

Sever Design Group Architects

Premier Architectural Services and So Much More

By Russ J. Stacey

When he was a kid, Mark Sever, AIA, not only labored on his uncle's South Dakota farm during summer breaks, but he also worked construction for his father, who was a contractor. It served the budding architect well as a proving ground.

"I was taught the building trades early on, working a few weeks every year, but I realized that lifestyle wasn't for me. Building definitely was, though. I always wanted to be an architect, and I've stayed focused on becoming the best one I can be since then." Relocating to Arizona in 1984, he founded Sever Design Group Architects, primarily an architectural firm, but much more, that focuses on high-end custom houses, in 1991.

"I realize that clients demand a high level of service because this is a huge commitment on their part, regardless of how much money

they may have. This is their dream home and it should be a dream project and a dream procedure all the way through. That's why I always hope I exceed expectations with the services we provide."

Describing his style as site-specific rather than narrowing it to one particular school such as modern or traditional design, Sever says he tries to coax the sites into telling him what to do with them. He never does the same house twice, either.

"With every stroke of the pen, I'm always trying to reach for that undeniable quality and timeless aesthetic. It's paramount to everything that I do, so there's definitely a high level of fit and finish in our projects."

Embracing new technologies has always been crucial to expanding the company's scope and capabilities. For instance, when Sever

The contemporary design of this home is kept warm with natural materials, soft furnishings and custom features that show off the owner's interests. Display space for art and the aquarium looks effortless thanks to the many design and coordination meetings that took place in the design phase.



PHOTO BY JERRY PORTELLI PHOTOGRAPHY



Modern comfort prevails in this master suite with its custom bed, headboard and incredible views. The connection of this room to its surroundings shows just how important site-specific design is.

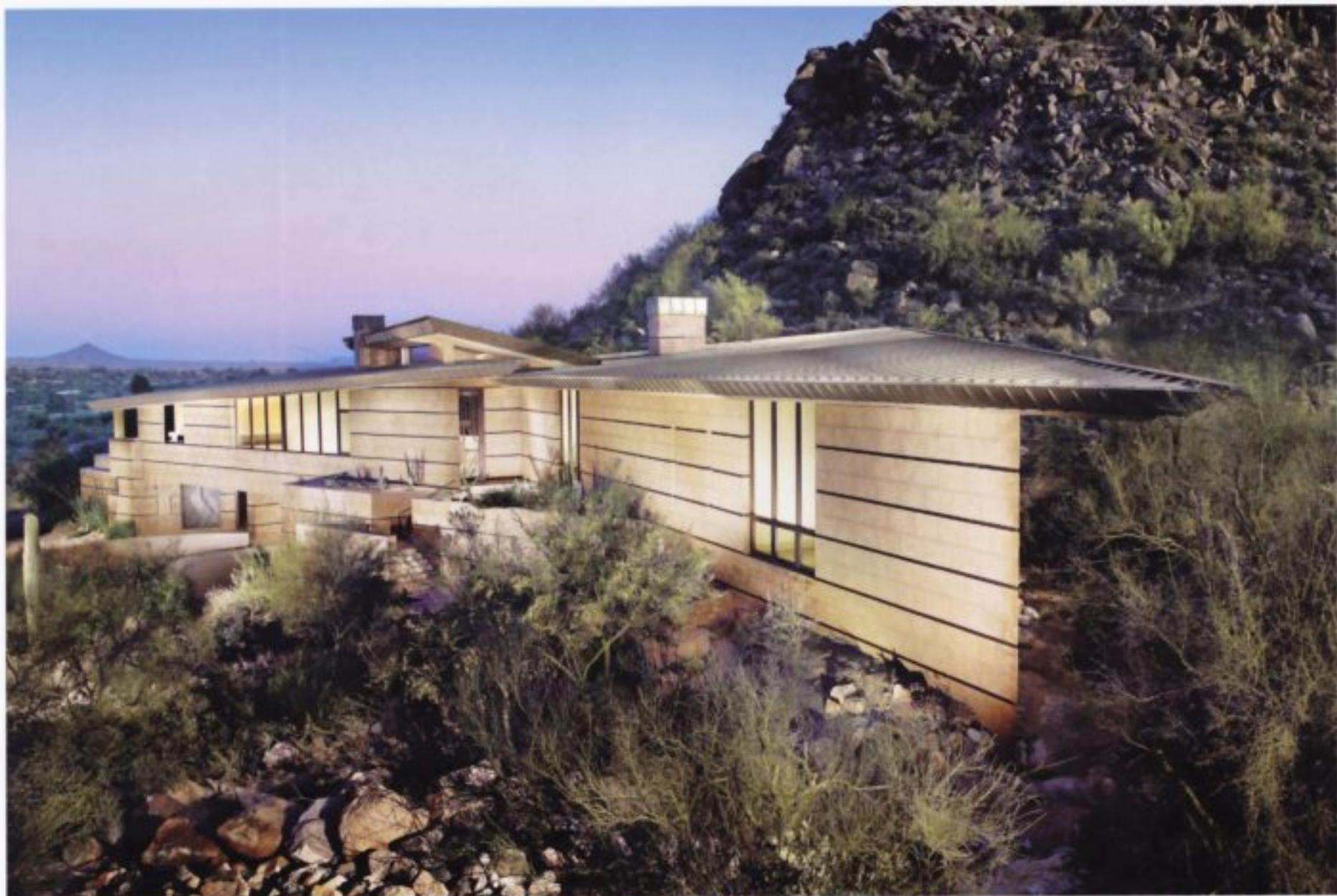
The gourmet kitchen of this house provides for easy living. The use of durable and natural materials on all surfaces and technologically savvy appliances make the kitchen low maintenance and user friendly.



