As so often happens in Santa Fe, the site of this 4,171-square-foot home posed a major problem for its designer, Spears Architects. The gently sloping plot is long and narrow, and its southern boundary is a deep arroyo. In addition, deed restrictions on allowable height made the home's massing and layout difficult.

The architect overcame these problems and more, our judges agreed, by creating a charming, unpretentious home that blends unobtrusively with its surroundings. Nestled among the piñon and juniper trees, a two-story portion to the west takes full advantage of spectacular views toward the Jemez Mountains. Exterior gardens are also a key to the dwelling's success, as nearly every major living space opens to landscaping that is wild and natural.

Built by Tony Ivey and Associates, the Spanish Pueblo Revival house is constructed of cast-pumicecrete. That's a relatively new building material that compares favorably, especially in price, to traditional adobe. The floors are mainly slate, the walls mud plaster, the ceilings fir beams with pine decking. Befitting the spirit of artsy Santa Fe, the ceilings were hand-painted by the home's owner.

1) The master bedroom upstairs, with its views west toward the Jemez. 2) The main entrance features crushed gravel, natural foliage and a deeply recessed doorway. 3) Corian countertops in the kitchen. 4) The sun-splashed, south-facing front entry, which opens to a flagstone patio. 5) Stepping up into the living/dining area, one notes the mud plaster walls and the patterned, hand-painted ceilings.

Photos by Nancy Melin