

modern times

What Is Modern? Three Design Teams Present Their Interpretations *By Nora Burba Trulsson*



The Slice House

Tucson, Arizona
Dreamspace, LLC, Tucson, Arizona

Photography by Bill Timmeman

IT IS A DECIDEDLY UNGLAMOROUS neighborhood near downtown Tucson, boasting neither mountain views nor historic adobe architecture. Until a few years ago, its only selling point, in real estate terms, was that it was right off the interstate and busy Speedway Boulevard. But the Barrio Blue Moon, as the neighborhood is called, is just that—a neighborhood, with families who'd lived there for years, despite weedy, empty lots and adjacent industrial businesses.

Barrio Blue Moon is the site of the Slice House, the first project done by Dreamspace, LLC, a partnership formed by architect Teresa Rosano, architectural designer Luis Ibarra, contractor/designer Page Repp, and Desi



Left: A steel overhang and house numbers mark the entrance to the house.

Below: Scored concrete flooring unites one unit's great room. Sliding glass doors open on to patio spaces on either side of the house. Purlin beams above the kitchen cabinets were used as a design statement and as an efficient way to move air across the room's expanse.





and Jerry Winter. Marked by a barrel-vaulted roofline, the Slice House's modern, edgy design at once blends into the neighborhood streetscape and elevates it.

The Slice House neatly sums up the partnership's mission, which is to do affordable urban infill projects that emphasize a high level of design and construction.

Dreamspace had its seed in Repp's senior thesis project while he was studying architecture at the University of Arizona in Tucson. He built his own masonry home on a lot in that barrio neighborhood, where he still lives today. While in school, Repp befriended Rosano and Ibarra, who also received their architectural degrees from the U of A, and who went on to form Ibarra Rosano Design Architects, a firm known for its innovative, award-winning residential designs. The Winters met Repp, Ibarra and Rosano when the couple had them redesign and remodel their Tucson home.

Completed earlier this year, the Slice House is actually two back-to-back units, with mirrored floorplans. Constructed of Integra blocks, each two-story unit measures 1,740 square feet and features a great room, galley-style kitchen, powder room and laundry on the first floor, and three bedrooms and two baths upstairs.

"We called it the Slice House because the lot was 40 feet wide and 155 feet long and it 'sliced' through between two streets," explains Rosano. "We designed the house to have the entries on to the parallel streets."

Keeping budgets in mind, materials were chosen for their raw, functional beauty. On the first level, flooring is scored, polished concrete, and a sculptural steel staircase leads to the bedrooms. Simple birchwood cabinetry, sourced from IKEA, adds a light touch to the kitchen, where a row of industrial Punkah-Louvres above the cabinets direct heating and cooling across the first floor. Sliding glass doors on both sides of the kitchen/great room flood the first floor with natural light. Upstairs, urethaned MDF board was used as flooring. Translucent Polygal panels are set into bedroom walls and doors, allowing borrowed light from the hallway windows to fill the sleeping spaces.

Since the two units are connected back to back, garden spaces were created by making 12-foot-wide patios on either side of the structure. Accessible by the sliding glass doors, the patios feature corrugated metal fencing and concrete decking, inset with channels of smooth beach stone. Both of the units are set back far enough from the street to allow three cars to be parked in front on a low-profile parking area made of decomposed granite.

Present plans call for the two units to be

leased, but in the future they might be sold as townhomes, Rosano says. "We're targeting someone who wants to live in the city," she says of the potential tenants or owners. "We want to give them an alternative to fixing up an old house or having to choose a tract home."

The Slice House has sparked interest in the neighborhood, and Dreamspace is on to several other residential infill projects nearby, including two under construction and two more in design phase.

According to Repp, "Through efficient use of materials, thoughtful design and smart site planning, new buildings will help new and current residents have a neighborhood that maintains its value and charm over time."

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Left: A sculptural steel staircase leads to the upstairs bedrooms. Above: From the street, each unit's front landscape includes enough room for three cars to park. The steel fencing provides privacy for both side patios.