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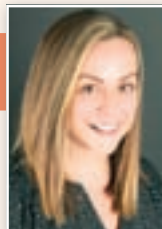
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EDITOR'S NOTE

Two of Arizona's most well-known architects – Frank Lloyd Wright and Al Beadle – used breeze blocks to add a modernist touch and crisp architectural lines on designs.

If you drive through midtown Phoenix, you'll see breeze blocks used on various parts of the home – in the backyard, in the garages, as a fence, etc. Wright and Beadle knew these concrete screens could serve as functional sculptures – casting patterns of shadow and light, offering privacy without shutting out the world.

Life's a Breeze, a new breeze block company that touts their product as a way to provide hope for the future took a page out of Wright and Beadle's books, proving that style and intention aren't just for the elite – they're for everyone.

This November, we invite you to take a closer look at the architecture around you. Whether it's a glimpse of breeze block on a morning walk or a full-on home appreciation tour, let yourself be drawn in by the details. They say more than we often realize.

Stories and feedback are always welcome. Until we meet again in the spring, thank you for reading Arcadia News and Arcadia Home & Design!

mallory

– Mallory Gleich



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Keep it breezy

This Phoenix business aims to rebuild hope, one wall at a time

By Mallory Gleich • Art by Oliver Renard

In the golden light of a Phoenix afternoon, a wall isn't just a wall – according to Phoenix local Sean Griffiths. It's a portal into memory, intention, and design, and in neighborhoods like midtown and uptown Phoenix, where Mid-century charm meets the realities of an Arizona afternoon, the once-overlooked breeze block is making a bold return.

At the center of this architectural revival is Life's a Breeze, a design initiative created by Sean and his husband, DJ, that's redefining what these decorative concrete blocks can be – and do – for modern communities.

Breeze blocks, also known as screen blocks, first appeared in the 1930s, gaining

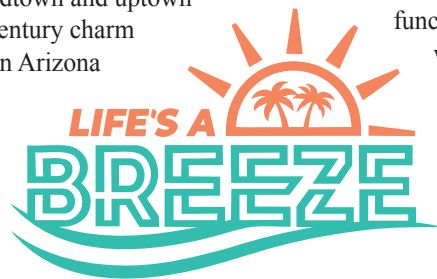
significant popularity during the post-war construction boom of the 1950s and 1960s.

"There was a sense of hope needing to be restored; bringing a different optimism that had been lost for a long time," Sean said. "As such, these blocks became something that served as a functional symbol of hope, of what's to come."

Inspired by sun-reducing screens in Asia and influenced by Art Deco and Mid-century modern movements, they were prized for their dual purpose:

allowing airflow and light to pass through while casting patterned shadows and providing privacy.

In desert climates, they became essential elements of vernacular architecture. Their geometric forms did more than decorate buildings; they filtered sunlight, cooled





interiors, and offered rhythmic elegance to facades and fences. Frank Lloyd Wright was an early innovator, using precursors to the breeze block – his iconic “textile blocks” – in both the Arizona Biltmore and Hollywood’s Storer House.

By the 1970s, however, architectural trends shifted. Glass, steel, and minimalism took center stage, and breeze blocks were relegated to the past; covered up, torn down, or left to crumble in forgotten motels and suburban neighborhoods.

But design, like memory, has a way of returning. Three years ago, when Sean and DJ moved into their condo in midtown Phoenix, they spoke to their neighbors, and an idea started to form.

“We’d never heard of breeze blocks, so we started researching what they are and what purpose they serve,” Sean said. “They’re also very artistic. We thought, ‘wouldn’t it be fun to bring these back to our community?’”

The duo began researching companies like Atomic Ranch (a platform and magazine that focuses on all things Mid-century modern) and even reaching out to a few Australians they’d found online who were in the industry. One of the main concerns was how to create the blocks at a lower cost with sustainable materials while still maintaining their charm and usefulness.

They knew they’d want to include an Arizona aspect, too, so they headed to Joseph City (three hours northeast of Phoenix) and its washes to gather sand. Add water and an aggregate, and – using casts provided by Pacific Molds – Life’s a Breeze created its first breeze block.

“We’re not looking to compete with any of the companies out there that create these. Rather, we’d like to complement them. They have a great product, and we want to create a great product,” Sean said. “We’re focused on the future of modularity.”



