

# PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

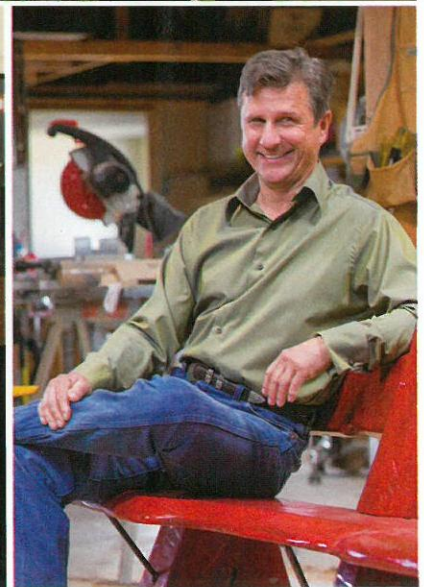
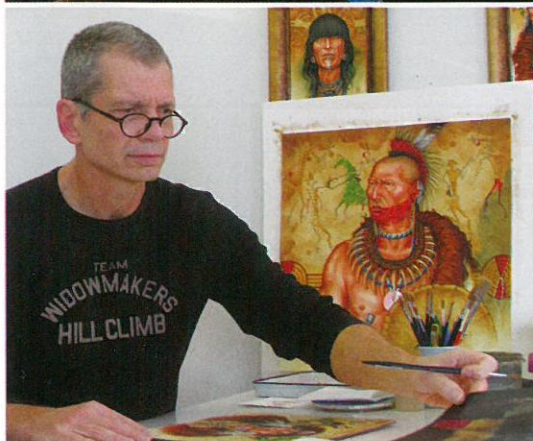
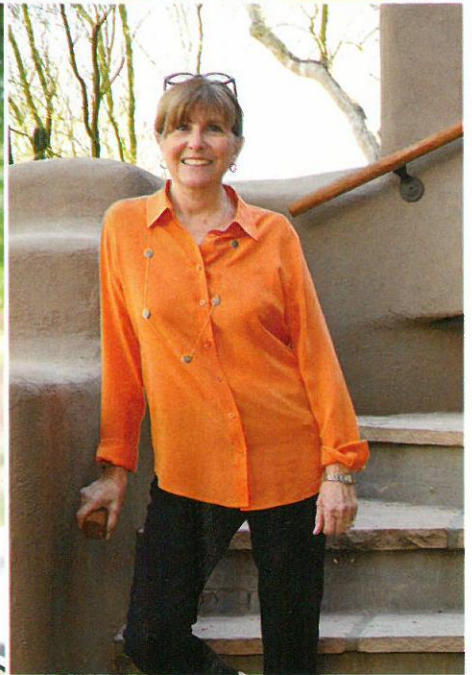
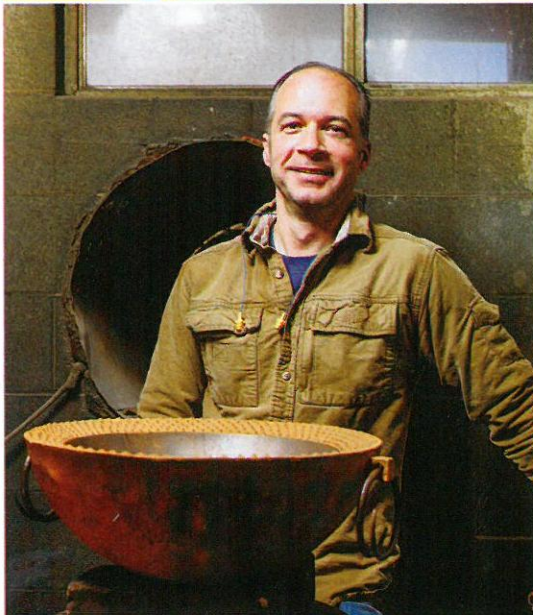
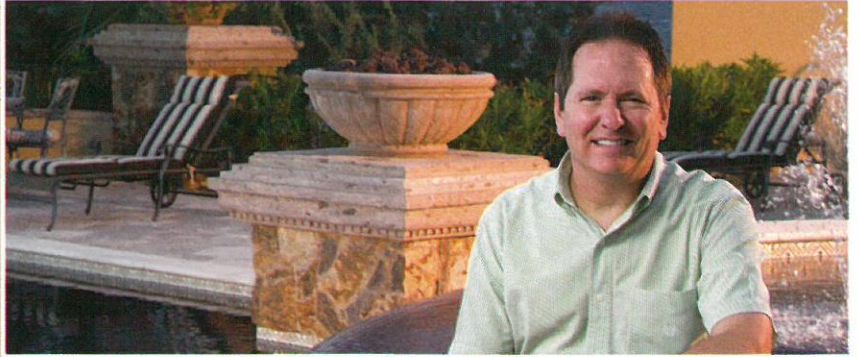
*The Magazine of Southwest Living*

