

Tucson and Southern Arizona Edition

# Builder/Architect

A photograph of a swimming pool with a stone deck, a small building with a tiled roof, and large trees in the background. The pool is in the foreground, with a stone deck around it. In the background, there is a small building with a tiled roof and two arched windows. There are also three blue lounge chairs on a patio area. The background is filled with large, mature trees under a clear blue sky.

**Copeland Construction**

Kelly Copeland: Homegrown and Down-to-Earth

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## Kelly Copeland: Homegrown and Down-to-Earth

By Sheila A. Consaul

### JACK OF ALL TRADES

Like millions of other American teenagers in high school, Kelly Copeland wasn't really sure what he wanted to do "when he grew up." He was active in the Distributive Education Clubs of America (DECA), an organization dedicated to "...enhance the co-curricular education of students with interests in marketing, management and entrepreneurship."<sup>1</sup> Kelly is a native Tucsonan and planned to stay at home in the desert. His father had worked for Sears Roebuck & Co. for 42 years (*Where the customer is always right!*) and his uncle, Andrew Arena, was a successful custom home builder. So when Kelly started at the University of Arizona, he had several paths in mind.

While in college, Kelly studied finance and real estate and was

awarded a B.S. in both areas. To help pay expenses, he worked every summer for his uncle's construction company. Each summer he spent toiling in different trades. One summer it was as a landscaper. Another summer he learned the framing trade. But those jobs were physically demanding, especially working outside in the scorching Arizona heat, so Kelly didn't warm to the idea of making any of the trades a full-time career.

During college, Kelly worked for Broadway department stores and considered pursuing a management career there. But somehow working in management for a department store just didn't excite him. Upon leaving Broadway, he moved into real estate sales, which better complemented his college studies in finance and real estate, and which he found much more stimulating.

**All indirect and natural light accent custom cabinetry and natural maple wood floors reminiscent of Old World charm.**



Symmetry is key in this front entrance/foyer in creating not only a welcoming feeling for guests, but also complementing the artwork displayed on cylinder platforms, visible interiorly and exteriorly through eight-foot glass walls.



Tucson's unique environment has been transported indoors through this seamless 20 x 11-foot glass wall.





Characteristic of Frank Lloyd Wright's architectural style, this fireplace was created and built for enthusiasts of Mr. Wright in Canyon Ranch.

## ALL IN THE FAMILY

Selling homes only whetted Kelly's appetite for the real estate business. His experience working in the trades during his summers in college gave him an appreciation for the detail and craftsmanship necessary to create unique homes from original designs.

In 1982, while at his uncle's company, Kelly became involved in a significant new development called Canyon Ranch.

Completed in 1979, Canyon Ranch is one of "the foremost spas in the States for personalized wellness regimes. During the 1970s, while the owner of a successful Arizona construction business, Canyon Ranch founder Mel Zuckerman struggled with excess weight, asthma and high blood pressure. After a month-long spa stay in California convinced him to commit to a healthy lifestyle, Zuckerman and his wife, Enid, bought a working cattle ranch outside Tucson and turned it into Canyon Ranch."<sup>2</sup>

Originally, Canyon Ranch sat alone on what was the Double U Ranch. Kelly credits Mel Zuckerman for being ahead of his time in creating and developing such an exclusive area dedicated to "find[ing] the best in yourself and experienc[ing] the exhilaration of healthy living."<sup>3</sup> During the early part of the 1980s through the mid-1990s, Kelly and his uncle built many of the casitas and custom homes that were included in the Canyon Ranch development plan. They built custom homes in several subdivisions during that time, including Sabino Vista

Hills, Canyon Ranch Hills Estates, Ridge Estates, Hacienda del Joven and Mountain Cove Estates.

## HOMES ON THE RANCH

For Kelly Copeland and Andrew S. Arena Inc., building homes at Canyon Ranch opened up a whole new world. The exclusivity and beauty of the area draws residents from far and wide. Many international clients have built homes in Canyon Ranch, and their demanding and creative "world-class" architects would specify new and unusual materials. As a result, Kelly significantly expanded his repertoire of custom-built home types and features to meet the needs of these sophisticated clients.

In the early days of building homes in Canyon Ranch, Kelly and his uncle worked on what he calls an "inner circle" of 35 custom-built homes. These expensive homes created a demand for superior building products and the use of materials not ordinarily used — let alone available — in Tucson. The first time they were asked to use fossil stone, they had never seen it before. Kelly likes to say that they were the first builder in Tucson who used Pella brand windows and installed granite for countertops, because that's what their clients wanted. Ironically, both these products are now considered somewhat "standard" in custom-built homes. This work with his uncle provided Kelly an important foundation in custom home building.



Arched courtyard gate, custom-built carriage-style garage doors and low accent walls add to the ambience of this Santa Fe-style custom home built in Tucson Country Club Estates.



Santa Fe-style architecture and masonry construction, as shown on this Tucson Country Club home, are signature features of Copeland Construction.



The combination of a client from New York and an architect from Vermont inspired this rustic Spanish contemporary-style home. Stainless steel and glass cabinetry along with contemporary lighting update the more casual elegance of Saltillo tile and wood beams.

