

# PHOENIX HOME & GARDEN

*The Magazine of Southwest Living*

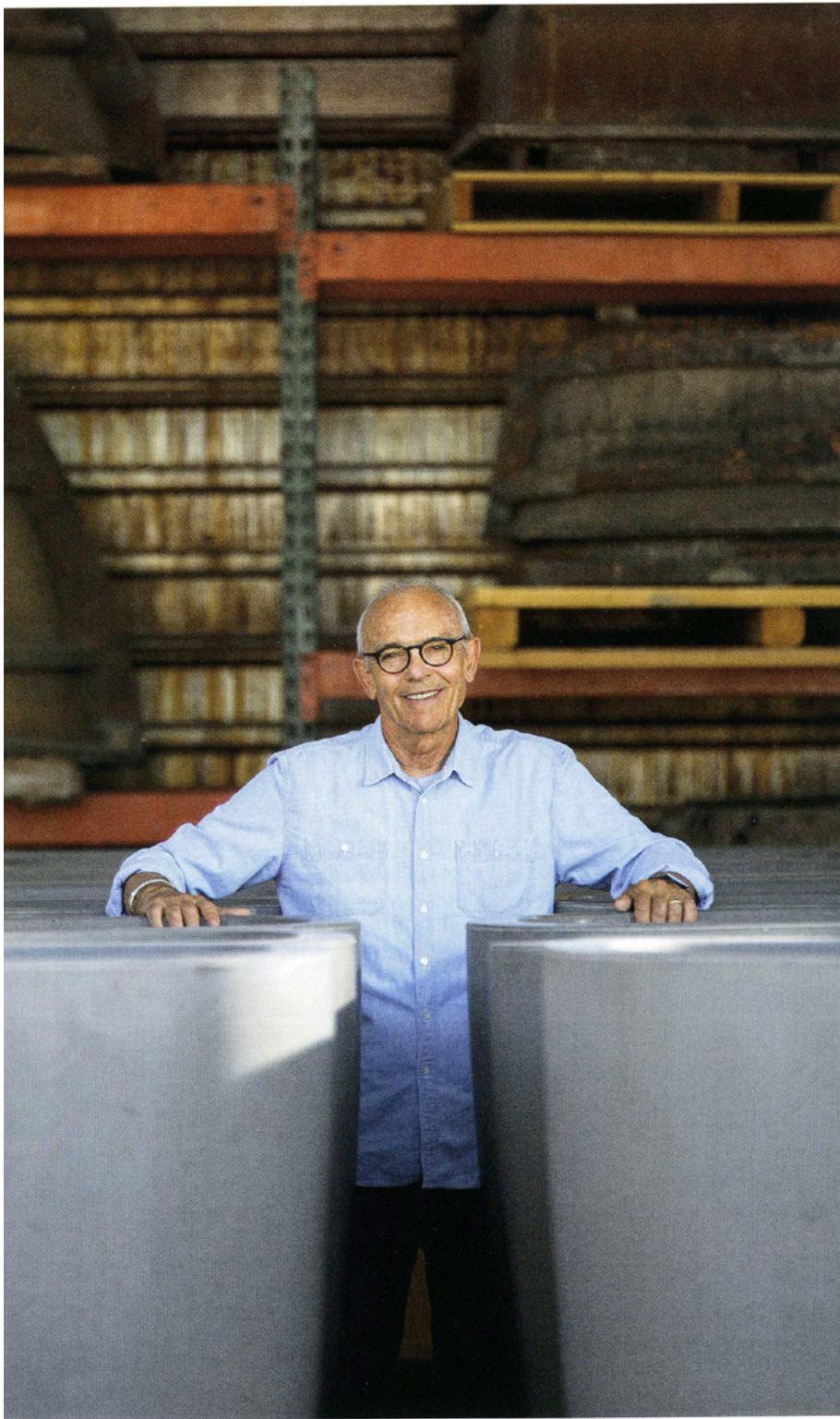
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# MASTERS OF THE SOUTHWEST



Larry Kornegay's primary inspiration for his work is the desert. "It's so much a part of me, it comes through everything I do," says the Arizona native.

## Casting a Spell

*This new series on revisiting past winners of our Masters of the Southwest award begins with concrete artisan Larry Kornegay*

BY LORI K. BAKER  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CHRIS LOOMIS

**L**ARRY KORNEGAY'S STUDIO provides a rare glimpse into the non-stop creative mind of a sculptor and designer who has elevated the humble concrete planter to an objet d'art. Inside Kornegay Design, tucked away in the industrial district just south of downtown Phoenix, a cadre of artisans mix a proprietary formula of concrete, pour it into fiberglass molds and open the molds once the concrete sets to reveal sensuous, sculptural forms. In his office, Kornegay sketches out details for his latest series of handcrafted cast concrete planters—gracefully tall, narrow and 24-sided—that he'll unveil at the American Society of Landscape Architects expo in Chicago in November. "There's something about the style of this series that reminds me of



## MASTERS OF THE SOUTHWEST

Intrigued by cacti, Kornegay gave a traditional agave design an Art Deco makeover for his Agave series of landscape containers, which he describes as mechanistically organic.

