



AT HOME

EAST VALLEY | SCOTTSDALE TRIBUNE

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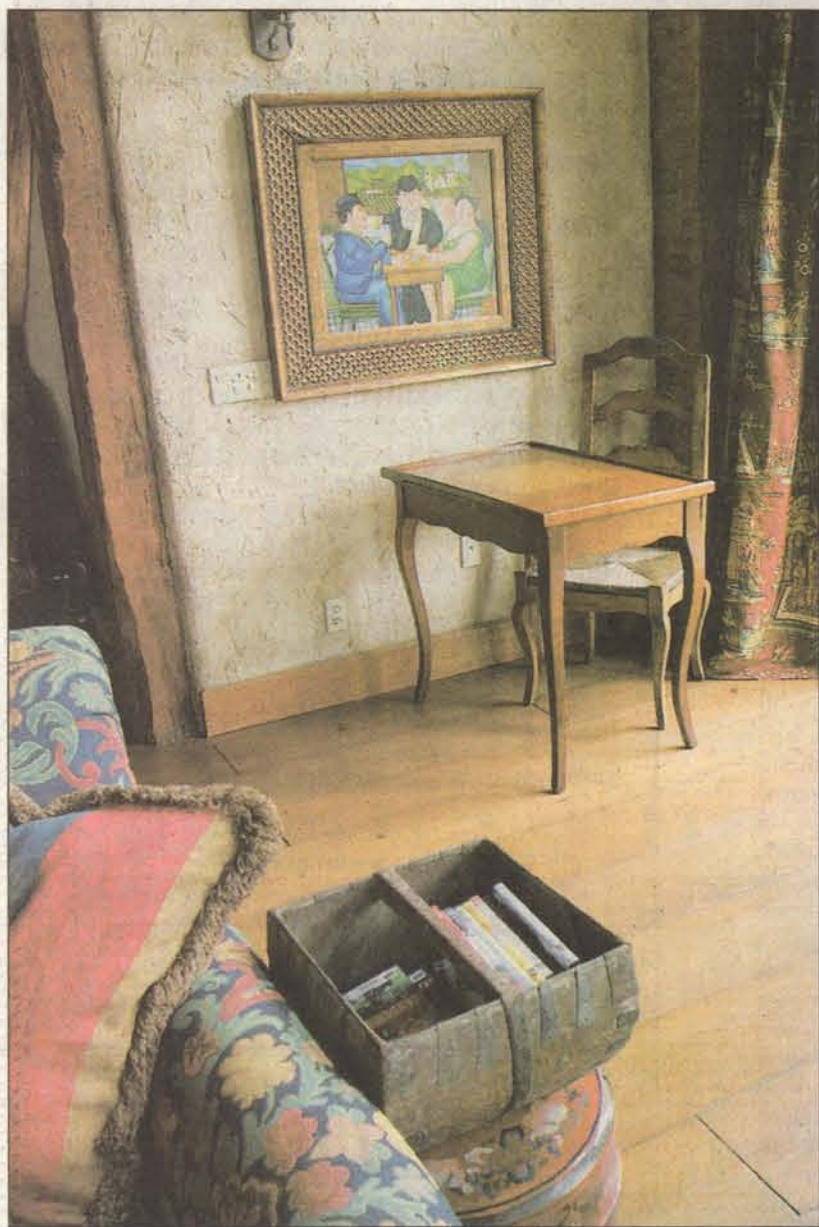
MY FAVORITE SPOT

My Favorite Spot will ask well-known Valley residents to show off their favorite places in their homes and share some of their decorating secrets. Whose house would you like to peek inside? Let At Home reporter Amanda Myers know by e-mailing amyers@aztrib.com or by calling (480) 898-6531.



JUST KIDDIN' AROUND: "Good Morning Arizona" host Tara Hitchcock starts a pillow fight with her two stepsons, Dane and Dylan Francis.

PHOTOS BY SARAH REGNIER, FOR THE TRIBUNE



ANTIQUE TOUCHES: An antique-looking desk and chair are a simple accent in the corner of Hitchcock's family room. A piece of Russian artwork accentuates the textured walls. Weathered wooden floors help complete the Old World look.

Tara Hitchcock's home sweet home

Family room is place to play

By AMANDA MYERS • TRIBUNE

It takes only moments in the blended Hitchcock-Francis household to realize that Tara Hitchcock, the perky host of KTVK-TV's "Good Morning Arizona," doesn't fake her 6 a.m. energy. This is an around-the-clock personality trait. Even at our 4 p.m. interview, she swings open the front door with gusto and a smile — no doubt her signature greeting for TV and home guests alike.

"Hi! I'm Tara!" That, of course, is obvious — if by nothing more than her booming, talk-show-host voice that mirrors her booming disposition. This slim and stylish woman is every bit as put together as her on-air personality, with blond hair and trendy clothes that bring to mind thoughts of a less neurotic Kathie Lee Gifford or a hyper Katie Couric.

