here and now." 🍂

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