PHOTOS BY JERRY PORTELLI PHOTOGRAPHY

This home is used as much for its outdoor living space as its indoor living space, and for the adults and kids at the same time. Custom details and features let it do all of that at once.





PHOTOS BY MARK SQUIRE

The dynamic lines of this desert house were a design and construction feat in themselves. The crisp and precise modern look takes immense coordination to achieve.

first got into the business, he was trained to draw by hand. That's a rarity for him these days. Modeling — he prefers that term over “drafting” — on Revit, a software program that's a building

information modeling platform, the firm is capable of presenting 3-D models of a design from beginning to end.

“In the old days, we used to do everything by hand or in the computer, which was just a computer-aided drafting tool, drawing lines, arcs and circles that happened to be electronic instead of paper. There wasn't a whole lot of intelligence. Every project that I now model gives me a database like an Outlook program. So, as I draw, I can actually use the software to do logistics in construction scheduling. It'll show all the issues we'll face with the project.”

This house has an incredibly unique setting in the boulders, and efforts were made to capture that energy on the interior. Custom details were implemented with natural materials, the rock sculptures from a local gallery and an unconventionally open woodwork fireplace screen.



Adopting modern tools has other advantages, like creating an unprecedented collaborative experience, centralizing all data and even helping the planet. Since many of Sever Design Group Architects' clients live out of state, access to their home's developments is an obvious concern. Another software program gives clients 24/7 Web-based access to all that information. From very early on, they're able to see

progress, photos, images, drawings, draw requests and money spent that's posted in the virtual file room. It gives clients a clear picture, and they're able to access it at their own pace and leisure. Plus, those time-consuming weekly meetings mandatory for updating all parties are eliminated.

