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Art meets life

by Peggy Conger

photos by Daniel Nadelbach, nadelbachphoto.com
styling by Gilda Meyer-Niehof, coyoacan.com

What happens when two art collectors join their lives – and their collections?

Well, an ongoing search for wall space, for one thing. But in the case of Santa Fe gallery owner Joyce Robins and architect Ron Whatley, merging their lives and their art has resulted in a vibrant residence that is testimony to the couple's love of contemporary art.

Joyce's Pueblo style home near Eldorado in outlying Santa Fe has yielded enough wall space to showcase fabulous pieces by Kathleen Kinkopf, Tamar Kander, Dick Evans, Susan Stamm Evans, Rhett Lynch and other artists, many represented by Joyce Robins Gallery, along with the couple's merged collection of masks and aboriginal art.

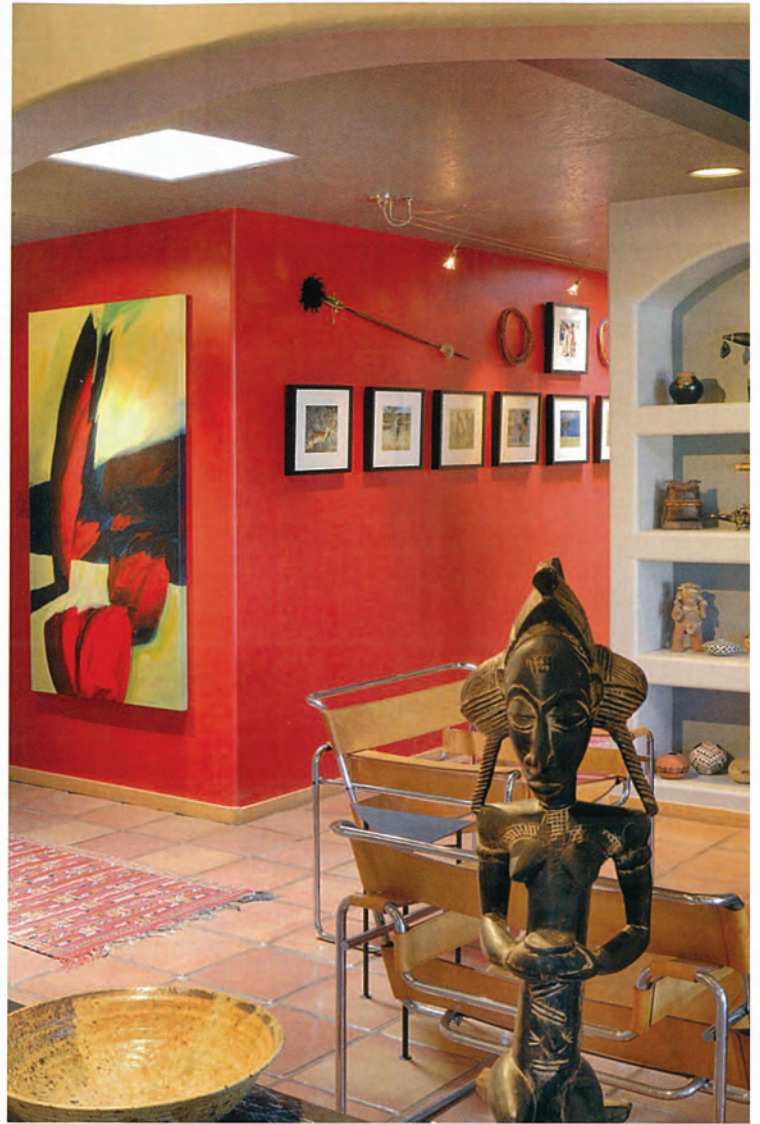
The result is a visual feast, set off by a color scheme that is a far cry from the shades of adobe so often seen in Santa Fe homes. Instead, varying shades of grey serve as the neutral in the home, punctuated by the strong colors both Joyce and Ron love.

