



Photo courtesy of Josie Lenwell

Josie's kaleidoscope

Josie Lenwell was tooling around Tesuque, N.M., in her pickup truck when she spotted a fallen down adobe. What caught her attention were its hand-hewn beams, and she didn't have to work hard to convince the woman who owned the ruin to part with them.

She told Lenwell, "If you can drag them out you can have them for \$10 each."

Ten years later, the four beams have a place in Lenwell's Cañón Heights home – in its entryways and the benches for the dining table built from a mesquite door. The house contains other found objects. Cedar trees define archways and twisted fence posts form the staircase's handrail. Stones from a Dixon copper mine are installed in the patio. Weathered barn boards frame bathroom mirrors.

Lenwell said, "I wanted to bring nature inside."



The twisted cedar handrail is one of many custom features in the 2,890-square-foot home. Josie's stained-glass artwork (left) mixes light with color. Custom barn wood cabinets (below) adorn the upstairs bathroom.

Photo courtesy of Josie Lenwell

Bringing nature inside – "I like old and rustic," she says – complimented her desire for a home that is organic and spacious. Combine that with fanciful tile work plus Lenwell's carnival-like treatment of color on furniture and fabrics, and the result is an adobe home that seems capable of breathing.

"I always thought an old adobe would be great, but I'm on my own so I didn't want the problems," said Lenwell, a psychotherapist for 34 years. "I was going to build it



Sunlight casts a warm glow in the eating nook off the great room. Iggy and Oggy (below) have ample space to roam – both indoor and out.

Photo courtesy of Josie Lenwell

Josie Lenwell creates a stunning and spectacular home wrapped in light & color combining traditional Southwest decor with handcrafted artisan beauty



myself and make it more spacious. I would have all the light, all the art space I could want."

Lenwell's two-story home has traditional Southwestern elements such as plastered walls, vigas and the latillas arranged in herringbone patterns on the ceilings. The house also has round rooms that suggest a Moorish influence and doors handcrafted in India. She opted for cherry wood flooring, which can handle radiant heat, for its warm tones and danceable surface.

Her furnishings tend toward the whimsical like the hobo table made of twigs and Amy Grasfield's metal daybed aptly titled "Peas on Earth" because of its dangling peas. Posey Franzetti's playful light switches are found throughout the house.

A HAVEN

The 2,890-square-foot home has three bedrooms, depending on how a person sees the layout. One room serves as Lenwell's art therapy space although with its half-bath and office it could be used as a bedroom suite, office or family room.

Lenwell's bedroom, with floor-to-ceiling bookcases on either side of her red metal bed, is located at the top of the winding stairs. It has an office alcove and a door onto one of the two decks located at this level.

She uses another bedroom as an art studio. Here she creates photo cards of her animal companions, past and present, dressed in costumes among other types of art. Full baths are on both floors.

In addition, the property has a 225-square-foot cottage that doubles as a guestroom and pottery studio. True to form, she bought a kiln on condition the owner would show her how to make tiles. Besides the ones Lenwell created for several rooms, she assisted children from her practice in making tiles for the walls of the therapy room and upstairs studio.



The great room brings nature inside by using old tree trunks and cedar hand-hewn beams that complement the cherry hardwood floors. The north view of the sprawling home, (above right).



Photo courtesy of Josie Lenwell

"I wanted to create a very private, spacious paradise for myself and my clients, but the home was also designed to create a safe haven for the homeless animals that seem to find their way into my home and my heart," said Lenwell, who shares her home with two dogs who showed up at her doorstep.

Adobe walls and latilla fencing enclose a 2/3-acre space to give littermates Iggy and Oggy plenty of room to roam. The dogs have easy access to her house through a pet door cleverly disguised by rounded adobe entrances that resemble hornos ovens.

Wildflowers abundantly fill the property's grounds during their season.

CHANGES

Lenwell has lived here since February 1997, although the house wasn't finished until three years later. Though she feels she was successful creating that private, spacious paradise she envisioned, it's time for her to leave it behind.

Winters, she says, are getting harder to take so she has put the house on the market. A native of Virginia, she yearns for a warmer climate and is considering a move to Austin, Texas, although she plans to stay in Taos for a year after the sale to close out her practice. A licensed marriage family therapist, she combines her training in psychotherapy and her experience in art for the work she does with children and adolescents. Her clients are evenly divided between adults and children.

Lenwell calls the next move an adventure, and it was that desire for change that brought her to Taos. She left San Francisco in 1993 after undergoing serious neck surgery. She promised herself then if she came out of the operation whole, she was going to do something different.

She searched for years to find a small piece of land in Taos she could afford. She recalled the day she saw an ad in the newspaper for two acres in Cañón Heights. The land had trees, water rights from the Acequia Madre, and a sweeping



The "kitchen in the round" features some of Josie's festive handmade tiles. In the petroglyph bathroom below, an old Moroccan window serves as a medicine cabinet.

She openly admires the contributions done by area artisans such as Phil Ford and his crew who constructed the adobe walls and some of the interior doors. Aaron Lewis installed the flooring and did other custom woodwork. James Cederlof built the cabinetry for the round kitchen and the unique handrail of twisted cedar. Patrick O'Brien turned barn boards into mirror frames and cabinets. Michael Ford created the double-entry doors and the late Case Cohen did the stonework.

Construction started in spring 1996, but out of financial necessity Lenwell moved the following February into the unfinished house, living in the upstairs studio. One bathroom was complete, a requirement for an occupancy permit. The wooden floors weren't installed and the living room was filled with power equipment and lumber. That lasted for years.

"I'd make a bunch of money, then pay the next group of people," she said, smiling.

Besides the workmanship of the people she hired, Lenwell's home contains her own lasting touches. They include stained-glass windows: two were installed in doors and three are located in the upstairs office alcove.

Then there are her ceramic tiles. Lenwell used petroglyph designs for one bathroom and tropical flowers for another. She also made tiles for the kitchen inspired by the free-style art of the children she helps in her Cañon Heights home. ■

Josie Lenwell's Cañon Heights home is listed with Page Sullivan Real Estate. Call (505) 758-7890 for information.



The upstairs bedroom was furnished with built-in bookshelves along the south-facing windows. The north courtyard (below) offers stunning views of the mountains. Wildflowers abundantly fill the grounds in season. The pottery studio/guest cottage (bottom left); Josie's unique style can be found almost everywhere.

view of the mesa and mountains. Only two miles from downtown, its location was convenient for clients.

"I called the realtor and he says, 'Well, I've got three bids so you'll have to give me full price, cash and get here in 20 minutes.'"

While she knew little about constructing a house, Lenwell was certain about its design. For one, it had to be an adobe. ("If I couldn't buy the real thing, I would at least build the real thing," she says.) She wanted long views throughout the house and trees must climb its walls.

She also had strong ideas about the room where she would meet her clients. "I set that up so it would be the most joyful, colorful, healing place it could possibly be for kids," she said.

Meanwhile Lenwell went on foraging expeditions, taking along a friend to help her drag the gnarled trunks of dead cedar trees from forests. She got a pickup truck to haul the stones and old boards she discovered along roadsides. She bought a hundred cedar fence posts from a ranch in Colorado.

She stacked her booty in the yard of the home she was renting. "I was that neighbor you do not want to have," she joked.

CREATING A HOME

As owner-builder, Lenwell hired a number of people to do the construction. "I'd hear about somebody wonderful, I'd ask questions and then I'd ask them to come in," she said.



Photo courtesy of Josie Lenwell



Exterior photos by Josie Lenwell

