

1. A BRIEF HISTORY OF SANTA FE STYLE

The year was 1250 A.D. the pueblos of the Galisteo Basin were thriving. Adobe and timber structures of multiple stories and in some cases thousands of rooms dotted the horizon. Little did these Native Americans know their building style would be thriving in the 1990's in the same areas. The "Santa Fe Style" which draws visitors from around the world and entices thousands of new residents a year is the result of not just its Native American roots, but also Mexican, Spanish and Anglo influences.

The Native American and Native Mexican populations choose adobe as their preferred material for many reasons, the primary reason being the abundance of its basic ingredient, soil. It could be poured, molded, formed and dried into vertical walls that had the highly desirable insulative qualities of being cool in the summers and warm in the winters, to this day we are not able to apply our modern formulas of determining the "R" value of a wall to adobe. It has unusual qualities which when combined with a soil roof created a totally natural yet man made environment on the interior.

Vigas (beams) and latillas (decking) were used to support the soil roofs and even bark was incorporated to fill the gaps between the latillas to keep soil from falling between the decking onto the inhabitants below. The vigas with one big end and one little end provided the natural slope to create a sloped roof, this was and is important to drain standing water. Vigas were hard to come by in these times and the native populations maximized their use by spacing them far apart and spanning the gaps with smaller branches (latillas). These materials were those that were available from the land in this semi-arid environment and for many centuries these were the only materials available (of course stone was used in many old structures also).

The availability of new materials coincided with the coming of the Europeans, first the Spanish from Mexico and then the Anglos from the new United States.

The Spanish who came to New Mexico in the late 1600's brought with them new skills that could be applied to existing materials in this area. Wood could be carved, metal could be created with the combination of certain natural elements, stone could be cut, glass could be made and wheels could be shaped. All these skills led to a metamorphosis of the native style to a conglomerate of native and Spanish styles.

The Anglos who arrived in the mid 1800's brought with them new skills as well. Brick making, wood milling, metal machining were some of the more important skills. These techniques were a result of the industrial revolution which made it easier to make units out of buildings. Now buildings could be measured, scaled, drawn and built. When the railroad came in the 1880's everything changed. Non-native materials became readily available. Exotic woods, plasters, paints and cement were all now within reach. New styles were introduced to this area. Victorian, Georgian, Territorial and Greco-Roman were now all possible and as more and more settlers arrived more and more dreams were realized by the newcomers resulting in a conglomerate of even more building styles. Metal roofs began appearing, grandiose details in wood and plaster were used and choices in building materials were available from wood to wrought-iron.

In the 1940's many Santa Feans and area residents recognized the importance of their past and began a drive to regulate design in the core of Santa Fe. This resulted in the creation of a regulatory body intended mainly to preserve old buildings from alteration or worse yet demolition. There have been many buildings that have been saved from inappropriate renovation or demolition by the Historic Design Review Board.

The Historic Design Review Board has carried its charter even further by also regulating new buildings and any renovations of any existing buildings. Its boundaries have expanded also to include some old residential areas and many areas of the "Eastside". Their regulation has been controversial in many ways and has led to the loss of many old buildings that were not in the "Santa Fe Style" particularly on the Plaza where only the Catron Building and the Palace of the Governor's carry any resemblance to their historic past look. This regulation has led to a continuity of looks throughout the downtown area which many people see as maintaining Santa Fe as a tourist Mecca. It appears this regulation will only continue to increase over the years, but Santa Fe Style must be looked at for what it is, a conglomerate of styles that has developed over centuries.