

# THE WALL STREET JOURNAL.

**These Orthodontists Wanted a Desert Home That Showed Off  
Their Creative Side**

**The two empty-nesters filled their \$2.5 million Arizona house  
with furniture and objects they made**



A pair of Arizona empty-nesters built a house designed to blend into the desert.

By J.S. Marcus / Photography by Cassidy Araiza for The Wall Street Journal

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Married orthodontists, Drs. Daniel Percy and Mittida Raksanaves are used to seeing their work displayed in smiles throughout the Tucson, Ariz., area, where they live.

But when the couple started planning a new house in 2019, they wanted to focus on showing off a different kind of handiwork: Percy, 64, is a passionate woodworker, and his wife, 60, turns her talents to everything from glassmaking to ceramics.



For decades, Drs. Daniel Percy and Mittida Raksanaves shared an orthodontics practice.

Their new 4,000-square-foot, three-bedroom ranch home was designed to accommodate the furniture and objects the two have made. “We built the house around the furniture,” says Raksanaves.

Relocating from the larger home where they raised their two children, the couple paid \$300,000 for a 4.17-acre lot in the town of Marana, northwest of Tucson. Working with Tucson’s Robinette Architects, they then spent around \$2.5 million to build their new house.



Raksanaves fashioned the fused-glass tiles used in a light fixture.

Pearcy, often working with tools he inherited from his own woodworking father, fashioned many of the home’s cabinets and tables, including a roughly 8-foot cherry wood table that anchors the open-plan living and dining area. Raksanaves contributed numerous decorative touches, including the fused-glass tiles of the dining-room light fixture and pieces of bric-a-brac that decorate her husband’s extra-long table.







Pearcy made this cherry table and a number of musical instruments, while a vertical piece by his wife hangs near the main entrance.

Raksanaves wanted to be an artist while growing up in Bangkok, Thailand, where her mother owned an upscale gift shop. But her parents convinced her that dentistry was a more stable income. She first met Percy, a native of Indiana, while they did their residencies in Louisville, Ky. She later joined him in his orthodontics practice in Tucson, where they were married.

About 30 years ago, the couple bought a piece of land in what would later become the Saguaro Ranch gated community, with plans to build a large family home and

studios for each of them there. In 2001, they completed a roughly 2,000-square-foot structure containing the studios, but abandoned plans for the house amid infrastructure setbacks in the development. They have kept the studio block over the years for its secluded setting, even though it was a 30-minute drive from their home in the Catalina Foothills area. Raksanaves likes to look out the window at the desert when working on her creations, appreciating what she calls the meditative atmosphere.





The couple's spacious studio complex, built in 2001, allows Raksanaves to work on ceramics while her husband makes a new guitar.

The inspiration they get from their studios' desert setting is one of the things that kept them in Tucson once they became empty-nesters. The couple maintain a ski condo in Telluride, Colo., and they considered relocating entirely to the mountain resort to build a new home and studio complex there. What kept them in Tucson? In addition to the desert scenery, it was Telluride's lack of local art supplies and a shortage of Asian grocery stores, Raksanaves says. So, they decided to build a new home in Saguaro Ranch for its proximity to their studios, where Percy spends up to several hours a day now that he is retired.





A back patio offers an outdoor eating area.

Raksanaves, who still works a few days a month, squeezes in three or four days a week at her studio.

The house runs east to west in order to emphasize south-southeastern views. This allows for dramatic vistas, stretching for miles down toward Tucson and up into its surrounding mountains. It also spares the home western exposures—which can dramatically add to air-conditioning costs.



The property has southern-facing views toward the city of Tucson.

Rocks dug up during construction were reused in the design, and century-old, multi-arm Saguaro cactuses were carefully replanted—no small feat, since the older they are, the less likely they are to survive the process, says Percy. “Knock on wood,” he says of the massive, treelike cactuses that preside over the south side of the house, “it’s been four years since those were transplanted.”



Saguaro cactuses were transplanted during construction.

The Sonoran Desert setting might conjure up the prospect of long stretches of 100-degree days, but a house in this part of the country must also accommodate cold nights, seasonal downpours and even occasional snowfall. The couple spent just over \$40,000 on their heating, cooling and ventilation, and just over \$200,000 on well-insulated, glare-resistant glazing.



In the living room, tables made by Percy complement a black modular sofa from Roche Bobois.

Their desire for a low-maintenance home meant an extra-sturdy corrugated-steel roof. “Knowing that Dan is a woodworker, we also wanted a lot of wood in the house,” says the couple’s architect, Ronald W. Robinette. The studio accomplished this with a network of exposed fir beams along the ceilings. Robinette estimates that this all added about \$30,000 to the roofing costs, which totaled nearly \$310,000.

Another area where the couple didn’t cut corners was the kitchen, which cost just over \$170,000 and includes granite-and-quartzite countertops, a Lacanche stove imported from France, and a desk space for Raksanaves, who says the room is where she spends much of her time.



The couple spent just over \$170,000 on the kitchen, which includes a Raksanaves light fixture.

A special feature of the kitchen: a restaurant-grade ventilation hood over the stove, to accommodate high-heat, Asian-style cooking. “The best Thai food in the country is in my kitchen,” Percy says of his wife’s culinary skills. During the design phase, Robinette was summoned to a meal at the couple’s previous house in order to experience the importance of a kitchen in the new build.





Raksanaves makes pretzels in the kitchen, which includes multicolored granite-and-quartzite surfaces.

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## **BALANCE SHEET**

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- Foundation and Framing: \$563,820
- Electrical: \$117,300
- Kitchen: \$172,300
- Glazing and HVAC: \$246,373
- Deck and Landscaping: \$80,000
- Flooring: \$87,950
- Roofing: \$307,620
- Furniture: \$34,000
- Bathrooms: \$150,000

Work started in fall 2020, slowed down for periods during the pandemic when supply chains were tight, then sped up in time for the couple to move in during early summer 2023.

Pearcy's handcrafted musical instruments are on display in the couple's new office. And a prime spot in the living room is given over to a Steinway grand piano belonging to their 28-year-old son, a graduate student in physics who is an accomplished pianist. But not for long. Raksanaves—who has added painting to her portfolio—has her sights set on it. "That is where my easel is going when my son has his own house," she says.





This Steinway grand piano will eventually be replaced by an artist's easel.

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