

# DESERT REVIVAL

*By Jeremy Pugh*

SCOTTSDALE, ARIZONA—PHOENIX'S POSH NEIGHBOR—is dotted with gated communities, resorts, spas, and fancy hotels. The state of Arizona as a whole remains best known to retirees, snowbirds, and a particular brand of Don't Tread on Me conservatism, but Phoenix and Scottsdale are drawing a new generation with their art, architecture, and design.

This isn't that unexpected. After all, two giants of architecture—Frank Lloyd Wright and Paolo Soleri—were Scottsdale residents, having lived in homes here that they designed: The former lived in the fastidiously designed Taliesin West and the latter in the chaotic Cosanti.

Beyond these estates, Phoenix and Scottsdale have an extensive stock of architecturally interesting older homes and buildings, especially mid-century projects from the 1940s to '60s. Today, Scottsdale's stuffy reputation is giving way to a second look from a younger generation, and spring and early summer is the perfect time to explore this new scene.



Roofline of Taliesin West



## GET YOUR ARCHITECTURE ON

Frank Lloyd Wright came to Arizona in the 1930s to create a space where he could work in peace and train his apprentices. He built **Taliesin West** (named in concert with his Wisconsin workshop, Taliesin) in what was then the middle of nowhere—26 miles from Phoenix. Wright and his students built everything at Taliesin West (12621 N. Frank Lloyd Wright Blvd., Scottsdale, [franklloydwright.org/taliesin-west](http://franklloydwright.org/taliesin-west)) by hand, using materials from the surrounding desert. He invented methods to engineer the plentiful rocks and boulders to build walls and harvested timber from nearby woods, all to the end of working with, instead of against, the terrain. “There were simple characteristic silhouettes to go by, tremendous drifts and heaps of sunburned desert rocks were nearby to be used,” Wright said. “We got it all together with the landscape.”

Today Taliesin West still trains architecture students in Wright’s methods. In a tradition dating back to the school’s earliest days, students are required to stay in tents in the desert, and design and build their own desert shelters to live in. Wright was a madman for order, and this National Historic Landmark is a marvel of thoughtful design and building. Not a blade of grass is out of place. The site offers tours daily.

If Frank Lloyd Wright was a madman for order, **Paolo Soleri** was just a madman. Although his reputation has recently been tarnished by posthumous allegations of sexual abuse, Soleri’s work remains an important part of design history. Soleri came to Taliesin West in 1946. He was an Italian architecture student and was among Wright’s apprentices. Briefly. His wild nature, manic energy, and boundary-pushing designs didn’t mesh with Taliesin’s monastic

environment. He also challenged Wright on the national stage, winning exhibitions in New York and making the cover of *Architectural Digest*, the *Rolling Stone* of architecture. Although there is no definitive account of why Soleri was expelled from Taliesin West, Claire Carter, the curator at **The Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art** (7374 E. Second St., Scottsdale, 480/874-4666, [smoca.org](http://smoca.org)) who has studied Soleri’s career extensively, believes the splashy Italian’s success in New York was a threat to Wright’s near-domination of the American architectural scene. “Soleri was brash, cocky, and his work was getting noticed in important circles,” she says. “I suspect that wasn’t to Mr. Wright’s liking.” Whatever the reason, Soleri left Taliesin for Italy in 1950, where he designed one of his most important buildings, *Ceramica Artistica Solimene*, a large ceramics factory on the Amalfi Coast.

Soleri could not, however, just let things lie. He returned to Arizona in 1956 to establish his own rival school and workshop, which he called **Cosanti** (6433 E. Doubletree Ranch Rd., Paradise Valley, 480/948-6145, [cosanti.com](http://cosanti.com)). Cosanti remains a workshop where apprentices fire Soleri’s Cosanti Bells—elaborate bronze or ceramic wind chimes—to help fund the continued work on Soleri’s masterwork *Arcosanti* (see p. 40). Where Taliesin West is all right angles (Wright angles?), Cosanti is wild and organic. Soleri pioneered a technique of building up huge mounds of desert silt, covering them in concrete, and digging out the dirt, leaving behind a dome structure that inspired George Lucas’ design of the Skywalker moisture farm in *Star Wars*. Tours daily.









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## BRING IT HOME

Old Town Scottsdale has a fantastic selection of funky consignment and vintage stores. Find high-end, one-of-a-kind vintage clothing at **Fashion by Robert Black** (7144 E. 1st Ave., Scottsdale, 480/664-7770, [fashionbyrobertblack.com](http://fashionbyrobertblack.com)) and **Vintage by Misty** (7046 E. 5th Ave., Scottsdale, 480/522-6875, [vintagebymisty.com](http://vintagebymisty.com)). For a chill, boho vibe, take a snack break from shopping and visit the **New Wave Market** and adjacent **Super Chunk Sweets & Treats** (7120 E 6th Ave., #19 and #20, Scottsdale, 602/736-2383, [newwavemarket.com](http://newwavemarket.com), [superchunk.me](http://superchunk.me)). Get the brownies. After you're fortified, you absolutely must visit **Cattle Track Arts** (6105 N. Cattletrack Rd., Scottsdale, [cattletrack.org](http://cattletrack.org)). This artists commune is a wild collection of local crafters, artisans, and performances. Be sure to check the website to see what's going on. For a smorgasbord of mid-century modern furniture, venture into Phoenix and stop by **Red Modern** (201 E. Camelback Rd., Phoenix, 602/256-9620) and **Modern Manor** (4130 N. 7th Ave., Phoenix, 602/266-3376, [modernmanorstore.com](http://modernmanorstore.com)).



