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an eclectic home and its world-traveling
owners defy labels and convention

Accented with eye-catching pops of fuchsia and red, the open spaces of the living room, dining room, and kitchen exude warmth and visual appeal, even as they retain their clean, contemporary lines and modern finishes. High ceilings allow the homeowners to show off the eclectic lighting fixtures collected during their extensive travels.



Twenty years of world travel came down to a 40-foot shipping container packed with an eclectic trove of treasures ranging from antique lighting fixtures and painted movie billboards to old barstools and handmade marionettes. And even though the house they would eventually build in New Mexico hadn't even broken ground yet—heck, the lot hadn't even been chosen—the owners of those pieces, internationally renowned shoe designers Dennis and Lynne Comeau, knew exactly how every one was going to fit

The Comeaus were returning to the States from Italy, where they had grown their shoe design business, raised two children, and designed the home they would eventually build in New Mexico. In 2001 their shipping container was delayed in customs for several months following 9/11, and then another month due to, ironically, the shoe bomber. The container finally made its way to New Mexico, where the couple alternately rented and owned in Tesuque not far from where they live now. Eventually they purchased a steep lot overlooking the Tesuque Valley, and got to work putting a house on it

"The kitchen is the house," says Lynne, an avid cook. Old factory lights illuminate the nonporous Neolith countertops, which have a live herb garden built right into them.



Left: Lynne whips up drinks in her neat-as-a-pin chef's kitchen, which boasts a FiveStar commercial double oven and sleek, built-in pantry space.

To say Dennis and Lynne travel extensively is an understatement; she's at home just eight months of the year around trips to New York and Brazil, and he's only here three months of 12. Thus, says Dennis, "The most important thing to us in designing our house was that we would feel like we were on vacation when we're at home. We want to feel relaxed when we're here, drawing inspiration from the 360-degree views."

They built the home around the concepts of architect, sandal designer, and all-around Renaissance man Bernard Rudofsky, who believed in blurring the lines between indoor and outdoor living. To that end, an enormous window wall opens the interior living spaces to the rear patio, bringing the breathtaking Tesuque Valley views straight into the house. Combining different elements—hard and soft textures, old and new pieces, and so on—was also important to the couple. "We have eclectic tastes," notes Lynne. "We wanted to blend the house into the environment and be contemporary, but not harsh."



Above: "We wanted red in the kitchen somehow, like Paris," says Lynne of the lone hanging lucite cabinet that stores their glassware. Flat-front stainless steel drawers are an interesting horizontal contrast to the vertical cabinetry.



The homeowners delight in pairing the serious with the silly, as in their "shrine" to alcohol (above). The bar piece was discovered at an antiques market in France.

"We wanted to blend the house into the environment and be contemporary, but not harsh."—Lynne Comeau

Working with a design by architect Richard Strang, veteran homebuilder Deborah Short of Vineyard Homes LLC worked with the Comeaus to build their dream home, making the 90-minute round-trip commute daily from Albuquerque and overcoming a series of challenges at every step. Permitting and zoning were the first, taking almost as long as the build itself. "The City of Santa Fe was hesitant about access," says Short of the unnervingly steep and winding driveway. "And we had to remove about 8 to 10 feet of land from the top of the hill to get the house to fit on the lot." Finding delivery vans and vehicles with 4WD to make the ascent—usually fully loaded, as with the commercial FiveStar stove—was another ongoing challenge in the brutal Santa Fe winter.



Above: Organization plus. These drawers aren't deep, but they're wide enough to easily store utensils, bakeware, and more.



Above: Shoe designers Dennis and Lynne Comeau, with Rhodesian ridgeback Boia ("reaper" in Italian), relaxing in the living room of their eclectic Tesuque home.



Above: The home is filled with unusual collected pieces, like these handmade marionettes from Austria.

Left, in niche: A friend in Florence, Italy, collects pieces from old altars and churches and makes them into candlestick holders.

Left, on wall: A one-of-a-kind hand-blown glass sculpture from the 1960s.

Antiques and feminine accents reminiscent of the French countryside soften the contemporary features of a guest bedroom.