A 1993 graduate of Boston College

and — just a semester later — a master's graduate of Northwestern's Medill School of Journalism, this Texas native started her broadcasting career at an ABC affiliate station in Beaumont, Texas, before moving to Phoenix in 1996. In June, she'll have been the recognizable face of the Valley's morning news on Channel 3 for 10 years.

Her drive is apparent, whether on or off camera. With a radiance most people take 10 cups of coffee to achieve, this newlywed (and new stepmom to two teens and a 10-year-old) doesn't seem to slow down for anything.

She sits. "My husband has a flat!" She's up, grabs the phone to call and check on him. Sits again. "Want some water?" Up. "Oh! Don't touch the dog! She's the stinkiest dog ever!"

I haven't said a word yet, but it's OK. With more than a decade of interviewing under her belt, this TV veteran isn't used to being on the other side of the interview.

LARGE HOME

The reason for today's visit is to get a glimpse into the place Hitchcock retreats to when she's not in front of the camera.

"This home is larger than anything I ever thought I'd live in," she says. Before moving into husband Kenn Francis' central Scottsdale house after their 2004 marriage, she lived in a modest Ahwatukee Foothills townhouse that, she coos, "I loooved," despite its lack of furnishings.

"Everything I owned, furniture-wise, I got from my grandma or friends," she says. "I just couldn't justify buying furniture until I had a house."

The self-proclaimed garage sale fan says she never wanted a "pretentious" home. So moving into this two-story house — built a decade ago by an Arizona State University professor to model a French chalet he saw on one of his travels abroad — took some getting used to.

Dropping her voice, Hitchcock seems almost ashamed to confess her first thoughts upon seeing the sprawling home filled with antique furniture and non-kid-proof fabrics.

"It felt like a museum," she says. With three rambunctious stepchildren under her wing, Hitchcock says she was surprised by how much the home didn't seem to fit the family's personalities. Prone to spontaneous wrestling matches and post-dinner pillow fights after she moved in, Hitchcock had the idea to add on a room devoted to just that.

"The kids would play in the basement all day, and I'd tell Kenn that we didn't even know they were here. I

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Tara Hitchcock's home sweet home

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like to see them and hear them.”
So, taking what was once a shallow arboretum off the back of the house, Hitchcock and Francis, with the help of Phoenix interior designer Martin Kuban, created a spacious and sunny family room with 10-foot-high vaulted ceilings and furniture, says Hitchcock, that you feel comfortable eating and drinking around.

Though she was born in Pennsylvania, Hitchcock spent the majority of her life in Texas, moving there with her family at age 10. So it's no surprise that though this down-home girl likes things casual, she also likes them big.

“We call them the Yao Ming couches,” says Hitchcock of the two enormous custom-made sofas facing each other in the center of the room. Seventeen-year-old stepdaughter Alex estimates, “You can fit, like, 20 people on them, at least.”

“The big couches reflect the family,” says Hitchcock. The family likes to gather on them at night to watch “24” and “My Name Is Earl.”

In the middle of the room, an antique door was transformed into an ornate and sprawling coffee table.

“It's at least several hundred years old,” says Francis.

“Doesn't this have a story behind it, too?” asks Hitchcock, holding up a

large box next to the couch.

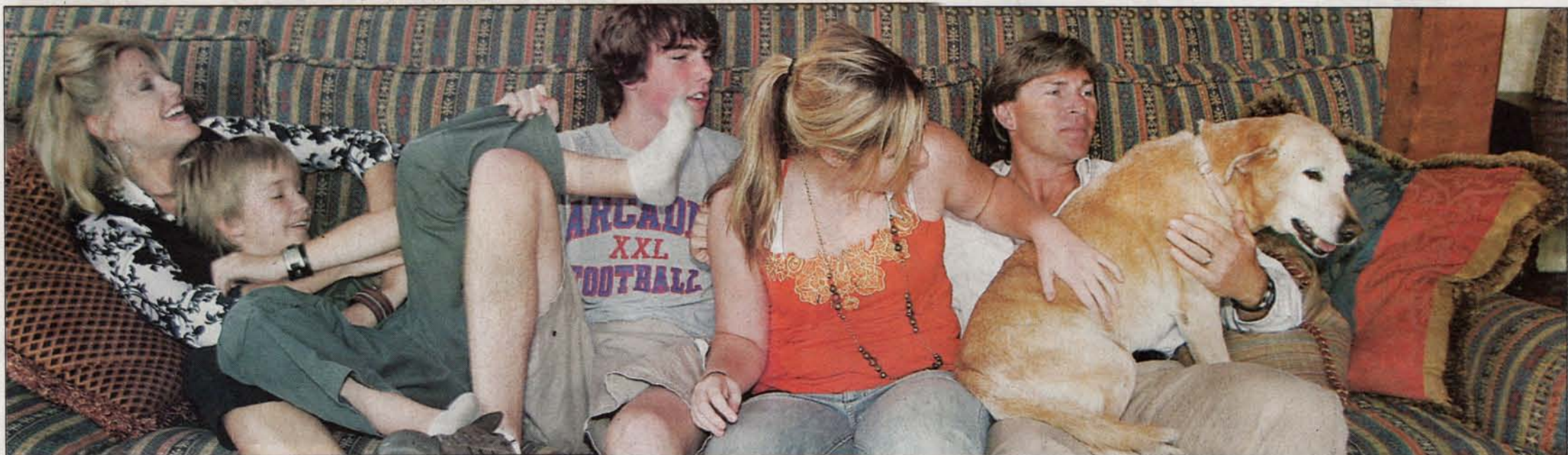
“Yes, it was used as an old Asian altar of some sort,” flubs her husband before breaking into a smile. “I don't know,” he admits with a laugh.

