

THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS

BY CARLA BREER HOWARD PHOTOS DAVID BLANK



After frequent visits to the Coachella Valley while growing up, Jerry Markovitz looked forward to sharing one of his favorite places with his partner Cameron Jobe. Ultimately, the couple sought a home of their own here, a complete departure from the charming Cotswold cottage they share in Los Angeles. Their new custom home, built in an established Palm Springs neighborhood, is a direct descendant of the renowned, 1950s “butterfly” houses designed by architect William Kreisel, but offers all the comforts and eco-savvy of today.



The new home's interior retains the spare, clean brilliance and open design of the original 2,200 midcentury Alexander homes, which were mostly designed for easy seasonal living or weekend getaways. But it also incorporates uncharacteristically deluxe—although true to the period—terrazzo flooring throughout.

The same spirit is captured in the furnishings. The modernist lines of the understated sectional are met with the Rosenau double-tier coffee table with a highly polished finish and legs capped in silver by Bolier & Co. Jonathan Adler's Addison chairs in light blue offer high-style pull-up seating.

Danny Heller's painting of the LAX theme building is paired with an untitled painting by Andy Ahn Ha on the adjacent wall. The homeowners' collection of midcentury Murano glass adds additional color.



“The original Kresel designs for the Alexander homes were not site specific,” explains Lockyer, “nor were any considered. A lot of them may do things that are not responsive to the conditions of the site.”



Markovitz, a Santa Monica-area physician, happily credits Robert Imber, who might be dubbed Palm Springs’ greatest architectural ambassador, with an introduction in the early 2000s to the city’s cache of midcentury modern buildings and to the Palm Springs Modern Committee community in general. “I gladly blame him for everything good in our lives about Palm Springs,” says Markovitz.

Thereafter, the couple returned more frequently, renting houses each time as they learned more about the style. “After renting many times,” Markovitz continues, “we made the fatal mistake of going to open houses and calling a real estate agent, who had listed many of them.” But after taking them to numerous period houses, the agent suggested the couple build a new one, and he knew just where to send them.

At the time, Solterra Development in Palm Springs had a relationship with Kresel, working with a Canadian developer. The idea was to build the original plan for his Alexander homes, but to modern codes. Palm Springs

LEFT: The couple’s Los Angeles home is a two-story cottage with brick and wood-siding, complete with leaded windows and a rose garden. Right: Cameron Jobe relaxes with the paper while Jerry Markovitz cooks a Palm Springs weekend breakfast.



that are not responsive to the conditions of the site.”

Once the empty lot on the west side of the street was acquired, it was clear that the typical orientation of the butterfly roof—whereby the roof line sweeps upward from the center of the house toward the side walls—would need to rotate 90 degrees so that the roof would pitch upward to the rear, taking advantage of the expansive mountain view.

Further, with so much glass now exposed to the afternoon’s sunshine, the house would need a deeper overhang, so it was lengthened to extend seven feet out from the walls. One additional and more subtle adjustment was to raise the roof’s pitch slightly more to the rear, allowing for taller clerestory windows and more view. On the other hand, the lesser incline toward the front of the house ensures greater privacy, while still preserving the exciting drama of the overall form from the street.

▶▶ DETAILS

Architecture and landscaping, Sean Lockyer, working with authorized William Kresel plans, ar+d, 457 N. Palm Canyon Dr., Studio B, Palm Springs; (760) 322-3339; studio-ard.com. Construction, Solterra Development, 700 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Palm Springs; (760) 320-4300; solterrahomes.com.

Markovitz and Jobe, who are both over six feet tall, appreciated another adaptation from the original Kreisel template, namely, more overall height. The new home's ceilings are two feet higher, and that meant adjusting everything proportionally, including the doorways. Instead of the standard six feet, eight inches, they're seven feet high.

The client-architect team made another space-enhancing decision, as well. The Kreisel butterfly design neatly measures 40 feet by 40 feet, notes Markovitz, but, while following the original layout precisely, the new house added two feet of depth all across the center. "Most of the two feet addition was added to the guest bathroom in the center hallway, which is in the same plane as the master bath," he explains, "so we just made them two feet deeper, which also widened the entry," which comes in through the side.

One thing that Kreisel didn't include in his plans was a guest casita. Lockyer remedied that beautifully, and then provided a 14-foot roof overhang off the rear that covers an outdoor dining area and kitchen with barbecue.

Inside, the sparkling mirror-surrounded fireplace opposite the bed is topped by a flat-screen TV. There's a mini bar-style refrigerator, a spacious and beautifully detailed bathroom along with ample clothes storage. One wonders how the couple manages to get their weekend guests to actually depart.

The owners also sought to make the house as eco-friendly as possible. It is equipped with solar panels on the roof, high-performance glass, drip irrigation for the desert-native landscaping and a saltwater pool. The unusual garage-door cover by Parklex features a resin panel with a wood veneer topped by a UV coating. The material reappears on the southwest-facing side of the casita and is repeated just inside the guest house's doorway, as seen on our cover. According to Lockyer, this panel sits off the wall about one and a half inches, allowing the air to circulate behind it. "It is impervious to the elements, low maintenance and good for the environment," he says.



