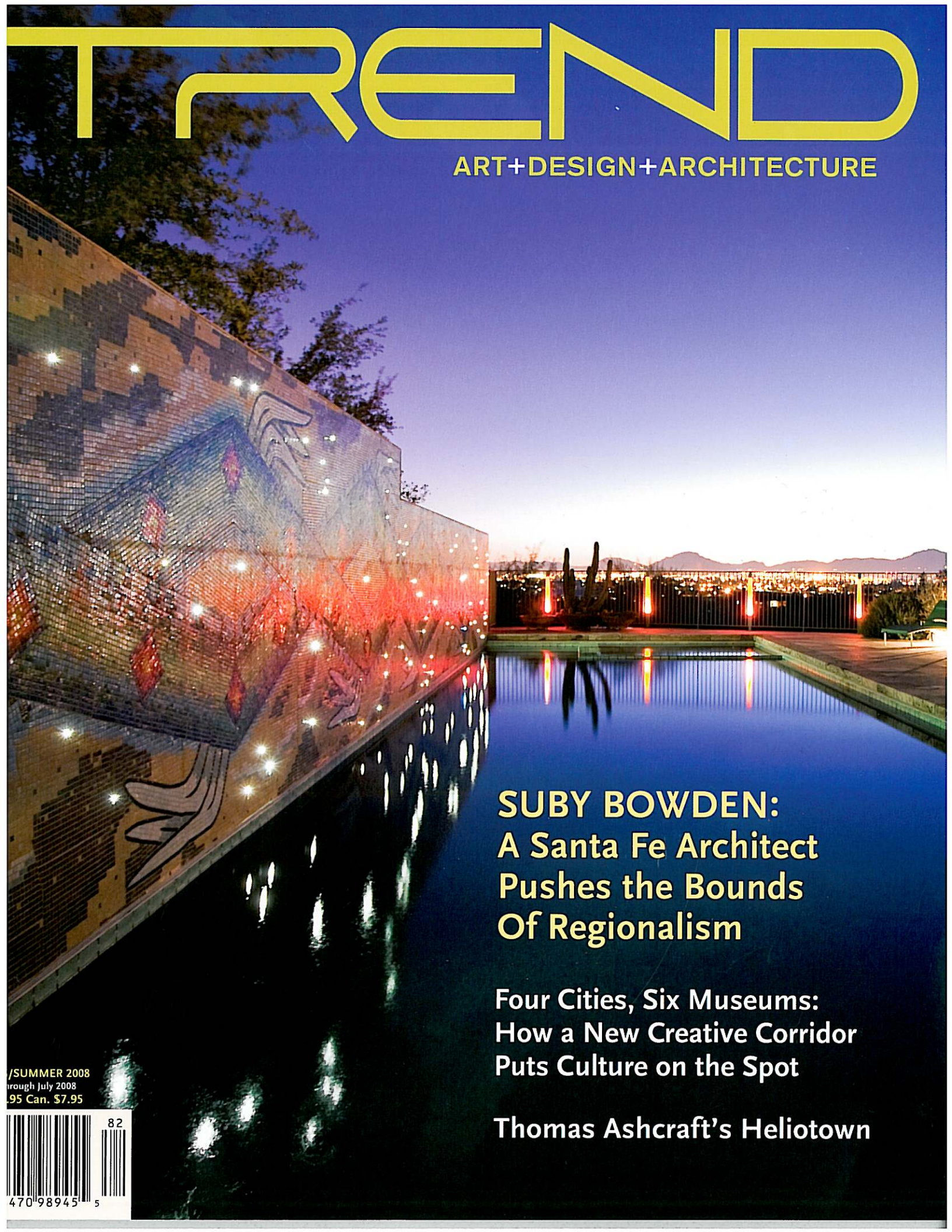


# TREND

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## SUBY BOWDEN: A Santa Fe Architect Pushes the Bounds Of Regionalism

