

Gene and Jess Marshall are moving to Ancala. “We love it here,” says Gene, who isn’t an easy sell. “We love the views and we love the central location.”

The Marshalls aren’t moving quite yet to the gated luxury-home community in northeast Scottsdale. They’ll have about a year before they’ll need to decide just where

from
conception
to move in

the anatomy of a luxury home

By David M. Brown

the China cabinet is going and where those signed and numbered lithographs will look best.

Designed by respected Scottsdale architect Nick Tsontakis, AIA, their 5,287-square-foot two-level is just

Designed by Scottsdale architect Nick Tsontakis, the Ancala home of Gene and Jess Marshall will be an exciting amalgam of four styles: Contemporary, Victorian, Southwestern and Antebellum. Rendering courtesy Nick Tsontakis



getting started on a hillside lot abutting the McDowell Mountains. They interviewed a few architects, and then their real estate agent, Brian Kusmer, of RE/MAX Fine Properties, introduced them to Tsontakis. “We liked him and his other work, and the process with him has been very enjoyable,” Gene says. The couple began working with Tsontakis in August 2002.

A native of Greece, Tsontakis has been designing homes for more than a quarter century, first in Montreal and, for the last decade, in Scottsdale. (“I moved here cold

and I just loved the warmth of the desert and the people. I called my wife, Sue, and told her this is where we were going to live. She said I was crazy. When she got here, she loved it, too.”)

The home, which will have two two-car garages, is being built by Gilbert-based Custom Homes by CDCI LLC, whose owner and principal, C.R. Freeman, expects to build for \$150 a square foot — a very good price in the Valley and a very, very good price for Scottsdale. “We spoke with a lot of builders,” Jess says, “but Bob delivered

the price we wanted as well as the building experience we were looking for.”

The Marshalls purchased the one-half-acre lot at Ancala about three years ago for a very competitive \$275,000. “We loved the view of the McDowells behind us and the city lights and Camelback Mountain to the south,” Gene says.

Today, the lot is worth a lot more. In fact, it was not originally platted, Jess explains: “With the slope, there simply wasn’t enough room on the existing lot to make it worthwhile to build a home.” But the city



of Scottsdale, he explains, responded to a developer request to slightly extend the rear boundary markers, opening the building envelope for this and the neighboring lots.

An Uphill Project

“The site presented challenges,” Tsontakis explains, “but we were able to fit a two-story home of more than 5,000 square feet of livable area — and offer great views into the mountains and the city lights to the south.”

While the slope off the mountain is not extreme, there was still about a 5-percent drop from what would be the front of the Marshall home to the street. So, following plans approval by the city of Scottsdale (there were no major problems) and the issuing of the building permits, the Marshalls called in the earthmovers, Desert Dirt Works of Gilbert.

From the first week in August until the middle of October, the loaders and dump trucks prepared the site, removing 145 dump-truck loads of granite and soil — 1,450 cubic yards of dirt. The excavation required no blasting, as the granite broke away with blade.

Meanwhile, the Marshalls installed a flood wall against the rear of the property, to protect the home and the neighborhood from runoff from the mountains as well as from the wash that runs east and west at the base of the hills behind them. As the final truckloads of granite and soil left, Dysart Harbour Pools in Chandler began excavating the Marshalls’ five-foot-deep play pool/waterfall and spa on the southwest side of the property.

Sweethearts Plan One Sweet Home

Jess and Gene have been building their relationship for almost a half century; they just celebrated their 40th anniversary. “We were high school sweethearts,” Gene says. They have a son in Denver, who has given them three grandchildren, and a daughter in San Francisco. Gene is from Oklahoma and Jess is from Maryland, although they were both raised in Colorado, where Jess specialized in restoring antique cars.

“We got tired of shoveling snow,” he says, “so we followed our daughter and Gene’s parents to Arizona.” They tried Yuma, but it was tough to make a living, so they left after a year. Following a short stay in Southern

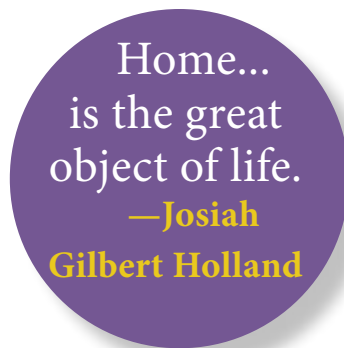
California, they moved to the Valley, where they owned automotive businesses, including a car lot, which they recently sold.

For them, the Ancala home celebrates their success as a team — in business and in marriage. Naturally, they were involved with the design from the start: “This is the first complete home we’ve done, but we have done several additions and remodels over the years,” Gene says. Jess, in fact, carries his set of plans with him and knows every column and every light switch.

Designs on Just the Right Home

“We formulated a program with Gene and Jess to incorporate the rooms and room sizes that they wanted as well as the relationship of the rooms to each other,” Tsontakis explains.

The ground level incorporates 3,486 square feet of livable area. It includes a two-story great room with two walls of motorized sliding-glass panels, a two-story entry hall



(off a porte cochère), a circular stair to the second level, an additional two bedrooms with a full bath, a kitchen and breakfast nook, a dining room, and a circular casita accessible from the exterior.

Their 1,801-square-foot second level will include the master bedroom suite with a sitting room, master bath, covered balcony, and walk deck to enjoy the city lights. Adjacent to the master bedroom are a home theater with a kitchenette/bar area and a circular den with a bath.

Because of the site challenges, Tsontakis had to be creative to maximize livable area, so he designed two sets of garages. One of the garages is attached to the home (above this is the master bedroom), while the other is detached (on this is a roof deck accessed by the walkway from the master bedroom and den). Tsontakis explains, “This garage split allowed us to increase livable area on



Jess & Gene Marshall, left, enjoy a moment on the site of their future Ancala home with architect Nick Tsontakis, AIA, and, above, loader driver Damien Jones of Desert Dirt Works of Gilbert.

the ground level. The layout and geometry of the house is thereby rotated to the views — with the perimeter fanning out along the building envelope.” As a result, the home is canted 25 degrees off center, so that the roof deck, for example, favors the view to the southwest, in the direction of landmark Camelback Mountain.

For style, the Marshalls wanted a home that is eclectic, with multiple yet integrated personalities. “We told Nick we wanted a ‘Contemporary, Victorian, Southwestern, Antebellum’ home. Then his imagination went to work on a plan. With just a few refinements, that’s the one we’re using.”

Tsontakis took their input and created a home that will express all of the styles. For the Contemporary look, he provided a number of details, including copper-plated metal columns and railings on the exterior, copper roofs, and a fine-stucco exterior. For the Victorian details, Tsontakis offered balcony railings and a turret-style for the rotunda casita. Because Jess is a Civil War aficionado, Tsontakis used soaring columns and a spiral staircase that would have made Clark Gable finally give a damn. And, to root the home in the Southwest, Tsontakis used stone veneer to match the adjacent hillside, coordinating this with the stucco. The copper also affirms the local connection, as this metal was so important to the development of Arizona in its territorial and early-statehood years.

The result is a home that fits Ancala community standards just fine — and the Marshalls’.

“I don’t want to look like everyone else,” Gene says. “I want just enough difference in what I am and where I live that I stand out.” ■