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Pinnacle Peak hacienda

a soul reclaimed

Long abandoned,
a Mexican-style hacienda now
pulses with life and family activity

by Jackie Dishner
Photographs by Chris Conle



Sara Hankins says she knew the moment she opened the dusty, dirty doors that this was the one. Looking past the cobwebs and clutter inside, she focused instead on the architectural details: colorful Hopi designs carved into the wood of the arched, double-sash doors at the entrance; the giant pine tree trunk projecting through the roof in the living room; the odd-shaped clerestory in the master bath.


"I walked in and felt a connection to this house. It had a soul, and I wanted to make it a home again," says the self-proclaimed rescuer. Sara and her husband Eric knew the scruffy foreclosure, a long-aban-

doned Mexican-style hacienda, would transform beautifully.

Built on a cul-de-sac at the end of a long road of custom homes that overlook Pinnacle Peak in North Scottsdale, this home did indeed gain new life when the Hankinses bought it from the bank and hired Republic West Remodeling of Scottsdale to restore it—in just over three months.



Above, far right: These carved entry doors were just one of the many unique original features in the home that called to the homeowners. The amazing mountain views from the backyard (above, center) also caught their attention. The couple decided not to stain the wood on the tree trunk in their living room (opposite), but they did insert lighting in the banco that surrounds it, making it an attractive and well-lit seating area at night.



Whatever wood in the house wasn't brought in new had to be stripped and restained. It took a month to get the stain just right, including on the vigas and skylight surround in the kitchen. The door handles on the arched door to the family room in back came from an old gate Sara and Eric found outside. When the new hickory kitchen cabinets were installed, the old cabinets were reused in the man cave.

To maintain an authentic casita feel in the kitchen, the homeowners opted for Saltillo—not on the floor, but on the backsplash.



“Everything [owner Jim Weisman] promised, he delivered,” says Eric. “In hindsight, it was a pretty unreasonable schedule,” Sara adds, recalling interviews with other contractors who pitched timeframes of a year or more. Between May and September 2011, the Republic West crew (which included up to 14 trucks out front—Eric remembers counting them once) was able to completely gut and rebuild the home into the 7,000 square feet it is today.

Eric and Sara are former Wisconsinites and the parents of two very active children involved in competitive racing (Kayla, 13, is a 2014 U.S.A. Cycling National Juniors Track Champion; her brother, Alex, 10, is a 2014 U.S.A. Cycling State Juniors Track Champion). Mom and Dad are two very active people themselves. Eric’s a high school science teacher and rides on the same racing team as his children. He also refurbishes and rebuilds vintage cars and limos and races hot rods. Sara is a corporate lawyer, a triathlete, and an accomplished horsewoman. The family needed space that would suit their active lifestyle.

“We wanted to maintain the integrity of what was already here and increase the feel of the house as a family home,” says Sara. This meant altering the floor plan.

Left: A sitting room was added as a bonus space to the master bedroom, the arches in its kiva and doorway lovely echoes of one another.

Below: The children’s framed artwork lines the hallway walls leading to their bedrooms, the guest bath, and their dad’s office.



"Speed wasn't the issue.
Making the dream the reality was."
—Jim Weisman, Republic
West Remodeling

Right: The fireplace in the master bedroom is just one of 11 throughout the house. Coupled with energy-efficient, 18-inch, scoria-pour (concrete and lava rock mix) exterior walls, the fireplaces help keep the house toasty in winter.

Below: This Mexican tile art in daughter Kayla's shower is one of the few remnants of the home's former casita state. They kept it because Kayla loves horses.





They added a sitting room to the master bedroom and redesigned the kitchen. A rooftop patio was completely enclosed and transformed into a second-story bar/lounge for adults only. The adjoining flat roof was turned into an outdoor deck for great sunset views. An elevator shaft in the family room became a stairwell, providing a secret hideaway for the kids. And the garage was transformed into Eric's workshop/man cave, showcasing his restored limos, a collection of vintage limo ads, and even a semi truck sleeper cab for extra overnight guests.

"Removing the elevator shaft was one of the greatest challenges, because we weren't sure what was there," Weisman says. "Was it a wood frame or metal or what? It turned out to be solid concrete and took a week to clear out. We had to chip away at it!"

The team salvaged as much as possible. The Hopi-designed doors stayed. Old gates in the yard were repurposed—one into a headboard in the casita. Leftover Mexican tiles became coasters. And they kept the skylight as well as all 11 fireplaces—each one handcrafted and different from the next.

Inspired by the bathroom, the guest casita on the east end of the house maintains much of the home's



Left, top: A small part of Eric's collection of 5,000 vintage limo ads line the walls of his man cave/workshop/garage. This is also where he parks his two fully restored vintage limos.

Left, bottom: This space upstairs was a covered patio before Republic West Remodeling converted it into the warm and inviting bar/lounge it is now. The long picture window opens to a fantastic view of Pinnacle Peak.



former hacienda appearance, complete with Mexican tile, heavy wood doors and beams, and a raised bedroom with canopy bed. Sara and Eric also updated the landscaping and added a slide to the pool, which includes a stream that runs along an outer edge.


They chose practical design materials, such as hickory and ceramic tile on the floors, and granite on countertops. To maintain an authentic casita feel in the kitchen, they opted for Saltillo—not on the floor, but on the backsplash.

Great seating arrangements take advantage of all the views. Sara's favorite for reading is the one next to the tree trunk. She and Eric both enjoy spending time upstairs in the lounge with friends and out-of-town guests, where a large picture window exposes the per-

"I hate to rip out things that don't need to be ripped out," says Sara, so they salvaged a lot, including the original backyard pool (above). Adding a water slide and water feature gave the pool a modern update.

Right: Blue LED lights mounted beneath the bar top create a soothing, jazz club ambience at night.







The Hankinses opened this space to entertain guests for a friend's wedding recently. Other friends have told them their sunset views are unmatched.

fect view of Pinnacle Peak. Sara, who worked closely with Republic West's design team, says it was hard to find coordinating materials for all seven bathrooms, which is why each bath has different sinks, hardware, and stone.

Weisman says he is still taken by "the sheer beauty of the job," most of it having to do with the wood in the house. The trim, vigas, and beams in every room had to be stained—and what a challenge *that* was.

"The wood was so old and untreated that every time we tried to stain it, the wood just soaked up the stain," says Weisman. "You'd wait a few days, and the color just wasn't right. We worked on that an entire month. We had a whole team trying to diagnose the problem and find a solution. Finally, we realized we were going to have to sand everything down and treat the wood as if we were installing it brand new." However, he notes, "Speed wasn't the issue. Making the dream the reality was."

Eric agrees. "It's so unique, and it's so comfortable here. As soon as I come home, I don't feel the need to leave." 



The couple added the hacienda-style gate for both privacy's sake and as a nod to the home's original design.

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—Sara Hankins