MASTERS  
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SOUTHWEST





# MASTERS OF THE SOUTHWEST



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# DESIGN DEVOTEE

*Timeless and Livable Homes With  
Elements of Surprise Are Hallmarks  
of Interior Designer Sue Calvin*

BY **MARIA MATSON** PHOTOGRAPHY BY **LAURA MOSS**

"This is the main living area, so you want it to look like a great room but you also want it to feel welcoming, warm and comfortable when you walk in," remarks interior designer Sue Calvin. She punched up the neutral palette with ethnic accents, including a mud cloth pillow, Bolivian silver pot and a fine Persian rug. The painting over the fireplace is by Gathie Falk.



**SUE CALVIN WAS LIVING A HAPPY,** rewarding life as a schoolteacher in Los Angeles when, one night, her life changed forever. “The ‘Sheik of Araby’ swooped me up and took me to the desert,” she says, only half joking. The backstory is that she was having dinner with a friend when a man walked into the restaurant. “I was pretty independent and I was not a pushover, but it was just one of those inevitable things,” she recalls. “He asked me out the next night.” Within four months, the couple married and moved to Arizona, and Calvin started the next phase of her life as a wife and mother. Instead of continuing as a teacher, she switched gears and started taking design classes at Scottsdale Community College. While earning her degree, she worked as an intern at Wiseman & Gale Interiors.

“That was 30 years ago,” Calvin says. “I interned for two years and then stayed on and built my business. My design background is Wiseman & Gale as an intern; then Wiseman & Gale as a designer; then Wiseman & Gale as a partner.”

Calvin was going to retire 12 years ago but instead decided to buy the business along with partners Patty Burdick, Jana Parker Lee and Scott Burdick. “It was not an easy decision; it really wasn’t,” she notes. “I don’t want to sound jaded, but I’ve been able to design in this country, out of this country, in this state, out of this state, with people who are wonderful and challenging and interesting. As much as I still enjoyed design, I felt like I had done it. I felt like I had really enjoyed a great career.” The challenge of learning how the business worked as a whole kept her in the game and put retirement on hold.

So, Calvin continues to design while helping lead the firm on its path of success. Juggling both roles isn’t easy, but she’s come to rely on the talent and support of up-and-coming designers. “If there’s one thing I’ve learned, it’s if one head is good, the input of others around you only elevates your design,” she says. “It’s your eye and you’re the editor of that job, but it’s always better as a collaboration.”

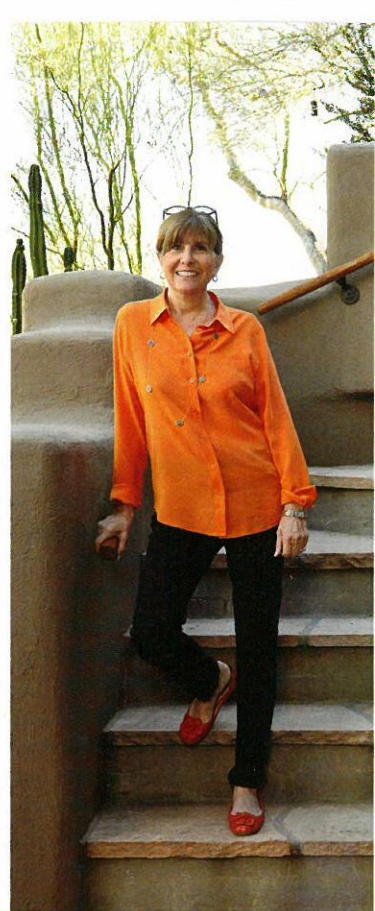
For the home shown on these pages, Calvin used a palette of neutrals and a selection of art and furnishings that complement and “stay out of the way” of the Bill Tull architecture she so admires.