At that moment, a wrestling match breaks out on the couches between Hitchcock and the boys, resulting in pillows to the head and one child upside down with the aforementioned “stinky dog” licking his feet.

The photographer snaps away.

“This is going to be on the front page of the paper for sure,” says Hitchcock, laughing.

CONTACT WRITER: (480) 898-6531 or amyers@aztrib.com



PHOTOS BY SARAH REGNIER, FOR THE TRIBUNE

ONE CRAZY FAMILY: Everyone piles on the huge, custom-made couches in the family room of their central Scottsdale home. Activities of choice in this room include watching “24” and having pillow fights. From left are Tara; Dylan, 10; Dane, 15; Alex, 17; Kenn; and family dog, Maggie.



TO TOP IT OFF: An ornate ivory chandelier graces the 10-foot-high vaulted ceilings of the family room.

Q&A WITH TARA HITCHCOCK

Q: Describe your decorating style in 10 words or less.

A: I like to call my decorating style “garage sale chic” and “scrapbooking memories,” which is probably why there's maybe one room upstairs dedicated to my design style, and that's the craft room. That's why we went with (husband) Kenn and (interior designer) Martin's design style throughout the rest of the house.

Q: What makes this family room your favorite spot?

A: Because I have been so blessed to

be brought into this situation, with three kids, and they went through this divorce, you know, and it could have been really difficult, and they have just embraced me from day one. We connect so well, so this is the room that represents how perfect the situation is. The family room is really the one chance that everyone gets to hang together, laugh. It's a great visual representation of how much fun we have together.

Q: How does your career influence the look of this room?

A: Well, there's a big TV set in it. We

have many television sets in our home. Let's see... six in total. I'm a news junkie, and my husband watches (Fox News conservative talk-show host) Bill O'Reilly a lot, but honestly he probably watches less TV than any person I know.

Q: Pick one item in the room and briefly share the story behind it.

A: The one that really stands out is the fact that we put the scrapbooks on the table. Every time we go on a big trip I make a scrapbook. The kids fill them out, journal, and I put in photos. So many times people take pictures of

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LOFTY ADDITION: Tara Hitchcock's central Scottsdale home is inspired by the look of a French chalet. The newly added family room at the back of the house is Hitchcock's favorite spot. Distressed wood beams crisscross textured plaster walls, and Russian artwork borders the top half of the room. One antique wooden door decorates the wall while another is used as a coffee table in the center of the room. Custom-made oversized couches are big enough to hold the entire family on TV nights.

trips and they're in albums, but scrapbooks are cool because they're right there, with a picture on the front and people want to thumb through them. And we're reminded of all the goofy stuff that happened.

Q: Is there anything in this room you'd do differently?

A: I'm not a big fan of the art in here. I'd rather have big, huge pictures of our trips. My friend Amy should probably have (the art) in her house. She went on and on about them when she was here, and I'm like, "Take 'em." I'm not the biggest Russian art fan in

the world, even though I took Russian in college and went to Russia. That's probably why (Kenn) put them up so high on the walls.

Q: What's the next home design project you're dying to tackle?

A: In our basement, our dream would be to create this wonderful media/theater room... big plush chairs and a popcorn machine and movie posters on the wall. We don't go to movies a lot, we like to have friends over and watch movies. But we're probably several years away from that.



FAVORITE ACCESSORY: While Hitchcock says the credit for their family room's design goes mainly to husband Kenn Francis and Phoenix interior designer Martin Kuban, she does take credit for the scrapbooks that accent the coffee table.

Design resource

Like Tara Hitchcock's home style? The man behind the magic, Valley interior designer Martin Kuban, will open his own store in the Valley in just a few weeks. Named Kismet, it can be found at 133 W. McDowell Road, Phoenix.

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