A collection of masks from Mexico stand out on an unexpectedly lime green kiva fireplace. Rather than gallery white, the entry way and hall are red, showcasing a painting by Dick Evans near the door and a collection of photographs and Masai necklaces from a trip Joyce made to Africa in the hall. Over the bed in the master bedroom, a deep blue wall is home to a Rhett Lynch piece that features tiny red prayer rolls used in Native American ceremonies.

Some of the art displayed is distinctly personal. In the dining room there is a large Kathleen Kinkopf painting depicting Joyce and her kids at a joyful, whimsical dinner. In the family room, Joyce and Ron proudly display their art collectors' solution to the age-old dilemma of how to disguise the TV. Theirs is enclosed behind a bold diptych Joyce commissioned from Tamar Kander, one of the artists her gallery represents.

Some of the art pieces are Joyce's, some are Ron's and some are things Joyce sold to Ron over the years he was a customer at her gallery. But they all tend to carry a common thread: Vibrant shades, boldly expressed.

According to Joyce, the kismet of it all is that she and Ron liked the same colors, long before they became romantically involved, which just happened to make the blending of their collections all that much easier.



"I think one of the most important things you can ask about somebody is 'What is your palette?'" Joyce jokes.

Joyce has lived in this home since 1995, when she moved to Santa Fe from Europe. A single mom with two kids, "I was looking for a small town with culture, where you could ski," she says. This particular house caught her eye for a couple of reasons. It had a generous layout, it was located on the edge of a flood plain, which meant there would be no homes built directly behind it, and the place had potential for improvement.

When Joyce bought it, the house was a fairly standard builder's Pueblo style home with two concrete slab patios. Over the years, she has added and refined, replacing those concrete slabs with portals that provide spacious outdoor living adjoining the living areas and the master bedroom. With an eye toward entertaining, Joyce had the wall of the patio off the living room built low enough that it can serve as extra seating for a dinner party. "I've had 30 people out here for dinner," she says.

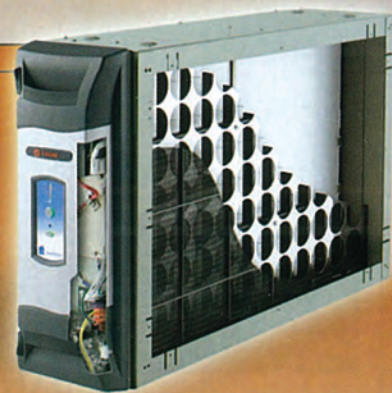


Above: Joyce and her kids are depicted in a whimsical Kathleen Kinkopf work.

Left: Black granite countertops are the centerpiece of a kitchen redo.

Right: An Indonesian mask from the couple's collection.





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Five years ago, she tackled the kitchen, leaving the builder-issue oak cabinets but boldly cladding her countertops in black granite overlays. With a black tile backsplash accentuated with lime tiles and a black door with the same accents, the room is a showstopper. Joyce halved a long wall of pantry cabinets, replaced them with custom built-ins and then opened the rest of the wall to the living room. A ledge provides space to display art. The new openness into the living room is great for entertaining, Joyce says.

The kitchen is also home to a wonderful Biedermeier armoire, one of two Biedermeier pieces Joyce acquired in Europe.

More recently, Joyce tore out the plain-jane sidewalk that led to the front door and replaced it with a graceful, Mediterranean-inspired courtyard. Gravel covers the surface of the courtyard, European style, and yarrow and lavender grace raised beds along the outer wall. Hardwood trees are encircled by low stack stone walls.

"This is where I came in," Ron says with a laugh, "just in time to build those walls."

With their compatible tastes and color palettes, did these two have to compromise at all when joining their households?

"I have a lot more furniture now," Joyce admits. But again there was a bit of luck at work. Ron's red leather sleeper sofa was perfect for his

The TV hides behind a piece of original art.





Ron Whatley and Joyce Robins

office. A black leather couch he brought along is right at home in the family room and the two chairs that came with it are now part of the living room suite.

