

Desert Cappuccino

Indigo MODERN

TEXT BY BRADLEY WHEELER

PHOTOGRAPHY BY BRADLEY WHEELER – ITALIAFOCUS.COM

"We practice 'Responsible Density', ... We coined that term to define development within an infill neighborhood that pushes unit count beyond the norm, but within the context of great architecture."



During a recent bi-annual tête-à-tête with my Italian and Austrian editors, I was struck by the global (architectural) village in which we all live. Immediately upon my arrival in Italy, I am kissed on both cheeks by my Milan editor, Paola. Before I can sip my first cappuccino, she asks, “quando e’ il prossimo progetto dell’architetto Rob Paulus?” (“When is architect Rob Paulus’ next project?”)

In Vienna at Café Prückel, my editor, Andrea, broaches the same subject but here the theme is Apfelstrudel. Since Barrio Metalico in 2004 - Rob’s first foray as an architect/developer - his simple, modern hand and easy industrial/energy-efficient architecture has gained quite the international following. So, during this warm December day while I am photographing the architect’s newest development, there is less pressure knowing that before I click the first image, magazines from Singapore to Milan and from Vienna to Buenos Aires are already queuing up to publish the indigoMODERN lofts.

This global interest is over an 11-unit, first half of a two-phased Tucson, Arizona campaign that will see an additional 11 units mirrored, on axis, across East 3rd Street between two boulevards, Richey and Dodge. Each residence is a cohesive 167 square metres (1,800 square feet) of open and sustainable living, working and family space, all rolled into one.

The units are punctuated with light and offer private balconies with unimpeded, dramatic views of the Catalina Mountains. Each space is a highly insulated enclosure, skinned with durable and recyclable materials and efficient glazing; mechanical systems have qualified each home for a \$2000 Federal Tax incentive. The units are 51 per cent more energy efficient than the national average and are pre-wired for photo-voltaic power and pre-plumbed for solar water heat.

The project is organised along a north-south 55-metre (180 feet) “spine” that serves as access from the gated-off street parking to the units and community swimming pool in the more secluded rear of the site. The unique layout creates a type of row-housing of separate, detached units whose towering walls provide shade and privacy to next-door neighbours.

The 4-metre (13 feet) wide, 7.6-metre (25 feet) tall central walk creates a dramatic Salk Institute-like canyon that is a simple yet powerful statement of architectural modernism not found at residential scale. The corridor, with its constant changing shade and shadow, acts like a giant sundial (think Aztec), tracking the sun relative to its longitude. And because good architecture can also be fun, the terminus point for the walkway is a jet engine cowling straight from Tucson’s aircraft boneyard. This 2.4-metre (8 foot) diameter drum becomes the perfect foil for the long shadows of the late afternoon’s amber light.

“We love how Rob Paulus creates a community that draws together like-minded and ecology-conscious people,” says Karin Shipman, after returning from recent volunteer work in Africa. Shipman and her husband, Raymond Hoehle, are resident “connoisseurs” of Paulus’ architecture - they were one of the first residents of indigoMODERN as well as Barrio Metalico.

“indigoMODERN functions well, and has a simplicity that suits our lifestyle,” she tells me as I set up to photograph her private courtyard. Shipman, a fine artist and the owner of an international business consulting firm, enjoys the way Paulus takes a little space and makes it “work”; “It is a small house with a lot of room in it.”

The next residence to photograph is that of Chicago architect John Burcher AIA, IIDA. This weekend, the DeStefano and Partners design principal is in the “Old Pueblo” taking a break from his international projects to escape the chill of one metre (40 inches) of Windy City snow. We are using his residence for the twilight “money” shot. As the “Chi-town” architect stokes the outdoor fireplace, he recounts that he has followed Paulus’ work “for a number of years and admired his ability to create modern ‘green’ communities”.

John appreciates that indigoMODERN is an infill project. “Tucson and Phoenix are communities that need to refocus on the revitalisation of their urban core. This project reinforces the existing fabric of the neighbourhood. Paulus has been a good advocate for this type of community development in Tucson.”





The sun is considerably over the rim by the time my photography is completed. Out of the shadows emerges architect Paulus, as promised, to lend a hand and help wrap up the shoot. "We practise 'Responsible Density,'" he says, gesturing with his free hand. "We coined that term to define development within an infill neighbourhood that pushes unit count beyond the norm, but within the context of great architecture," he continues as we enter the furnished display unit. "Responsible Density' encourages community because it brings people together," he says as he prepares cappuccinos for the entire crew. *Va bene architetto. Arrivederci and Auf Wiedersehen. Until the next cappuccino!* ■



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PROJECT CREDITS+
 DESIGN FIRM **ROB PAULUS ARCHITECT**
 ARCHITECT **ROB PAULUS**
 FLOOR AREA **167 SQM PER UNIT**