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A revival in the Valley of the Sun

Today, breeze blocks are undergoing a renaissance, thanks in large part to a cultural reawakening around Mid-century modern design and a renewed focus on sustainable, climate-conscious architecture.

Founded in Phoenix, Life's a Breeze has installations across residential and commercial projects, combining locally sourced materials with striking custom molds to craft blocks that are both functional and poetic. These aren't just facades – they're statements of belonging, sustainability, and soul.

"Our blocks carry memory," Co-founder DJ Mosier said. "They remind us of a time when design was playful, hopeful, and human-scaled. We're bringing that back, not just for aesthetics,

but for how it makes people feel."

Sean and DJ paired up with a friend, Bobby Panighetti, and the trio collaborated to devise a method for producing breeze blocks quickly and cost-effectively. Sean oversees strategy and content marketing, Bobby handles logistics, and DJ is the hands-on individual who assembles the blocks. The longer you curate them – seven to 14 days – the more versatile they can be used indoors or outdoors, as the client desires.

Whether it's a shaded backyard breezeway, a garden wall patterned with sunlight, or an interior feature that blurs the line between indoors and out, each installation is intentional. The designs support biodiversity and promote passive cooling without compromising individuality.

Casting more than concrete

What sets Life's a Breeze apart is its belief that breeze blocks are not just decorative relics – they're emotional architecture. The company emphasizes collaboration and community-led design, involving residents and boards in the co-creation of custom blocks that reflect local culture and environmental needs.

Their mission is threefold: to bring historical charm into present-day living, meet Arizona's 2030 sustainability goals, and provide meaningful, modular solutions for heat mitigation and visual storytelling. Their installations do more than beautify – they inspire pride and restore connection, especially in communities that have felt overlooked or disconnected.

In a desert where escapism is less about fantasy and more about functional survival, Life's a Breeze offers a style-forward solution to a warming world. Shade, airflow, and privacy are reimagined as elements of delight and identity.

Looking forward: A new chapter for concrete

"DJ is our mad scientist, in the best way," Bobby said. "As soon as we get the weight down, we're looking at bulk production and keeping it affordable for everyone."

The trio is evaluating vendors and promoting their name – what Bobby calls standard hurdles when introducing a new product to the market. Life's a Breeze is exploring materials like recycled aggregates, lightweight composites, plastic and translucent resins. Their molds aren't pulled from dusty archives; they're reinterpretations of mid-century motifs.





“We hope they become part of the texture of the landscape, and meet a growing demand,” Sean said. “We want people to get back outside and give them a point of interest.”

The future of breeze blocks isn’t about nostalgia; it’s about possibility. And Life’s a Breeze is positioning itself as an innovator, transforming once-forgotten patterns into scalable,

sustainable solutions that reflect Arizona’s heritage and its future.

Eventually, the company would like to offer a tongue-and-groove block that allows buyers to fasten the product together, and will explore ways to make it lightweight. Customization is also on the table, but the group wants to focus on what the customer wants and needs.

“We’re constantly going to be evolving,” Bobby said, “but we’re excited to grow and share with our customers the next big thing.”

A framework for hope

“The name Life’s a Breeze is a play on words,” Sean said. “But it’s also something to think about. We see the daily struggles, and we want

to be a catalyst for thinking about transforming their environment as an escape from the ‘bad’ and the daily minutiae. It’s symbolic.”

Life’s a Breeze blocks aren’t walls, they’re invitations. To breathe. To believe in something better. And in the shade of a patterned wall, beneath the filtered light of a desert sun, hope feels not just possible, but permanent.



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Fall Blooms

Over 100 specialty roses and nearly 200 iceberg roses bloom in this Arcadia garden.



A 2.5-acre homestead shows what's possible in Arizona's climate

By Chrissy Doern

As a proud native of the Arcadia area, Heather MacLean embodies a wonderful spirit of dedication, especially when it comes to her gardening adventures – a hobby that started with her grandmother.

“She had the most enchanting rose garden in Long Island, and I grew up watching her tend to it with care and intention. Roses are my heart plants. Following in my grandma’s footsteps, I’ve created a collection of specialty roses that feels like a living legacy,” MacLean said.

When she bought a 2.5-acre property in the neighborhood, it felt like the perfect blank canvas to pursue her gardening dreams. Now she, her husband, and their son happily share their home with 18 chickens, seven desert tortoises, four dogs, and two cats.

