

at home

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HOUSE OF WHIMSY

Color and cuteness reign at the home of Gail T. Roberts and Stephen Rubin.

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This curvy bookshelf and its contents are a perfect example of the colorful, often fun, interior of the Central Tucson home of Gail T. Roberts and Stephen Rubin.



The glass-topped "grand-piano" coffee table reveals the puppetlike legs of the piano player.

FUN HOUSE A RIOT OF COLOR

By Gillian Drummond
SPECIAL TO THE ARIZONA DAILY STAR

It's not everyone who would choose to live with paintings of fast food, a piano-shaped coffee table, and pink papier-mâché pigs.

But in the home of Gail T. Roberts — artist, mother, active community member and challenger for the award of bubbliest person alive — it just seems to fit.

Roberts' love for fun, color and whimsy oozes from the red brick of her 1950s home in Central Tucson. It's there before you even set foot in the door, with her vivid mosaic tile work adorning the mailbox, and some brightly covered fencing that marks a side entrance to her yard.

Roberts, 56, has painted, sculpted and turned her hand to ceramics throughout her career. Her work is on display in Tucson restaurants, including the two Chopped restaurants, the Brandi Fenton Memorial Park near East River Road and North Dodge Boulevard, and private homes throughout the city. Yet, while she makes her living out of art, it's husband Stephen Rubin, 58, a Pima County Juvenile Court judge, who takes charge of much of the interior design in their home.

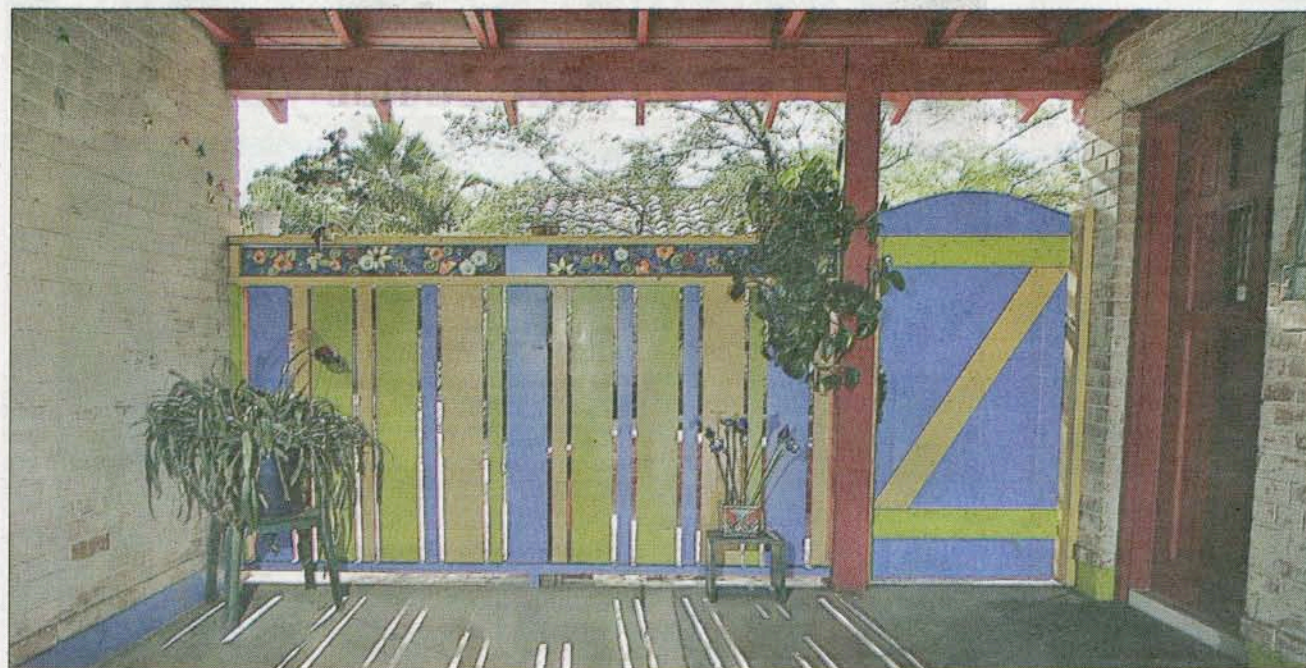
"I make decisions for a living," is Rubin's explanation. Roberts embraces her husband's "fantastic design sense," adding: "I just sort of agree with him."

