

# A Place for Reflection

A minimalist aesthetic combines ancient wisdom and contemporary grace



Linear time, with its ceaseless march of hours, days, months, and years, is a uniquely modern concept. Our ancestors from the distant past had a less confining view of time, unrestrained as they were by the tyranny of watches and day planners. They perceived it instead as a circular flow of seasons, gestation periods, and crop cycles, each yielding gracefully and inevitably to the next until the entire rotation began anew. They marked these natural fluctuations not with today's elaborate timepieces, which divide past and present into separate, unbridgeable entities, but by monitoring the movements of the sun and the stars, observing the effect of the earth's rotation on light and shadow, understanding the seamless unity of past, present, and future.

Here in New Mexico, this nonlinear conception of time gave rise to the prehistoric Anasazi people's successful merging of architecture and astronomy: Buildings were oriented to mark seasonal shifts via openings in the walls and ceilings that allowed shafts of light to enter at specific angles during the solstices and equinoxes. The structures themselves blended organically with the land on which they sat, their intricate stonework the only indication that a human hand had intervened in nature's plan.

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These Anasazi precepts are employed dramatically in what would seem to be an unlikely project: a 10,000-square-foot contemporary residence of glass, steel, and stone sited on a 195-acre tract in the foothills north of Santa Fe. The architect, Stephen Bucchieri of Bucchieri Architects, based in Cleveland, Ohio, designed the home to showcase the owners' stunning collection of contemporary and Native American art, as well as to provide clean, uncluttered living spaces that capitalize on the nearly 360-degree views.

"The initial step in the planning stage, which lasted about a year, was to discover what the house would be," explains Bucchieri. "We determined which spaces the owners would need and the room sizes, then set that aside to concentrate on the architectural concept, trying to relate it to the landscape and historic architecture. We viewed local homes, but Pueblo Revival just didn't seem to fit—people copying copies of a once-authentic style until the true thing gets lost. Then we noticed that many landscaping walls around town were made of Pecos sandstone, which inspired us to look closely at Anasazi ruins."



OPPOSITE: A manicured entryway features an intricate rock wall and a 1,000-pound steel door. TOP: Views from the living room take in the Sangre de Cristos to the east and extend all the way to Colorado to the north. ABOVE: The steel and glass structure appears to float within the landscape.





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Bucchieri and the homeowners researched the architecture of these early New Mexico residents, reading texts and visiting Chaco Canyon to get a better understanding of the principles involved. “We looked into their sun calendar, which determined festivals and planting seasons, and at the same time we were researching ways to protect the artwork from exposure to the harsh New Mexican sun. The research kept overlapping, and we ended up creating a gallery hall that provided natural light for viewing art. The gallery is aligned with true north, which we accomplished by precisely sighting both Polaris at night and the sun at solar noon. This alignment reveals a long ray of light that moves across the gallery floor throughout the day, reaching the exact center of the hall at solar noon.”

Skylights on either side of the long space allow sunlight to reflect off the side wall surfaces and the horizontal light shelf below, creating still more reflections as the light is cast back up to the flat ceiling. Natural light also enters through the center skylight and strikes the pale limestone floor, creating an overall effect that is softly luminous and soothing to the eye. This gallery hall forms the heart of the building by connecting the main living areas, and opens out onto a heart-stopping mountain vista that is framed by the projecting roof plate and its structural columns. Sixteen-foot-high windows make the outside appear as a continuation of the interior space, bringing the stirring landscape into the living area.

“As important as the interior use of light is the placement of the house and the way it addresses the integrity of the land,” Bucchieri explains. “We located it below the ridgeline so it wouldn’t dominate the site. The slope of the terrain was just right; from inside you can see down to the ground as well as out to the vistas—San Antonio Peak near the New Mexico–Colorado border, the Jemez and Sangre de Cristo ranges.” Indeed, the house seems to float atop the land, and inside one feels oneself to be floating in the space as well.

“We worked with natural materials,” reports the architect, who enjoyed the rare opportunity to employ stone, plaster, and weathering steel in a unique design. “Because of the custom design, we had to set up a small fabrication center on-site. The house took three years to complete, and the collaboration with the builder, Denman & Associates, was unusually productive and rewarding.”

Contemporary minimalism infuses all of the living areas. Rectilinear forms and geometric planes enhance the modern feel, while sleek furnishings of steel, glass, and leather, some designed by Bucchieri, others from B&B Italia, complement the building materials. Large steel doors swivel silently on pivot hinges to open up private spaces, then disappear seamlessly into the walls upon closing, with no visible hardware to mark their presence. A Zen-like inner courtyard can be viewed from the master bedroom, the dining area, and the tranquil guest suite, which in turn looks out on a rock wall.



ABOVE: The gallery hall housing the owners’ extensive art collection merges spatially with the living room, which is furnished with pieces from B&B Italia. OPPOSITE: Inspired by ancient Anasazi structures, the gallery’s design lets in shafts of light to trace the sun’s daily path across the floor.



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An inner courtyard separates the dining area from the guest suite. Intimate living spaces are clearly defined, while glass walls provide an open, expansive feeling. Reflected light adds visual interest to the configuration.



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Antique Native American parfleches on the wall above the bed add a subtle splash of color to the soothing hues of the master suite. The large windows and adjacent balcony create a feeling of outdoor living in a room that’s at once spacious and cozy.

Throughout, reflections play off each other in an ever-changing dance of light that illuminates glass, steel, smooth plaster walls, and limestone floors. The weathering steel frames and pillars were deliberately left unsealed so that the slow rusting process would allow them to change gradually over time, adding to the organic feel of the home. The net result is a residence that is itself a piece of art whose spatial contours are continually transformed by the shifting light, a kind of tableau vivant that reflects the owners’ reverence for simplicity, serenity, and the natural world.

When asked what it’s like to occupy such a grand space, they reply: “We didn’t expect it to feel so intimate—it’s a wonderful house for living as well as entertaining. We can look out any window and feel inspired by the landscape, and we become more aware of the shadows and light reflections the longer we live here. Even at night, you get the feeling that there’s no barrier between house and sky—it’s a lovely optical geometry.”

Adds Bucchieri: “The calmness and quiet of the interior are particularly striking to me. Overall, this has been a really satisfying project, a wonderful opportunity to work in a new location, relating the building to both the New Mexican landscape and its historic architecture.”

Bucchieri’s attention to these details has produced a cutting-edge contemporary vision that honors the Anasazi legacy, merging time and space in a nonlinear sense to create a rectilinear repository of timeless beauty. ✿ For a list of resources, turn to page 189.



The light-infused dining room showcases pieces from the owners’ collection of Latin American art. Over the fireplace is *Lienzo para él* by the late Rudolfo Morales of Oaxaca, Mexico; an ancient Incan textile from Peru hangs on the wall above the console table.