Above: A guest bathroom combines the old (a hand-carved sandstone sink from France, a Mexican wedding chest pedestal, and an old light from Paris) with the new (Italian tile and contemporary wall-mounted fixtures).

“We worked with the Comeaus on so many special things. Every item they ordered was unique—nothing was standard,” says Short, who was excited to be able to use certain design materials—steel I-beams, Neolith countertops, waterproof Variance plaster—for the first time. “And then Lynne kept pulling out these *lights*,” she laughs.

Indeed, lighting is a big deal here, and every piece has a story. Lynne made the tiny “winged” solo lightbulbs scattered around the house, as well as her favorite piece, a pendant crafted of crow’s feathers and found wood from Amsterdam. There are the huge gray industrial lights over the bar that came from a factory in Poland. The guest bedroom chandelier made of Pepsi bottles. The massive crystal chandelier in the living room, from Venice, that took two days just to assemble.

And yet, every piece of lighting—like every piece of their furniture, art, or décor—has found the perfect, thoughtful place in the Comeaus’ home. There are so many vibrant pops of color against the gray Variance-finished walls and concrete floors that it’s a surprise when you realize that, unadorned, the home is really quite neutral and industrial. As the owners had intended, their lovingly curated treasures add a warmth and whimsy to the spaces, which could easily have gone the chilly, sterile direction of many contemporaries.

Walking around their house is like taking a trip around the world. Dennis and Lynne know the provenance of every piece they own, or at least remember exactly where they acquired it—usually flea markets and



Above: A typical vignette places antiques against polished concrete flooring and other modern finishes.



The master bedroom is sited to capture views on three sides, including from the sculptural freestanding tub (not shown). The owners found the mirrored bed during travels in Provence, France.



The master bath mixes new pieces with collected antiques, including a lighting fixture from 1940s Paris. There's a shower, a toilet, and a bidet. The tub, however, is located squarely in the master bedroom a few steps away.

shops around Europe. They designed their entire kitchen, with its dark gray Neolith and stainless steel countertops, rustic stone backsplash, and kicky clear red lucite hanging cabinet, around a hand-painted advertising poster from 1940s Italy. Dennis built a Guinness keg into the cabinetry; his collection of quirky taps and Lynne's live herb garden add color to the counters. Between the kitchen and the rustic dining table and its chic aluminum Phillipe Starck chairs is a shrine of sorts, a cheeky celebration of alcohol and religion atop a bar piece acquired at an antiques market in France.

Walking around the Comeaus' house is like taking a trip around the world.

In the living room, with its soaring 20-foot ceilings and eye-grabbing fuchsia sofa, a hand-painted poster for the Ingrid Bergman and Roberto Rossellini film *Stromboli* (1950) takes up much of a wall, part of a tableau containing a couple of guitars, an amp, and a spotlight from an Italian film studio. Interesting enough, but then you hear the story behind it.

"We hiked for hours up the side," Dennis says of *Stromboli*, the active volcanic island in southern Italy. "Pieces of molten lava look like they're going to touch you. We get to the top, and it's raining—and really cold. We look around and find a hut with two sleeping bags, so we just slept there." In the morning they awoke to beautiful weather, and, finding no way to easily descend the way



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The Comeaus' compact, 2,400-square-foot contemporary home fits snugly on a hilltop lot that was shortened to accommodate the floor plan.



Above: A large covered patio overlooks neverending views of the Tesuque Valley.

came up, *slid* back down in just 20 minutes. Dennis adds, almost unnecessarily, "It was the most amazing and exciting adventure of our lives."

And this couple has likely had quite a few. In their extraordinary and singular residence, Dennis and Lynne have created an architectural chronicle of their travels and memories. They have brought together in aesthetic harmony things that don't always work: old and new, hard and soft, even sublime and ridiculous. Like its owners, this is home that defies labeling and just says no to the conventional. 





resources

Builder & Interior Designer

Vineyard Homes
 Builder: Deborah Short
 Interior Design: Christy Cain
vineyardhomesnm.com

Architect

Strang Design Group

Appliances

Builders Source Appliance Gallery
builderssource.com

Concrete Flooring

Pyramid Concrete
 High Desert Painting

Fireplaces

Mountain West Sales
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Front Door, Garage Door, Sliding Door & Windows

