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CREATING MAGIC

IN THE SPACE BETWEEN CONTEMPORARY AND HISTORIC

BY ELAYNE LOWE | PHOTOS BY WENDY MCEAHERN

Even ghosts would have rethought making the 130-year-old formerly white and turquoise adobe building on East Palace Avenue their home.

Doors hung ajar. The patch of dirt out front hardly warranted the label of a yard. Drop ceilings made the rooms, which were chopped into separate apartments, a hazard to anyone with claustrophobia.

Where others saw a headache of repairs, remodeling and rewiring, Keith Gorges saw possibility.

“The thing I’m most proud of is having the guts to take on this house,” said Gorges, builder and homeowner of Tierra Concepts’ 2019 winning Remodelers Showcase entry.

Tierra Concepts is a custom home building and design company, which has won the Grand Hacienda Award in the annual Parade of Homes six times. Gorges said having his home win the 2019 award is an honor, but also a testament to perseverance after facing the difficulties of being both the

builder and the client for the year-long renovation.

“It’s the hardest relationship you’ll ever have,” he said with a laugh.

Gorges and his life partner of 18 years, Ricardo Sanchez, wanted a home that reflected both the structure’s historic beauty and their shared passion for contemporary design. Gorges said while the repairs posed unique struggles, he was almost more stressed by finding the balance between old and new styles.

“The most daunting challenge was knowing how far to take it and when to stop,” he said.

The goal was to make the Santa Fe Historic Preservation Division smile while welcoming the house into the 21st century with style. The historic facade was restored to a warm sand color. Landscaping brought new life to the front with local vegetation. Kitchen updates made the space functional. Gorges, alongside Tierra Concepts builders, tore down walls to open the interior spaces, built a master bath suite, and developed outdoor living areas.

The best surprise, Gorges said, was finding the original vigas

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under two drop ceilings. This was also one of the scarier parts of the renovation, because, he said, they had no idea what they would find. All the original vigas, minus one, were in excellent shape, he said, and once the team removed dirt buildup from the roof, the beams snapped back into place.

While challenging, he said, juxtaposing styles ended up enhancing both.

“If you create this tension between the two you create this effect where they both stand out in this special and magical way,” Gorges said.

Saguna Severson, Tierra Concepts marketing director, said this was a challenging job in terms of both design and construction.

“It shows that we have a fantastic team at every level,” she said. “Not many people would have the vision or the talent to take on this dark and cramped home, retain the historic elements, satisfy the [Historic Districts Review Board], and come out with a fabulous family home.”

Gorges advises other homeowners looking to accentuate their historic abode while modernizing it to seek out examples of what they want.

“Find people who’ve done things that resonate with you and pick their brains,” Gorges said. “It’s nice to show people there’s a whole other palette you can do to showcase these older homes.”