“Sue’s interiors are remarkable—a lot of good bones with surprise elements of art and humor thrown in to make the whole a delight,” says Anne Gale, co-founder of Wiseman & Gale. “You can never truly see or understand her interiors with just one glance. Her work has many layers of interest and color. You can inspect a room she has done over and over, and you will continue to see new and interesting things. Because of this sophisticated

complexity, her rooms will last for many years, decades even; they will never be dated or boring.”

Calvin considers Gale her mentor and learned many lessons from her, she says, such as how to think outside of the box and not to limit herself as a woman. But, if she had to boil it down, she supposes her success comes from being a good listener.

“That’s the thing I try the hardest to do,” she remarks. “It doesn’t matter how talented you are if you can’t please your client. The fun of it, the whole idea of it, is to give them the highest design you possibly can while giving them what they asked for. Otherwise, they’d all look like little Sue Calvin houses, and that’s not the goal. It still makes me really happy to walk into a house 20 years later and look around and think, you know what, this is livable and welcoming and gracious, and my design isn’t the only thing you see in this room; there are people living in here.” ■



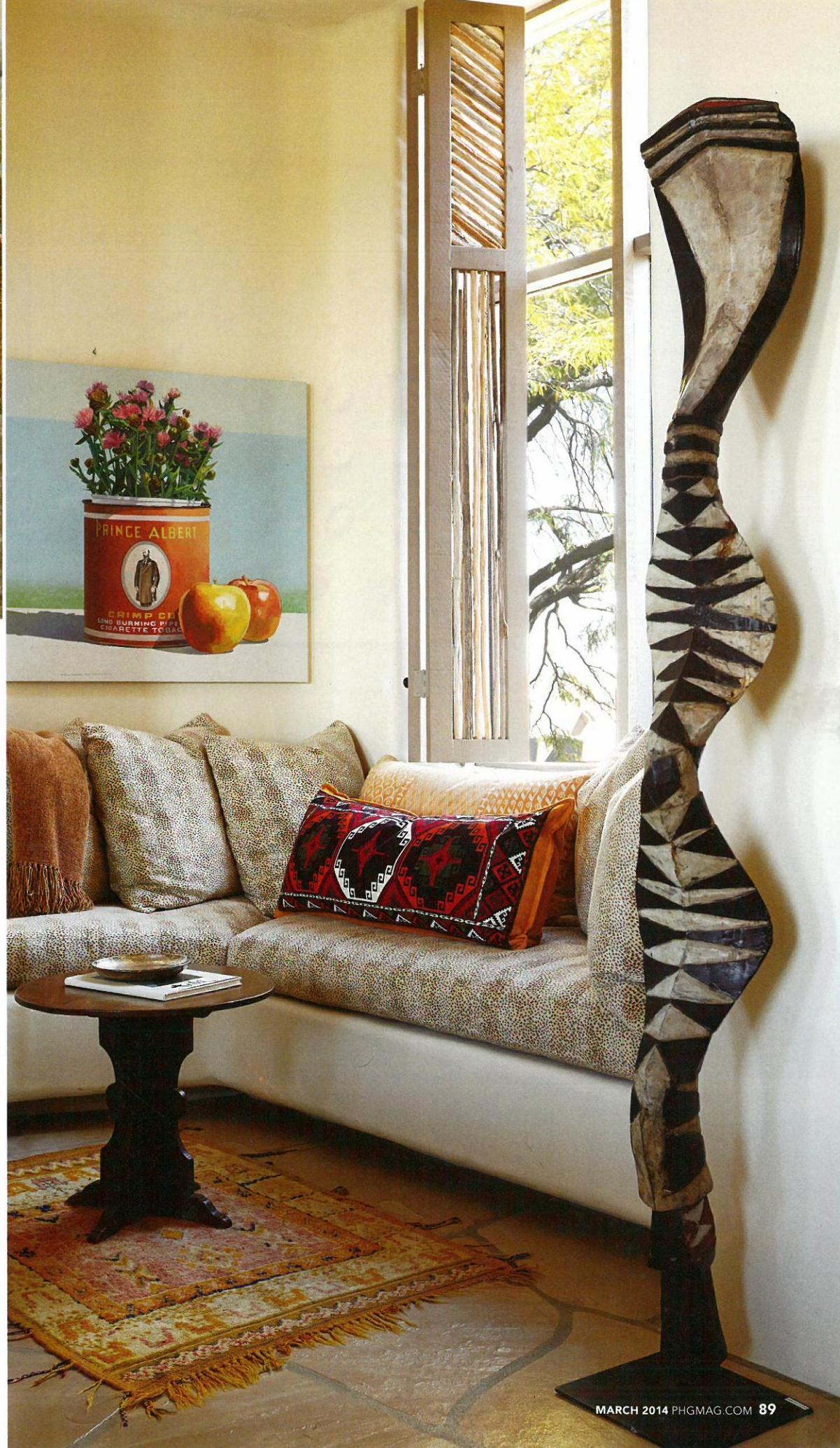




**Above:** Master of the Southwest Sue Calvin stands on an exterior stairway of the home featured on these pages. "I've been lucky to be able to work with some wonderful architecture, like this adobe designed by the late Bill Tull," she relates.

**Opposite:** The twists and swirls of a wrought-iron floor lamp provide contrast to the straight lines of the saguaro-rib shutters.

**Right:** This reading nook is indicative of Calvin's fondness for bold accents. "Neutrals are beautiful, but you need to add some fire to them," she declares. The African snake sculpture and graphic pillow cover prove her point. A painting by William Roberts adds a burst of color.





For a nook in the study, the designer used artwork by Gathie Falk as a cue, repeating the same cream and red tones and playing off its graphic nature. "I like the idea of mixing rustic pieces with the crispness of the painting," she notes.





A flat-weave rug from Afghanistan and a painting by architect Bill Tull highlight the kitchen's dining area. Cane chairs with gently curved backs complement the round table.