Even during the roller-coaster economy of the late 1980s, when interest rates for home mortgages climbed to 14, 15, 16 percent or higher, Kelly and his uncle were able to weather the storm due to the economies of scale they had already established. During that period, many of their clients were professionals — doctors, lawyers or corporate executives from nearby IBM and Hughes/Raytheon facilities. Their niche among these professionals allowed them to financially “ride the burst of the bubble.”

### TIME TO MOVE ON

By 2001, Andrew Arena was interested in slowing down and scaling back his business. His development company had played a major role in creating the face of Tucson and further defining Canyon Ranch as not only a premier spa/resort/wellness center, but also as a highly desirable and comfortable residential community. Coincidentally, Kelly just happened to be ready to go out on his own, so in 2001 Copeland Construction and Development, Inc. was founded.

Because Kelly is so committed to each and every one of his projects, he routinely buys his own piece of land, builds a home on it and lives there. This gives him the advantage of being able to understand his customers’ frustrations and points of view. By living in one of his own homes, Kelly can truly understand what his clients will experience. Despite having to move fairly often — and with six children at home,

that’s no easy task — Kelly feels being close to his clients and their homes only enhances his ability to please them.

In addition to continuing to build custom homes in Canyon Ranch, Copeland Construction also does remodeling. Over the past three years, Kelly has built seven homes and completed five remodeling projects. In 2005, he plans to build six new homes and tackle three remodels. His current staff on payroll consists of a supervisor, a head carpenter, a carpenter’s helper, a customer service representative and two laborers. He also runs what he calls “Crew 2,” which includes a supervisor and two laborers. Crew 2 focuses mainly on remodeling projects over \$200,000.

### LOYAL RANCH HANDS

Kelly credits a major part of his success to developing extremely loyal relationships with subcontractors. He treats them as his “team” and refers to them as “craftsmen.” He’s known many of those who do subcontracting work for him now since his early days at Andrew S. Arena, Inc. — nearly 24 years ago. Many are second-generation tradesmen who have joined their parents or have taken over the family business.

Kelly is passionate about using the same subcontractors over and over. Jumping around to find the lowest bidder may save money in the short run, but Kelly strongly believes it compromises quality in the long run. Working as a giant team, these subcontractors “move as one big unit,” Kelly says. They also understand and appreciate Kelly’s

high standards, his focus on quality and his commitment to the client. They also recognize that poor work or cutting corners will only come back to haunt them as they'll likely see each other on Kelly's jobs again and again.

What Kelly enjoys most about his subcontractors is all their "different kinds of personalities." He also knows his cohesive team has enjoyed the "uniqueness of Canyon Ranch" construction. Furthermore, both Kelly and his subcontractors "love new challenges" and are happy to see what's around the next corner together.

## ADVOCATING CONSTRUCTION DISBURSEMENT

One way Kelly differentiates his company from other Tucson-area builders is his support and promotion of "construction disbursement." In an effort to improve the reputation of the construction industry and avoid "kickbacks" or other questionable practices between a contractor and subcontractors, Kelly advocates the establishment of a construction disbursement account. This account is usually held by a title company or similar agency. Money is deposited into an account and accessed during the construction process provided certain thresholds are met. The Title Security Agency of Arizona states, "Funds are disbursed when and where needed, and help keep your construction

crews on schedule. The funds are disbursed only after the inspector verifies that work and materials are completed and consistent with the construction budget and disbursement schedule."

Kelly firmly believes this system avoids "robbing Peter to pay Paul" and stems the temptation of commingling funds from different projects. "Every job pays for itself," he says, and these accounts generate confidence that "people will be paid." Kelly says that construction disbursement is law in the nearby states of California, Nevada and Colorado, but not as of yet in Arizona. He hopes the practice will "become an industry standard for builders" nationwide. "So when the subcontractors do the job, they get paid."

