

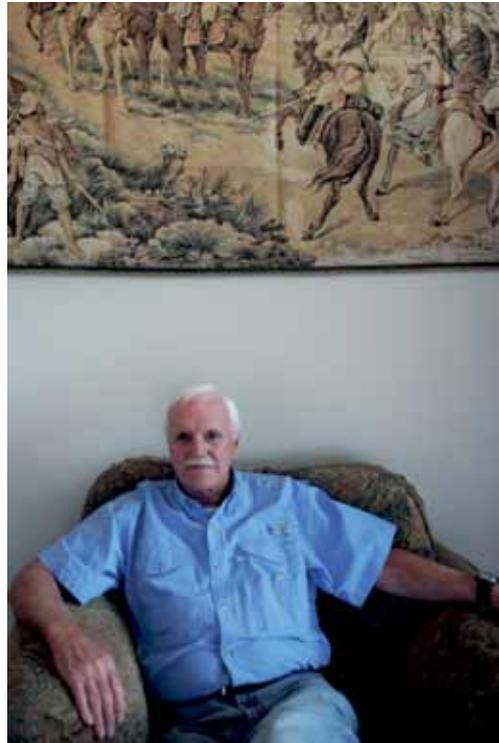


BY TARA SOMERVILLE • PHOTOGRAPHY BY TINA LARKIN

*Des Montes mansion grandeur,
still cozy and warm*



A bank of windows on the back of the house showcase the mountain views.



Owner, Larry Richards relaxes under a tapestry.

Carry a compass and wear comfortable shoes if you visit Larry Richards in Des Montes because this is a house you can get lost in.

The 15,000-square-foot adobe feels like a charming, historical village as much as it does a home with winding halls, surprising nooks and splendid plaza-like rooms. And despite its grandeur, it's still cozy.

"Many times big houses are like mausoleums," says Larry. "But because of the way this house is strung out, guests comment all the time on what a warm feeling it has."

A wooden St. Francis statue, amidst bursting columbines and irises, welcomes you on the path to the front door. After stepping into the foyer, I was in the throes of indecision. Which way to turn? The home has a total of eight bedrooms, nine baths, three kitchens, and several regal living spaces and dining rooms.

"When I have family-type guests, we usually hang out in the pool room. The kids are in the pool (with a basketball net at one end) and hot tub and the adults gravitate to the sitting area," explains Larry. "I'm kind of the breakfast guy so when kids and grandkids come, the grill in the pool-room kitchen is great for French toast and pancakes," he says.

Windowed walls surround the 50-foot-long swimming pool and offer jaw-dropping views of the mountains. Everything looks smaller than usual in the context of this massive room, including the row of gym equipment next to the talavera-tiled 14-person hot tub. Doors lead out to a generous wooden sunbathing deck, where folks also gather as sunlight wanes. "It's funny, we look east instead of west at sunset because of those mountains. On some nights they turn blood red, it's just incredible" says Larry.



Silver chandeliers hanging from the soaring ceiling highlight the massive great room.



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For evening gatherings, the great room is a dynamite setting. Silver chandeliers dangle from an impossibly high ceiling and the bar's dark wood is inlaid with turquoise and mother of pearl. After I took in the views from the floor-to-ceiling windows, I climbed the wooden spiral staircase encased in adobe walls. Larry's grandkids came to mind because this home is surely one of the top-10 places in the world for hide-and-seek.

The loft has two separate rooms. The first is a bedroom with several windows that look into lush Des Montes, and three smaller windows with wooden shutters that open into the peak of the great room. The smaller room is like a balcony offering a wider bird's-eye view of the room, which merits a view from every possible angle.

When Larry purchased the home he decided to decorate it as a hacienda and took a trip to Mexico in pursuit of furnishings. He stumbled upon an auction of the cherished items of a recently deceased Catholic priest, Padre Urzua, (who had not taken a vow of poverty) and was the foremost collector of antiques in Guadalajara.

The hallway leading to the great room features heavy wooden church chairs and a stunning collection of framed fans from Madrid, Paris and Vienna, which Larry acquired at the auction.





