

# TRANSFORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION

To practice what he preaches, devoted Modernist Architect Peter Koliopoulos turned his family's typical Paradise Valley ranch home into a nest of minimalism and cutting-edge design.

**T**HERE IS A ZINC AND GLASS BOX IN PARADISE valley and underneath it is a home remodel. "This is the most radical transformation of a house I've ever seen," says Landscape Architect Bill Tonnesen of the newly redesigned Koliopoulos residence. And Tonnesen isn't one to speak lightly of radical transformation. As the desert's go-to guy for cutting-edge and experimental residential and commercial landscape designs, Tonnesen is always game for new ideas ... and partnering with Koliopoulos, whose firm, Circle West Architects, defined a new design typology with the buildings of DC Ranch and its epicenter—Market Street. "I loved what he did there and have wanted to work with him ever since," says Tonnesen.

Walking up to the house, it's apparent that the free-flow of ideas between Tonnesen and Koliopoulos was productive. The mildly dense Palo Verde trees soften the hard lines of zinc and glass, helping to set the home within a context of natural desert, rather than the faux Tuscan homes that surround the site. From the street, a trail of larger, flat-topped rocks provides a meandering trail through a landscape of barrel and cholla cacti. A short, trickling water feature harkens to a small creek, and its shape—a perfect circle—provides an antithesis to the hard-lined, rectangular structure.

Koliopoulos says, "The overall concept was a 'modern intervention in the desert.' We expanded the home in every direction at





The exterior walls of the old house are now interior walls, thanks to a shell of zinc and glass. The architect and homeowner, Peter Koliopoulos, is seen here walking by the master bath toward the living areas and kitchen.



various dimensions, but placed just as much emphasis on what was outside as well as inside.” To enjoy those views, 80 feet of 13-foot-tall glass on the north and south sides (front and back) let natural light flood the interior spaces. Every 32 inches, a perpendicular, 12-inch glass structural fin holds the massive panes in place. “The fins could have been placed further apart, but aesthetically, I wanted them at 32 inches for rhythm; plus, this only adds to the reinforcement.” Overhangs that reach out 8 feet in some areas protect the interior concrete floors from direct sunlight in the summer (reducing

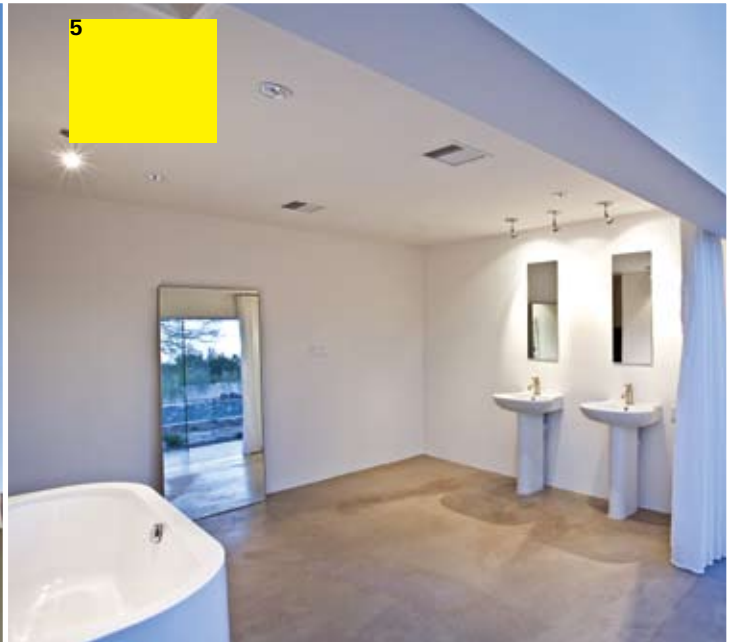
heat gain), but allow sunshine to hit the slab in the winter (bringing heat gain). “That’s sustainability 101,” says Koliopoulos. CZ Multi, a division of design and build firm, Construction Zone, installed this daring glass system, while Urban Edge served as general contractor to other parts of the home. Everything here is custom, from the front and rear door handles to the artfully perforated air return covers.

