



Light, shadows create unique home

Architect Amit Upadhye designed a modern home in Scottsdale for John and Jennifer Fasolino.



Cheryl Evans/The Arizona Republic

The sleek kitchen of John and Jennifer Fasolino's home serves as the hub of the house.

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Amit Upadhye's description of the home he created for John and Jennifer Fasolino and their two sons is like a poetic tale.

Upadhye and the Fasolinos met a few years ago at a holiday party. The couple told him they intended to build a home near legendary architect Frank Lloyd Wright's Taliesin West home in north Scottsdale. They would raze their existing home and build one to

accommodate their growing family, their visiting parents and their sense of style and function.

Out of the conversation a professional and personal relationship grew. The Fasolinos embraced Upadhye's energy, ideas - and poetry.

Upadhye, an architect who trained in India, holds a graduate degree in architecture from the University of New Mexico. He's in the process of becoming a licensed architect in the U.S. He owns AU Design Studio in Scottsdale.

A few months ago, he and the Fasolinos stood in the tall entry of the couple's home. Upadhye explained the home's evolution, from an idea conceived during a cocktail conversation to an edifice of imposing interlocking walls of masonry, concrete and glass.

"This wall was 12 feet, 22 inches high and 118 feet long, casting desirable shadow on the east, where the Fasolino family could thrive," Upadhye explained.

He had been hiking in the mountains and had been impressed by a large boulder and the shadow it cast. It was his inspiration for the couple's home.

"As soon as I put this wall on the west side of the site, the sun said, 'You are turning your back towards me,' " Upadhye said.

That's when he envisioned a notch. Upadhye turned to poetry to describe how the home evolved in his mind.

He quoted Osho, an Indian mystic and spiritual leader: "You can hold the sky in your fist, provided the fist is open."

So as an homage to the sun and to the Fasolinos, and with the guidance of an Arizona State University astronomy student, Upadhye notched the home's western and eastern walls so that on May 3, the couple's wedding anniversary, light from the morning and setting sun would illuminate special spots on their bedroom wall.

"Poetically, the notch became the open fist that holds the (setting) sun," Upadhye said.

Besides providing a symbolic beginning and ending to their anniversary day, capturing the sunlight in this way was another acknowledgment of the desert.

"It makes you aware that you are a part of the Valley of the Sun," Upadhye said.

The play of light and shadows was important to both parties.

The couple also wanted a modern home that celebrated the desert and had authentic architectural roots, John said.

To that end, Upadhye invented a special tool for laying the interlocking masonry and concrete walls so that the shadow cast by one block onto the other would be deeper than by conventional methods.

"The home seems like a massive fortress, but it's light," Jennifer said.

The kitchen serves as the home's public hub. It's an open two-story space with an island in the center and a tall wall of warm-toned wood cabinets. On the second floor, the upper sections of these cabinets serve as linen storage. Below, they function as storage for the kitchen.

Upadhye used a slot skylight to focus a slender band of light that forms a subtle demarcation between the public library space upstairs and the private bedrooms. From the library you can look down on the kitchen below.

The gray masonry and concrete walls and scored-concrete floors serve as a monochromatic grounding for the expanse of floor-to-ceiling windows and wood cabinetry.

Horizontal and vertical slot skylights focus light against walls in nearly every room.

Bright colors that reflect desert plants - green, orange and fuchsia - are used sparingly on walls. Sunlight hits those walls, and the color splashes throughout the home.

Outside, the main house, a garage a guest house and a lap-pool pavilion form the perimeter of a courtyard, with a backdrop of spectacular views of the McDowell Mountains.

The Fasolinos look at their home as timeless, its classic lines and embrace of light a fitting companion to its Taliesin West neighbor.

Reach the reporter at susan.felt@arizonarepublic.com or 602-444-7596.