

Santa Fe REAL ESTATE Guide

Artisan/craftsman/**builder**

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What defines 'Santa Fe style'?

by Kurt Faust

Some people just assume that "Santa Fe style" is part of a natural progression of the buildings that were always being built here and that the style gradually became popular. However, it had its beginnings when the railroad bypassed Santa Fe to the south through Lamy. As an effort to encourage tourism, city officials began to promote the idea that Santa Fe was an historically significant destination which included the Santa Fe Trail, an important collection of artifacts from the region and some of the oldest buildings in the land.

Architecturally speaking, Santa Fe Style burst into place between 1915 and 1920 with the construction of the Gross, Kelly & Company Warehouse in the railyard, the Museum of Fine Arts, La Fonda and the U.S. Post Office on Cathedral Place, all designed by Isaac Hamilton Rapp. Also at this time, Jesse Nusbaum removed the Victorian gingerbread from the historic Palace of the Governors, giving the building the look it has today. It was also at this time the city began to enact its first historical style ordinances.

In the early 1900's many artists and writers began to relocate to the area from New York and other places. These artists fell in love with the magical light, the mix of cultures, and the laid-back, creative atmosphere that they found here. Mostly, they had a bon-vivant lifestyle and an orientation to visual aesthetics. They had a philosophical point of view that valued the spiritual and cultural preservation of the indigenous peoples and the artifacts from the past.

The artists found a variety of building styles when they arrived, much of it emulating the high style of the Eastern seaboard, a Territorial hodgepodge and Victorian Americana. These architectural styles were thought to be inferior to the more "authentic" Spanish-Pueblo style and the artists felt an imminent need to preserve some of the local culture that was disappearing. They actively promoted the idea that the "City Different" was a place where lifestyle and beauty were of utmost importance. Many of these artists built their own homes in the Canyon Road and Camino del Monte Sol area.

I moved to Santa Fe in the early eighties. My artist's eye fell upon the light and the land of our high desert and I



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immediately loved the sculptural qualities of the arroyos and pinon spotted hills. I relished in the simplicity of the clear blue sky broken only by a single cloud or a raven soaring by. I too, delighted in the myriad natural materials and textures.

It is this combination of the artist's eye and pure self-expression that is at the heart of what makes Santa Fe Style so compelling. In the creative person's commitment to honoring these qualities and connecting them to authentic self-expression lies the elusive quality that truly makes Santa Fe unique.

These early Santa Feans did a heroic job of creating and protecting the "City Different." We are now coming to a crossroads of what defines Santa Fe Style. It is my opinion that the "artist's eye" is the single most important ingredient of Santa Fe Style. It is time to ask the question of how our legacy of historical ordinances help us and hinder us.

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