

Perched on the edge of a precipice, the two-level residence has pine-framed views of grass-filled Dry Lake below.

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY DINO TONN

# Living On the Edge

A STYLISH FAMILY RETREAT  
RISES ON THE RIM OF  
A FLAGSTAFF CALDERA.



AT FIRST GLANCE, THE HOUSE IN THE  
FLAGSTAFF RANCH GOLF COMMUNITY APPEARS  
TO BE A WARM, COMFORTABLE GETAWAY

FOR A PHOENIX WOMAN, her adult children and her grandchildren. The two-level abode is a place where they can gather, cook together, enjoy the pine-scented air and play 18 holes with views of the San Francisco Peaks. Its rustic mountain architecture and cool-hued traditional interior combine to make a study in classic mountain living.

But the dwelling's backstory isn't exactly one typical of an alpine subdivision. Instead, it includes sparks of natural and human history, not to mention a bit of construction derring-do.

"This home's half-acre lot is literally at the edge of an old volcanic caldera," explains architect Ryan Smith, a Flagstaff native. Spanish for "caldron," a caldera is a bowl-shaped depression formed by the inward collapse of a volcano. "The site is called Dry Lake, and it's now part of Coconino National Forest," Smith adds, noting that Basque shepherds, who arrived in Arizona from Spain in the late 1800s, grazed sheep on the land during the early part of the 20th century. During the midcentury, the Zanzucchis—the family behind such beloved Flagstaff landmarks as the Museum Club and Granny's Closet—ran a dairy in the desiccated lake bed. Today, the area includes a 40-plus-acre ephemeral wetland that's frequented by local wildlife, including pronghorns and elk.

When asked to design a 4,600-square-foot getaway that would blend into the wooded landscape, Smith was inspired in part by the vernacular architecture of Northern Arizona—log cabins, Mary Colter's Grand Canyon work and Flagstaff's Riordan Mansion, a historic stone-and-timber dwelling by Charles Whittlesey, who was also the architect for the famed El Tovar Hotel.

**ABOVE** Inspired by the vernacular architecture of Northern Arizona, the home's exterior features Western red cedar cladding and a standing seam metal roof, as well as wrought iron and stone details. Boulders from the cliff's excavation were used in the landscape. **LEFT** Guests enter through an entry courtyard, where colorful flowers add a cheery note. On the right is a casita, with its own separate entrance.



While the residence harmonizes effortlessly with its surroundings, its construction was not exactly a slam-dunk. “We love a challenge,” says builder Mike Tulloss, “but this was a bit of a hairy experience.” Because there was no access to the site or the face of the escarpment from the forest land below, all of the work had to originate from the top of the lot. “We made a 25-foot-deep cut into the side of the caldera to accommodate the home’s lower level and its supports,” Tulloss says. “The subcontractor sat at the edge of the precipice with an excavator to lower the backhoe down to do the cut. He had nerves of steel.” The build team also employed cranes to assist construction within a tight building envelope and its cliffside perch. Boulders removed from the site were reused as abutments in the landscape.

Malapai stone accent walls, wrought iron, Western red cedar siding and a standing seam metal roof that patinates over time give the home a decidedly mountain feel. The floor plan includes the main living quarters, master suite and casita at street level, with a family room and guest bedrooms set on a lower plane against the cliff—all leading to decks with views of the caldera below. Subtle design strategies, such as having the main living areas on one level, a casita that can morph into a caretaker’s quarters, and a closet designed to accommodate a future elevator, were employed so that the owner can age in place.

“This house is all about a casual, cozy, inviting look that’s maybe a bit more traditional than the typical Flagstaff vacation home,” notes interior designer Hank Arens, who was aided by his design associate, Laura Finsterwald. “I’ve done several homes

**OPPOSITE** A stone-clad fireplace and tongue-and-groove pine ceiling add mountain warmth to the great room, where comfortable furnishings invite lingering in front of a fire. Window walls open to the upper deck, which has broad views. **ABOVE** Located off the dining room, a covered deck is the perfect spot to enjoy outdoor meals while taking in the scenery.

for this client, and we've become good friends, so I knew what she wanted. Because she spends a lot of time here, she desired beautiful finishes and great craftsmanship."

Working with a background of dark hickory flooring, cream-colored walls, stone-clad fireplaces and honey-hued tongue-and-groove pine ceilings, Arens suggested plenty of cushy, lounge-worthy upholstered seating, accented by wood and metal tables, all done in a palette of cream, silver, taupe, aquamarine and pale green, echoing the home's forest setting. "The client already had a house in Flagstaff, so we were able to use some furniture from the previous residence, which we reupholstered for a fresh look," he explains.

Special touches throughout enhance the home's sense of rustic refinement. In the spacious kitchen—separated from the living room by a generously sized walk-in pantry—a pale blue range, a zinc-and-limestone hood, traditional cabinetry and an island topped with Alexandrite quartzite veined in aquamarine and deep pink evoke French flair. In the master bathroom, porcelain wainscoting that mimics Carrara marble is framed by a zinc chair rail, while a chandelier adds a touch of glam above the deep soaking tub. Downstairs, the designer suggested using antique French brick pavers for the floor of the intimate wine room, where the bottles are displayed on a custom cabinet that includes a half wine barrel. And for the wee ones who are



**LEFT** A luxury French range and a Parisian-inspired zinc hood imbue the kitchen with a sense of timeless elegance. **ABOVE** The island's richly veined countertop and aquamarine cabinetry that complements the powder blue range provide pops of color in an otherwise neutral setting.



Furnishings were kept simple in the dining room to keep the focus on Mother Nature's grandeur.

“This house is all about a casual, cozy, inviting look.”

—HANK ARENS, interior designer



**OPPOSITE** The view of the home's expansive decks underscores the structure's treehouse-like setting along the face of the cliff. **RIGHT** Antique brick pavers and an old wine barrel enhance the intimate atmosphere of the lower-level wine room.



Playful accessories and primary colors dominate in the grandchildren's lower-level bedroom. Custom trundle beds with traditional lines lend a polished look and feature built-in shelves for toys and books.

frequent visitors, Arens created a grandchildren's bedroom, featuring custom trundle beds that guarantee lively sleepovers.

The home has become a year-round retreat for the owner and her family. And, as they have a glass of wine or relax on the decks to watch the sun slip past the oak and pine trees, they're not the only ones flocking together. In the caldera below, javelinas make their way across the grass, migrating birds roost in the towering pines, and elk bugle to attract mates. For humans and animals, Dry Lake is the perfect place to gather for the evening. □

ARCHITECT: Ryan Smith, Smith Architects Inc. BUILDER: Mike Tulloss, Stillely Tulloss Design Build Group. INTERIOR DESIGNER: Hank Arens, Hank Arens Designs.

For more information, see Sources.



**ABOVE** The master bathroom makes a glamorous statement thanks to a chandelier over the deep soaking tub and a zinc chair rail that frames the Carrara marble-look wainscoting. Sconces that feature silver birds on branches are a subtle nod to the home's natural surroundings. **LEFT** Soothing hues, natural woods, sumptuous bedding and luxe draperies mark the master bedroom.