“Over the years, I’ve built raised garden beds, a chicken coop that could pass for a guest house, planted fruit trees, and cultivated a rose garden with over 100 specialty roses and nearly 200 iceberg

roses. I really leaned into gardening. It’s become my passion and my grounding space,” she said.

The raised beds are dedicated to nurturing vegetables alongside an orchard filled with apples, pomegranates, peaches, nectarines, Asian pears, plums, and figs. With decades of experience, MacLean hopes to inspire others with valuable insights for both beginners just starting their gardening journey and experts seeking a refresh.

A few tips from the MacLean garden

Understanding your planting zone and becoming familiar with the unique environment is crucial for growing a thriving garden in Arizona. When gardening in Arcadia and central Arizona, it is essential to recognize that we are in USDA Zone 9b: a plant hardiness zone defined by the United States Department of Agriculture, where the average annual minimum winter temperature can get down to 25°F to 30°. This zone is ideal for



PHOTOS COURTESY OF HEATHER MACLEAN

Eighteen feathered residents help keep the garden ecosystem thriving.



“November is a time of renewal in a garden, where the cool weather brings relief from the heat, and the soil remains warm enough for roots to take hold.”

growing subtropical and some tropical plants, as it experiences mild winters and a long growing season.

“Urban gardening in Zone 9b is a gift because our growing season is long, but timing is everything. My biggest tip for fall is to start fresh with your soil – add compost or organic matter before planting so your beds are energized after the summer heat,” MacLean said. “Raised beds and large containers are perfect for smaller spaces. Don’t be afraid to mix beauty and function: roses and herbs can thrive side by side.”

And finally, water consistently but deeply; shallow watering is the biggest mistake she notices.

“Plants get stronger when their roots must reach down for moisture,” she said.

November is a time of renewal in a garden, where the cool weather brings relief from the heat, and the soil remains warm enough for roots to take hold.

“This is a perfect time for leafy greens like kale, spinach, lettuce, and Swiss chard. Carrots, radishes,

and beets also thrive in the fall. For something heartier, broccoli, cauliflower, and cabbage stand out as reliable performers,” MacLean said. “They’re quick growers, so there’s always something ready to harvest.”

MacLean advises against planting warm-season crops like tomatoes, peppers, or basil in the fall, suggesting that it’s wise to wait until late spring to reintroduce these heat-loving plants into your garden.

Organic gardening

MacLean firmly believes in keeping things simple and natural. For tackling pests like aphids and spider mites, she recommends a homemade spray made of water and a few drops of dish soap. Additionally, she advocates for Neem oil as a powerful, safe option that protects pollinators when applied with care.

Companion planting has proven to be vital for managing pests in her garden. By incorporating herbs like marigolds, mint, and garlic alongside

vegetables, she effectively deters unwanted bugs. Additionally, the presence of chickens enriches the garden ecosystem – they not only enjoy munching on insects but also provide fresh eggs in return.

“Achieving balance is essential: by nurturing beneficial insects, discouraging harmful ones, and

fostering a chemical-free garden, we can create an environment that thrives,” MacLean said. She recommends Berridge Nurseries for gardening items and Singh Farms for organic compost.

Check in on MacLean and her gardens by following along on Instagram @heathermaclean27



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“YOUR NEIGHBORHOOD WINDOW COVERING STORE”

At the Phoenix Home and Garden Home Tour, attendees can meet the team behind the scenes and interact with renowned architects and designers.

Inspired living spaces

Stroll through artful homes, gardens and studios

By Sherry Sklar

Fall resets the clock for many, whether we're heading back to school or preparing for the gift-giving season. It's a time to embrace friends and community.

Phoenix's home and art tours will heighten appreciation of the creativity and style that define the city. Meet talented artists and craftsmen, and tour a curated selection of dream homes that may inspire a purchase – or a refresh – of your own.

Camelback Studio and Art Sale

camelbackstudiotour.com

Saturday, November 8, 10 a.m.-5 p.m.

Sunday, November 9, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

Admission is free

Camelback Studio Tour and Art Sale opens its doors to visitors, marking the 18th annual event and offering a wide array of art, jewelry, paintings, sculptures and collector's finds to view and purchase.