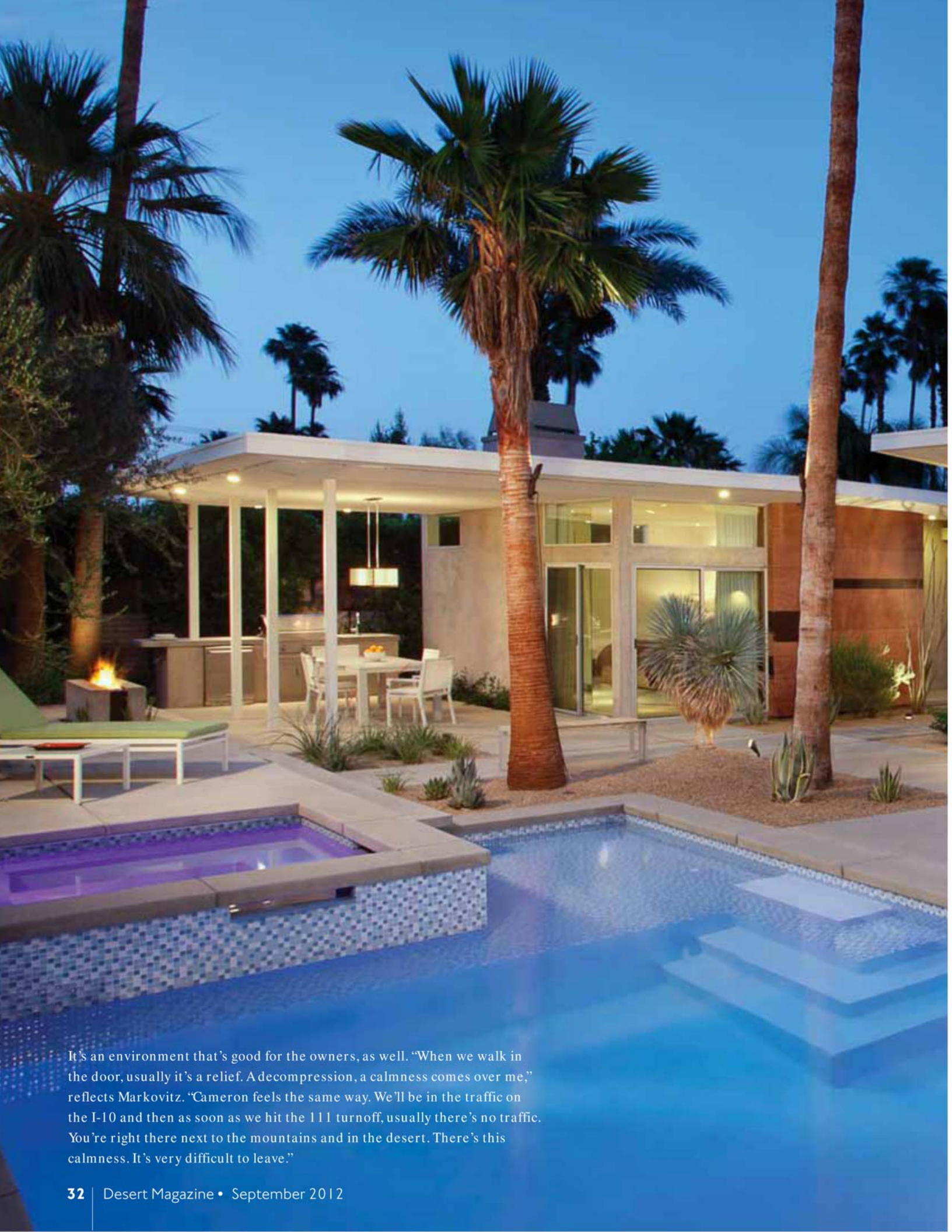
ABOVE: Open to the entry, in the upper right-hand corner, and also to the dining and living room areas off to the right, the kitchen reflects in the walnut cabinetry the wood hues of the nearby furnishings. The crisp white countertops are Caesarstone quartz. The painting of the Ace Hotel & Swim Club pool, set against the glass mosaic backsplash, is by Danny Heller.

RIGHT: Carrying the brown and blue hues into the study are a vintage Danish Modern desk and chair from JP Denmark in Cathedral City's Perez Art and Design Center, topped by a period lamp from Ventura Arts and Gallery in Palm Springs. The floor plan for the house is framed above.

BELOW: The guest casita continues the airy but cossetting mood of the main house, with a bed and bedside tables from Hickory Chair and a rug by Angela Adams. Of special note is the floor-level window by the bed, which connects with the land while protecting guests' privacy.

STYLING: CARLA BREER HOWARD





It's an environment that's good for the owners, as well. "When we walk in the door, usually it's a relief. A decompression, a calmness comes over me," reflects Markovitz. "Cameron feels the same way. We'll be in the traffic on the I-10 and then as soon as we hit the 111 turnoff, usually there's no traffic. You're right there next to the mountains and in the desert. There's this calmness. It's very difficult to leave."

Elegantly proportioned outdoor furnishings from Janus et Cie of Paris include the Lazlo chaise lounges near the concrete-block chimney as well as the Lazlo dining table and chairs under the casita overhang beyond.