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# The Proud Regionalist

Suby Bowden in context

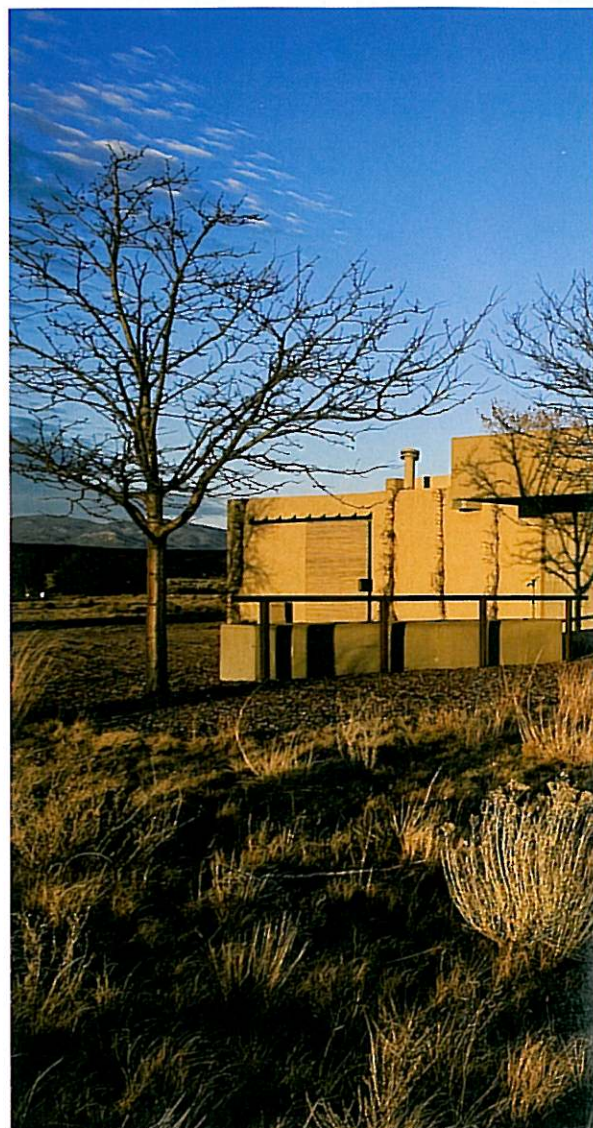
**B**uildings enfold people in places; architect Suby Bowden is avidly interested in all three. From her student days at the University of Texas at Austin, where she got what she calls a “vibrant” and “dynamic” education under five deans in as many years, she experienced that architecture can have a multitude of definitions. Attuned to her current practice, Bowden is clearly at home in situations that invite her to play the astute learner. Bowden’s intellect can shape-shift, from discussing a great book on design solutions to the global calamity (Bruce Mau’s *Massive Change*) to talking about where to thrift-shop in Tucson (Fourth Avenue). She’s rangy in conversation and in her architecture—and attributes the diversity of her projects, to some extent, to being a woman in a still-male-dominated profession. “As a generalization, most men have one style; most women have a multitude of styles,” she observes. “To me, the way projects are designed are based on first analyzing site, then the culture of the community, then the culture of the client. With that prioritization you get a unique solution each time.”

Bowden herself would argue, in this vein, that every site has a

complex identity, and to make architecture material in its location involves engaging that context energetically. That way, the symbols that the building transmits not only relate to their place but relate the players—site, client, community—respectfully to one another.

In three projects that Bowden has completed over the past decade, such sites have included a northern New Mexico river valley; a Tucson, Arizona, subdivision; and the Galisteo plains. The complex social and spiritual cultures at play in all three have resulted in projects that look very different in each.

Bowden in 2007 won the first Jeff Harnar Award for Contemporary Architecture for that Galisteo project, Saddleback Ranch, which she finished designing in 1996 (construction was completed in 1998) with her former architecture partner, J.D. Morrow. Saddleback Ranch—30,000-plus square feet of residence and outdoor spaces with massive, triple-thick adobe walls and poured-concrete perimeter walls—was envisioned as both shelter and sanctuary for an extended family that mainly dwelt in busy cities. Patrons Sheldon and Emily Fisher Landau brought to the project not only an internationally known art collection but also a wish







that their retreat here be just that—a respite from busyness and a place of calm in which to reconnect with family. For Emily, tracing her site in Galisteo to her reverence for the plains architecture of Frank Lloyd Wright resulted in a house whose exterior spans more than double the living space.