This year's event includes 15 tour stops, highlighting more than 40 local artists. Held over two days, attendees can peruse artists' home studios and meet artists who live and work in the area.

Featured artists who are opening their studios to the public this year include sculptor Kevin Caron, bronze artist John Tuomisto-Bell, painter and printmaker Joe Ray, glass artist and tour founder Lynn Gustafson, and ceramicist Rick Panella. They're joined by dozens of other talented makers working across a range of mediums. The tour is self-guided through mid-Phoenix, south Scottsdale and Paradise Valley.

Phoenix Home & Garden Home Tour

phgmag.com

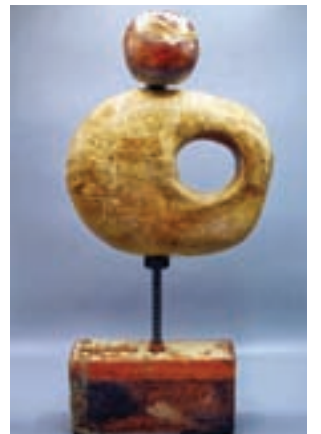
Saturday, November 15, 10 a.m.-4 p.m.

VIP from 9 a.m.-5 p.m.

Tickets are \$85 for general admission, \$125 for VIP.

Step inside the Valley's most breathtaking residences as *Phoenix Home & Garden* opens the doors to its annual luxury home tour. This self-guided outing features homes selected by the magazine's editorial staff.

Meet the team behind the scenes and interact with renowned architects and designers in attendance, who will be on-site to showcase their work. The special VIP package includes early admission, a bonus home, refreshments, and a subscription to the magazine.



(above) Elizabeth Page's "Lost Dutchman Copper Skies" can be found at the Hidden in the Hills Artist Studio Tour. (top right) Painting by Jules Gissler (bottom middle) "Simply Complex Sculpture" by Kevin Caron (bottom right) Ceramic by Mary Delmege.

F.Q. Story Home & Garden Tour with Holiday Marketplace

fqstoryhometour.org

Saturday, December 6, 11 a.m.-7 p.m.
Holiday Marketplace 11 a.m.-5 p.m.
Tickets are \$25 through November 28,
and \$30 afterward.

The annual F.Q. Story Home & Garden Tour decks out its holiday finery each year, welcoming guests to explore historic homes and shop for seasonal treasures. Centered along Culver and Willetta Street between 7th and 16th Avenues, the neighborhood event – now in its 39th year – features ten charming homes and six gardens open for self-guided tours.

New this year: the Hops & Vine Beverage Garden, along with food trucks, the iconic Cookie House, and live performances by carolers and musicians. Luminarias will glow at sunset as you shop the holiday marketplace. Take in the charm at your own pace through one of the most cherished districts in the city.

Hidden in The Hills Artist Studio Tour

hiddeninthehills.org

November 21-23 and November 28-30,
10 a.m.-5 p.m.
Admission is free

The Sonoran Arts League is hosting the 29th annual 2025 Hidden in the Hills Artist Studio Tour, which invites visitors to explore the private studios of artists in Cave Creek, Carefree, and North Scottsdale during the last two weekends of November. This event offers a rare chance to purchase art directly from artists and learn about their creative process.

Enjoy the scenic beauty of the Desert Foothills communities while checking off your gift list for friends, family, and maybe even yourself. This year's program features Elizabeth Page's mixed-media collage, "Lost Dutchman Copper Skies," a striking composition in gold and mixed-metal leaf

that captures the splendor of the Superstition Mountains.

Other featured artists include Joye DeGoede, known for her whimsical JoyEful Party Animals series; Leonor Pisano, who fuses sterling silver and 14-karat gold with oceanic gemstones in her hand-forged jewelry; and Deb Wight, whose bold glass and metallic works celebrate the desert's natural beauty. With more than 150 participating artists, the tour offers a diverse range of works and distinctive pieces.

Willo Home Tour 2026

willophx.com

Sunday, February 15, 2026
Home Tour 10 a.m.-4 p.m.
Street Fair 9 a.m.-5 p.m.
Tickets are \$25

The 37th annual Historic Willo Home Tour takes place in one of Phoenix's oldest neighborhoods. The Willo District spans from Thomas and McDowell Roads,

between 1st and 7th Avenues, and features architectural gems and a welcoming community.

