



# A Desert GEM

By James M. Williams

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Gems are created from the simple elements of the earth. What was once a piece of carbon may become a priceless diamond? The transformation requires much time and effort as well as the careful care of a master. The more time and effort spent on a gem, the more precious and valuable it may become.

There is a place high above the desert

floor where all the elements — water, wood, fire, earth and metal — converge, are organized, and rest in perfect balance. It is here that another priceless desert gem has been carefully created.

This is a place where one is simultaneously at peace and is energized. This gem is the Millar residence located in Stone Cliff above St. George,

Utah. Dr. Roger Millar and his wife wanted to build a home that would take full advantage of the 180-degree vista, provide privacy, be ideal for entertaining friends and associates, provide ample space for visiting family members, and could also be considered a work of art and architecture. J.D. Thompson and AE URBIA were selected for the job.



What a job the firm did.

A winding stairway provides a breathtaking view of the valley and leads to a decorative entry gate. Passing through the gate you enter a desert oasis unlike any imagined. The ceiling opens up to the blue sky. The walkway curves around a large reflection pool, which is surrounded by stone walls on one side and curved

glass walls on the other.

The glass walls look through the interior stone columns, through the house, the entire valley and the distant mountains and sky. The courtyard is also seen from inside of the house, and at night the light from the pool dances on the stone wall. Indeed, the home exudes a sparkling gemlike quality during the night.

The interior of the home is open and flowing. All of the living spaces on both levels of the home have splendid views. Although much of the home is glass, privacy is still maintained where needed.

For starters, the home is elevated above the street and surrounding neighbors. More privacy is provided by the large courtyard and garages located at the





front of the house. The windows are protected from the sun by the use of large overhangs and decks. The roof cantilevers as much as 16 feet in some locations.

There's also a sun shelf that provides shade from direct sunlight, but allows indirect sun for lighting. The sun shelf can also double as a plant shelf. The clerestory windows also add to the light-airiness of the home. Other areas incorporate small square windows that allow light but minimize heat. Light wells also allow light into typically dark areas such as closets and baths.

The colors of the surrounding

skies and mountains change dramatically each morning and evening. Nature provides a vivid, dynamic, ever-changing mural or backdrop, which brings the house to life and puts all manmade artwork to shame.

Famed architect Louis Kahn once said, "What man makes, nature cannot, and what nature makes, man cannot."

This home unites the creations of man and nature and elevates them.

It is better because of the nature that surrounds it, and nature is better appreciated due to the design of the home.

The site's buildable area was maximized by leveling the

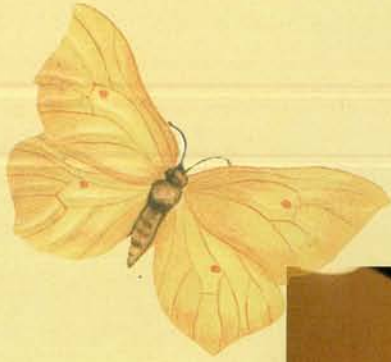
lot with the use of engineered stone-retaining walls. The entire subdivision is constructed in this manner, thus the name "Stone Cliff."

The lateral load-resisting system, which resists wind and seismic forces, consists of wood-shear walls and steel-moment frames. The steel frames are interior and covered in a stone colonnade. The building is curved in order to take advantage of the 180-degree view.

Therefore, the steel-moment frame is also curved.

To maintain clerestory windows, a vierendeel truss was constructed of tubular steel

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members. There are very large cantilevered roofs on both the front and back of the building. The 16-foot rear cantilever also required steel members. A glass house also requires a lot of steel and concrete.

It's been said that to have great architecture, the architect has to have great clients. The Millars are great clients!

