

Desert compound proves two roofs better than one

—Los Angeles Times, June 19, 2005

Artist Hally Thacher turned two midcentury houses on 10 acres in the high-desert town of Morongo Valley into a home for herself while creating a new model for desert living.

She calls her residence a “house port,” which she defines as “a living experience conceived as not only an inexpensive and functional solution to expanding living space, but also a structural form in which the viewer can interact on the same scale as the mountain landscape.”

Thacher installed an open-sided shed, normally used to keep hay dry, over each house to work like a carport, deflecting sun, rain and heat while expanding her living space in each house by about 1,000 square feet. Steel beams, some as long as 30 feet, support the roof.

Around the perimeter of each port’s roofline, she installed curtains made from white dropcloths that can be drawn around the houses, creating a billowing, sanctuary effect.

To create a seamless transition to the indoors, she painted the interior’s concrete floors the same dark red as her brick terrace.

Inside, angled windows in the living room channel the sunlight. Thacher painted the rooms white and filled them with furniture she designed.

About this house: The project worked so well for Thacher that she is planning to build another house port in the high desert.

It’s a rare home that can be comfortable without air conditioning in the area, where temperatures often soar into the 100s. But such is the case at this property, Thacher said.

Size: The property includes two houses, one used for guests. Each house, built in 1959 and renovated in late 2004, has two bedrooms and two bathrooms in about 2,000 square feet.

Features: Each house has its own koi pond.

Where: Morongo Valley, between Palm Springs and Joshua Tree.