The L-shaped house — in Roberts' words,



PHOTOS BY KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR

Roberts created the ceramic flowers and plants that adorn her home's mailbox.



PHOTOS BY KELLY PRESNELL / ARIZONA DAILY STAR



A papier-mâché pig from the series "When Pigs Fly" holds sway over the spa tub in the bathroom.

Roberts enlivened the previously drab fence between her home and guest house with bright paint and her own ceramics.



The kitchen, which sports a look that is hip in Europe and coming here, is actually 20 years old. The home itself, an ambling red brick, was built in the 1950s.



A sectional couch with black leather upholstery from Copenhagen graces the spacious living room of the 3,300-square-foot home, which includes a guest house and an addition.

"huge and ambling" — is centered on an airy, white-walled living space that used to be two rooms. It combines vivid pieces of art (by Roberts and others), modern pieces of furniture from Copenhagen, and some touches that just make you laugh.

A low table in the shape of a grand piano — its glass top revealing only the puppetlike legs and feet of its player — came from an art gallery in California. On display in the corner is a pink papier-mâché pig, from an exhibition Roberts did for the Invisible Theatre. And on the wall hangs one of Roberts' first paintings, a cartoonlike representation of her and Rubin on a beach vacation that she turned into

postcards for friends and family.

Rubin and Roberts don't always follow fashion. Their look is their own, and they've made remodeling decisions others might deem risky or questionable.

After they moved in in 1987, for example, they pulled out a set of expensive plantation shutters from the large living room window that overlooks the backyard and pool. They were beautiful, says Rubin, but darkened the room.

They have retained the original 1950s tile in two of their three bathrooms. One is cutesy blue and pink (Roberts hates it, Rubin loves it), the other black and white. But in the latter, Roberts has redone the counter-

top herself, replacing brown tile with jagged hand-cut pieces of black tile. And over the raised bathtub — also original to the house — hangs, or rather flies, another pink pig.

The kitchen is all-white laminate cabinets and gray countertop, with a touch of granite and butcher block on the island. It's a look that's hip in Europe and making its way here, yet this one is nearly 20 years old.

Outside, Roberts' quirky, colorful tile and ceramic work is hung on the patio walls. ("Camp quarters" reads a handmade ceramic sign at the entrance to their guest house.)

Roberts and Rubin have been lovers of the desert since they

visited Tucson in 1975 on a post-college road trip. "We said, 'Let's have an adventure,'" says Roberts. Tucson was their first and last stop.

Their home spans 3,300 square feet, which includes the guest house and an addition that Roberts has turned into her work studio and an informal artists' cooperative. Here, she and longtime collaborator Lori Ryder are joined by other female artists, volunteers and passers-by — all of them eager to learn, to help, or just to hang. And can you blame them?

► Contact freelance reporter Gillian Drummond at GCDrummond@aol.com.

ARTISTS' SHOW

Roberts is helping organize a group show of artists called "Juxtaposition" at Stone Studios, 2506 N. Stone Ave., in conjunction with Tucson Pima Arts Council's Tucson Open Studio Tour 2008. The opening reception is Nov. 7 from 6 to 9 p.m. The studio will remain open for tours on Nov. 8 and Nov. 9 from noon to 5 p.m. Call 887-1871 for more information, or e-mail gailarts@cox.net.

For more information on Tucson Pima Arts Council, call 624-0595 or visit www.tucsonpimaartscouncil.org.

For more information about Gail T. Roberts, visit www.gailrobertsarts.com.