

# Wall's Well That **Ends Well**

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PHOTOGRAPHY BY LIAM FREDERICK

The transformation of a historic home involved not only what was to be changed, but what would be preserved.





It was a blank wall that did it. A blank wall and an eye-popping piece of art. When Susan and Appy Chandler were touring properties for sale in Tucson, a historic home near the Arizona Inn stood out. Although the property posed challenges — such as a dysfunctional layout, and years of unchecked flora growth — there was one thing that spoke to them. It was a long bare wall in the living room.

Five years earlier, the Chandlers had bought a large triptych — a panel painting by Santa Fe artist Sheila Keefe, nationally recognized for her Christian iconography. Striking as it is, the artwork was not easy to display. It had remained in storage while the Chandlers figured out what to do with it. “One of the selling points for me about this house was that this piece could go right on that wall,” says Susan, nodding to the location that meets visitors when they enter the living room.

Being able to place art was important for the Chandlers in choosing their second home, where they hoped to eventually retire. Both are collectors — Southwest, spiritual and art collected during travels, particularly Africa.

Another requirement was that they be able to walk and bike to places, so this established, central neighborhood seemed ideal.

“The bones of the house were great,” says Susan of the 1940 home that sits on approximately an acre of land. The Chandlers faced an ambitious remodel, but fortunately they had experience.

They had both been married before. Appy — full name Alfred duPont, the son of business historian and Pulitzer Prize-winning Alfred D. Chandler Jr. — had family property deep in the Great Marsh of northeastern Massachusetts. Susan had grown up in Oklahoma City, then moved to Texas before moving to New York City for seminary. The two met in Israel in 2000 and married a year later. It was then they began to build their first house on a tidal island in Rowley, Massachusetts. Designing a new home can be a strain on any ▶

LEFT A triptych panel painting by Santa Fe artist Sheila Keefe is the focal point of Susan and Appy Chandler’s living room.

ABOVE The original custom steel-and-glass table was designed by architect Bil Taylor of Taylor Design + Build.



relationship, let alone on newlyweds. But the Chandlers relished being able to combine their tastes and collections. “We found it to be a lot of fun. You discover so much about each other,” says Susan.


An ordained Episcopalian priest, she is accustomed to counseling couples and her professional experience helped in her own home shopping. “We started making a list of things we would want to have. This was potentially a home where we would spend the rest of our lives.”

The Chandlers had been visiting the Southwest since the beginning of their marriage; they had good friends in Tucson and, “We fell in love with it,” says Susan. After owning a “middle of nowhere” house in New England, they wanted to live in a central city neighborhood where they could enjoy the art and cultural scene.

When it came to choosing an architect, the Chandlers sought advice from Patrick Hickox and Brigid Williams, the Boston architects who had designed their Rowley home. Hickox and Williams recommended Bil Taylor’s Architectural Design firm, Taylor Design + Build. Bil brought in Darci Hazelbaker of HA/RU to assist with the interior design, due to their previous working relationship, as well as their sympatico views on a minimalist modern aesthetic. ▶

TOP The master suite includes a sleeping alcove — “a space within a space” — with a motorized curtain wall by Sonoran Shades that keeps out the morning sun. The low mesquite table was crafted by Arroyo Design.

LEFT The large master bath combines modern glass and tile with warm wood tones.



A retractable glass wall allows a seamless flow from the dining room to the covered patio. Brick flooring provides visual continuity.



Bil describes the Chandlers as having “adventurous energy,” something they needed to transform the home with a minimalist-meets-Southwest aesthetic and yet preserve its historic character. The addition doubled the size of the home’s original rectangular plan, while being architecturally concealed behind a new garage, clad in matching recycled brick from a demolished shed to blend perfectly. The addition in the backyard announces “new” via the use of a colored concrete “scrim wall,” which is metaphorically lined and aligned with corresponding brick mortar lines in the original structure.

The master bedroom addition, featuring a room-within-a-room, is perhaps the most striking part of the house. Susan is sensitive to light and always sleeps with a mask on. Responding to her request for a dark space, Bil initially proposed a red velvet curtained “surround” that morphed into an enclosed sleeping area. Susan then spotted a magazine photo of a house in Costa Rica, with a drop-down insect screen at

LEFT Sand-blasted ceiling beams add a Southwest touch to the home.

BOTTOM Solar tube lights add brightness to the small kitchen. The subtle green tone of the glass tile flows throughout the kitchen.

OPPOSITE TOP The existing pool was restored by Integra Pools and Spas. Landscape designer Dean Alexander worked with architect Bil Taylor to create a colorful desert garden.





the front of an enclosed sleeping area. “It’s like a sleeping cube. I thought it was brilliant,” she says.

Bil Taylor, Darci Hazelbaker and the Chandlers worked to create their own customized version of the cube. The result? A compact three-walled area with maple bed and built-in night stands, two doors, and a remote-controlled Roman shade. The shade is lowered at night to form the fourth wall and keep out the light from the room’s east-facing patio doors.

The master bedroom (with photovoltaic solar panels on the roof) flows seamlessly onto a paved patio, and then into an adjacent dining room — part of the original house and formerly a porch. Here, Bil’s build team sandblasted the porch’s existing wood ceiling and beams and replaced the concrete slab with brick pavers, which were continued into the patio.

Bil also was able to extend his architectural design sensitivity into furniture design, with a dining room table made of “hot rolled” black steel with a one-inch-thick (per Susan’s request) glass top, to seat eight people.

When it came to the Chandlers’ kitchen, Susan had special requirements. “Susan is a *Grand Diplôme* graduate from Le Cordon Bleu who loves to cook in a smaller space since she is the primary

cook,” says Elizabeth Spengler, president of Dorado Designs, which did the kitchen remodel. They worked with one modest window on the north side of the room. Tubular solar inserts in the ceiling bring in extra light, and the glass door cabinets have LEDs inside to visually expand the room. Maple veneer cabinets and a white silestone countertop keep the space light.

“I make easy and quick decisions,” say Susan. And so it was with the glass tile backsplash, one that has a subtle wave effect, by Island Stone from Artesana Tile. Susan loved the tile so much she didn’t want to spoil it with electrical outlets, so the outlets are built into the counter — flush when not being used, and popping up when they are needed.

All the parties involved — Taylordesign + Build, HA/RU, Dorado Design, Arroyo Designs, Blue Agave, Integra Pools, and others — agree that the process ran smoothly. “No one had a big ego and everyone was unified on the end goal,” says Stephen Paul, owner of the custom furniture firm Arroyo Design.

The Chandlers share a passion for wood. It’s prevalent in their Massachusetts home, too. Here in Tucson, they sourced a mesquite mantel, designed by Arroyo Design, that anchors the living room. Arroyo Design also was responsible for a

mesquite settee in the living room, and the low table in the master suite.

New meets old outside as well. An original swimming pool (“dilapidated,” in the words of Bil Taylor) was restored by Integra Pools and Spas. In the midst of the yard, re-landscaped by Blue Agave Landscape Designs, stands the remains of an adobe wall original to the property. First identified by Bil as an archaeological artifact in need of keeping exactly as is, it is symbolic of the home’s transformation, one that respects the building’s history, while at the same time bearing the Chandlers’ new, unique stamp. **HG**

#### Sources:

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