Casa Paciencia in Tucson entered Bowden's sights in 1999 and after multiple years for design was completed (including landscaping) in 2007. The client-owners, a Chicago-based venture capitalist and his wife, needed a retreat center where changing groups of medical researchers working on early-diagnosis cancer research—which the businessman funds—could congregate. Like at Saddleback, a dispersed family of the client-owners comes together there. Yet Casa Paciencia also needed to wrangle warm-weather hospitality to galvanize interactions among its unrelated guests. The site, in a subdivision in the Santa Catalina foothills, with the environment of Mexico palpably close (just 35 miles to the south), suggested a solution in vernacular Mexican architecture.

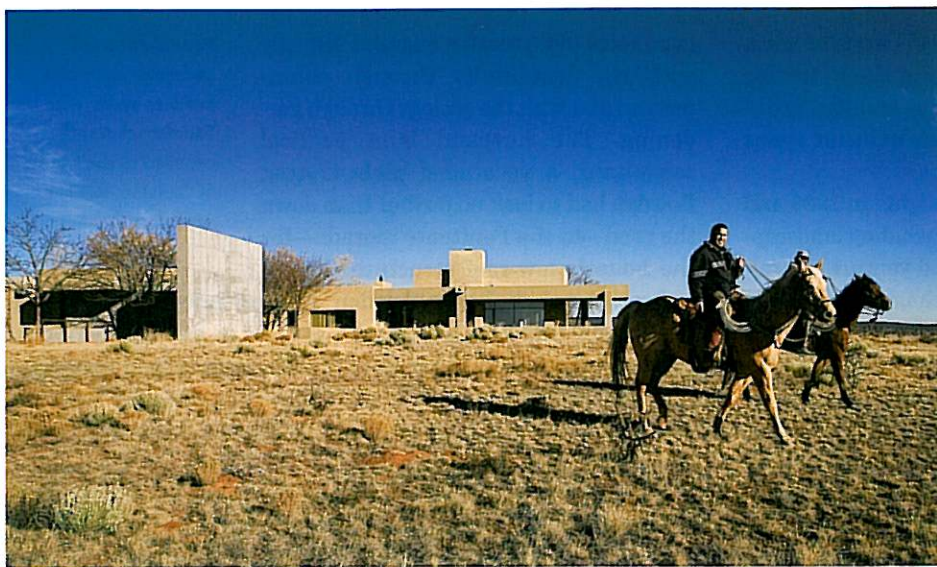
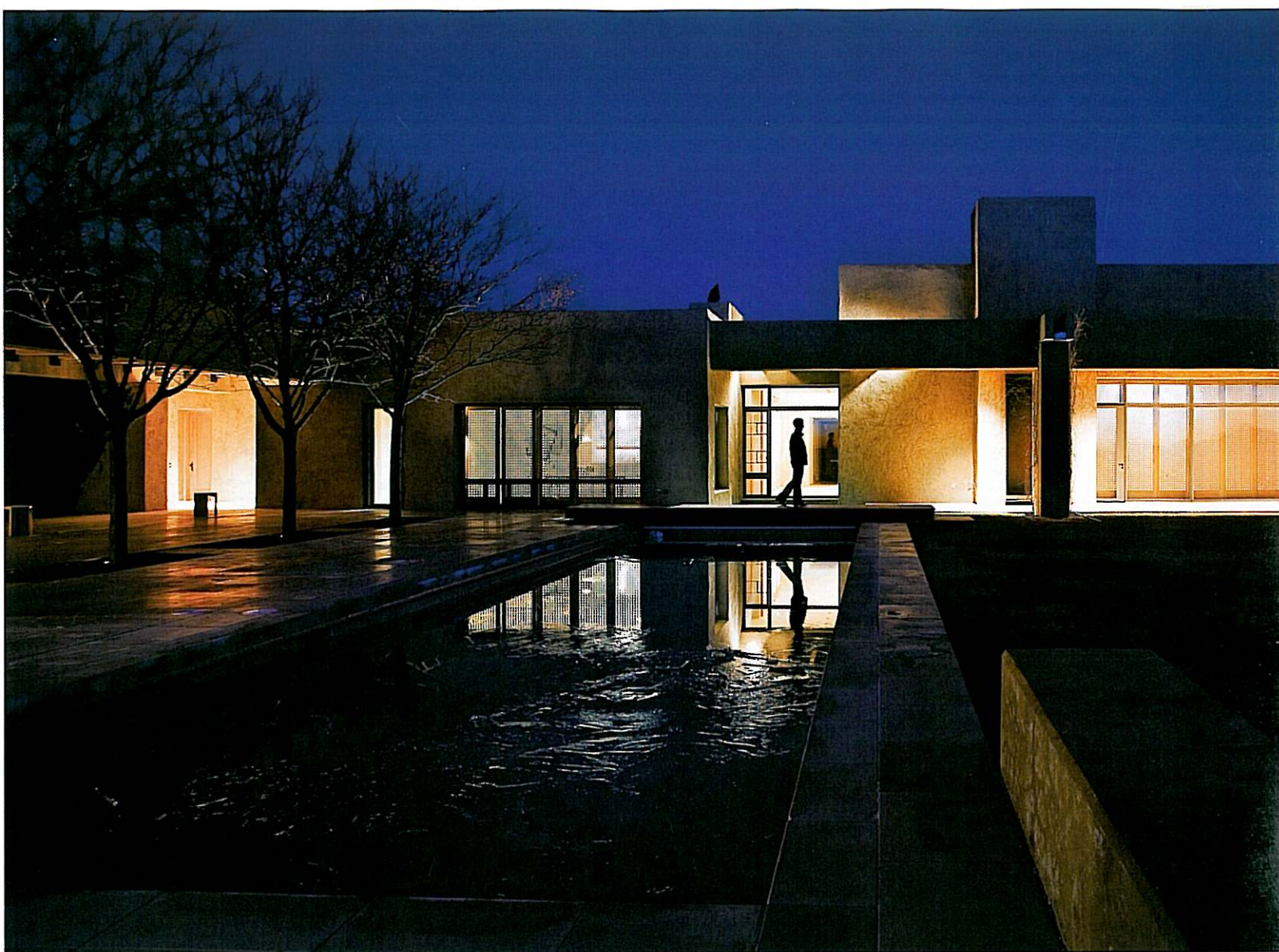
Back in New Mexico, tasked with answering a smaller and more personal need, Bowden began in 1999 to design a house for a married couple near Taos, which was completed in 2007. The wife has