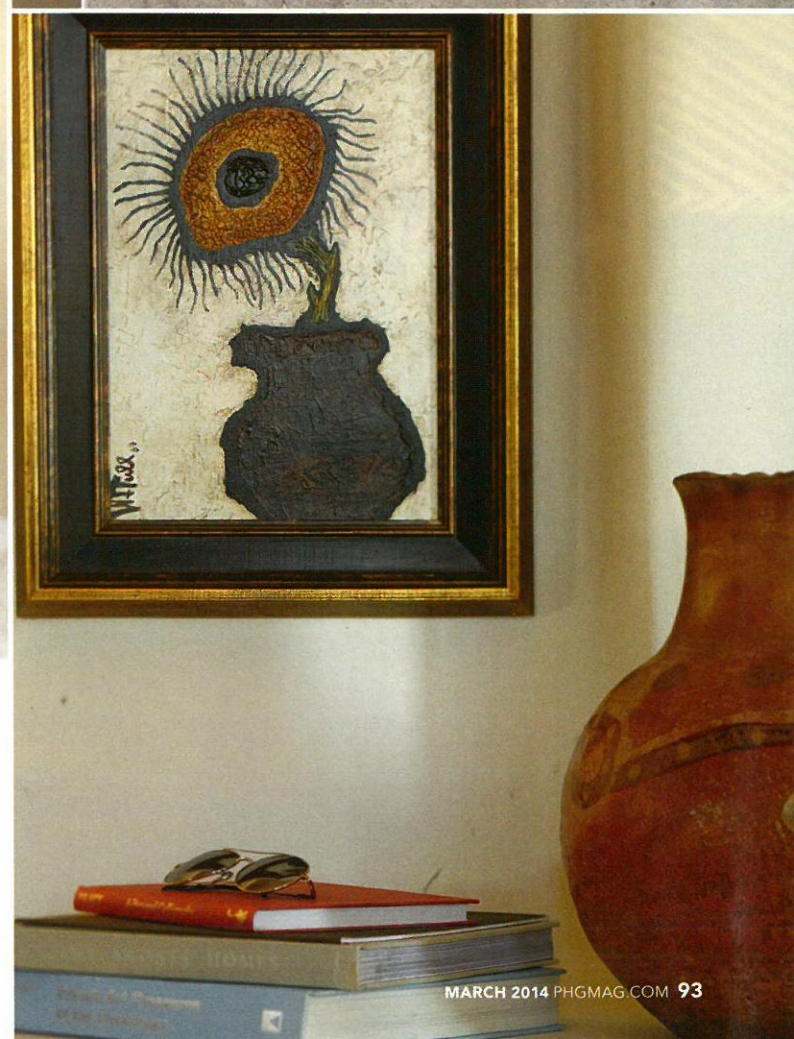






**Above:** The sleeping area in this guest house bedroom—as well as the two detail photographs on the opposite page—showcase some of the homeowners' extensive collection of art. "Normally, I pick out art for my projects," remarks interior designer Sue Calvin. "But these homeowners have an excellent eye and a significant collection that blends in beautifully with this home." The painting above the bed is by Erik Budd.





**Top right:** Perched on a pedestal, this stone sculpture is by Colleen Matamunba.


**Bottom right:** A painting by architect Bill Tull hangs near an old Bolivian pot.



The master bathroom is pretty much the same today as when it was originally designed, Sue Calvin notes, although she did update a few elements. "I put stone tile in the shower and on the tub surround," she says. The artwork is by Jacqueline Rochester.