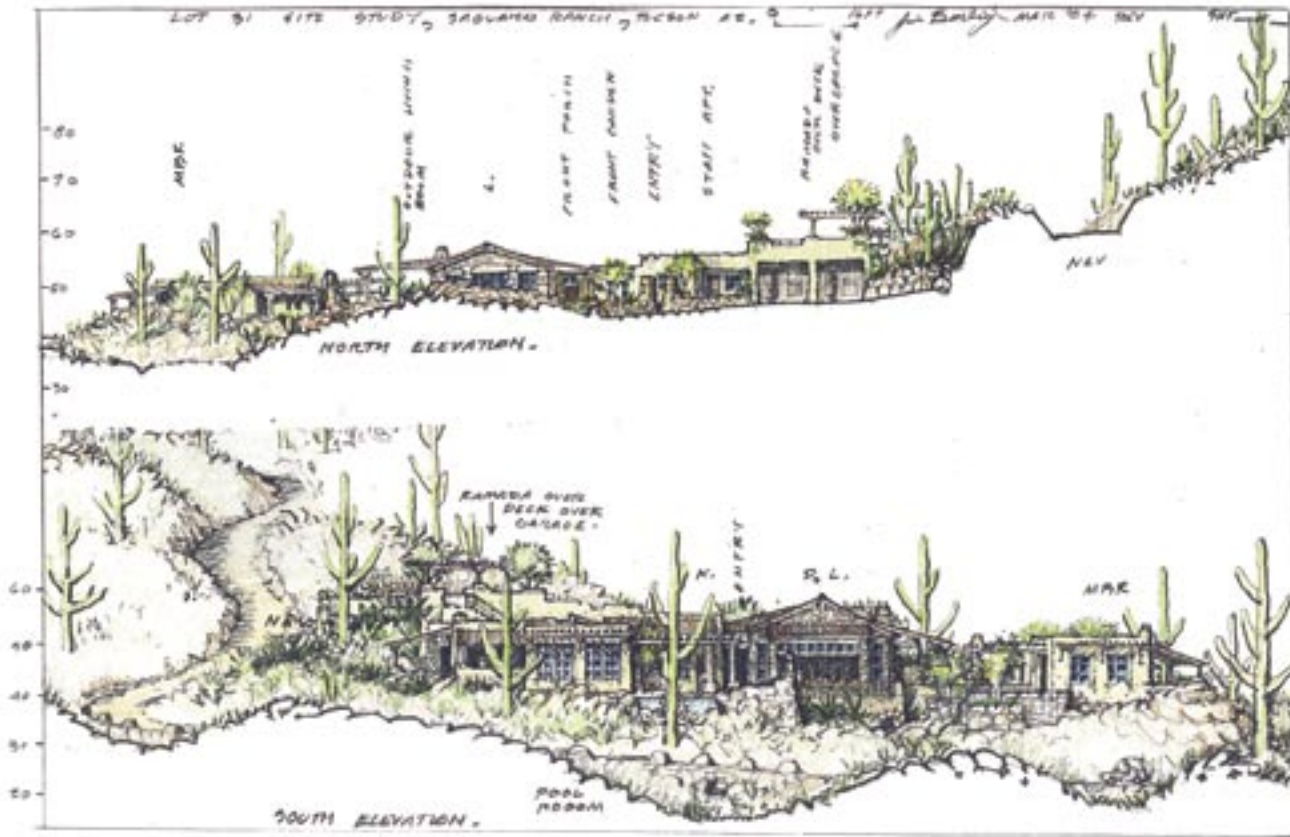
Kelly also feels strongly that clients should perform thorough reference checks prior to engaging a builder. That includes having discussions not only with other customers, but a builder's subcontractors, vendors, suppliers, architects and designers as well.

## WHAT'S NEXT?

After years constructing upscale properties in Canyon Ranch, Kelly is now working on his last home there. But he's hardly waiting for the phone to ring. He's already booked with projects at least for the coming year. Kelly's experience in Canyon Ranch provided him

**Most custom homes today include lush landscaping, specially designed pools, ramadas, guest quarters or studios to create a tranquil setting for relaxation in the outdoors.**





Private home under construction at Saguario Ranch considered by Copeland Construction to be “a great venture. (From the publisher: ...and quite an honor for Kelly.)

the opportunity to deal with a diverse and demanding clientele. His jovial personality, homegrown business style and baby-face good looks meshed well with the challenging environment. He developed a reputation as being easy to work with, honest, knowledgeable, responsive, accessible, conscientious, an effective communicator and adept at problem-solving — that’s in addition to providing a quality product that creates a unique and dramatic residence for its owners. Kelly’s down-to-earth charm and emphasis on customer service appeal to his clients whether they’re building a home for retirement or one to add to their collection of vacation escapes.

With Canyon Ranch nearly behind him, Kelly has begun working on several properties in the exclusive Saguario Ranch (*Builder/Architect* Nov. 2004). Kelly was introduced to the developer of Saguario Ranch, Stephen Phinny, about three years ago. This exciting one-of-a-kind community sits on 1,035 acres, 80 percent of which will remain undeveloped. The homes will be luxurious and supported by innumerable amenities. Kelly already has three projects on the drawing board there including a significant remodel of a building that will become the sales office, and Stephen Phinny’s own home. Despite missing the work at Canyon Ranch, Kelly looks forward to seeing Saguario Ranch grow and develop. The modern technology being included there, such as fiber optic cable, intrigues him as does the rugged terrain and Stephen Phinny’s incredible vision. But best of all, working at Saguario Ranch keeps Kelly right at home. ■

<sup>1</sup> From DECA.org web site

<sup>2</sup> The Bliss Report, *Departures* magazine

<sup>3</sup> Canyon Ranch web site

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### Background information:

- Native Tucsonan
- Bachelor of Science in Finance and Real Estate, University of Arizona, 1982
- Married, six children, one Golden Retriever

### Past experiences:

- 24 years with Andrew S. Arena Inc.
- Over 30 years in the Tucson home building industry

### Advocates:

- Construction Disbursement Accounts
- Thorough Reference Checking

### Local projects at:

- Canyon Ranch
- Saguario Ranch
- Stone Canyon
- Dove Mountain
- The Gallery
- Honey Bee Ridge

For more information on construction disbursement accounts and services in Arizona, contact:  
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