

When we moved to New Mexico from downtown Chicago 20 years ago, we were thrilled to find that it was possible to find acreage that provided easy access to town for schools and jobs, but also provided a private oasis that gave us rare access to a flowing river and surrounding mountains. We fell in love with the “River House” property that used to belong to a long-time Taos sheep-herding family. We learned from one of the grown children that he grew up in a small adobe home, now crumbling on an adjacent piece of property. We heard stories about them walking into town to school (only the boys!) and taking their sheep across the river and downstream to the confluence of the Rio Pueblo and the Rio Grande. We hiked to that point many times to see the waterfall at the confluence and imagine a young man sleeping out with the sheep for months at a time. As we started building our house, carving it into the dense basalt rock ledge overlooking the water, we learned that this spot is an ancient Native American living space, as evidenced by the petroglyphs we found scattered around the property. One of those symbols led us to discover a spring located near the river. More recently, the property was known as a great fishing hole for locals trying to catch the local trout.

As we built the house, we designed it to be more of an homage to the incredible landscape than an “enclosure”. Our focus was always outward from our floor to ceiling windows throughout most of the house and the large patio that extends the length of the house along the river. Our wall space is mostly windows and the amazing views are our “wall art.” The large rock wall across from the house is thought to be the result of ancient volcanic activity. It is home to a display of color that changes constantly throughout the day as the sunlight changes and also home to a couple of red-tailed hawks who have a nest every year. We have watched them feed their baby from the outdoor hot tub many times. The river itself has a constant parade of wildlife from elk and deer coming down to drink to eagles and hawks and ducks and beavers. It is designated as a duck conservation area by the County Wildlife folks. We have watched blue herons do daily migrations up and down the river from our living room.

We had daily visits from a very inquisitive roadrunner who made our home a part of his morning ritual to come look in all the windows along our porch.

We brought elements of the spectacular outdoors inside as well, incorporating one of the wonderful basalt rocks as a seat in the master bath to use with the hand-held shower, or stand under the water-shower canale that invokes the flowing river outside. The hand-troweled concrete floor throughout the downstairs is softly heated with radiant heat and mirrors the soft greens, yellows and reds of the rock wall across the river. The hand-crafted kitchen cabinets and carpentry throughout the downstairs were also designed to have an organic feel that melds with the surrounding beauty, rather than competing with it. The indoor pool with hummingbirds visible from the pool-level windows and the in-ground hottub overlooking the river complete the water element of our “River House.”

We have always felt a spirituality in this unique piece of land that we have been fortunate enough to spend time on and tried to create a house that incorporated and reflected the surrounding historical property. We hope that another owner will be equally captivated by it.