The great room features 19th century vestments sewn with gold thread, worn by priests to celebrate Mass. They are draped over chairs beneath a shimmering historical tapestry. The marble table in the room came from an auction at the castle of Chapultepec in Mexico City, which Larry likens to the White House. The French ceramic statues gazing from the nichos each have their own little overhead light.

Thick, dark, stained vigas are one of several features in the home that mirror aspects of the historical St. Francis of Assisi church in Ranchos de Taos. Wolfgang Pogzeba, who owned the home in the 1970's was responsible for these and other significant contributions to the home's magnificence.

Wolfgang, who died in 1983, was an architect with a reverence for tradition, adobe building and the famous Ranchos church, which he wrote a book about called "Ranchos de Taos, San Francisco de Asís Church."

Drawing inspiration from the church, he added large flying buttresses to the home's exterior. They

serve a practical purpose — to support tall adobe walls — and also add a mystical sculptural beauty. In addition, he added thick, wooden, antique Mexican doors to several entrances, including the one from Larry's bedroom to the patio. This door splits in two towards the top, giving a cross-sectional glimpse of the hearty wood. Wolfgang also masterminded the construction that joined two homes into one mansion.

Paul and Jan Johnson purchased the home in the 1980's and undertook three years of renovations on the home's interior, including the addition of the poolroom and refining the great room loft. They had 10,000 square feet of tiles shipped from Barcelona to grace the floors after they added a foot of concrete for insulation. Following renovations, they hosted the Taos Art Auction in the great room. The Johnsons then

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Double french doors look out onto the patio in the pool area.



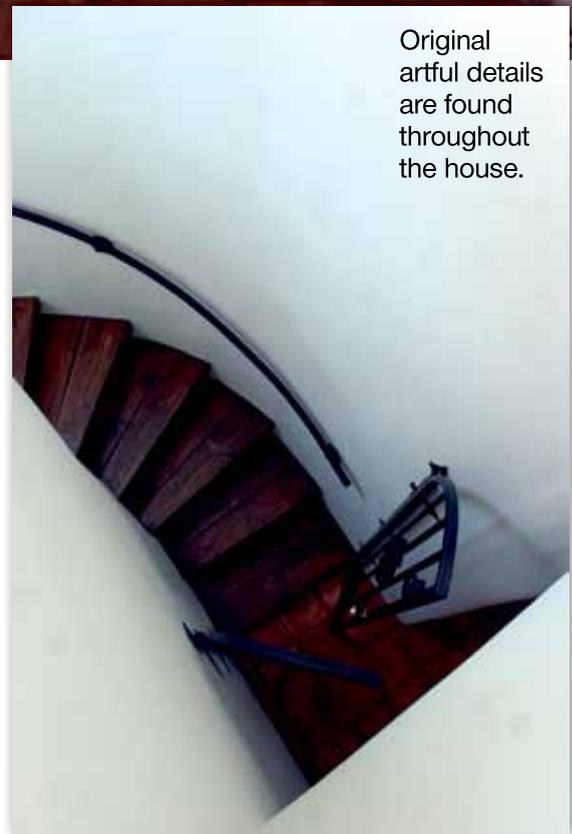
19th century vestments sewn with gold thread, worn by priests to celebrate Mass are draped over chairs beneath a shimmering historical tapestry.

sold the home to a couple that primarily rented it out for weekend wedding parties.

Original, artful details resound throughout the home. Kitchens cabinets are handcrafted and most bathrooms have impeccable details. Carefully sculpted kiva fireplaces are plump and adorned with talavera tiles and locally handcrafted wrought iron gratings. The poolroom bathroom has an extra large double shower of dark blue tiles.

As I was leaving I noticed the bell tower above the carport – a thick rope dangles down. Larry likened it to the church bells in the colonial silver mine cities in Mexico (like San Luis Potosí, Zacatecas etc.) rung each day to call people to morning Mass. “When we have guests here, we announce them with the bell. Then when they leave, we ring it again to say farewell,” says Larry. He pulled the cord and the sacred radiance rang out far beyond the borders of the property. 🏠

This property is represented by Judy Buck of Coldwell Banker Lota Realty.



Original artful details are found throughout the house.