

DESERT CALLING

BY RACHEL AYDT



COURTESY OF KIM HERNANDEZ, THE GALLERY INTERIORS



KELLY GALLAGHER PHOTOGRAPHY

ONE WOMAN'S JOURNEY INTO THE HEART OF THE SOUTHWEST.

What began as a trip with her mother in 1989 ended up changing Lauren Harrison Genovese's life. The destination? Santa Fe, capital city of the "Land of Enchantment," New Mexico.

Perched at an elevation of more than 7,000 feet, Santa Fe is famous for its vast beauty, ever-changing light and vibrant pastiche of art and culture. It is a small city of approximately 70,000 people, surrounded by the Sangre de Cristo (translation: blood of Christ) and Jemez mountain ranges. Those who travel to Santa Fe often never leave its clutches: Photographers and artists flock there for the landscape and light; spiritualists for the like-minded community; foodies for the inspiring cuisine.

"When I first came to Santa Fe, I felt this sense of spirituality," says Genovese, a former businesswoman who now gives her time and treasure to a multitude of organizations (she's vice chair at Miami's Kristi House and board chair at St. Philip's Episcopal School). "I'd grown up on a cattle ranch in Texas and appreciated the big, open skies. I felt right at home." She began traveling with more frequency between her Mizner-inspired home in Coral Gables and Santa Fe, and as time marched on, she and her future husband John, a founding partner of a top South Florida law firm, bought their first Santa Fe home in 2000. Since then, their growing family, which now includes 9-year-old twins Stefan and Alessandra, has been ensconced in a new house.

The Genoveses found their dream Southwest abode nestled in a community of 60 properties developed in the 1980s called Vista Redonda, which is located about 20 minutes north of Santa Fe proper. "We took our time finding the right place," explains Genovese. "What sold us on this house was the 360-degree view."

The house is a 6,000-square-foot Tuscan contemporary with a mandated adobe-style exterior. "So many places we looked at didn't take advantage of the surroundings," says Genovese. "They didn't incorporate the lovely views, amazing sunsets and sweeping vistas. This home was so well built to show the neighboring ski basin, the badlands and even the views of Colorado 200 miles away." Another stunning feature is the 109-foot hallway that is terraced down a hill, which provides views of the mountains and the twinkling lights of Los Alamos.

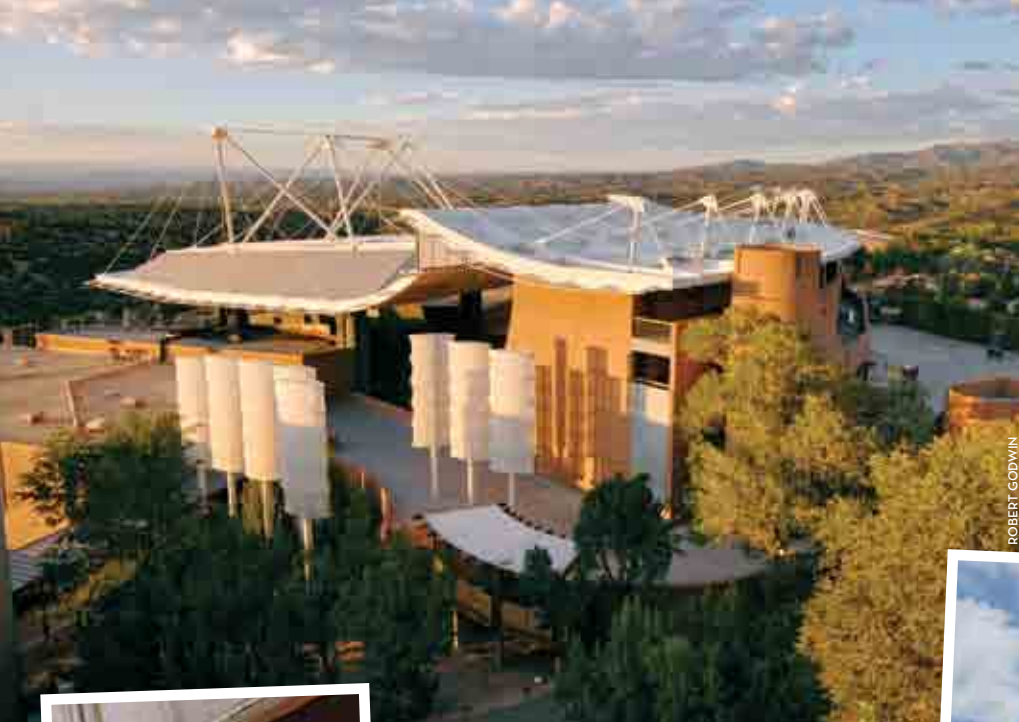
A favorite activity is horseback riding at Bishop's Lodge Ranch Resort & Spa (505.412.4067, bishopsloodge.com), a renowned resort with a rich history that abuts the Santa Fe National Forest at the foot of the Sangre de Cristo mountains. "Wranglers will take us out on trails in the national forest," Genovese explains. "I go as often as I can, because it's a way to experience the solitude and tranquility of nature and to see views that so few are able to see because you can't drive there. It's so amazingly quiet." The wrangler she most likes to ride with is renowned local "horse whisperer" Joaquin Gonzalez. "He's so knowledgeable," she says. "The horses seem to think he's one of them."