Visit more than 10 unique homes representing a variety of building styles as well as a historic firehouse museum. Convenient hop-on, hop-off trolleys transport guests down palm-lined streets to each house on the tour.

Willo rose on the edge of town in the 1920s on what was then undeveloped agricultural land. Today, the neighborhood association hosts its annual event, attracting history buffs and vintage enthusiasts. Visitors can also shop at a street fair featuring more than 150 vendors offering handcrafted goods, jewelry, antiques and art, alongside a classic car show.

Live entertainment on the main stage and at every home on the tour, along with food trucks, adds to the festive atmosphere.

Downsize, don't compromise

How Atom Modular is reshaping Phoenix housing

By Alex Gross | Art courtesy of Brian Darnell

With rising housing costs and the job market becoming increasingly competitive, traditional living standards – like buying a house or keeping up with rent – have become stressful for many.

In a wave of opposition to this expectation toward housing is Atom Modular, one of many companies helping to bring the recent phenomenon of micro-housing to Phoenix. Micro-housing refers to small residential units of no more than a few hundred square feet, which maximize the use of their limited living space.

You may have seen popular micro-housing designs before, such as the simplistic, unfolding cubic units from Boxabl, a Las Vegas-based company.

But Atom Modular is doing things a little differently. CEO Brian Darnell was burnt out from the residential construction industry after working for decades as an architect and general contractor.

“I just got tired of the uber mansions that we were doing. You see a mountain of waste in dumpsters, just tons of sheet goods and lumber thrown away,” Darnell explained.

His approach, he decided, would be based on sustainability.

“I decided to do our modular homes out of steel, and I also integrated a very unique foundation that does not rely on concrete, yet is considered a permanent building,” Darnell said. “We’re on a sheet material base, meaning we’re going to use four-foot increments whenever we can. Our waste is very low. I would say it’s exponentially beneficial because it becomes more predictive, both in cost and labor.”

Due to a multitude of reasons, including California’s high expenses and stringent regulations regarding steel construction, Atom Modular relocated to Arizona years ago. The change of scenery allowed their vision of modular housing to take off.

With Phoenix recently passing a law allowing for accessory dwelling units on single-residence properties, the demand for these micro-houses is expected to grow. Whether the unit acts as a casita or a short-term rental, different models are designed to fulfill every need.

Contrary to his traditional demographic of wealthy retirees, Darnell is starting to see a shift in clientele: young adults aged 25-35 who are looking for a “living solution.”

Atom Modular’s micro-homes start at around \$200,000, and the company currently offers four different floorplans.

“You can start with a studio, which would be a one-bedroom, common area, full bathroom, full kitchen. They start at about 280 square feet, and then, because it’s a steel modular approach, you can add on components,” Darnell said. “You can grow these



Atom Modular creates expandable steel modular homes starting at 280 square feet, using a concrete-free foundation and future assembly-line construction to deliver affordable, efficient housing.

successfully up to about 1,800 square feet. These are living structures that grow with the needs of the family.”

This shift in clientele is just one of many changes that the micro-housing industry has experienced in the six years since Darnell founded his company, and some have been easier to navigate than others.

“What has been the most difficult thing for us as a startup company is finding employees who have trade skills. It’s really a rarity now,” Darnell said.

To combat the dwindling pool of tradespeople in both skill and number, Darnell envisions implementing a centuries-old innovation into the micro-housing industry: a factory approach.

This assembly-line style of residential building would enable the mass production of housing units at a significantly more affordable rate. With a new method of production also comes a new design strategy.

“We think about aesthetic projection,” Darnell said, describing how the trend in industrial design has been leaving curves behind and instead opting for a more rigid, angular style. “From a manufacturing fabricator perspective, that is much easier, much quicker, much lighter, much more affordable to do, and you’re seeing people stop caring as much about aesthetic maintenance when it becomes more cost-effective.”

Micro-housing began as an early 21st-century movement in cities like Seattle, where the legalization of small, efficient dwelling units sparked a national trend. As for the Phoenix metro area, Atom Modular is not the only company bucking the trend of traditional housing practices.

“I’ve seen fierce competition in tiny and micro housing,” Darnell said. “There are a lot of people who are trying to find the solution. That solution is



expensive to get to, but I feel that we’re really close to honing in on that recipe.”

Even in a saturated industry, these opportunities offer real hope and support for Phoenix residents navigating housing challenges.