*The Doors* by Donald Lipski is part of the Scottsdale Public Art Program.



Hiking in the Arizona desert

## PLAY

Now that you understand the underpinnings of Scottsdale's art, architecture, and design world, it's time to enjoy the desert—specifically the Salt River. Yes, a river. The **Salt River** flows past the cities of Mesa, Tempe, and Scottsdale and is a haven for wildlife. Birds, river otters, and herds of wild horses find their way to the flowing water, and a kayaking trip is a riot of desert life. Kayak the Salt with a guide from **Arizona Outback Adventures** (866/455-1601, [aoa-adventures.com](http://aoa-adventures.com)). Or spend a day hiking in the **McDowell Sonoran Preserve** (18333 N. Thompson Peak Pkwy., Scottsdale, 480/312-7013, [mcdowellsonoran.org](http://mcdowellsonoran.org)). The preserve was set

aside in 1990 by a citizen's initiative to keep the growing sprawl of the greater Phoenix area at bay. Today it is nearly 36,000 acres—an area larger than the cities of Tempe and Paradise Valley combined—of permanently protected land. For more art and culture, take a walking or bike tour of the **Scottsdale Public Art Program** ([scottsdalepublicart.org](http://scottsdalepublicart.org)), a diverse collection of 70 permanent and 30 temporary artworks that include traditional bronzes like George-Ann Tognoni's trio of galloping horses, and contemporary and experiential installations like James Turrell's *SkySpace* at the Scottsdale Museum of Contemporary Art.



Wild horses playing in the Salt River.

## STAY

At the foot of Camelback Mountain lies **Mountain Shadows** (5445 E. Lincoln Dr., Scottsdale, 480/624-5400, [mountainshadows.com](http://mountainshadows.com)), formerly a resort to the stars (think Bob Hope and Lucille Ball) who came to escape the flashbulb paparazzi. Although it eventually fell into disrepair, a new heyday has arrived for it. Fastidiously renovated in the now-retro decor that is so chic, it's chic again. For even more of a throwback vibe, visit the **Hermosa Inn** (5532 N. Palo Cristi Rd., Paradise Valley, 602/955-8614, [hermosainn.com](http://hermosainn.com)). Handcrafted in the 1930s by cowboy artist Lon Megargee as his residence and art studio, this hacienda with its 34 guest casitas is like staying at Hopalong Cassidy's house, if he had one. (We assume he did.) If boutique-on-top-of-boutique style, with a dash of the artisanal and the hand-crafted, is more your bag, consider the **Bespoke Inn** (3701 N. Marshall Way, Scottsdale, 844/861-6715, [bespokeinn.com](http://bespokeinn.com)). Bespoke Inn shares a courtyard with **Virtù** (480/946-3477, [virtuscottsdale.com](http://virtuscottsdale.com)), a James Beard-nominated, chef-driven restaurant.



Hermosa Inn

Images courtesy of Experience Scottsdale



Mountain Shadows



Arcosanti

### SOLERI'S UTOPIAN DREAM: ACROSANTI

Seventy miles north of Phoenix lies **Arcosanti** ([arcosanti.org](http://arcosanti.org)), an ongoing endeavor to build one of Paolo Soleri's fantastic cities of the future. Soleri thought big, and he drafted plans for hundreds of cities. He coined the term "arcology," a commingling of architecture and ecology, and published a book with that name. He began construction on Arcosanti in 1970 to demonstrate how urban conditions could be improved while minimizing the destructive impact on the planet that modern sprawl generates. Acolytes still journey to Arcosanti to join intensive five-week-long workshops where they study Soleri's work and techniques and continue the city's construction.

## DINE

Scottsdale's dining scene has mirrored the town's artistic revival. Take for example, **FnB** (7125 E. 5th Ave. #31, 480/284-4777, [fnbrestaurant.com](http://fnbrestaurant.com)), which is a haven of local food and local wine. Yes, Arizona has a growing wine industry. Helmed by James Beard Award-finalist chef Charleen Badman, who is known for her collaborations with local farmers, FnB highlights a different Arizona growing region every four weeks. Plus, wine. For a marriage of food and architecture (and more wine) try **Postino** (4821 N. Scottsdale Rd., Scottsdale, 602/428-4444, [postinowinecafe.com](http://postinowinecafe.com)). Postino's owners find mid-century modern commercial buildings (think banks and post offices) and turn them into restaurant spaces. Also, their happy hour is bananas—\$5 glasses of wine and pitchers of beer before 5 p.m. and \$20 for a board of bruschetta and a bottle of wine after 8 p.m. For a taste of Old Arizona—yes, there was an old Arizona; it was Spanish—visit the margarita heaven **The Mission** (3815 N. Brown Ave., Scottsdale, 480/636-5005, [themissionaz.com](http://themissionaz.com)) in Old Town Scottsdale. Try the Malbec-braised short rib and chorizo porchetta. For a truly unique dining adventure, find yourself in the Sonoran Desert with **Cloth and Flame** (480/428-6028, [clothandflame.com](http://clothandflame.com)), which sets up dining experiences at a fully appointed table amid the saguaro cacti, just in time for a spectacular desert sunset.



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