local roots and remains engaged intently with the community through volunteerism and with the ecology through gardening. The husband is a political consultant, a vocational globe-trotter. Bowden had to look no farther than down the road—to the Penitente morada—for the house's low-roof structure. But in order to “explode,” says Bowden, the residence into a soaring form that would let the husband's plugged-in personality find its gambrel, she studied the Penitente belief system for a metaphor. The one she found, “the brothers of light,” foretold the form of a crystalline geode of glass and steel, where the husband's home office allows him that aloft feeling.

That the solutions in all three cases express a strong vernacular and embed messages in their details and forms is something Bowden is unabashedly proud of. “Being a regionalist to me means analyzing the cultural past, and its present and future. I am a regionalist—no ifs, ands, or buts,” she says with an audible exclamation. >

Poured-concrete perimeter walls and headers make Saddleback Ranch, exposed to the winds of Galisteo, feel like sanctuary architecture.





Acknowledging the culture of the client is a strong component in Bowden's architecture. When she and J.D. Morrow designed Saddleback Ranch, that culture included both the clients' superb art collection and Emily Fisher Landau's precise visual memory for architectural details such as those used by Frank Lloyd Wright in another house she owned.

Above: The house's strong geometry is one of massive volumes expressed in adobe built of triple thickness. A long passageway extends back through public rooms designed for paintings, and into private rooms that each frame views of the plains.