“We’re changing the paradigm. To think we’ve been building houses the same way for 500 years,” Darnell remarked. “We’re trying to bring a small, modular, livable solution to affordable housing, that has an architectural wrapper to it.”

atom-modular.com



Jerry's



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From grocery deliveries to pet care, the concierge team knows each resident personally and handles daily needs with ease.

Concierge living

Inside The Bergen's hospitality-focused approach

By Rachael Bouley

As apartment living continues to gain momentum across the U.S., the expectations for what defines a “luxury rental” are evolving. A growing number of residents now seek more than just sleek design and desirable locations – they’re looking for hotel-style services that simplify daily life. At The Bergen, a luxe

apartment residence in Arcadia, concierge living is at the heart of the experience.

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of renters nationwide has increased steadily over the past decade, with multifamily developments experiencing strong demand in metropolitan areas. In response, developers are rethinking how to merge lifestyle convenience with upscale living, bringing

personalized service into the rental world.

Opened in June 2024, The Bergen is part of The Grove masterplan. This mixed-use development replaces former office buildings and parking lots with office space, fine dining, a boutique hotel, and high-end residential options. At The Bergen, 24/7 concierge services are a defining feature.

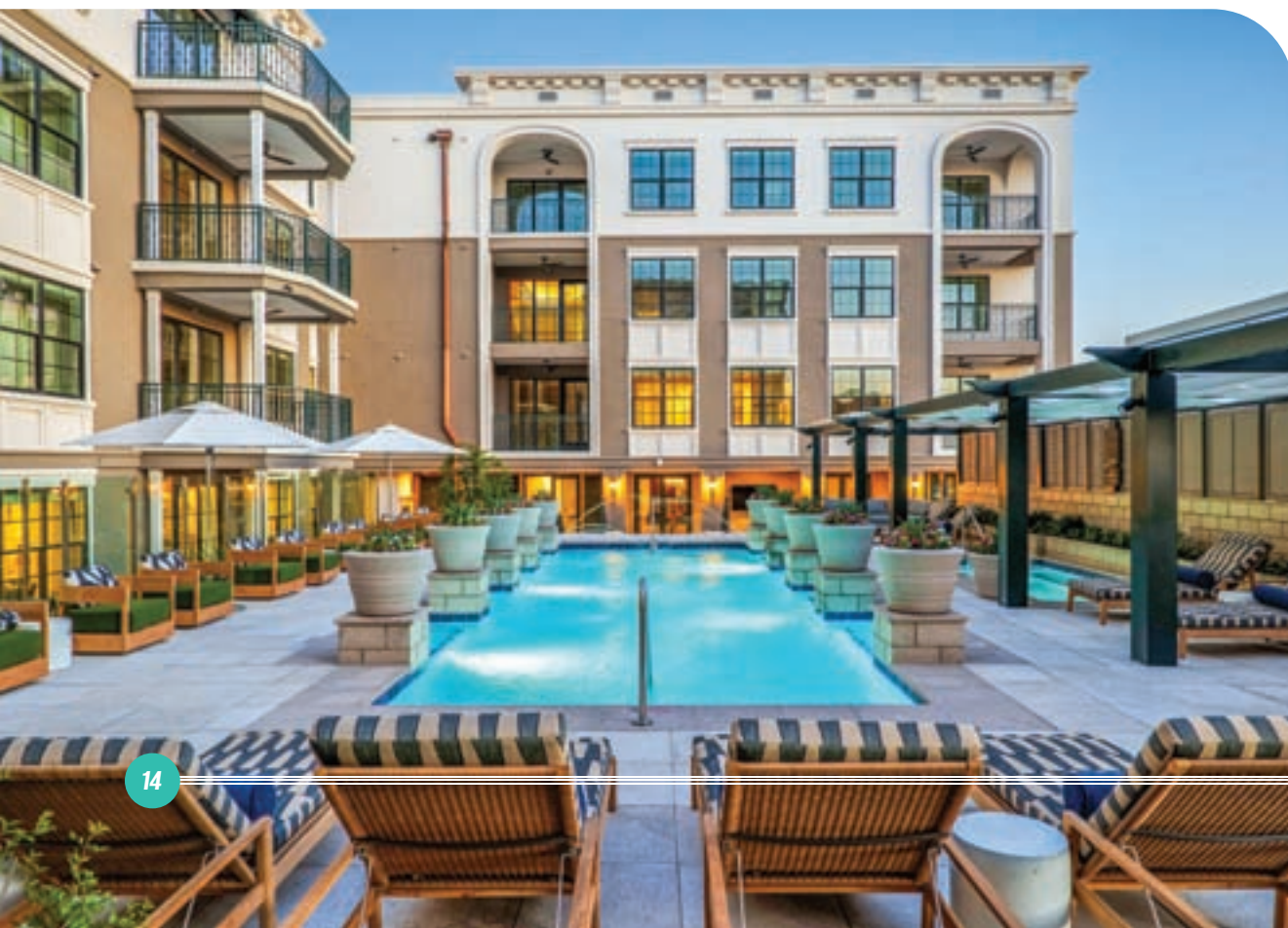
“Their goal was to introduce something new to Phoenix – a rental community that delivers the exclusivity and service of the most elite private club,” General Manager Colleen Smith said. “Every element, from the design to the amenities, was created to support a lock-and-leave lifestyle.”