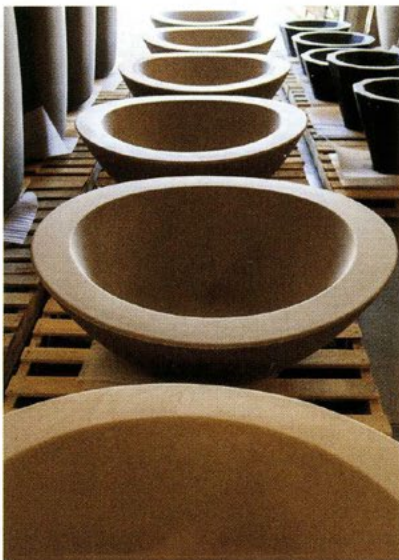




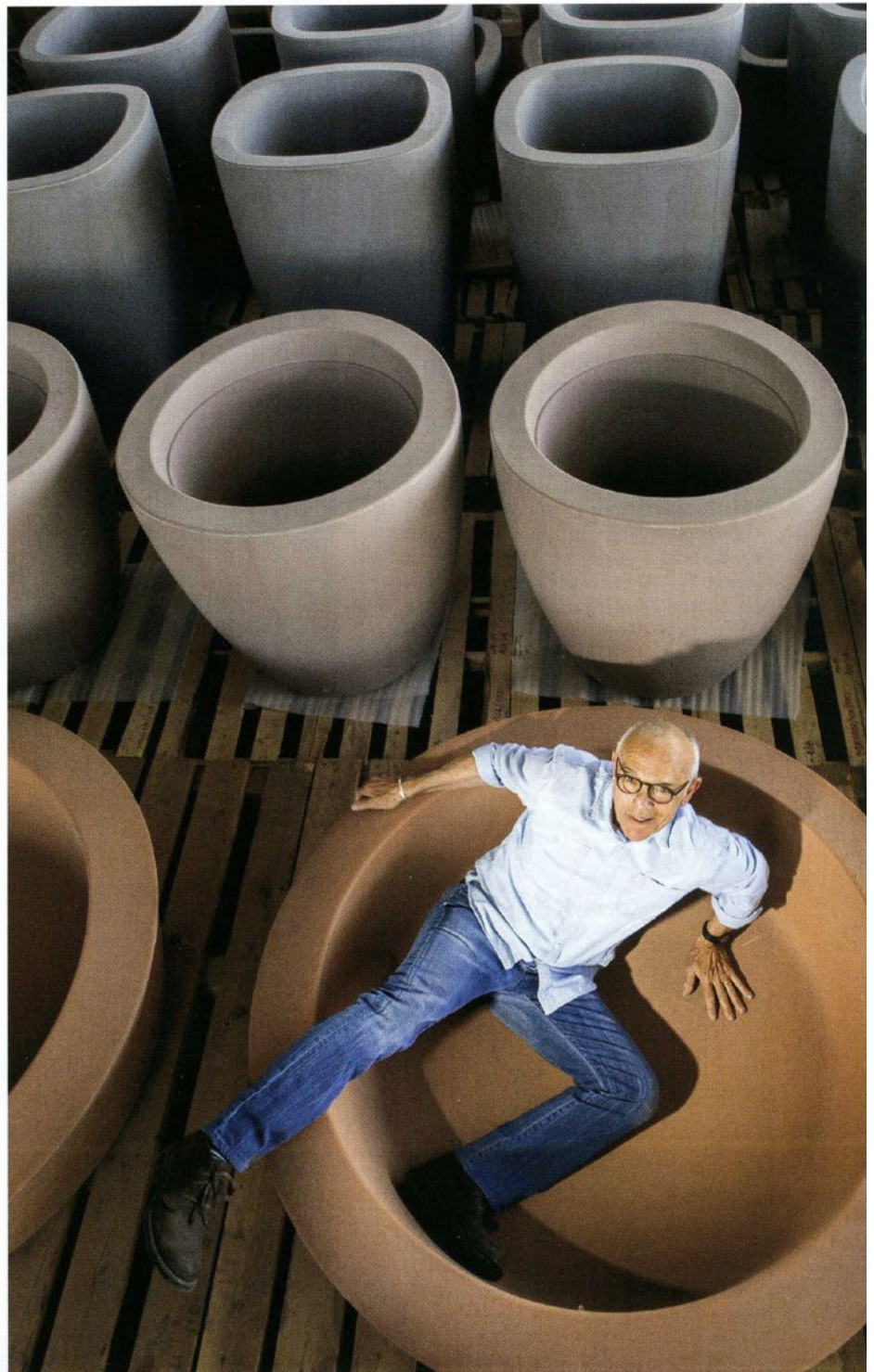
## MASTERS OF THE SOUTHWEST

Las Vegas in the 1950s or '60s," he says. "It's very different from anything else that's out there. It's exciting to create something new."