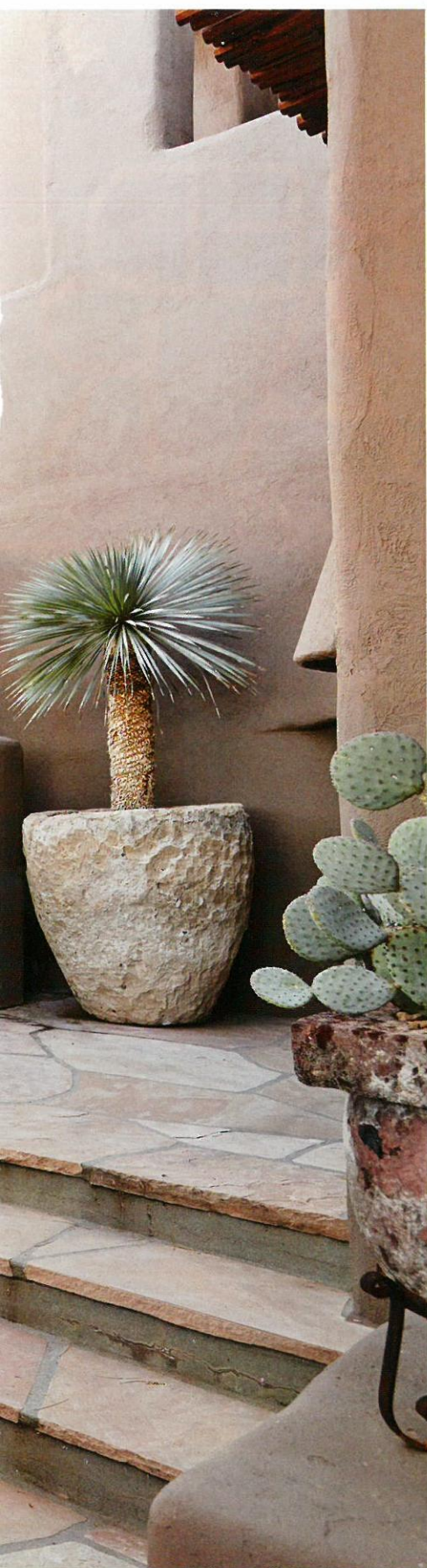


The hand-carved doors opening to the master bedroom are original to the house. Calvin added a few standout pieces—art-work, mud cloth shams and a Persian rug. “The architecture says so much in Tull houses that I really try to stay out of the way,” she points out. “There is nothing you have to do to draw the eye away from anything.”









The same flagstone flooring used inside flows out to exterior spaces. Views of the front courtyard (left) and a fireplace seating area (below) showcase the architecture of Bill Tull, which is closely associated with Arizona and notable for its thick adobe walls, rounded corners and many twists and turns.

*See Sources.*