The concierge team acts as a personal assistant for day-to-day needs. Staff get to know residents individually, making the service feel tailored rather than transactional.

“Whether it is stocking a favorite bottle of wine, arranging grocery deliveries, securing a hard-to-get dinner reservation, or stepping in to care for a pet while someone is away, the concierge is always ready with an answer,” Smith said.

The building’s design supports this service model. Select residences feature dual kitchens or catering kitchens, allowing grocery or dry-cleaning deliveries to be placed directly inside; this ensures privacy and uninterrupted comfort. Residents also enjoy valet service, with a quick text triggering car retrieval.

While The Bergen does offer refined interiors – like Monogram and Wolf paneled appliances, walk-in



Spacious layouts offer chef-inspired kitchens with state-of-the-art appliances, en suite baths, and walk-in closets designed for comfort and function.



closets with built-in islands, and expansive patios – the emphasis remains on how the space serves residents, not just how it looks.

“The layouts are spacious and carefully designed; chef-inspired kitchens with state-of-the-art appliances, en suite baths, and walk-in closets with built-in islands,” Smith explained. “These residences feel more like custom homes.”

Concierge care isn’t just about luxury; it’s about efficiency, peace of mind, and personalization. That aligns with broader renter trends – especially among professionals, retirees, and those downsizing from single-family homes – who seek high-end living without the burden of home maintenance.

“The Bergen carries the presence of a five-star resort, yet it feels unmistakably like home,” Smith added. “Our goal is to continue cultivating a resident experience built on a hospitality-forward approach, making everyone in the building feel special and cared for.”

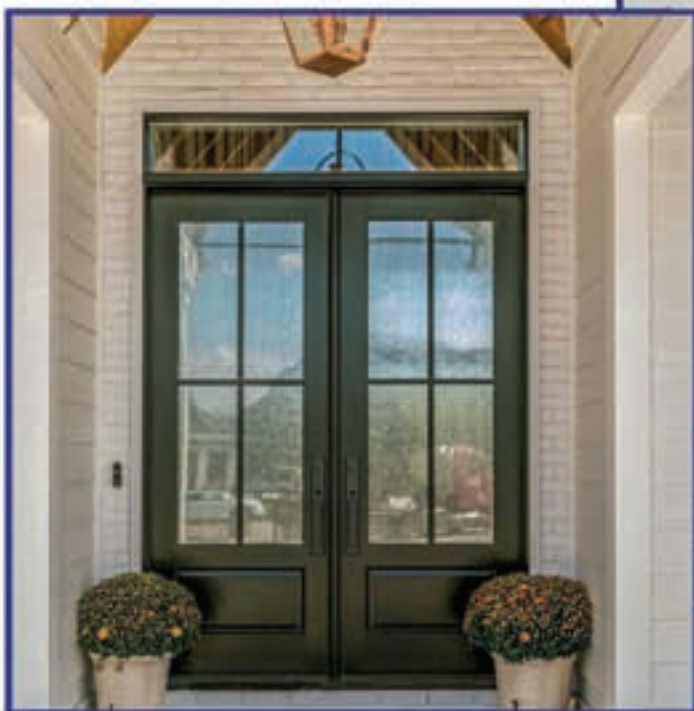
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