



*Striking a*  
**Balance**

The Remodel of a 1936 Home Marries  
Modern Design and Historic Charm

BY MARIA MATSON ■ PHOTOGRAPHY BY MICHAEL WOODALL



The barrel-vault ceiling in the living room wowed Joe Bushong and Chad Christian when they first saw this historic Phoenix home. "This room, this ceiling, sold us on the house," Bushong recalls. The double-hung windows are new but match the originals. Wood flooring here, as in other rooms, is oak planks. The painting on the left is by Barbara Rogers. The painting above the fireplace is by Henry Schoebel, and the landscape on the right is by Tom Murray.



Once covered with pavers, the backyard now has an inviting lawn area, a sunning platform, and a planter box surrounding the large olive tree.

**ASIDE FROM SOME “AWFUL” WALLPAPER** they promptly removed, Joe Bushong and Chad Christian left their historic house as is after moving in. They had been looking for a home in the Encanto-Palmcroft neighborhood of Phoenix for several years and were happy to have finally found one. Eight years later, they decided to redo their master bathroom, and “it snowballed,” Bushong recalls. “We thought, ‘While we’re at it, we might as well do the kitchen, and as long as we’re doing the kitchen, we might as well do the other bathroom.’ We were out of the house for about a year.”

During that time, they rewired and replumbed the entire house, replaced most of the windows, added a laundry room and guest suite, revamped the pool and matched the original oak flooring to flow throughout the house.

Bushong and Christian are the fourth owners of the 1936 Spanish Colonial-style residence, but not the first to remodel it. In the '70s, a previous owner stripped out the crown molding, door knobs and other original architectural details. “We didn’t do it, but we’re happy someone did,” Christian admits. “Sometimes people get upset when that happens. I would say most people who own these old houses want them to look old. We’re more contemporary but still want to respect the house.”

To help them merge their contemporary aesthetic with the home’s historic pedigree, they turned to their friend, interior designer Beth McGehee of SB Design. “The majority of work I did for them was in the kitchen and bathrooms,” the designer notes. “Chad and Joe had a good strong sense of what they wanted to do, but it’s not what they do every day, so they needed help figuring out how to pull their ideas together.”

One thing the couple envisioned was a larger, more functional kitchen with a “clean” look that still echoed the era of the home. Today, it is triple the size of the original galley kitchen and strikes a balance between then and now with top-of-the-line appliances set among mahogany cabinetry and Carrara marble countertops, materials McGehee calls “authentic choices.”

In a guest bathroom, she retained authenticity by refinishing the original sink, tub and toilet, and selected new tiles to cover the walls from floor to ceiling. The tile, she says, is more current in color but is similar to a ceramic tile that might have been used in the 1930s.

“In any other house, they probably would have gone more modern,” the designer acknowledges. “But with a historic property, there is a fine line between bringing it current and still leaving some of its history behind.” ■

A "before" view of the front yard shows the original windows and tile roof, as well as landscaping in need of some TLC. Today, the roof is the same, but the yard is manicured, with a pathway leading to the original mahogany entry door.



←  
Before

## THE SCOOP

**BIGGEST CHALLENGE:** The kitchen. The old kitchen was about one-third the size of the current kitchen, and remodeling it brought all the surprises you run into with an old house: You open up a wall and one project turns into four.

**BIGGEST SURPRISE:** Moroccan tile in the sitting area between the dining room and living room. "It was originally a patio with big brick pavers. When the contractors pulled the pavers up to install the wood floor, we found Moroccan cement tiles underneath. They weren't salvageable, but they were cool to find. They're still there, under the wood."

**BIGGEST SPLURGE:** Tile work. "We did a lot of really cool tile work in the bathrooms. Beth McGehee helped us with that and went to town with it. But it was fun to do, and we're really happy with it."



Before

The original galley kitchen ended just about where the new island begins. Since the current homeowners cook at home most days and frequently entertain, the new and improved light-filled kitchen was worth the effort of knocking out walls, rewiring and replumbing, they say. The countertop cabinet adjacent to the window opens to reveal the home's original milk delivery door.



