

Magazine: *Phoenix Home and Garden*, January 2009

Article: Continental Blend, Mediterranean Flair Enhances a Southwest Garden

Ten years ago, interior designer Michelle Carroll fell in love with the baroque beauty and lush gardens of the villas she visited in Italy, Spain and Mexico. Ensuing trips to these lands inspired her to build her own Mediterranean-style residence in the desert Southwest, where she incorporated design elements taken from photos and drawings of architectural details she loved. "This is how I've brought my amazing discoveries home," she explains.

In 2002, Carroll, owner of Old World Designs, began working with landscape architect Michael Rockwell of Azul-Verde Design Group Inc. to set the scene for her dream home, located at the foot of the McDowell Mountains in Scottsdale. He recalls, "Our goal was to choose elements that would give Michelle's villa concept a Mediterranean flavor."

Carroll found artisans in Arizona and Mexico who could fabricate her designs. "Nearly everything is custom-made," she notes. Spanish-style cantera planters, columns, and door and window surrounds were carved, and iron was forged. Carroll re-created an elaborate wall fountain based on one she had glimpsed through an archway in Positano, Italy. It sets a magical mood for the entry walkway.

Meanwhile, Rockwell dealt with the site's challenges. The 1 ½ acre property has a 15-foot elevation change that corresponds with the orientation of the house. "Usually a grade change falls away from you, but here it comes toward you," he says. "We decided to create terrace features that allow the home and gardens to follow the land while adapting to its various uses."

Even though each area of the grounds has unique appeal, Rockwell says the homeowner wanted to create a sense of discovery that encourages visitors to move from one space to the next. Carroll adds, "I wanted people to feel the surprise of opening a beautiful gate and finding themselves in Europe or Mexico."

Carefully tended foliage binds the house with the landscape. Abundant layers of trees, shrubs and flowers mirror the luxurious materials that Carroll selected for her interiors, including silks, taffetas, marble and granite. "I like to care for things myself," she notes. "So I'm training climbing roses, Jasmine, bougainvillea and fig vine to cover the walls."

The scarlet-orange blooms of trumpet vine, glossy leaves of cat's claw and curlicues of flowering snail vine soften a world of weathered stone and wood festooned with iron scrollwork. The richness of the setting completes the illusion that within the walls of this villa one is transported to another place and time.