

Santa Fe REAL ESTATE Guide

Artisan/craftsman/**builder**

On the evolution of 'Santa Fe Style'

by Kurt Faust

Even before Santa Fe was a "style" the local people were building "cute little adobe homes" using available materials and in response to the environment. 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. The buildings were necessarily small, often one or two rooms with low ceilings and very small windows and doors. These homes were often added onto, room by room, as time went on.

Santa Fe as a "style" slowly began to emerge during the 1800s. As people came along the Santa Fe Trail, the adobe style they encountered was remarkably different than anything back east. However, not everyone was impressed for the better. Some complained about the dirt: dirt walls, dirt floors, dirt streets, dirt filtering in from the ceilings.

A turning point for Santa Fe came when the railroad passed by the town and headed for Bernalillo, extinguishing the Santa Fe Trail and ending Santa Fe's regional trade monopoly. Bernalillo had more agricultural products for shipping and Santa Fe was 2,000 feet uphill and out of the way of the railroad's western trajectory. This caused tremendous economic pressure and influenced a trend toward preserving the architectural character of Santa Fe.

There has always been a strong preservation component to Santa Fe Style. In the mid-1800s 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. 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. With support from the Archaeological Institute of America the School of American Archaeology was established in Santa Fe. At this same time the State legislature created the Museum of New Mexico. Santa Fe shifted its focus from being the center of trade to being the cultural center of the region.



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The face of Santa Fe visibly changed during this time period 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. The Museum of Fine Arts, the La Fonda hotel, the old Post Office across from St. Francis Cathedral, and the Gross Kelly warehouse changed Santa Fe's skyline and anchored the notion of preserving the architectural heritage of Santa Fe.

The Cinco Pintores and other early artists built their own adobe homes in the Canyon Road area and on Camino del Monte Sol. It was the era of these artists, most notably John Gaw Meem, which transformed the traditional use of the adobe materials into the expression which defines Santa Fe Style today.

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