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[Dress up a front yard without compromising your home's architectural style](#)

By Sharon Cohoon, *Sunset* senior garden writer

Owning a home designed by a famous architect can be a little daunting. Even if there are things you don't like about it, you feel reluctant to make any changes because you don't want to mess up a good thing. That's the situation Phoenix landscape designer [Troy Bankord](#) found himself in when he bought a Blaine Drake home. (Drake was a protege of Frank Lloyd Wright during the period Wright worked in Phoenix and later became renown in Phoenix in his own right.) Troy loved the interior of his Drake home, but thought the front yard had zero curb appeal. Having never lacked self-confidence, I suspect, Troy plunged in, updated the look without changing its essence, and made a good thing even better.

Here's what the house looked like before:



And here's what it looks like now:



Photograph by Norman Plate

This is what Troy did:

1. **Changed the paint.** Peach rather than white stucco plays up the tones in the slash of sidewalk leading to the front door. (This walkway was pre-existing). Painting the bricks two shades of gray provides a nice contrast and makes the home look even more modern.
2. **Added negative space** Taking a few bricks out of the long planter that runs along most of the length of the house makes the expanse look jazzy -- almost like a section of a musical score.
3. **Divided carport from the garden** A new four-foot tall wall made of cement block now separates the two spaces. The perforations in the block echo the negatives spaces in the planter mentioned above. The wall is also a nice place to perch when sorting through your mail or saying good-bye to lingering guests, says Troy.

4. Put a new twist on the rule of threes Troy kept the mature kumquat tree, seen in the before picture, and added two fountains the same in shape but not in size. "The rule of threes is a good one," says Troy, "but they don't have to be identical objects." The similar shapes of the tree and the fountains unite them to create a trio, he says. Though they look like copper, the fountains are made from resin and fiberglass and are manufactured by [Oracle](#). Troy found them at [DIGS](#) in Palm Springs.

5. Downsized neighborhood traditions Lawns are still the rule in this part of Phoenix, so Troy left a token patch. But the majority of the yard is mulched in river rock lightly planted with red yucca. Troy took the same approach with seasonal color. He tucked in a few petunias, pansies, and geraniums, in keeping with the spirit of the neighborhood. But he kept the planting small and made them look less dated by adding lots of Berkely sedge (*Carex tumuicola*).

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