Left: Bowden and Morrow delivered the vernacular of ranch life through two kitchens, including one for ranch hands, and hitching posts at which guests and cowboys can tie horses throughout the property.

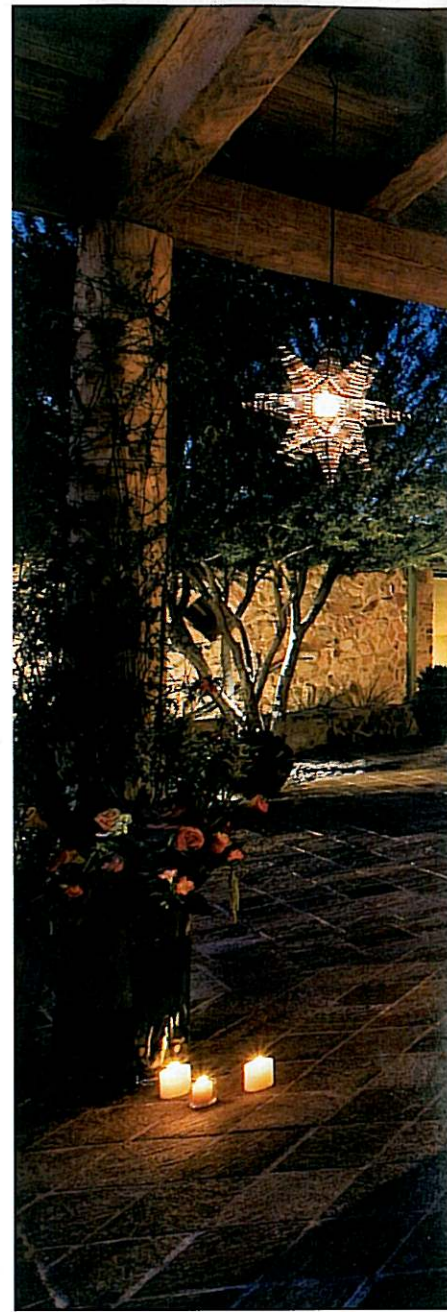




The lap pool puns on the famous Frank Lloyd Wright cantilever. While it doesn't hold weight at either end, it extends the gesture of the house onto the plains. The house's long hallway and walls (below) in turn act as a windbreak for the pool and the structure itself. In a bold gesture, the concrete form rising up beside the pool references brutalist architecture, a style using raw poured concrete that emerged in the 1960s. Saddleback won the first Jeff Harnar Award for Contemporary Architecture, in 2007.

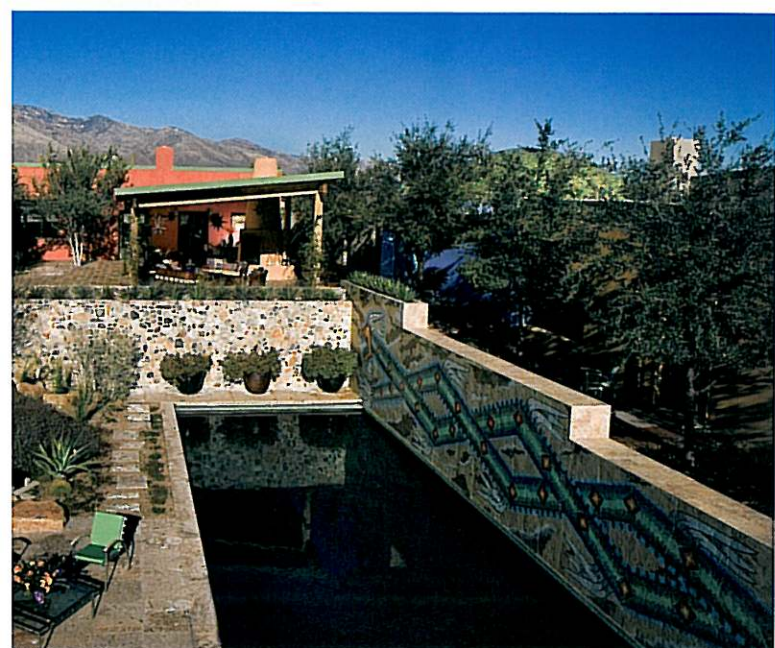






Casa Paciencia, a Tucson retreat evocative of a Mexican hill town, inscribes links to the jubilant colors of Oaxaca as a key part of Bowden's strategy. What she learned along the way was how certain designs share cultural freight even between geographically distant places. The entry doors represent Mexican motifs; they were carved by Tibetan monks from Santa Fe who explained that the designs are similar to some from their native country.





