

SANTA FE  NEW MEXICAN

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SANTA FE REAL ESTATE GUIDE

JUNE 2022

HOME BUILDING



PHOTOS WENDY MCEAHERN

Contextual Modern design aims to retain and enhance the wood features that are such a part of our architectural history.

Contextual Modern Design in Santa Fe

PART 2

Many of us have walked into a delightful older home in Santa Fe's Historic Eastside and declared our love for it, only to qualify that love: it has too many small rooms and not enough big windows, or the ceilings are too low. We must remember, though, that when these homes were built, these features were originally included of necessity. Builders had access only to local logs, so they could only build with smaller spans. The lower ceilings and smaller windows ensured that the heat generated by kiva fireplaces and wood stoves kept the rooms cozy.

Today, we benefit from huge advances in home building technologies. For example, we have radiant floor heat that runs off heat exchangers in all-electric solar-powered homes. We can build higher ceilings with insulated roofs; we can put in well-insulated glass window walls to let the light and views in.

As we add modern and technologically advanced elements to homes, we always ask ourselves: How do we retain all the features of Santa Fe style that we love and that make living in Santa Fe so special? Many Santa Fe homeowners now request vast expanses of glass that take advantage of the light and views. The challenge now becomes retaining the warmth and comfort of a classic Santa Fe home while creating homes and spaces that meet current and contemporary desires.

Contextual Modern design embraces both classic and contemporary styles and integrates them in a way that allows the best features of each to seamlessly co-exist. Contextual Modern combines the openness, high ceilings and large vistas of contemporary architecture with the wood, stone and earthiness of old Santa Fe style. The result is

a modern design in the context of Santa Fe, not modern design in the context of Arizona or California or Texas.

One primary way to incorporate Contextual Modern into home design is to retain and enhance the wood that is such a part of our architectural history. We can use wood floors and/or ceilings; we can have exposed beams, either of wood or steel. We can keep the generous portals, so wonderful in the old days and just as wonderful now for spending warm days outdoors, shaded from the sun. We can landscape with native grasses and trees, and we can use the earth-toned stucco colors that remind us of the mud washes on the original adobe homes.

Thick walls also remind us of when all homes were constructed from locally made adobe bricks, and these walls now allow us to build super-insulated homes. Hand-troweled plaster walls recall the fine craftsmanship that was always a hallmark of Santa Fe style.

We still use wood and stone in our fireplace surrounds, and we still love to sit around fireplaces, indoors and out, in the cooler weather. Even humble wood stoves, found in so many older homes, have been re-invented to be more beautiful and functional in their designs, and they fit into the most modern home.

The movement toward blending the best of two styles here in Santa Fe is taking hold, and a "new" Santa Fe style is emerging. Contextual Modern design allows for flexibility in architecture, with respectful continuation of the best of the classic and beloved elements of Santa Fe style.



SAGUNA SEVERSON

Saguna Severson graduated with a BA in Architecture from the University of California, Berkeley, College of Environmental Design. After going off to study architecture in Japan, she moved to Santa Fe and has never looked back. Working first for Santa Fe architects, she then went for an MA in Counseling Psychology, and is now an assistant to the partners at Tierra Concepts.



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