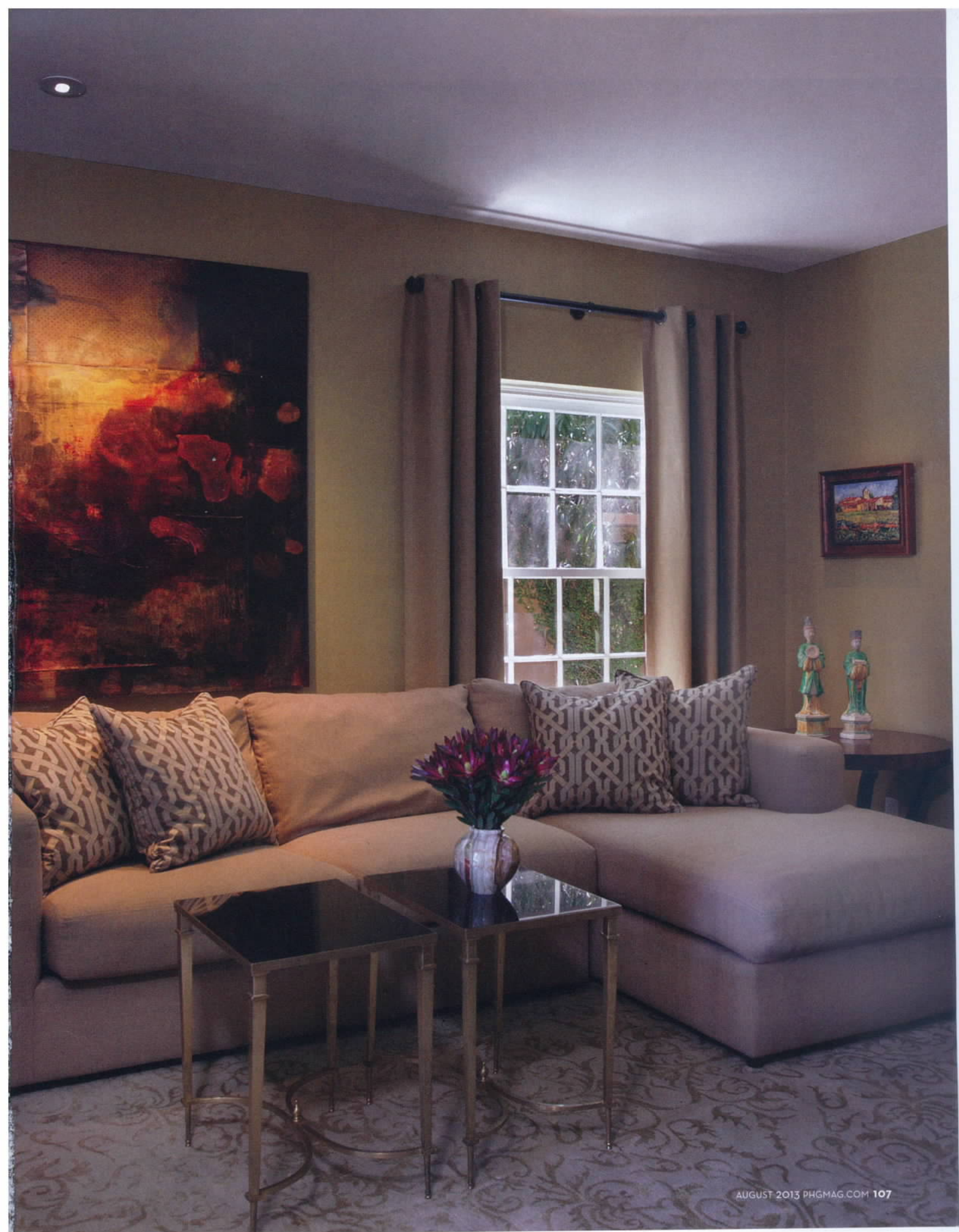


Formerly a child's room with walls covered in race-car wallpaper, the den is now a cozy place to relax and watch TV. The large painting behind the sofa is by Jerry Jacobson.



Before

"The inside of the house should be a reflection of the architecture, not a complete departure," says designer Beth McGehee. The guest bathroom illustrates her point. Instead of gutting the space, the designer chose to keep the existing pedestal sink, tub and toilet, but installed new floor-to-ceiling tile in hues and patterns that meld the past and present.







**Above:** Previously closed off with shutters, the dining room retained its original shape during the current remodel, but the homeowners made it their own with a rich wall color, Contemporary furnishings, a Poul Henningsen Artichoke Lamp, and a painting by Richard Larson.

**Opposite:** "This is where all the remodeling started," homeowner Joe Bushong says of the master bathroom. "There was giant rose wall-paper and pink tile; it was really something. And we lived with it for a long time." The room is now outfitted with a floating vanity and glass-walled steam shower but still honors the past with floor tile in a historic pattern and the same marble countertop material used in the kitchen.

*See Sources.*