After a brisk ride, there is nothing like unwinding at a favorite local haunt. A small bar in the nearby village of Tesuque, the Tesuque Village Market (505.988.8848, tesuquevillagemarket.com), serves great grapefruit margaritas and chicken chorizo enchiladas. "There are creaky oak wood floors," she describes. "It's very rustic and casual."

When it comes to fashion, Santa Fe style is rooted in the dusty landscape and Genovese embraces it with great affection. "When I'm there, I love to wear my cowboy boots and cowboy hats," she says. "I collect Native American jewelry, and my favorite place to shop for it is Ortega's on the Plaza" (505.988.1866, ortegasontheplaza.com). Much of the jewelry is crafted in nearby pueblos, but the shop also features contemporary jewelry artists. "One of my favorite [Native American jewelry] designers is Federico Jimenez," she says. "He creates beautiful, bold statement pieces that are very traditional with a modern flair."

Shopping in Santa Fe is as easy as heading downtown to the central picturesque Plaza, a historic square surrounded on one side by the old Palace of the Governors museum and outdoor market arcade, and by shops and restaurants. It's a great spot for antiques, particularly Santos from all over South and Central America. Santos are sculptures carved from wood that depict various religious figures. Many collectors focus on the antique Santos, but some modern artists in Santa Fe have taken the art to a new level. Original works by popular local artist Juan Sandoval can be found in boutiques around town.

OPPOSITE PAGE: THE GENOVESES' HOME AWAY FROM HOME IN SANTA FE. THIS PAGE: THE GENOVESE FAMILY; INSIDE THEIR SANTA FE HOME; LAUREN ENJOYING ONE OF HER FAVORITE PAST-TIMES, RIDING.



DETOUR: SEDONA

ABOUT 400 MILES TO THE WEST OF SANTA FE LIES ANOTHER EPICENTER OF SOUTHWESTERN BEAUTY AND NATIVE AMERICAN CULTURE: SEDONA, ARIZONA. PERCHED AT AN ALTITUDE OF 4,500 FEET AT THE EDGE OF THE STUNNING 100,000-SQUARE-MILE SONORAN DESERT, SEDONA IS OFTEN REFERRED TO AS "RED ROCK COUNTRY" BECAUSE OF ITS SIGNATURE RED LANDSCAPE AND RED ROCK STATE PARK, WHICH BOASTS 286 STUNNING ACRES OF NATURAL PRESERVE. VISITORS TO THE SMALL CITY OF 10,000 CAN DAYTRIP IN THE YEAR-ROUND TEMPERATE CLIMATE TO TAKE IN THE CINEMATIC ROCK LANDSCAPES SO ASSOCIATED WITH THE AREA, OR PLAY A ROUND OF GOLF AT ONE OF THE HIGHLY RATED COURSES SET AGAINST A LANDSCAPE OF ROCKY OUTCROPS WORTHY OF JOHN WAYNE WESTERNS. AND, IT'S WORTH POINTING OUT: THE GRAND CANYON IS A LESS-THAN-TWO-HOUR DRIVE AWAY. FOR MORE INFORMATION, GO TO VISITSEDONA.COM.



