

Window of OPPORTUNITY

A glass-and-steel residence in Scottsdale provides an urban architect with the ultimate chance to experiment

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Talk to David C. Hovey about Cloud Chaser,

the home he designed and built in Scottsdale, Ariz., and you will get an earful on more than just earthly bricks and mortar. You will receive a dose of divine insight. “I think it was Saint Augustine,” he says, “who described beauty as the splendor of truth. It’s not that you have to use the most expensive materials when building a house. You have to use really great materials in a very simple and elegant way. It’s how you compose the materials and how you join them together that makes something luxurious and elegant.”

For Hovey, president of Optima, a Chicago-based real estate development firm, simplicity may pertain to his palette of materials but not to his architectural vision. Cloud Chaser, for example, includes only five structural components—steel, sandblasted concrete block, Douglas fir and concrete and bamboo floors—but they are arranged as meticulously as stained glass.

When Hovey, a native of New Zealand, grew restless with Chicago’s predictable landscape in 2000, he launched a coast-to-coast search for a new challenge. He found it in Scottsdale’s Desert Mountain community. To build within the development’s 8,000 acres, Hovey would have to respect the site’s natural topography. There would be no grading en masse and no wanton destruction of indigenous vegetation. Instead, Hovey would seek original residential answers to foreign terrain. “What I’m trying to do is discover a way to live in the desert, see the desert, experience the fantastic plant life and vegetation of the desert and, at the same time, be fully enclosed and protected from the harsh elements of the desert,” he explains.

He settled on the aptly named Saguaro Forest, an enclave in Desert Mountain, for Cloud Chaser. The house overlooks a sea of cacti. “The cacti give Saguaro Forest a certain romantic quality,” Hovey observes. “To me, a cactus is better than a Miró sculpture. It’s so interesting to look at.”

So is Cloud Chaser. It is one of four Desert Mountain residences Hovey has built on a somewhat experimental basis; he is working on two multifamily residential projects, one in Phoenix and another in Scottsdale (Optima specializes in



Previous pages: The colors of a Lumature sofa and George Nakashima redwood-root coffee table will never fade, thanks to Cloud Chaser’s liberal use of glass made with a UV-filtering film.



Opposite, top:
As the house steps
down the site, each
of its horizontal planes
follows the natural
contours of the land.
Bottom: A seamless
transition between
the kitchen and an
outdoor terrace.

This page: The
dramatic lines of the
14-foot steel over-
hangs are echoed in
the negative-edge
pool below.

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designing and building multifamily residences), and he wanted to explore the nuances of desert construction by first building on a smaller scale. In *Cloud Chaser*, Hovey learned how to maximize passive solar energy. He integrated 14-foot steel overhangs into the house's design (similar features will appear in the multifamily residences he is building) and positioned the house to receive more natural light during the winter and less during the summer.

"Some architects only design buildings from the outside," Hovey says. "They're only concerned about when they drive by in the car—what does their building look like? I believe that the building has to be good in every sense of the word. It has to function well—the heating and cooling have to be good, the plan arrangement has to be good, the materials have to be good. It has to last a long time; it has to have structural integrity and it has to be beautiful."

The house's primary areas—the master suite, living and dining rooms and kitchen—occupy the second level. Access to the first floor is gained by way of an outdoor staircase and, inside, steel stairs where each tread is cantilevered off a sand-blasted concrete-block wall. Butt-glazed glass walls form the bulk of the home's boundaries, yet a street-side, perforated, concrete-block screen wall protects the interior from the curious glances of passersby. Even the glass is subject to a shielding treatment—a film is sandwiched inside to block damaging UV rays.

Far right: Ceramic vessels by local artist Jeremy Briddell complement the George Nakashima bench in the foyer. The dining room's eight white leather Mies van der Rohe Brno chairs are from Hovey's collection.

Right: Rooms are clearly defined, despite the house's open floor plan. The foyer, dining and living rooms are stacked atop the recreational room and outdoor courtyard.



"SOME ARCHITECTS



ONLY DESIGN BUILDINGS FROM THE OUTSIDE” —David Hovey

Courtyards and balconies also ease the house's transition into the desert. "It's important in the desert to create sheltered outdoor space because of the harshness of the summer and the winter," Hovey says. In *Cloud Chaser*, courtyards are present at the entry (replete with a linear reflecting pool) and on the lower platform, where the shady, landscaped space offers refuge to swimmers in the negative-edge pool and to those wandering between the guest suite and the recreation room. Even the staircase and walkway between the two courtyards form a vertical, courtyardlike space—a transition, ironically, between transitional spaces. Terraces, meanwhile, which jut out from the master suite and kitchen, act as stark, direct connections to the great dusty beyond.

Cloud Chaser's abundance of space is, in Hovey's opinion, its greatest luxury. It is both tangible (7,200 square feet of livable room) and intangible—through the views that encompass a panorama of cacti, rock and desert. Nowhere is the lavishness of space better underlined than in the 63-foot-long, 21-foot-wide living and dining room with 14-foot ceilings. As if knowing better than to block the views, the furniture floats toward

the center of the room and creates a compelling partnership of clean lines (in the sofa and rug) and natural curves (in the George Nakashima redwood-root coffee table).

"One of the magical elements about Mr. Hovey's houses I discovered when I stepped inside the house just after all the glass had been put in," says Maria Dawson, principal of Dawson Design Associates Ltd. "I was amazed—without furniture, the room didn't look empty."

Dawson, who helped Hovey select and place furniture as well as choose countertop and cabinet materials, recognizes how the architecture can easily overshadow what is inside. Yet for all its power, it is strangely vulnerable, too. Low kitchen countertops, a floating wall of kitchen cabinetry, a sliding door to the master suite and an overall lack of compartmentalization imbue *Cloud Chaser* with a strong sense of overt openness. It has, in essence, an honest face that would do Saint Augustine proud. 🏠

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