Not that there weren't a few differences between the couple as they merged households. Joyce is not a fan of displaying small items or memorabilia around the house. "I like things very minimal, the way it is in my gallery," she explains. But Ron's collection of pottery and other travel mementos have found a home on built-in shelves in the living room.

Another difference? Joyce tends to read books and then pass them along rather than find a place to keep them in the house. But Ron likes to hold on to favorite titles.

This poses a dilemma. "Bookcases tend to get tall, which means you can't hang any art over them," Joyce says. The compromise is a low wall of bookcases in Ron's office, and plans for more book space in an addition the couple is building.

"You can't have an architect without new design!" Joyce says. Ron sold his architecture firm six years ago and now consults on a few select projects. The addition he's designing for the house adds two guest suites and 100 square feet of public space. It'll provide ample room for guests and especially for Joyce's kids when they visit.

And the couple is looking forward to another big benefit from the construction: more wall space.

"We have art behind the furniture, in the closets and under the bed," Ron says. "It'll be nice to get it out."

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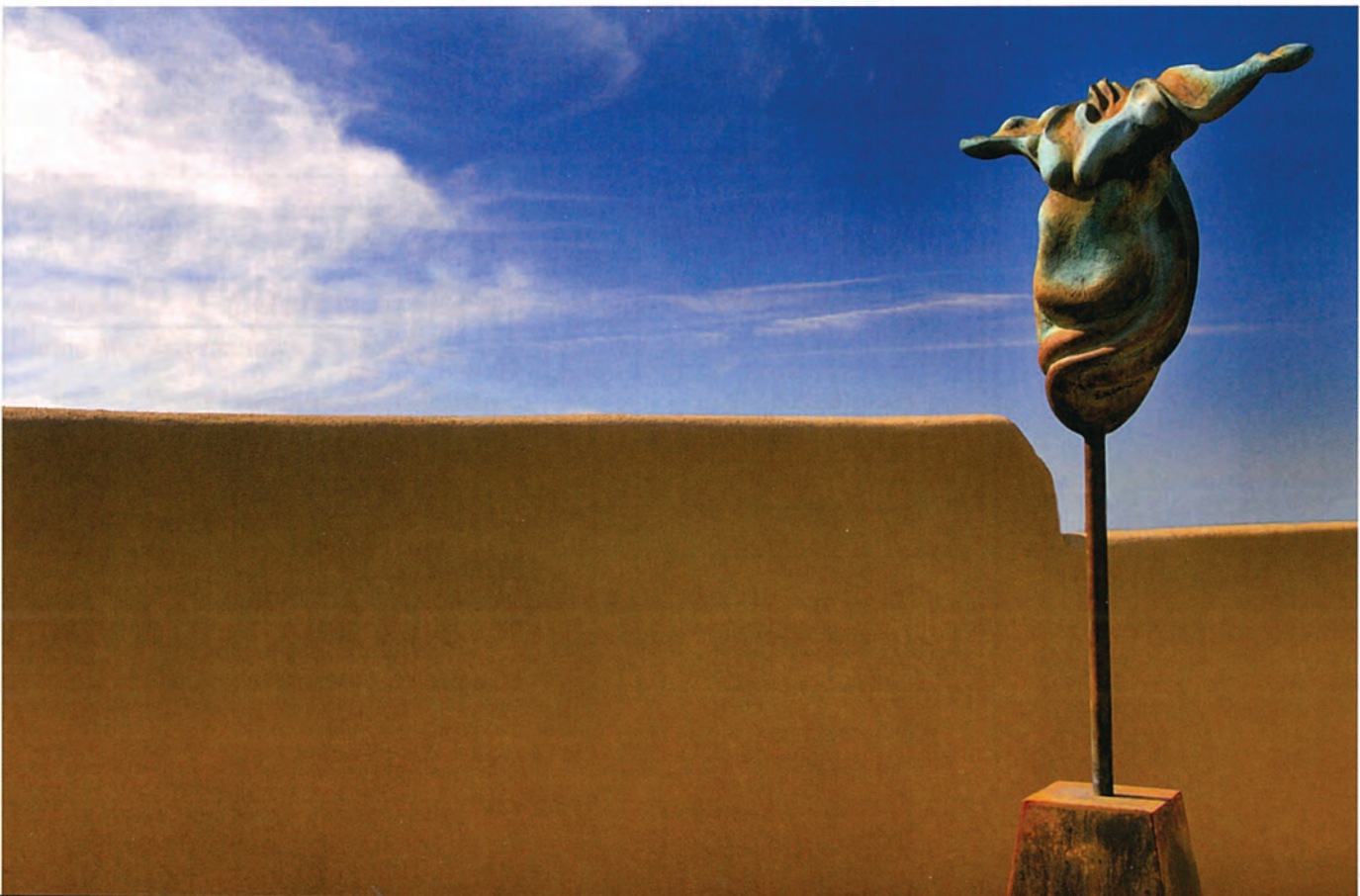
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Below: A sculpture by Enrico Embroli graces the Mediterranean-inspired courtyard.