HERBLITZ, GEORGIA O'KEEFFE HOUSE, ABIQUIU, 2007. © GEORGIA O'KEEFFE MUSEUM

The Santa Fe Opera House (505.986.5900, santafeopera.org) puts on its season every year in July and August, and the sweeping open-air theater design offers indelible acoustics and views of starlit skies against the backdrop of world-class music. The Chamber Music Festival (505.982.1890, santafechambermusic.com) runs for six weeks during the summer, with concerts taking place in three charming venues, including the stately old Lensic Performing Arts Center located off the Plaza.

In addition to the performing arts, Santa Fe has long been a hub for artists and writers, dating back to the days when D.H. Lawrence used to pass through town. Georgia O'Keeffe famously lived in the tiny village of Abiquiu, 50 miles north of Santa Fe, and many still make the pilgrimage to tour her Spanish Colonial-era home. It's one of Genovese's most-loved spots in the area. "Tears roll down my cheeks every time I go into her house," she says. "To see the personal space of such a creative visionary, and to see how she got her inspiration from the view of her bedroom window and the pile of river rocks that she arranged on the edge of a banco (bench) in the living room, as well as the skeleton of a coiled rattle snake ready to strike... It's so moving."

If short on time, O'Keeffe's namesake museum (505.946.1000, okeeffemuseum.org), located on Santa Fe's Museum Hill, is a brilliant excursion. Filled with more than 1,000 works by the artist—along with nearly 2,000 by other artists of note—the Georgia O'Keeffe Museum is one of the most popular museums in town. Another way to spend a day: the Museum of Spanish Colonial Art (505.982.2226, spanishcolonialblog.org) houses thousands

of historically significant pieces in a Pueblo Revival-style building designed by renowned architect John Gaw Meem in 1930. It's "a little jewel box of a museum," says Genovese.

Also on Museum Hill, the outstanding Museum of International Folk Art (505.476.1200, internationalfolkart.org) showcases works from more than 100 countries. While downtown near the Plaza—as well as on Canyon Road, about a half mile down the road—scores of art galleries nestle into the narrow streets.

Dinner in Santa Fe is an experience in itself. This is a chili town—and locals here prefer the green Hatch variety, which can be found in some form on just about any regional-style menu in the area. But the cuisine runs the gamut from Mexican to organic to fine dining. (Insider tip: If in a burrito joint, say, "Make mine Christmas" and you'll get a smattering of both red and green chile on top.)

One local eatery Genovese frequents is the Cowgirl Santa Fe (505.982.2565, cowgirlssantafe.com). "I take my friends here for its casual and warm setting," she says. "We'll go for their barbecue or their Frito pie." The restaurant also serves gamey fare—like elk, venison and buffalo burgers—that's harder to find in other parts of the country.

But perhaps the ultimate dining experience is an upscale establishment on Canyon Road called Geronimo Restaurant (505.982.1500, geronimorestaurant.com). "It's the consummate dining experience in Santa Fe," Genovese says. "The global eclectic cuisine is very upscale, and it's housed in what was a home from the 1700s. The structure, with its kiva fireplaces and wooden beams, is breathtaking." ■



PETER VITALE

ABOVE: THE TOWERING FORMATIONS OF CATHEDRAL ROCK IN SEDONA STAND OUT LIKE BEACONS IN RED ROCK STATE PARK. LEFT: THE COZY AMBIANCE AT GERONIMO RESTAURANT. BELOW: GERONIMO'S MARYLAND BLUE CRAB CAKES WITH CAVIAR SAUCE AND BRAISED LEEKS.



PETER VITALE

CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT: THE SANTA FE OPERA HOUSE; THE RAILYARD AT NIGHT; FOLK ART IS A BIG DRAW IN SANTA FE; INSIDE THE O'KEEFFE HOME IN ABIQUIU; SHOPPING FOR ART IN SANTA FE; PALACE OF THE GOVERNORS.

Another popular destination with locals is the Santa Fe Railyard (505.982.3373, railyardsantafe.com), a junction of shops, restaurants and the Saturday Santa Fe Farmers Market (505.983.4098, santafefarmersmarket.com).

Tourists flock to Santa Fe year round, but the area is most crowded during the summer months, when the performing arts come alive. "There's so much going on in the summers here," Genovese says. "There is, of course, the Santa Fe Opera, which we love; the Folk Art Festival; as well as the annual Chamber Music Festival."