

Site Defines Dwelling



JIM THOMPSON / JOURNAL

The Hutchins residence in the Tierra Monte subdivision stair-steps its way up the Sandia Mountains.

By Martha Man

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Jim and Debra Hutchins offered the architect and general contractor a challenge:

Build their home with a Southwestern flavor in the Tierra Monte subdivision, include both formal and informal elements, take advantage of the building site and its views, and keep the costs within their budget.

The couple already had the lot for their home in the enclave north of Sandia Heights and off the road to La Luz trail.

"We bought it in 1984 knowing this is where we wanted to build our home," Jim Hutchins said. "My dad, Charles Hutchins, was one of the first four homesteaders up here about 20 years ago."

In the early stages of their careers — he's an employee at Sandia National Laboratories and she works for Honeywell — the couple kept close watch on the costs as their dream home was designed, Hutchins said.

The purchase of a few items was delayed — such as a fancy chandelier for the dining room — and other

choices were made in those cases. New furniture for some of the rooms remains in the future, as does expansion on terraces and patios.

"But there were some things we would not skimp or compromise on," he said.

The Tierra Monte lot offered a challenge of its own — a 35-foot slope from east to west.

"A design requirement was to use the terrain that was here," said architect Robert Habiger of R.D. Habiger & Associates Inc. "No dirt was brought onto the lot as is done for many homes."

The architect said the planning phase for the residence was lengthy.

"I was hired in the late fall of 1989," Habiger said, "and the house took almost a year to design."

In fact, he said, the home took longer to design than to build.

The Hutchins were "very diligent clients," he said. Every space was analyzed in relation to other spaces in the home and to exterior landscaping possibilities and views. In addition, the various materials and fixtures that went into the residence

were selected quite carefully, he said.

"The family wanted both formal and informal qualities in the house," he said, so the kitchen and family room areas are the more informal elements with a distinct Southwestern flavor — rough-cut beams, tongue-in-groove wood ceiling in a herringbone pattern.

The more formal elements are found in the living room / dining room area and the stairway. The second floor has a "bit of a blend" of the two, Habiger said.

The plans were completed by the end of 1990 and the Hutchins began their search for a contractor to build the home.

"We put it out for three builders to bid, but the bids came in too high," Hutchins said. In the meantime, a friend suggested another custom-home builder, Steve Hacker.

"We wanted someone who had built

in the area and in the Southwestern style we knew we wanted," he said.

The couple met with Hacker and discussed the project.

"We found him very personable and enthusiastic," Hutchins said. "We liked his computerized cost-control process and asked him, 'Can you keep it within \$233,000?'"

The response was affirmative, Hutchins said, and Hacker Ltd. was contracted to build the residence.

Construction got underway in the spring, and the home was finished Oct. 25. The closing — the financial reckoning and paper signing — was done the same day, Hutchins said.

Two days later, Hacker and his wife, Antoinette, were killed in the crash of their plane in Arizona.

The finished home is a 3,000-square-foot frame / stucco residence with four bedrooms and three bathrooms. It hugs the Sandia Mountain slope to the east and fans out to encompass the high desert vistas to the west.

"The house is situated both for the views and how it sits into the site," said Habiger.

The entry is on the east

side of the house, through an enclosed patio. The front door opens onto a hallway that stretches to the kitchen and family room on the left and to the two-story bedroom wing on the right. Straight ahead are the formal living room and dining room, with large windows facing west.

The main hallway also provides a mix of the formal and informal — the floor is of the "temple cream" vein of New Mexico travertine marble quarried southwest of Belen, and the pillars and walls along the west wall of the hallway are of exposed adobes.

The travertine flooring is carried into other parts of the home including the kitchen and dining alcove as well as the guest bath on the main floor.

While the mix might surprise some people, Hutchins said, "It works for us. We were determined to have the travertine, it's New Mexican."

The house stair-steps down from the entry hall and kitchen level to the living room, dining and family room. Another step leads to the patio level.

Habiger said a key aspect of the

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The kiva stair-step and serpent's tail design used on kitchen cabinet doors are among the prominent touches adding a Southwestern flavor.