A network of sidewalks leads from the communal areas of the main dwelling (kitchen, living room, and outdoor ramada—above, shown lit with dozens of twinkling stars) to public spaces such as the swimming pool. At the pool (left) a mural by Sam Leyba of Santa Fe represents the Aztec god Quetzalcóatl, the feathered serpent. The helixed serpent is also the symbol of the Hippocratic oath, representing a keystone of the medical profession, whose researchers gather here.

The buildings flaunt color, which the wife of the couple “adores,” says Bowden. The architect created a parrot-colored array—tangerine, lime, azure, yellow. Making these overt references to the Oaxacan palette required special dispensation from subdivision planners who originally feared seeing the color red from the road, relates Bowden. Now they love it.









Rammed-earth construction in the Casa Paciencia living room (above), along with 12 inches of insulation on all roofs, helps keep the facility super-insulated. The orientation of the site to a valley abutting the Santa Catalinas allows natural ventilation and cooling through the large doors. The herringbone pattern in the *bóveda* (Spanish for "brick dome") of the living room is a Oaxacan feature. Bowden reactivated her connection with former UT Austin classmate Logan Wagner, who brought a father-and-son *bóvedero* team from Oaxaca to Tucson to do the bricklaying. The father, relates Bowden, "would take the brick, butter it, throw it up in the air to his son." The son would catch and position it. The dance of the installation became a destination for local contractors and building crews who were fascinated by the process they had not seen used in Tucson before. Opposite, top: The stone walls in the kitchen and dining room impart a baronial touch. Bottom: Backsplash tile murals in the kitchen and bar, by Kelly Plymasser of Santa Fe, use blood patterns from the microscopes of cancer researchers as a design element.





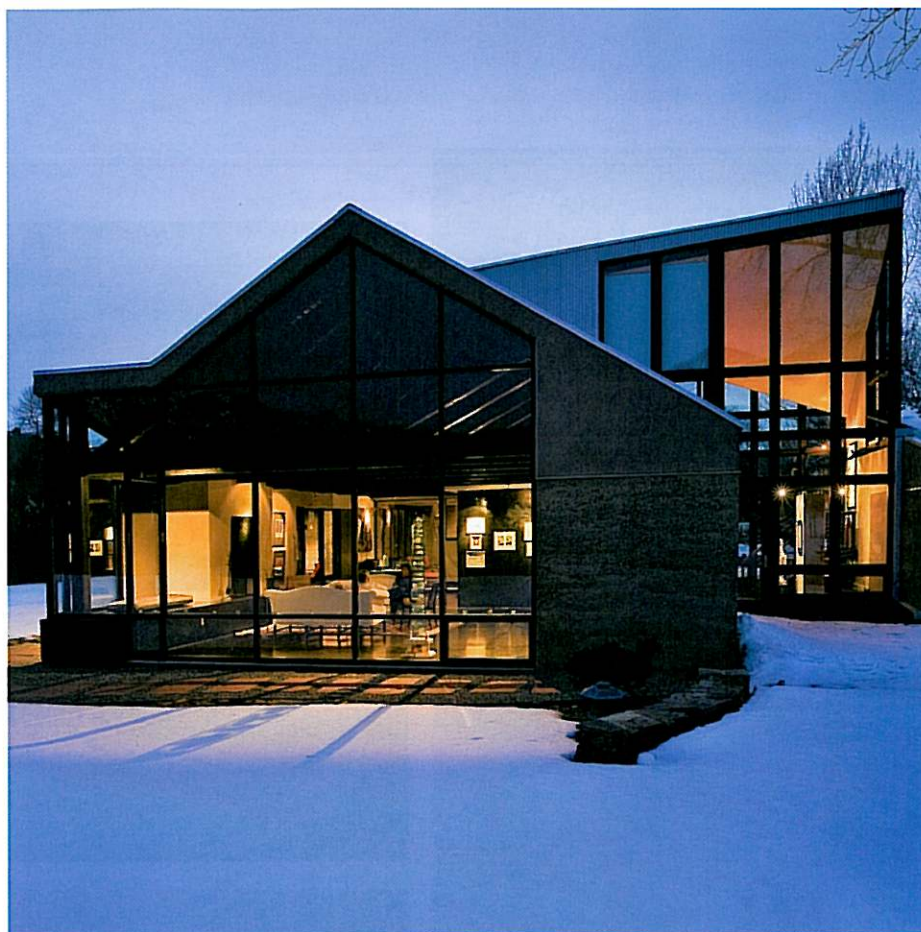
This house in the Valdez Valley of Taos makes its rammed-earth construction visible only from the outside. On the inside, white walls, polished black floors, and dark wooden beams highlight the strong contrasts the house was designed to embrace. The couple's art collection spotlights work they have acquired in Texas and New Mexico.



