

COLLECTORS EDITION

COLORADO HOMES[®]

& lifestyles magazine



**A visit
WITH THE
First
Family**

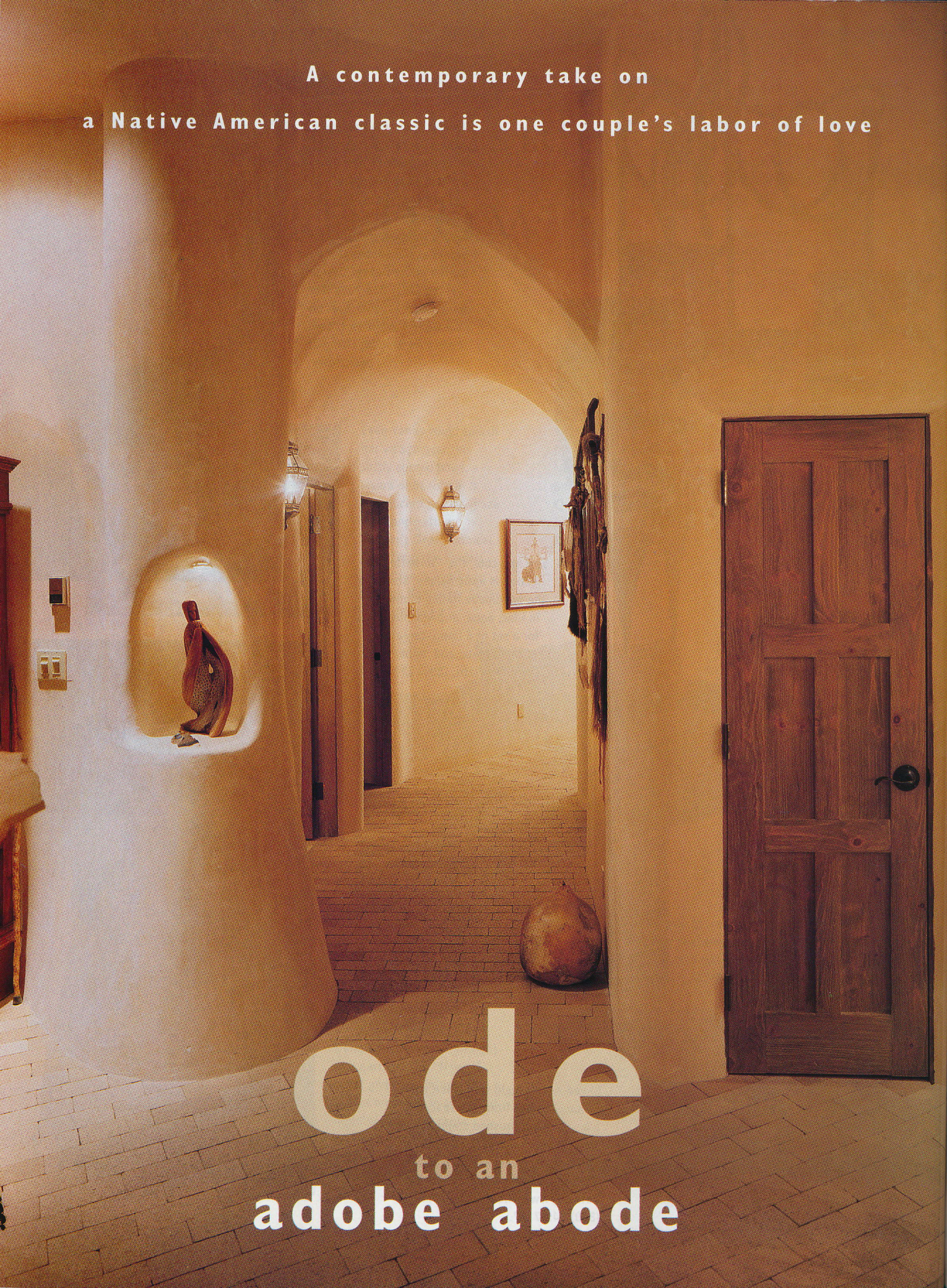
**Colorado styles
past & present**

A Wiesner Publication \$3.95
www.ColoradoHomesMag.com



JANUARY/FEBRUARY 2000

A contemporary take on
a Native American classic is one couple's labor of love



ode
to an
adobe abode

By David Wallace

Photography by Dave Beightol

AS ALL THOSE WITH AN INTEREST IN THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF THE SOUTHWEST KNOW, A KIVA IS USUALLY A ROUND, UNDERGROUND OR PARTLY UNDERGROUND ROOM IN A PUEBLO INDIAN VILLAGE USED BY the men for religious ceremonies or councils. Even if partially above ground, it is windowless and entered by a ladder through a hole in the roof. None is used for living purposes. In the minds of many, the most famous is the often-photographed example at the Taos (NM) Pueblo, which has been inhabited for over a thousand years.