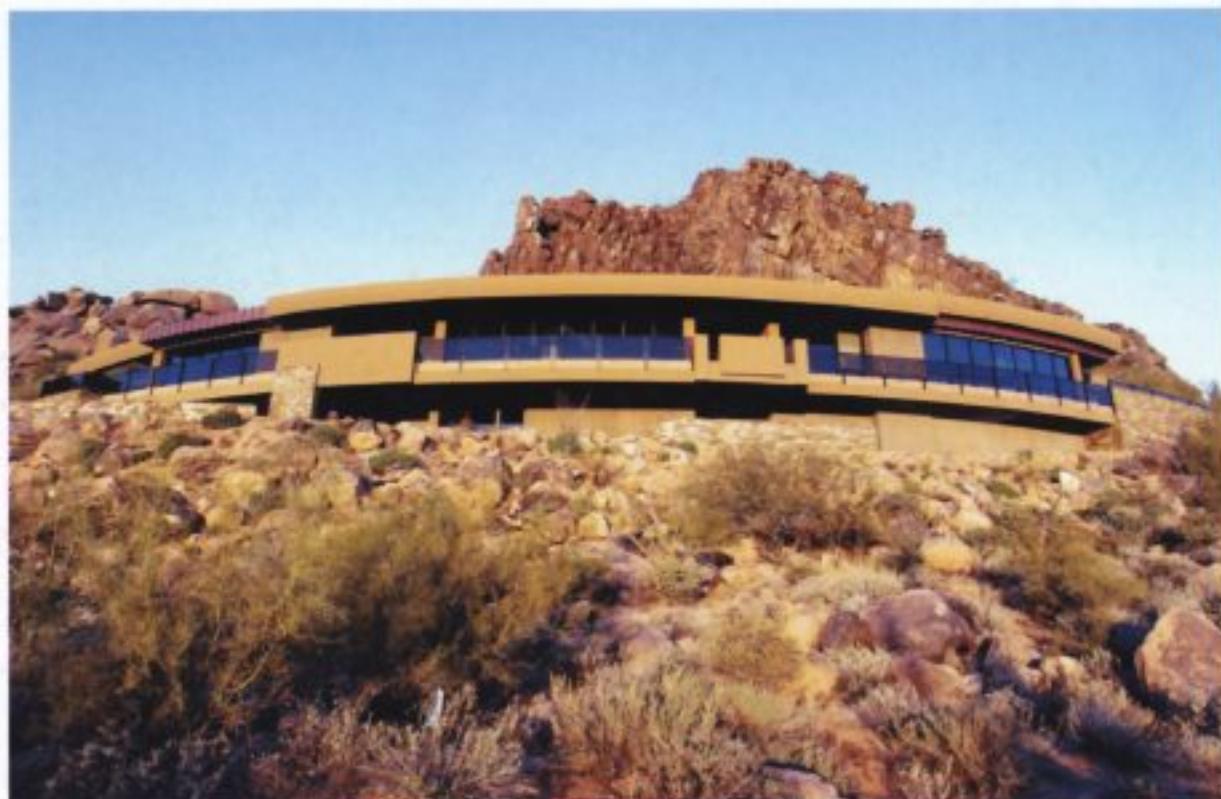
That same program also allows Sever to pursue his commitment to converting his office to being as paperless as possible. "I know that's an oxymoron in the contracting industry," he says, "but we truly have reduced our paper trail by 80% or 90%."

With the interior design practice taking off, Sever relies heavily on his designer, Alice Brown. "I have really good superintendents, project managers and a controller in the office, but for the most part, I'd say that Alice and I are the company's core team."

"What's really nice about it is we're able to do things from start to finish, and I'm part of that so I can incorporate the client's ideas into their interiors," Brown explains. "It's all one flow, and we work well together just bouncing ideas around. So, in the end I believe the client gets a better project because it's a lot easier for them to have one office to coordinate everything."

A licensed general contractor in addition to being a member of the American Institute of Architects, Mark Sever also builds for other architects, general contractors and principals of production builders.

"I get to do their custom houses, so I take that as a pretty big compliment. A lot of people feel that architects are supposed to be this general practitioner, able to quarterback many things and do all types of buildings. I don't think in today's world that's a fair statement. We need to practice on those building types by working



This home grows from its site using the stone at its perimeters as a strong connection; the radial geometry follows the hillside with not an inch to spare in its height restriction.

PHOTO COURTESY OF SEVER DESIGN GROUP ARCHITECTS

for other architects who have mastered that type."

Peering into the crystal ball, Sever sees his firm increasing the applications within his discipline in the future. "I specialize in one building type, and that is prototypical unique custom housing, but within that one type we have expanded our focus and gotten into doing interior design, the general contracting of the project and even the subcontracting entities as well. So, I see us maybe adding additional trades under our own license. It would also be my dream to push more toward the more prefabricated house and try to eliminate all the waste that goes into construction projects."

Sustainable design and build techniques are nothing new for Sever, who has applied those principles to his houses "since day one." He's been a member of the Green Building Program in Scottsdale since its inception, as an architect and as a general contractor.

"For example, when you build a wood house, there are typically four huge dumpsters going away in wasted lumber. That shouldn't happen. And so early on, I started my own steel-framing company just so I could build my homes with steel. I prefer building with masonry, concrete and steel because I want the materials in the house to outlast the mortgage.

"In the end, we're an architect-led design/build firm with everything under one roof. We're soup to nuts. I like to think that I've tailored my business over the years to be what I would say is the ultimate service business."

For more information about Sever Design Group Architects, please call (480) 596-0040 or visit www.severgroup.com. ■

The butterfly roof geometry of this house mimics its site while allowing for incredible views and abundant natural light throughout.



PHOTO BY MARK SQUIRE