Western Building Supply
westernbuildingsupply.com

Kitchen Cabinetry

High Mountain Cabinets

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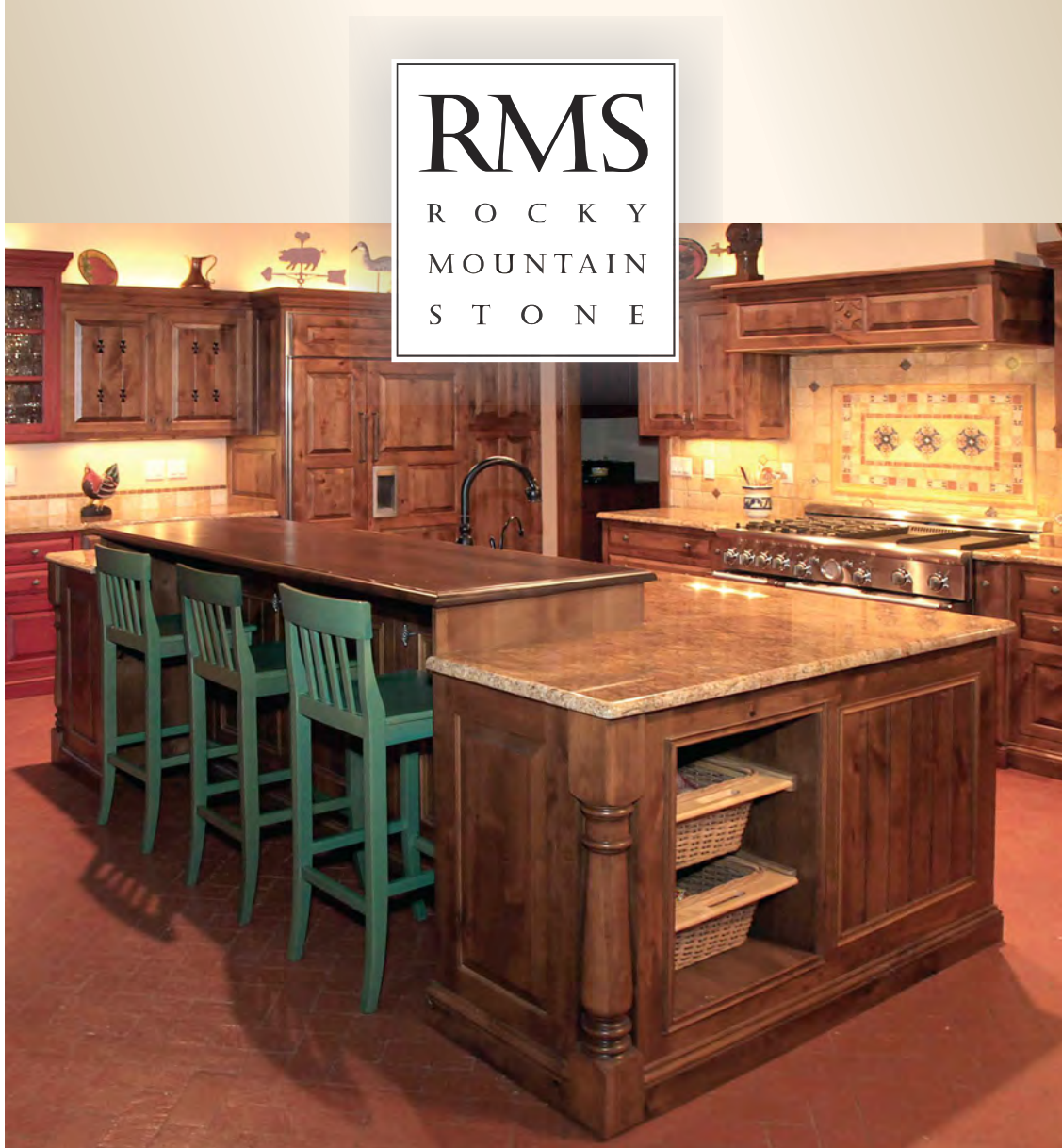
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