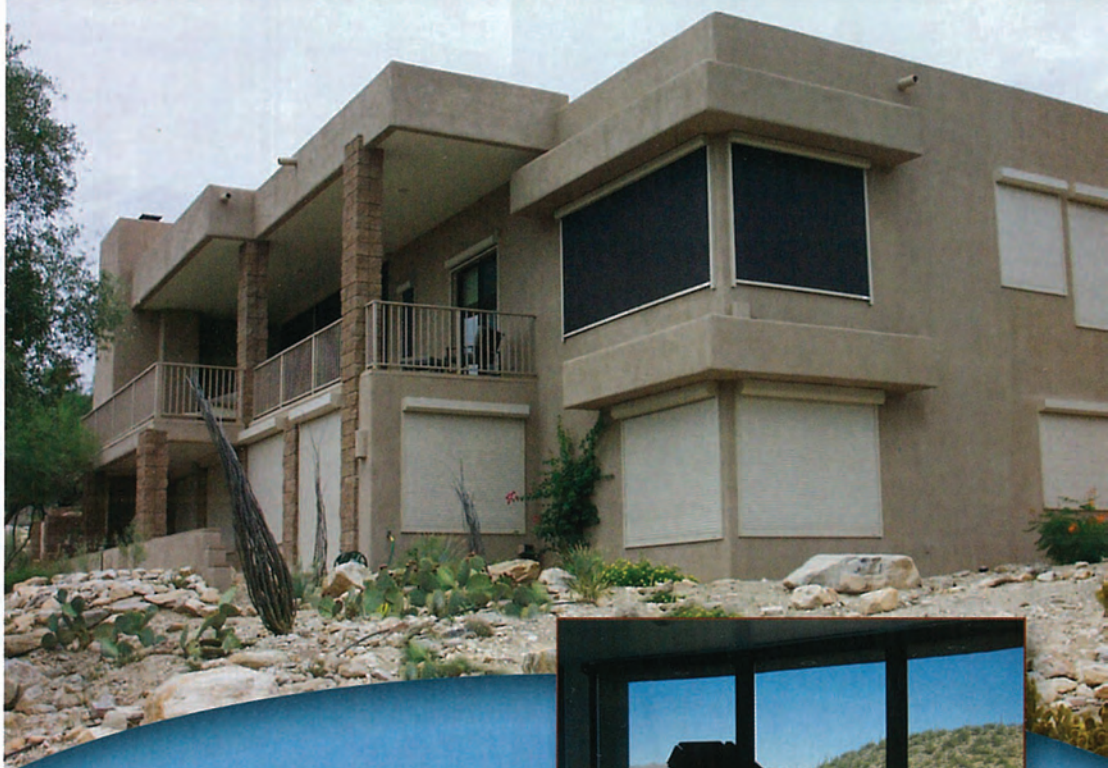
Artwork (selected pieces):
Joyce Robins Gallery
Santa Fe • 505.989.8795
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Kitchen countertop granite overlays:
Granite Transformations
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