

# RAISING ARIZONA

IF FRANK LLOYD WRIGHT IS TO ARIZONA ARCHITECTURE WHAT SAGUAROS ARE TO ITS LANDSCAPE, THEN TALIESIN WEST'S OWN YUMI DOI AND GUSTAD IRANI REPRESENT THE FUTURE OF DESERT DESIGN.

In a way, Taliesin West holds some of the same allure many people feel for the state. Just as people from all over the United States plant new roots in the Valley, Taliesin—which no longer exists on the fringe of the city but is now surrounded by it—continues to attract architecture students from around the world. The advantage of so much influx, hopefully, is a progressive community that draws on tradition when developing ideas for its architecture and its very civilization.



**ARCHITECTS:** Yumi Doi and Gustad Irani, Organic Design Workshop.

**BUILDER:** Tim Larson and Ron Steege, La Casa Builders Inc.

**INTERIOR DESIGNER:** Janelle K. Schick, Schick Design Group.

**LANDSCAPE ARCHITECT:** Joan Brooking, Joan Brooking Landscape Architects.

**CABINETRY:** Allan Rosenthal, European Design.

**TOTAL SQUARE FOOTAGE:** 5,170.





## Solutions: Flame Formed

The husband wanted panache. The wife wanted practicality. So Yumi Doi and Gustad Irani of Organic Design Workshop developed this one-of-a-kind fireplace.

- > The four brushed-glass triangles that fold over the chimney serve several purposes. They balance the proportion of the abutting windows; they attract attention to what becomes the focal point of the room; and they tie in the triangle motif that runs throughout the house.
- > The chimney's stainless steel cladding—behind the triangles and over the concrete block—is textured to contrast with the smooth triangles.
- > The relatively small hearth becomes suitably framed by the striking form rising above it and the dark granite bordering it.



**A POOL FOR ALL SEASONS:** The 60-foot lap pool inside the home continues outside the large retractable window walls.

Doi and Irani are auspicious harbingers of such a culture. The two met at Taliesin 12 years ago after relocating from Japan and India, respectively, to study architecture. They became friends; they collaborated on endeavors like the Promenade Project, which features the 125-foot-tall spire originally designed by Frank Lloyd Wright; and, when The Frank Lloyd Wright Foundation changed the way Taliesin's architectural services were run, they partnered professionally. "I think we were the only two who actually joined together and formed a company as a team," Irani says. "Most of the [Taliesin] architects formed individual companies."

Teaming up has proven extremely beneficial for the duo: Irani often leads the conceptual end of design; Doi figures out which ideas, from a practical standpoint, can work. "[One] client described it like he and his partner counting to 10," Doi explains. "Both can do it, but together [they are] much stronger.



**COMMANDING ENTRANCE:** The stainless finish on the main entry doors is both smooth and ridged; contemporary and reminiscent of Frank Lloyd Wright.

One through five, maybe Gustad is very good at; but 6 to 10, maybe I'm good at. So two together [yields a] much more complete project."

The homeowners of this Paradise Valley house would likely agree. They gave the architects a floor plan of an existing house and asked them to follow its circulation pattern when designing the new house. Irani and Doi began to tweak the plans, improving their function while including a 60-foot lap pool and an additional wing of guest rooms that the homeowners desired.

Plunking rooms into the floor plan, however, was just the beginning. Irani says he prefers to rely on mental power rather than expensive finishes. So he and Doi incorporated a number of motifs into the project, the first being a balance between the home's dynamic appearance and practical upkeep. (The husband wanted the former; the wife demanded the latter.) The front doors introduce this concept—Irani designed them with a stainless finish that is both smooth and ridged—but the balance is best illustrated by the front and

rear elevations of the house. Approaching the home, you see a low-slung, subdued structure. The lines are straight and modest; the house seems to stretch lazily along the horizon. From the back, however, the dwelling explodes in sloping lines and sharp angles.

Assisting in this dichotomy is the recurring use of the triangle form; which, Irani believes, is the shape that best captures the feel of the desert. So triangles appear on the front door, in windows, on the fireplace and even (in a move that smacks of Taliesin) on the pool-equipment building that bisects the backyard. There, the sloped roof creates a shady, triangular perch for those watching a game on the neighboring tennis court.

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The backyard, in fact, is where Doi and Irani infused a relatively characterless lot with some individuality. The triangular-shape planter boxes intersect with small patches of lawn, while introducing flowering plants to the landscape and helping to mitigate the visual impact of the high house walls.

The team's creativity extended indoors as well. Instead of cutting each concrete block at a 90-degree angle, for example, they cut them at 45-degree angles. ("That makes the wall look a lot more delicate," Irani notes.) Then Doi and Irani alternated wall finishes. "The plaster wall is at an angle," Irani explains. "The concrete then dies into it. Then the plaster wall does its thing

[before it] dies into the concrete wall...The combination of the two looks richer." Where plaster or concrete doesn't dominate, interesting wallpapers do. Bearing an unusual rose-gray hue, they and the cabinetry stand out against a mellow backdrop of stainless finishes and off-white terrazzo floors with inlaid zinc strips.

Turning walls and floors and pitched ceilings into a house led Doi and Irani to another theme: origami. Time and again, the house folds around itself and the landscape like paper art. The guest wing looks out onto the same grassy patch as the house's attached

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guest rooms, yet guests can't spy on one another from their lodgings, because the sets of windows are angled away from each other. By maximizing the number of rooms that capitalize on a single vista, and by deftly skewing a wall here or moving one there, Doi and Irani designed a house that is at once efficient, private and something of an artistic statement.

More examples of the home's origami elements occur in the reflecting pool's fountain, which is a series of stainless steel poles topped with open-end triangles; the fireplace's triangular fascia; and the sculpture at the entry that relies on multiple triangles to form an abstract saguaro. The painted metal roof, however, takes the triangular theme to an even higher level. Its sloping lines, hips and valleys create a magnificent structure

that seems to float above the house and blend into the landscape. And the landscape, according to Irani, is what should command your attention from the exterior.

Inside, artwork assumes the landscape's role. Whether it's a multicanvas piece, glass installation or small painting done by the wife (who is an amateur painter), art is the interior's focal point. But the home's details could almost qualify as art, themselves. The etched shower door in the master bathroom, the sandblasted glass door to the guest quarters, the property's entry gate, the front door, the roof's fascia—all are functional items that were embellished with custom artistry. And since art is a byproduct of freedom, it thrives in

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contemporary exercises of desert architecture like this one. "If you do a Prairie style, the style restricts you," Irani says. "Southwestern style also, it does have its restrictions. [But] this type of a style really allows us to take the best advantage of Arizona's character."

It may not be what Wright would've designed for the lot, but that's the point: The home's architecture artfully interprets history and the site within a contemporary context; and in doing so, it symbolizes the possibilities for the future. □