

## The Advent of Santa Fe Style 2

by Kurt Faust

Before Santa Fe was a “style” the local people were building their homes with the materials they had available to them in response to the climate and environment in which they lived. They were building for the lifestyle they were leading, which to a large degree was subsistence and survival. The mud walls, viga ceilings and dirt roofs were unpretentious and in keeping with the technology of the day. It was a lot of work to drag the vigas out of the forest and raise them up onto the adobe walls, therefore the buildings were necessarily small, often one or two rooms to begin with. The low ceilings and very small windows and doors helped to keep the elements at bay and the temperature inside stabilized. These homes were often added on to room-by-room as time went on and new family members were born or children married and began their own families.

As people came along the Santa Fe Trail during the 1800's, the adobe style they encountered was remarkably different than anything they had seen back East. The baked mud bricks and the mud plaster combined with the flat roof is such a simple solution and fits in so well with the landscape it amazed the visitors. The locals noticed how impressed the newcomers seemed to be with the architectural style. The idea of Santa Fe as a “style” slowly began to emerge. However, not everyone was impressed for the better. Some complained about being overwhelmed by living with all the dirt - dirt walls, dirt floors, dirt streets, dirt filtering in from the ceilings.

A major turning point for Santa Fe came when the railroad passed up Santa Fe and headed for Bernalillo instead. This extinguished the Santa Fe Trail as the primary trade route from the East and ended Santa Fe's monopoly as the destination for trade in these parts. Bernalillo had more agricultural products for shipping and Santa Fe was 2,000 feet uphill and out of the way of the railroads' western trajectory. This caused a tremendous economic crisis in Santa Fe and influenced a trend toward preserving the architectural character of Santa Fe as a way to attract visitors. Santa Fe Style began to solidify in people's minds.

There has always been a strong preservation component to Santa Fe Style. In the mid-1800's the philosophy of the Arts and Crafts Movement was gaining acceptance along with its appreciation for the intrinsic value and beauty of the simple lifestyle of indigenous peoples. This was a reaction against the increasing industrialization here and abroad. Concurrently, in the Southwest were those who desired to preserve and collect the artifacts of the Native Americans and the Spanish culture. The Historical Society of New Mexico was formed in 1859 for that very purpose.

With the railroad came more people and more fascination with the anthropological and cultural history of the area. There was growing national support to study the archaeology of America. Adolf Bandelier documented the pueblo ruins in the late 1800's. With support from the Archaeological Institute of America, the School of American Archaeology was established in Santa Fe in the early 1900's. At the same time the State legislature created the Museum of New

Mexico and many artists and writers began to locate here. Santa Fe shifted its focus from being the center of trade to being the cultural center of the region.

The face of Santa Fe visibly changed during the early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, ushering in what might be called the “Golden Age of Santa Fe Style.” The Palace of the Governors was remodeled from an assortment of Territorial and Victorian styles into one of the first prototype “Santa Fe Style” buildings. Also built at the time were several other prototype buildings: the Museum of Fine Arts, La Fonda Hotel, the old Post Office across from the Cathedral, and the Gross Kelly warehouse. These buildings, built in a relatively short time span, dramatically changed Santa Fe’s skyline and anchored the notion of preserving the architectural heritage of Santa Fe. The local artists were largely responsible for the look of the new architecture.

It cannot be overstated how much impact the newly forming artist community had on the look of Santa Fe Style. The decade from 1912 to 1922 saw a major influx of artists living and working in Santa Fe. The first to come were Carlos Vierra, Gerald Cassidy, Sheldoh Parsons, and Warren Rollins. Following them were the well-known artists W.P. Henderson and wife Alice, John Sloan, Randall Davey, and Robert Henri. And finally, Frank Applegate and the Cinco Pintores. The artists were attracted by the brilliant light and the beautiful landscapes of the area. They often used the soft adobe houses and churches as subjects in their paintings.

Most of these artists were enthusiastic and vocal about their love for the local style of architecture. They were proponents for the establishment of an Historic Zone to protect the existing structures and to compel new buildings to conform as well. Many built their own homes in this style. Vierra provided some of the aesthetic influence for the design of the Museum of Fine Arts and was involved in a civic group proposing the new architectural design guidelines. Henderson started his own construction company committed to building Santa Fe Style architecture and furniture. Applegate built a home on Camino del Monte Sol and then sold land to each of the Cinco Pintores and helped them to build their own adobe homes. John Gaw Meem, who is probably the most notable architect, began his practice of architecture in 1924, and called the old buildings a “fundamental form” of America.

It was these, and other artists who took the idioms of the simple structures of the local people and invented Santa Fe Style as we know it today. It is the “artist’s eye” which takes the idioms of today and reinterprets them, thus continuing the evolution of Santa Fe Style. Hopefully, as you tour the homes in our Parade, you will be inspired to use your own “artist’s eye” and the help of the many talented designers and builders to create a Santa Fe Style just right for you.

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