Inside, smooth, white drywall covers the former exterior and interior walls. Although, most of the latter have been reconfigured to accommodate a total overhaul of the interior flow. Just inside the north



**01.** A VIEW OF THE HOME FROM THE ZEN GARDEN OF BOULDERS AND GRAVEL. **02.** ALL OF THE LANDSCAPING AROUND THE HOUSE ARE DESERT-NATIVE SPECIES THAT WOULD HAVE BEEN FOUND WITHIN A HALF-MILE OF THE HOUSE 50 YEARS AGO. **03.** ROCKY TERRAIN CONTINUES FROM THE GLASS EDGE, TO THE POOL, AND BEYOND.





**04.** OVERHANGS PREVENT DIRECT SUNLIGHT FROM HITTING THE CONCRETE FLOORS AT CERTAIN TIMES OF DAY. **05.** THE MASTER BATHROOM IS A STUDY IN SIMPLICITY, SEPARATED ONLY BY A WHITE SHEER CURTAIN.

curtain of glass, three frosted glass doors lead to two bedrooms and a home office. With the newly wide open spaces and durable concrete floors, “the kids love skateboarding inside,” says Peter’s wife, Lynn. “Although the minimalist thing has taken some getting used to, their friends definitely call this the ‘cool house,’” she says.

Many rooms are separated only by flowy, white sheer curtains on often meandering tracks. A curtain is the only thing, for instance, separating the master bedroom from the rear wall of glass, meaning the desert is only steps away from the bed.

Outside this southern curtain wall of glass is a massive stone-covered pool deck. Resembling Frank Lloyd Wright’s Taliesin West pool area, the stones here are similar in their large size and natural beige tones. The 60-by-18-foot pool itself is clad in these rocks, making virtually no distinction between the man-made and natural environments.

Just beyond the pool is a rectangular Zen garden of smooth gravel, with a curiously placed pile of large boulders opposite a giant rake made from Palo Verde branches—a gift from Tonnesen to the Koliopoulos’. “It’s really a place holder for a future pool pavilion,” says Peter, always thinking of the next design move.

For now, the family is simply going to enjoy living without construction. (They lived *in* the remodel off and on for a few years.)

**06.** GLASS PERIMETER WALLS ALLOW THE HOME TO GLOW LIKE A JEWEL BOX AT NIGHT, WHILE THE INTERIOR WALLS RETAIN PRIVACY FOR THE INHABITANTS. **07.** THE GARAGE DOOR WAS CUSTOM ENGINEERED TO SLIDE HORIZONTALLY. WHEN CLOSED, IT RESTS FLUSH WITH THE ZINC WALLS. **08.** THE DRAMATIC OVERHANGS.



“We do *not* recommend that,” Koliopoulos says half-jokingly. “Please, put that in big bold lights in your article!” The final design brought the home’s square footage up to 5,000 from 3,500, but the real change occurred in how they live. Koliopoulos says, “People come over and ask, ‘Where’s all your stuff?’ But when there’s architecture, what else do you need? It should be less about quantity and more about quality. I can explain a concept to a client in a conference room or I can have them over for dinner. It’s important as an architect to practice what I preach.”

But the big question: did the Koliopoulos’ realize the potential of

their average ranch home from the beginning? “When we moved in, we were only planning to change the carpet, add a fresh coat of paint, you know, clean it up – but that was the beginning of the end,” Koliopoulos jokes. “It would have turned out different if we started from scratch, but the old house defined the character of the new one.” As an homage, he preserved the stucco surface surrounding the electrical box – which was on the exterior of the old home. Just open one of the doors inside the glass box and there it is, a snapshot of the home as it was once was, and now, still is. ■