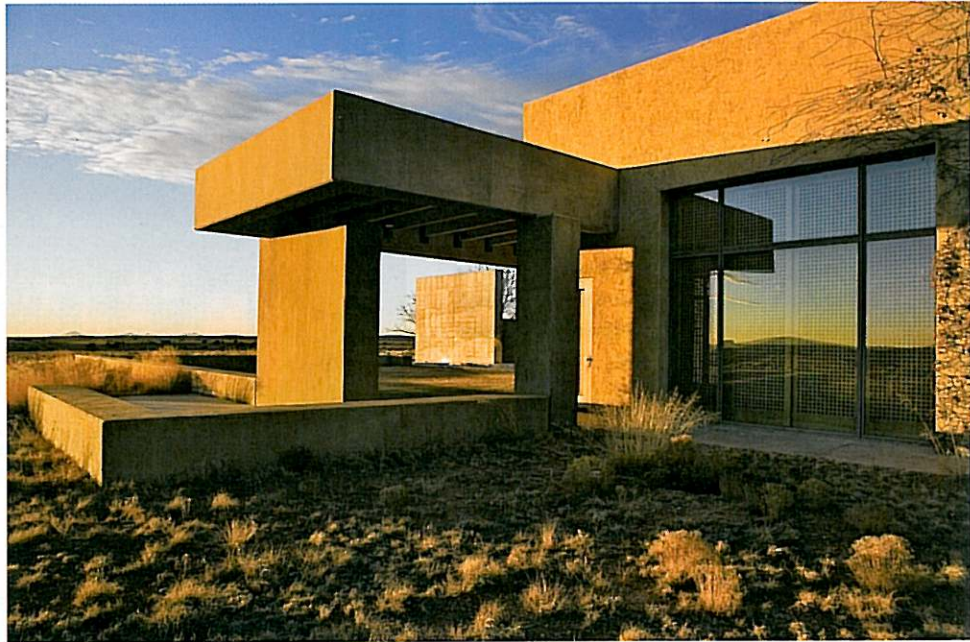
The relationship between low form and a glazed "spaceship" command center behind speaks to the project's tasks to embrace the local, ecological roots of the wife and the husband's plugged-in life as a political consultant.

Right: The low-roof structure "explodes" into a geode-like form that reaches 24 feet at its apex and houses the husband's office. Both reference the nearby Penitente morada; the geode does so metaphorically by using the Penitente symbolism of "the brothers of light."

Below: A black-plaster art wall mimics the high finish of the floor and dialogs with the dark beams supporting the roof.







Clockwise from top left: Frida and Diego's houses were an overt source of inspiration at Casa Paciencia. Saddleback Ranch at dusk. The Taos house functions as a treehouse above the river that runs through it. A sense of enclosure in Taos. ✱