

## ROOM WITH A VIEW

TEXT BY SUSAN COFFROTH | PHOTOGRAPHS BY LARRY KANTOR



Michael and Joanne Frerking live in one of the most energy-efficient homes in the Prescott area. The home's 20-inch-thick insulated poured-earth walls ensure a cool environment in the summer and a warm abode in the winter. It's comfortable inside, but more often than not, you'll find them outside on their roof deck.

"My wife and I find that we spend more time outside than inside. In the spring, summer and fall we have almost all of our meals outside," Michael said.

An architect, Michael carefully planned his roof decks to take advantage of the sun and the shade throughout the year. In the morning and at noon, they dine on the south deck, when the house provides shade. At dinnertime, the house shades the east deck and blocks the prevailing southwest winds.

"It is very important for people to understand sun and wind patterns and design the spaces accordingly," he said. "Working with natural patterns is the key to exceptional roof gardens."

Using the roof as a deck and a garden not only changes your point of view, it's an affordable extension of the living space.

Understanding sun and wind patterns is the key to designing a comfortable roof deck.





The Frerking's use part of their deck to grow plants — edible as well as ornamental.

Michael said he was motivated to think about a roof when he started planning construction of their home four years ago. The hillside lot presented challenges. Michael chose to incorporate the house into the hill rather than on top of it, and the roof decks were a natural extension.

"Getting double use out of a roof and using it as deck makes a lot of monetary sense," he said. The additional cost for the Frerking's was for lightweight pavers, some structural upgrade for the roof and a railing. "I estimate the pavers will double or triple the life of the roof membrane because they protect it from the sun."

An added bonus is that the roof garden is protected from ground critters. The Frerking's grow vegetables as well as flowers in cattle troughs decorated with corrugated metal. The railings surrounding the deck are as artistic as they are functional.

Roof decks offer lots of added value, especially for people who are concerned

about building costs, Michael said. "Of course, the view is the primary plus, especially if the home didn't have a view."

Another major benefit is that a roof deck adds space so that the home under the roof can be smaller. "This way, the outside and the inside are linked, and the home feels larger than it is." Even a less accessible roof deck can provide a place for stargazing or spending a cool summer evening.

His advice for remodeling a home to incorporate a roof deck is the same that he offers for those starting with new construction. "Do your homework. Lots of factors need to be considered whether you do it yourself or hire a contractor."

Here are some questions Michael recommends answering before you start: When and where do you want sun and shade and how can the building create shade? What are the wind patterns and how can the building block or catch the wind on a daily and seasonal basis? What are the best views and how can

you capitalize on them? How and when do you intend to use your roof space? He advises to think about longevity in the materials you select for construction and consider metal and masonry over wood.

With a new rooftop room, you may find that, like the Frerking's, you spend most of your time outside. ▼

## RESOURCES

### Architecture:

Living Systems Sustainable  
Architecture  
Prescott, 928-717-2755  
[www.michaelfrerking.com](http://www.michaelfrerking.com)

### Metal work:

Cosmic Steel  
Royce Carlson  
Prescott, 928-445-8665