



Charles Sidi show off a model of a luxury custom home he is building in Scottsdale. When finished, the home will cost \$5 million to \$6 million.

SUZANNE STARR/THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

Brit builder takes shine to Valley

By Christia Gibbons
 THE ARIZONA REPUBLIC

When Charles Sidi looks out his window, it's what he doesn't see that brought him to Arizona.

He doesn't see rain coming. Nor boring insects.

Perhaps strange requirements for a luxury custom home builder, but after making a name for himself in the United Kingdom, Sidi said he decided to bring his goals and ambition to Arizona so his two young sons could play outdoors year-round and see "scorpions, coyotes and mountains."

"The worst bug in England is a little spider," said Sidi, who cherishes the

kinds of sunsets here unknown to those living back in his hometown of Manchester. "The weather factor here is very attractive to us Europeans."

In the United States on what's called an E2 investment visa, Sidi recently purchased Arizona Custom Home Builders. He has changed the name of the 30-year-old company to Scottsdale Arizona Custom Home Builders. This month, he signed a lease for office space at the Citadel on Pima Road in Scottsdale, where he'll move the building company and house his Quinta Property Invest-

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Charles Sidi

■ Age: 38.

■ Started in the construction business in Manchester, England, at age 18, with a loan of 60,000 pounds from his father, David Sidi. Father is a developer of note in the United Kingdom.

■ Refurbished Gawsorth New Hall Barn, originally built in 1706, into four five-bedroom houses in 1996.

■ Is using his own funds to build the spec house in Desert Mountain.

■ Quote: "If you want to do something, American people want you to have a go."

ments LLC.

David Kemmerer, previous owner of the home building company, said he'll stay on board. "For some time now I have been thinking about retiring, but I don't want to close the company. I wanted to continue," he said.

Sidi said he views coming to Arizona, in particular the state of famed architect Frank Lloyd Wright, "brilliant." ("Taliesin blew my mind.")

He has teamed with Lee Hutchison of award-winning Urban Design Associates of Scottsdale, known for its organic design of flow and integration with surroundings, to build a 10,000-square-foot spec home in the \$5 million to \$6 million range in Desert Mountain. And, in a market in which even the sale of custom luxury homes has slowed a bit, Sidi said he doesn't fear the competition.

"I think a lot of them are poorly done," Sidi said. "The quality does not represent the price people are paying."

Hutchison agreed, adding that Sidi understands the mindset of the buyer at this range. "There is competition at the top, and that's where we are," Hutchison said.

Sidi said he strives for the "Oh my God, I want this" reaction to someone stepping into one of his houses, by using the best materials and giving the slightest detail big consideration.

"Every home I build has to be a work of art, not just a box," he said. "I'm thinking about the last important detail that makes a difference. I'm not thinking about how much money I make."

Fellow luxury custom homebuilder Tony Calvis, a principal with Calvis-Wyant out of Scottsdale, said the lifestyle of buyers in this market range hasn't changed much, although they may be more hesitant.

"They're just as able to buy, but probably more thoughtful," he said.

Still, "Especially in Desert Mountain there's always a market for architecturally significant homes," Calvis said.

Karl Tunberg, co-founder and president of Sanctuary Builder, a luxury custom home building company headquartered in Chandler, agreed that where a house is counts most in today's market.

"Location is the driving factor right now," Tunberg said. "Another big fac-

tor is buyers are looking for great custom builders with a solid reputation, a good history in this market and someone that they can have a good relationship with."

He warned that buyers, banks and subcontractors might be skeptical of someone new in the market. "You definitely have to 'earn your keep' in this market to get established."

Sidi may not have the history in the United States, he said, but he, too, believes the relationship between client and developer is crucial. He said he takes minutes of every meeting and phone call with clients so everyone is on the same page throughout the process.

"It's about me caring and investing in someone else, taking their trials and tribulations over," Sidi said. "I like to keep clients informed before they have to ask."

Sidi zeroed in on Arizona after visiting his parents at the Boulders, where they have wintered for more than 10 years.

He and his wife, Sarah, are raising sons Joshua, 7, and Adam, 10.

On May 31, Sidi received the highest award for home building in the United Kingdom during a ceremony before 500 people. The competition was sponsored by the National House Building Council, the Royal Institute of British Architects and the newspaper the *Mail*.

The particular award was for an ultra-modern house of glass, but he has captured accolades for his work in renovating historical British buildings, such as a barn from the 1700s.

His goal here, he said, is "to develop very special single-family homes in very special locations."

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This model of a Charles Sidi luxury custom home takes into account a desert wash, which is shown running under the house.