# Cool house, warm look

Add coziness and personality with a mix of classic
and contemporary elements

BY NORA BURBA TRULSSON  PHOTOGRAPHS BY THOMAS J. STORY

The living room is a
veritable cocktail of
pattern and texture:
Rugged sandblasted block
walls and rich wood beams
and window frames
contrast with a smooth
glass coffee table,
upholstered seating,
colorful bolster pillows,
and a soft, wavy-
patterned rug underfoot.

Mirrored façades bring unexpected gleam to the concrete block poolside walls. **ABOVE** Germani's preference for table lamps and pendants rather than recessed lighting gives the home an inviting glow.

"**LESS IS MORE**" is an often-repeated design motto. Seeing the phrase boldly trumpeted across a home's entry, however, is something else entirely. A tribute to influential modernist architect Ludwig Mies van der Rohe, who coined the phrase, the statement sums up the design principles that guided Bobby Costa and Daniel Germani during the remodel of their 1953 ranch-style home in central Phoenix.

Although both Costa and Germani are fans of the midcentury-modern look, their house is neither minimalist nor sterile. In fact, it's downright cozy, both indoors and out. "We didn't want a museum or a show-case," Germani says. "We wanted a place where you could sit down comfortably and have a cup of coffee."

Germani, who studied architecture in his native Argentina and now works in corporate branding, and Costa, who's in the mortgage industry, had been looking to buy a home for some time. Two years ago, they found what they'd been search-ing for in a 1,700-square-foot, three-bedroom house in Phoenix's Marlen Grove neighborhood. The house, along with many others in the area, had been designed by Ralph Haver, a Phoenix archi-tect known for his post–World War II ranch homes. Germani and Costa loved Haver's signature style of low pitched roofs, carports, and clerestory windows. "We put an offer on the house without seeing the interior," Germani says. "We knew it had good bones."

The couple wanted to strip the home back to its 1950s roots and open the inte-rior more fully to the surrounding yard. Existing slate flooring was kept in place, and the interior of the concrete block walls was sandblasted to add texture. The kitchen got a bigger island, a stainless steel backsplash, and a series of book-shelves that serves as a divider from the living room.

Exposed beam ceilings were repainted in the open kitchen, living, and dining rooms. The master bedroom was reconfig-ured to add privacy and a new closet— a freestanding walnut cabinet designed by Germani that floats between the bedroom and the home office. The couple stripped the paint from original wood window
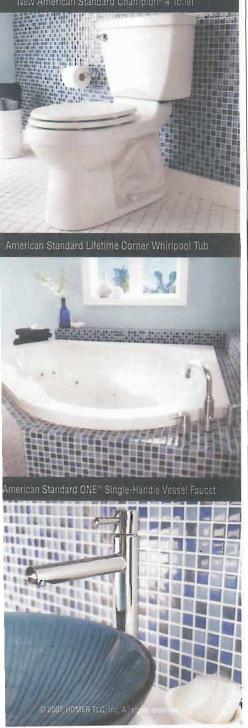
Brightly colored ceramics are showcased against the sandblasted wall. **LEFT, FROM TOP** New walnut veneers restore period charm to original kitchen cabinets; Daniel Germani with his dog, Maddie, in front of his home's design credo; a dropped ceiling in the master bedroom was removed to reveal original wood beams. **BOTTOM RIGHT** Vignettes of favorite objects and art mix with a console designed by Germani.

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frames and replaced sliding doors and small bedroom windows with 6-foot-wide, aluminum-framed pivot doors, opening the house to the garden.

After three months of renovation, the two moved in, bringing furnishings and art from their previous residence. But they found themselves weeding out items and adding pieces that better reflected the home's '50s character, including several walnut tables and a console designed by Germani. While the couple chose a few iconic 20th-century pieces of furniture—like the Mies van der Rohe glass coffee table in the living room—they managed to keep the classic pieces from looking clichéd by working in their favorite collections.

Costa and Germani enjoy cooking and entertaining, especially outdoors, so they also transformed their landscape, particularly in the back and side yards. Working with landscape architect Chad Robert, they added a rectangular pool, a ramada, and a back patio large enough to hold tables and chairs for conversation and dining. The front patio serves as another spot for alfresco entertaining.

Even though he and Costa both loved the house from day one, "we're really happy with the results of all our hard work," Germani says. "Ever since the remodel, it's everything we wanted it to be."

**INFO** Design: Daniel Germani, BD&M, Phoenix (602/466-3820). Landscape architecture: Chad Robert, Exteriors by Chad Robert, Phoenix (www.exteriors-cr.com or 602/252-6775). Resources: See page 130. ■

### Lessons in keeping modern style cozy

*Homeowners Daniel Germani and Bobby Costa offer their tips for creating an inviting environment.*

**USE TEXTURE AND PATTERN** Stark, unadorned surfaces can seem icy without a balancing element. "We used sandblasted block, raised-pattern wall panels (pictured at top right), and funky, fun wallpaper to counter the slick decor and create casual, interesting backdrops," Germani says.

**DON'T HIDE YOUR STUFF** Books, stacks of magazines, photos, and fun objects can be on display without looking cluttered. Show off your art collection, even in unexpected places like bathrooms. Make sofas and chairs more inviting with throw pillows. Use plants and area rugs to add warmth, color, and vitality.

**LIGHT ROOMS WITH TABLE LAMPS** Place groupings in varying heights, shapes, and materials on side tables or credenzas to create soft, low pools of light.

**MIX IN WOODS** The 1950s aesthetic was hardly limited to stainless steel and molded plastic. The use of wood, especially walnut and mahogany, was a main design feature of that era; it adds tactile depth to any room.

**LET THE SUN SHINE** Nothing warms up a room like natural light. Bring it in through glass doors and windows wherever possible.

**ADD HUMOR** "We don't like to take ourselves too seriously," Germani says—which explains the lighthearted black-and-white portraits of pop icon Madonna that take pride of place on a living room wall.

**CONNECT INDOORS AND OUTDOORS** Extend the warmth of your house into the yard by adding colorful accents and inviting seating areas outdoors (as seen at top left).