There are, of course, many homes in New Mexico that mimic the kiva, and a number still exist in southern Colorado as well. Although many un-kiva-like aspects apply to Bev and Mark White's house (particularly wings that break up the kiva's trademark rotundity), the result is a clear demonstration of a millennium-old design inspiring a fresh and interesting direction for Colorado architecture.

Certainly, when the Whites built their home in 1996, erecting a house that resembles an Indian kiva amid scores of expensive Tudor-esque and Carmen Miranda Spanish houses perched on the lower slopes of Colorado Springs' Cheyenne Mountain, residents of their Boulders Broadmoor neighborhood were puzzled. A few actually became rather hostile because of what seemed to be an insanely non-traditional way of building a house. "I think some of them thought we were going to line the driveway with old tires and paint them white," laughs Bev, a vivacious interior designer.

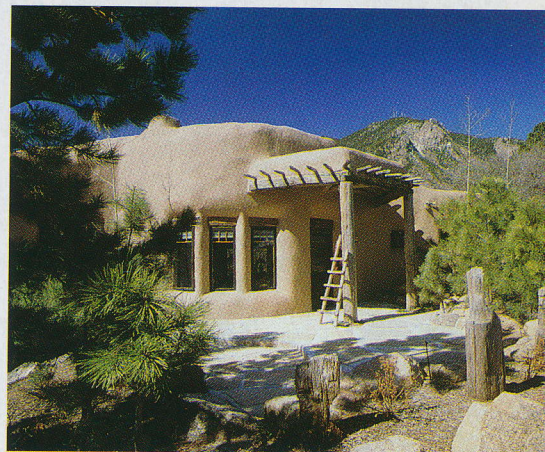
The Whites' house is also an imitation, of course; a simulacrum of a Navajo dwelling that never was. But its spirit is as honest as Indian buffalo jerky, and it's also as tough. "The joke when we were building this was that NORAD (North American Air Defense Command)—headquartered in caves under Cheyenne Mountain—had already reserved our back bedrooms," says Bev, "because, when the direct hit came, they knew our house would survive even if NORAD didn't!"

Constructed with steel studs, tons of rebar linking everything and cascading down inside the two-foot-thick walls, and two layers of shot concrete, all on a bunker-like foundation that consumed 125 cubic yards of concrete, the 3,400-square-foot house could probably survive into the *next* millennium. "There is so much steel, we can't call out of the house with a standard cell phone," says Mark, a retired Arabian horse trainer, breeder, and broker. "I'm not saying the house couldn't slide off the mountain, but it will end up in one piece. It was so overbuilt, the inspector just laughed," he adds. "We had a contracting advisor who believes in overbuilding, so that's the way we did it."

Those neighbors who were concerned about the house's construction process were right; it was unorthodox, at least in this day and age. The Whites designed it themselves, despite having no prior experience (Larry Gilland, a local architect, refined the design and drew the plans), and they contracted all the work themselves as well. Not only did it work, it also brought the couple a new, if unconventional, circle of friends with whom they "worked hand-in-hand" to build their house.

Among what Mark calls his "cornball labor" crew were members of Gold's Gym in Colorado Springs, a convict on a work-release program, and a pair of ex-convicts. "They were ornery as could be, but they were great," Bev recalls. "Ex-boxers; good-bad boys whom we just loved."

Not only love, but trust, was a crucial ingredient to the success of the project. "A lot of wonderful people came into our lives," Bev says. Among them was a world-class woman rock-climber who did much of the lath work. "She could get into any little hole," says Bev. Another was a Santa Fe flea market dealer who, through a string of Byzantine connections, led the Whites to the purchase, sight unseen, of three huge, museum-quality, antique Indonesian doors. The smallest,



COURTESY OF THE COLORADO HISTORICAL SOCIETY

Opposite: A Virgin Mary *santo* grants passage down a glowing Moorish hallway. *This page:* Then and now: The kiva's exterior and interior transcend time by both complementing and contrasting with the natural surroundings. In the '30s, function came first; comfortable furnishings are a contemporary phenomenon. See Resources, p. 172.





Spacious yet intimate, the central gathering room, suffused with light, encircles Bev and Mark's guests with an enticing warmth. Solid curves and natural materials provide a harmonious blending of architecture and furnishings.

measuring a hefty seven by ten feet, now separates the living/dining area of the house from the master suite.

Bev and Mark strained and mixed the adobe for "another character who came into our lives—the woman who hand-built all our adobe fireplaces," Mark notes. "She is also a top-level martial arts champion who studies in Japan," he adds.

