



DESIGN

## Open for Living

*Architect Sean Lockyer's luxurious new homes push modernism and indoor-outdoor living to the next level.*

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY LANCE GERBER





The pavilions of the home overlook the courtyard and pool and offer more private seating areas in the back.



THE VALLEY  
DESIGN

■ In real estate, timing and location can make you or break you. In Echo, an enclave of architecturally driven homes in Rancho Mirage, rookie developers Eric and Byron Smith nail both.

The brothers, desert natives, and former pro golfers revealed their first spec house amid a pandemic that seems to have only nourished sales of single-family homes in the Coachella Valley. Demand and prices are up for winsome properties to shelter in place and work from home. Echo, located on 5 acres north of Ginger Rogers Drive, has a soothing Zen vibe with a panoramic view of the San Jacinto and Santa Rosa mountains.

But it's the design of the pavilion-style structures that distinguishes this community of nine homes.

After their golf careers, the Smiths were intrigued by the

architectural renaissance in the valley and wanted a piece of the action. They formed Esotero Group with their father Bob, founder of the Rancho Mirage-based civil engineering firm MSA Consulting, to give talented architects a platform to innovate and integrate the surrounding environment.

They liked what they saw in Sean Lockyer of Studio AR&D, a design and construction firm with offices in Palm Springs and Los Angeles, particularly his work on the Schnabel Family Retreat in the Little Tuscany neighborhood of Palm Springs. The architect, grounded in the principles of modernist design, is especially sensitive to siting and orientation to maximize views and create transparency in the architecture that makes the terrain feel like part of the interior. Inside, he balances a variety of materials — black matte steel, natural stone,

and white oak — to create planes of texture and color, both warm and cool.

At first, Eric was ready to “echo” Lockyer’s aesthetics. “I didn’t think we could get Sean,” he concedes. “I thought this is the guy we want to copy.” Instead, he and Byron pursued the architect, who signed on to also oversee the construction and landscape design. “Once we found him, it was just a matter of staying true to his vision.

“We wanted a contemporary but organic and earthy look and atmosphere bringing the outdoors into the inside,” he continues. “Everybody says that and tries to do it, but this place has a lot of pass-through spaces that extend the interior square footage to the exterior and capture the views as much as possible.”

In the first of two spec houses built in the enclave, the south- and

west-facing sliding glass walls each frame a tableau of drought-tolerant desert plants and boulders and open to a courtyard and swimming pool, facilitating the indoor-outdoor experience that is the holy grail of desert living. When closed, the sliders are hardwired for shades.

Skylights fill interior spaces with indirect natural light and accentuate Lockyer’s minimalist forms, reductive color, and mix of materials and textures. The white oak floor, for example, softens the effect of the black steel planes in the kitchen and the gray stone wall (with built-in gas fireplace) separating the living room and private wing, where a media room offers functional space between two bedrooms on one end and the master suite on the other. “All the floor plans on Echo Lane include separation of spaces,” Lockyer says,



noting how the stone wall continues beyond the glass and into the courtyard. It mimics the exterior façade, which features a deep, steel-framed overhang with a hardwood ceiling marking the entry into the breezeway leading to the front door.

Inside, different surfaces and finishes — from the zellij tile in the bathrooms to the marble counter and backsplash in the kitchen — provide textural and tonal diversity throughout the 4,155-square-foot house, while details such as built-in hardware on doors, drawers, and cabinets reinforce Lockyer’s clean and minimal design sensibility. “We created a secondary kitchen for messy stuff, such as the coffee maker and toaster,” he says. “And it contains the pantry and laundry facilities, as well as entry into the garage.”

The house has one partial and four full bathrooms, the master featuring floor-to-ceiling windows and a solid travertine tub that had to be craned into the house.

Across the courtyard from the master suite, a freestanding guest



Stone walls, white oak floors, black marble, and furnishings provide a variety of texture and color.



casita repeats the black matte and white oak in the elevated workspace and sleeping and seating areas, as well as the distressed-style tile in the bathroom. The entire space orients its occupants toward the courtyard with a view of the pool and well-placed groupings of drought-tolerant plants.

“Byron and I wanted to contribute something genuine and relevant to the cultural landscape,” Eric says. “We didn’t want anything forced or seemingly unnatural. Sean is executing that vision.”

The nine lots along gated Echo Lane unfold as 16,000- to 22,000-square-foot properties with houses with four floor plans and four elevations with two options for the façade, each ranging in size from 3,700 to 4,200 square feet.

Echo homes start at \$1.95 million. This first spec house sold for roughly \$2.2 million.

Visit the properties at [echoranchomirage.com](http://echoranchomirage.com) and schedule a safe, touch-free tour with Keith Markovitz at [info@ttkrepsents.com](mailto:info@ttkrepsents.com).