

Catalina greets the morning from the foyer of the Volks' restored El Encanto home.



Return to
GRACE
*Bringing dignity to an
El Encanto dame*

BY ERIC VAN METER • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRENCE MOORE

LIKE ANY OF

the gracious, midcentury homes at the hub of Tucson's L'Enfant-inspired El Encanto neighborhood, Rick and CJ Volk's new home was, as their Realtor put it, "born fine." She was refined but not fancy, roomy not sprawling, self-assured. I say "she" because the home spoke to CJ—woman to woman. And though she started life unmarred, what was done to her later was not pretty. CJ paints

the picture: “Everything fauxed. And crackled. And muraled. And saguaros. And saguaro murals. And tin doors stamped with saguaros...”

She’s not kidding about the cactus fetish. Not only did a former owner saturate the decor (think bathroom tiles painted with saguaros arranged in the shape of—guess what—a saguaro), but the property became a saguaro sanctuary, refuge to the dying and long dead—160 all told.

CJ was working in Paris when her husband called to say he’d found it, the home they’d been looking for. From his description, she knew exactly the house he was talking about: the one that had always made her think, “I should like it, but I don’t like it at all. It’s that house that should look good, but just looks weird and lonely.” The interior shots he e-mailed nearly triggered a seizure. But when she saw the floor plans, she could breathe again and knew he was right. It was the perfect location. And despite all that had been done to the home, she had good bones. She was beautiful. She’d been born fine.



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ABOVE: An aircraft maker's tool chest (far wall) is right at home with comfy worn leather and local art in the family room.

LEFT: CJ's bookcase is a microcosm of her home—a careful but casual array of eclectic treasures.

CJ immediately began planning how to open the kitchen, shift some rooms and bathrooms, all with an eye to preserving the home's natural gravity, that feeling of rightness that develops over 60 years like complexity in a good scotch. She found appointments befitting the home's age and stature, replacing modern fixtures with Holophane glass and an heirloom chandelier from the ballroom of New York's Commodore Hotel. She gave the kitchen a breakfast bar by topping a massive

antique mercantile chest with a zinc countertop, dappled with a mellowing history of spots and spills over time. Classic arabesques replaced saguaro tiles, contemporary doors gave way to turn-of-the-century salvage from an Italian convent, and

reclaimed chestnut trestles from 100-year-old barns became the planks of bedroom floors. And then there's color. CJ first created her own paints—now sold under her Citron Paint label—out of frustration with commercial products that build their



hues on muddy undertones stewing up from black pigment. Citron's paints contain no black, offering their colors in luminous shades as inspired as their names (and here, a quick tour of just a few CJ used to dress her home): thick socks, rillito, tarnished silver, mystery novel, hollandaise, sea glass, and Jan's rose—an homage to CJ's mom. Most of the home's rooms boast five or six colors, but instead of a visual assault, CJ's preternatural eye for light ensures the opposite effect.

"There's nowhere in nature that has the same color on all four sides," she explains. "We're not used to being in a box. By changing the paint with the light-reflectiveness of the wall, you create a quietness of color." She can walk into a room and read its light like you or I might take in a busy intersection. She sees where the light enters, where it bounces, and what it picks up. Where it's tinged blue by the Catalinas beyond a window or washed brown from overhanging

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Classic, elegant materials selected for the new kitchen make it hard to believe it isn't the home's original.



ABOVE: Antique industrial cabinets find new life under vintage lighting from a New York hotel in CJ's workspace.

RIGHT: A zinc-topped breakfast bar replaced a full wall to let light and air flow between the kitchen and dining area.



eaves, and she knows how—with paint—to make all of that electromagnetic frenzy settle into a harmony that, whether deep and dramatic or barely kissed with color, is ridiculously comforting. And here's where her master's in physiology comes in handy.