Since receiving an iconic *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award in 2012, his career has catapulted to new heights, including winning a prestigious Good Design award by The European Centre for Architecture Art Design and Urban Studies and The Chicago Athenaeum: Museum of Architecture and Design. The Good Design award honors his collection of handcrafted cast concrete planters he calls the Larkspur



Kornegay's most popular collection is the dramatic Dune series. Its graceful form was inspired by the rhythmic undulations of desert sand dunes. The series received recognition as one of *Architectural Record's* Noteworthy Products of the Year. One juror described it as "elegant and different."



Steve Martino, a landscape architect and fellow *Phoenix Home & Garden* Masters of the Southwest award winner who frequently commissions Kornegay's work, describes the designer (above) as a "perfectionist who is dedicated to his craftsmanship, his art and sustainability." He adds, "Nothing leaves his shop that is not perfect."

Kornegay says  
of his four-  
foot-diameter  
planter in the  
Nutshell series:  
People wanted  
something  
bigger, bigger,  
bigger!

series, which artfully combines a square shape with soft, rounded edges.

Today, Kornegay's collection consists of 10 series of planters in varying sizes—some weighing more than a ton—and manufactured in a palette of 40 standard colors, plus custom colors. His work is commissioned by landscape architects and other trade professionals only, and it is shipped locally, nationally and across the globe to faraway places like Dubai and Namibia for residential landscapes, corporate offices, government buildings, airports, resorts, universities and shopping malls. He also creates custom design projects, such as "Tending the Garden," the donor wall at Phoenix's Desert Botanical Garden, and cast-concrete outdoor pieces he calls site furnishings.

"The beauty of concrete is the uniqueness within each piece," he says. "As one of my clients once told me, 'I want scenery in my surface of concrete!'" The "scenery" shows up in a magical way. "Concrete is

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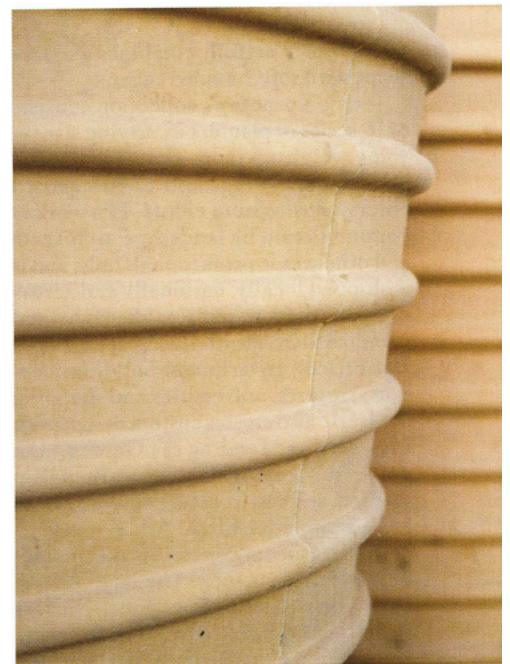
## MASTERS OF THE SOUTHWEST



very organic,” he explains. “Weather change, temperature and how much water you use all affect it.”

While Kornegay’s designs fit neatly into the Modern design movement, concrete planters were actually first introduced in European gardens in the 1930s and remained popular for decades. Yet concrete’s decorative potential was a personal discovery for him, not something he read in history books. He grew up in Globe, an old copper-mining town east of Phoenix, not far from a massive concrete bridge his grandfather helped construct. Throughout his childhood he lived in a concrete-block house his father designed and built, and one of his favorite playthings was a miniature concrete mixer he still keeps on a shelf in his office.

Kornegay’s designs are woven throughout the fabric of metropolitan Phoenix—in Desert Botanical Garden, Biltmore Fashion Park, Scottsdale Quarter, the



**ABOVE AND TOP RIGHT:** In the early years of his business, Kornegay was the sole employee, casting, finishing and delivering each piece himself. Today, a team of artisans carries out his artistic vision throughout the manufacturing process. While each worker follows the same steps, no two planters emerge with identical surfaces. **RIGHT:** Each piece, like these from the Ribbed series, features subtle differences.



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Musical Instrument Museum (MIM) and Arizona State University, to name a few. At last, he's beginning to earn the recognition he so richly deserves. In his studio, he proudly displays his Masters of the Southwest award next to the first trophy

he ever won, in a model car contest at age 12. "It took me 50 years to get my next trophy, but it's a great feeling to be put in the same category as the other Masters of the Southwest award winners—people who are at the top of their game," he says. ■



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MASTERS OF THE  
**PHOENIX**  
HOME & GARDEN



Sitting next to sand-hued Dune planters, charcoal-colored pots from the Faceted series are characterized by a tapered, multi-faceted shape and a natural concrete tone. Trade professionals can select from a wide-spectrum palette of integral pigments or choose custom color mixing to ensure that the containers blend perfectly with their surroundings.

*See Sources.*

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