

Art in Bloom

A Carefree artist's desert garden inspires creativity.

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One glance around the Carefree garden of oil painter Lucy Dickens shows that a working artist lives and creates here. Surrounded by the rugged beauty of arid landscapes, Lucy's work captures the interplay of light and shadow on the resilient blooms and sculptural forms of cacti, but the influence of the garden flows both ways. Visitors to Lucy's home are drawn into a visual dialogue between her work and the natural world that inspires it. The garden becomes a canvas in its own right, adorned with art installations contributed by fellow artists and thoughtful arrangements that echo the themes and motifs from her paintings. Through this reciprocal relationship, Lucy not only draws from the landscape but also contributes to its narrative, enriching both her creative practice and the communal appreciation of the garden's beauty.

The property wasn't always a welcoming place of inspiration. About 10 years ago, Lucy and her husband, Richard, relocated from Glendale to Carefree to be near the artistic communities in which she was already



Artist Lucy Dickens paints one of her favorite subjects in her garden, the large white ephemeral blooms of the Argentine giant (*Echinopsis candicans*).



Colorful desert succulents greet visitors to the Dickens home, while several glass-and-metal sculptures by fellow artist Joshua Dopp highlight the courtyard entrance, both inside and out.

embedded. In their search, they found a run-down property in complete disrepair. “It was bank-owned, stripped inside and abandoned, with a bobcat living in the courtyard,” Lucy recalls. Nevertheless, Richard eventually convinced her to ignore the house and look at the lush desert landscapes and mountain views while imagining a rebuilt house with a gallery and studio. Lucy was sold.

Soon after, the couple hired a contractor, along with landscape architect Glenn

Fahringer, to transform the property to their specifications, inspired by their Mediterranean travels. “We love to entertain and host art events, so we wanted to create great gathering areas and make the home and hardscape ADA-compliant,” Lucy says. According to Fahringer, the homeowners were very hands-on from the start. “Lucy and Richard let me know that they had a busy social calendar with lots of visitors,” he says. “I focused on making the entry to her studio

unobtrusive so it would not be confused with the front door but also not completely hidden. Maintaining a nice flow both visually and physically was also important.”

The yard required a large amount of clearing of dead brush to see what was salvageable. Fortunately, Fahringer was able to incorporate much of the existing vegetation, which included specimen cacti, tree varietals, flowering shrubs and several saguaros. They added a back wall to create a garden around the



pool area while leaving more natural desert behind the wall, where Lucy envisions adding walking paths so she can explore the plethora of cholla and prickly pear blooms that brighten the desert each spring. Inside the wall, Fahringer created many different intimate gathering areas with layered desert gardens highlighting every space, including around the pool. “I love to paint our blooming desert, so I requested quite a variety of native plants to be included,” Lucy says. “I wasn’t very experienced with desert gardening at the time. As the years have passed, I have learned a lot and am actively involved in caring for my yards.”

While the landscape architect’s crew still maintains most of the garden, Lucy meets with them almost weekly to choose new plantings and manages all potted

This glass and metal sculpture by Joshua Dopp evokes the desert plants that surround it just outside the front courtyard.



Many of the trees are original to the property; Lucy likens the mesquite tree at the far right to a bonsai for its relatively small size and twisted form.

succulents in the courtyard herself. “I am always looking for something unique and beautiful to add and later paint,” Lucy says. Her latest find was an *Echinopsis* ‘Apricot Glow’. “It is stunning with its blooms ranging from a beautiful peachy apricot to oranges and reddish fuchsia, all in the same bloom,” Lucy describes. Some of her other favorites include a towering *Euphorbia royaleanna* in her front courtyard, which was first planted seven years ago and has since spawned many descendants placed throughout the yard, and of course, more night-blooming cacti, such as Argentine Giants (*Echinopsis candicans*), with their huge white blooms.

“Probably my favorite blooms to paint are prickly pears,” Lucy says. “I have several varieties blooming in red, orange, gold, fuchsia and yellow-green. The Santa Rita (*Opuntia santa-rita*) variety has purple and teal pads with fuchsia edges that complement so beautifully with their yellow blooms.” Near the pool, Lucy recently added and painted a potted claret cup cactus (*Echinocereus triglochidiatus*) to complement a red and yellow agave-inspired glass sculpture created by her friend and fellow artist Joshua Dopp, who also contributed several other glass and metal pieces installed in places of honor throughout the garden. Smaller bronze

animal sculptures created by another artist friend, Jason Napier, also grace the backyard, adding a touch of whimsy.

While Lucy’s paintings capture the essence of the desert’s beauty, her garden, in turn, becomes a living testament to her artistic vision. “My studio is attached to my home and entered through my beautiful courtyard,” Lucy says. “I have a large picture window by my easel overlooking the front desert garden, with a couple of huge saguaros and mountain views. I love having my subject matter just outside. I’m often distracted watching the scenery and wildlife before me.”

For more information, see Sources.



One of Lucy’s favorite subjects to paint is prickly pear blooms, such as this Santa Rita variety with its purplish pads and contrasting yellow flowers.