And those patrons of Gold's Gym? Among other things, they raised the roof's huge log beams, one of which had lain 35 years submerged in the Great Salt Lake and weighed 2,500 pounds. "We were so stupid, we didn't know you could hire a crane to do this," Bev recalls. "It took all eight of them to get the big one up there." The Whites also demanded that only recycled wood be used in their house. The headers for windows and doors, for example, came from a barn built in the mid-1800s located north of Colorado Springs and reputed to have once been a hideout for the Cole/Younger gang. The *vigas* that frame the ceiling *latillas* in the living room were harvested from wood killed by a fire in Yellowstone Park several years back.

Trust was also an important element in the couple's own relationship during the 13-month building process. "We had the lot which I hated but she loved," Mark says. Recalling their search for land on which they would build their dream house, Bev adds: "We had a big old male Akita (a Japanese hunting dog) named Grizz, who was in the Jeep when we were looking around the neighborhood. When we stopped, he jumped out and ran up to this piece of ground. I followed him, and the minute I saw it, I knew it was the place.

"It had to be scary for Mark," Bev admits. "Everything was wrong with the lot. It was little, only a half-acre; it didn't have the views we wanted, you couldn't see the sunset, and it was closed in with trees instead of offering the space we wanted," she says.



Most visitors today not only also understand, they're stunned by their first experience with the house.

"Mark thought I had totally lost my mind, but he physically worked on the house, and wrote checks every day for over a year. About three weeks before we finished it, he looked around and said 'I really love this.' He finally understood what the house could be."

Most visitors today not only also understand, they're stunned by their first experience with the house. Entering it after passing through the antique mesquite front gate and cozy patio is like walking into a huge, sun-filled drum. Across this embracing space, paved with tan brick and studded here and there with huge boulders found on the lot, sits a long leather sofa in front of large windows open to a breathtaking view of Cheyenne Mountain. Before the sofa, an Indonesian teak bullock cart trimmed in brass serves as a coffee table; chairs, upholstered with an Indian-design fabric, were picked "for comfort," Mark smiles. A large entertainment center is made from old mesquite wood Bev discovered in Hondo, Texas.

In the dining area—still within the embrace of the house's central drum—a huge Mexican tin chandelier hangs above a 19th-century English oak library table and iron and cane chairs which welcome fans of Bev and Mark's trademark dinner of salad and fresh fish cooked on their grill. Opposite and through the Indonesian door is the master suite, it, too, circular, like a smaller kiva. The bed and side tables are built into the floor and far wall embedded with ancient potsherds. Across from the bed, a replica of an Indonesian cabinet holds a collection of Bev's beloved antique Lalique glassware. On a nearby antique Indonesian writer's table is a bronze statue of an Arabian stallion named Lamolin that Mark bought and showed for years; it was commissioned as a birthday present for him by Bev. In a niche outside the bedroom is another bronze, also commissioned as a gift for Mark—a statue of "La Duquesa," a double-national champion Arabian mare he also showed for several years.

The travertine-sheathed master and guest baths share an unusual feature: there are no doors on the showers. "Once you get used to it, you'll never have another shower door," Mark asserts. Outside the bedroom are a pool and waterfall set amid landscaping resembling an alpine meadow.

The guest bedrooms that Bev joked about NORAD renting on the opposite side of the house are down a hallway (also studded with potsherds) where we are led by Asia, the couple's new Akita, who loves chasing the occasional skunks that wander by the house. Everyone's favorite is the smaller room, where the bed and night stands are built into the wall and floor of the sisal-carpeted space, as is a comfortable bench facing a television set placed in a large wall niche.

Because of the Whites' inexperience, construction mistakes may have seemed inevitable; amazingly, there was only one. One end of the travertine counter in the guest bath holds the clue: a handy flagstone ledge. "The counter was cut too short," Mark recalls, "so Bev just stuck some flagstone left over from the patio paving there."

One cannot help wondering if the house is as rewarding to live in as it looks. Bev, of course, loved the house before it *was* a house; she still does. But it took a while for Mark to be convinced. So, how does he feel today after living in a modern kiva for a couple of years?

"Oh boy," he enthuses; "for me, it is enchanting. I love the roundness and the warmth of it; it intoxicates me." ■



Opposite: Hand-made beaded amber lights illuminate the concrete-topped free-form island in the distressed pine-dressed kitchen, juxtaposing an aura of age with thoroughly modern conveniences. *Above:* In a master bedroom perfect for quiet reflection or conversation, comfy overstuffed armchairs invite a pre-bedtime snuggle in front of the hand-built adobe fireplace.