"It goes back to old-brain functions and the phenomenon of color constancy," CJ says. So she works with the brain: paler colors on more reflective walls to harvest the light, deeper shades on window-walls to

make them disappear and frame the view, medium tones in between. And while she generally coats ceilings in colors that become pale blues and pinks, helping them float up, up, and away, her own high-ceilinged living room is topped with a bold, smoky mauve.

"My one disappointment is I wanted to walk in to that color," she says. "I love color and would normally have something super dramatic on the first wall you face. But here it's a light-reflecting wall. I just couldn't



Throughout the Volks' home, dozens of colors harmonize to create a sense of quiet contentment.

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do it. I couldn't take this beautiful, bright, elegant room and turn it dark and funky.” In the end, those concessions—deferring to what the house wanted—gave the Volks' new home a mature beauty it deserves. “I could have made this house rockin' and wild,” CJ says, “but I felt like she'd been so disrespected. I wanted to honor her. Here was this beautiful home all dressed up in a costume, and she just wanted to be a quiet, good old dame of a house.”

Still, there is that wide living room ceiling so high you can do anything with it. And CJ admits that



What better way to top a luxurious bath than a crystal chandelier?



TOP: A plain, iron-gated front door was extended out to create this dramatic entry.

BOTTOM: Once home to 160 saguaros, the landscape now offers room to breathe with open spaces and areas for outdoor living.



despite the home's self-possessed beauty, she's more than just a plain ol' gal—she'll want something sexy and new from time to time. And there's a certain Citron paint—a deep, smoldering blue she named for a Jane Austen heartthrob...

Our interview almost over, CJ searches that ceiling with something like hunger in her eyes. “Mr. Darcy would be so yummy in here,” she says, as if it might not happen, and knowing already it will. **TH**

Eric Van Meter lives and writes in a 1922 Tucson home that will leave him to go live with CJ if it ever reads this article.

Resources

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- ARCHITECT:** Therese Brown, Henderson Brown Inc., 751-8959 » **ANTIQUES & ART:** The Grey House, 325-0400, and Robin's Nest Antiques & Collectibles, 624-4535, www.robinsnestintucson.com » **ARTWORK:** collections of the owner, and Joanne Kerrihard, represented by Davis Dominguez Gallery, 629-9759, www.davisdominguez.com » **BATHROOM TILE INSTALLATION:** Flagstile Creations, 869-6647, www.flagstile.com » **CABINETRY:** Atkinson Millwright LLC, 792-4775 » **CARPETS:** ProSource of Tucson, 624-7788 (to the trade), www.prosourcefloors.com » **CLOSETS:** Closet Trends, 325-1880, www.closettrendsaz.com » **CUSTOM CURTAINS:** Barbara's Interiors, 866-309-6682 » **CUSTOM UPHOLSTERY:** Kalav Upholstery, 298-0183 » **DOORS:** Amighini Architectural Inc., 800-MY DOOR-1, www.amighini.net » **DOOR FINISHING:** Butler Floors, 820-0631 » **FIREPLACE MATERIALS:** Cantera Custom Creations, 326-6051, www.cantercustomcreations.com » **INTERIOR DESIGN, INTERIOR PAINT, FURNISHINGS, LANDSCAPE DESIGN:** CJ Volk of Citron Paint & Interiors, 886-5800, www.citronpaint.com » **INTERIOR PAINTERS:** Simplicity Surface Design, 358-3198, and Prickly Pear Painting Inc., 490-5672 » **LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION:** Santa Rita Landscaping, Inc., 623-0421, www.santaritalandscaping.com » **LIGHT FIXTURES:** Sun Lighting, 322-4303, www.sunlighting.net » **MAIN FLOORING & KITCHEN TILE INSTALLATION:** Casa Decor Tile & Stone, 270-0278 » **PLUMBING FIXTURES:** Water Ways, 770-9978, www.waterwaysdph.com » **RUGS:** Asian Trade Rug Company, 326-7828, www.asiantraderugcompany.com » **TILE:** Fractured Earth Tile & Stone (to the trade), 620-6219