

Architectural Alchemist

Bringing Old World principles to the new, Craig Hoopes unites traditional and modern, indoors and out

BY ASHLEY M. BIGGERS

DANIEL NADELBACH

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“We as human beings want to feel that there’s more to come... When we stop believing there’s anything around the corner, we get old. We try to design all of our buildings so there’s something to pull you in, so you’re not confined.”

Whether it’s revitalizing a downtown performing arts venue or designing a living room for musicians rehearsing, Craig Hoopes has brought a harmonious blending of modern and traditional to his scores of Santa Fe architectural projects. Steeped in the architectural legacy of Le Corbusier, he reconciled the pioneering Modernist’s severe principles with the soft, round, earth-centered habitations of New Mexico’s traditional dwellings. Over his 40-year career—25 of them in Santa Fe—Hoopes has established a new vernacular of contemporary Santa Fe style.

He did it by entering into a relationship with place, rather than holding the arid landscape at bay. His structures invite the outside in, blurring the boundaries between domicile and desert. Crisp interiors reflect the passage of time, collecting and casting light across space.

Starting at Cornell University, where he was steeped in what he calls the magic of Le Corbusier, Hoopes emerged in 1973 with an intricate knowledge of the Swiss-French architect’s point of view that would serve as a touchstone throughout his career. Yet he also continued to resist it as overly austere and sterile.

Admired and disparaged today in equal measure, the architect who called himself Le Corbusier (1887–1965) espoused a quintuplet of tenets, which he dubbed the Five Points of a New Architecture—such as perching buildings on ground-level support columns, creating open and free-flowing interiors, and incorporating rooftop gardens and grand windows that introduce natural light and exterior views. “I wanted to get away from that,” Hoopes says of the muse he calls “Corb.” But “I still liked some of the ideas, and there are some things I’ve been able to bring to New Mexico.”

His education didn’t stop at architecture. The philomath and Renaissance man studied art history in Florence and piano at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University from 1976 to 1981. “I just had to go and find out if I had any musical talent,” he says. Ultimately he decided that he was better suited to architecture than music, but his affinity for the arts has influenced the projects for which he is best known.

During his early years as an East Coast architect, Hoopes designed award-winning office complexes and facilities, but he felt his firm’s designs growing ever more ornamented, widening the gap to his minimalist leanings. “In the end I wanted the simplicity of a wall,” he says. “A plain wall can be extremely beautiful.”

Craving change, he headed west in 1992 to Santa Fe, a place he’d visited many times. (His father worked in public relations at then-College of Santa Fe.) He founded Hoopes + Associates Architects the same year, keeping the firm intentionally small to focus on the contemporary design to which he remained devoted. Landing in a place where the prevailing design aesthetic was anything but modern, Hoopes could be said to have launched a mission to demonstrate that modern architecture can exist harmoniously with traditional Southwest forms.

Opposite and previous page: Floor-to-ceiling doors at the Bunkowski residence allow for true indoor-outdoor living. Inside, the unexpected awaits around every corner.

Contractor - Prull & Associates
Interiors - Paul Rau Interiors
Landscape - Serquis & Associates



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This transitional-style home includes some elements of traditional Santa Fe design in an open, contemporary layout. Opposite: A stairwell off the patio leads to a roof deck with fire pit.

Homes as expressions of life

"I'm a Modernist," Hoopes declares. "We live in this time period, so we should honor the time we live in. From that standpoint, I want the work the firm does to reflect the time period." He knows, however, that structures do not exist in a cultural or geographic vacuum, and over the decades his own aesthetic preferences, lessons from Le Corbusier, and the legacy of regional styles have played out in a long dialogue about the new tenets of Santa Fe style.

With an eye toward clean lines and intention, Hoopes's designs repurpose classic regional styles. The thick walls are reimagined to incorporate cabinetry, in keeping with contemporary needs. Roof beams are decorative, casting light that reflects the passage of time through the space. Hoopes's homes still nestle into the landscape, even perched on hilltops, but not out of any practical necessity to shelter from summer heat, winter cold, or spring winds. "Even though we're doing something that's very contemporary, there's a sense of belonging to the land in the way the old houses used to do," he says.

Creating this relationship with the land begins with positioning structures to maximize views, often of the Sangre de Cristo and Jemez mountains. Exterior spaces are foregrounded. "In our environment here, I want people to feel as much that they are living in the landscape as they are living in their house," Hoopes says. "The house is not confining our lives. Our lives are expansive and take us in new directions and make us see things differently as time passes." Homes should, too.

Hoopes's adherence to the fluidity between indoor and outdoor spaces is certainly an inheritance from Le Corbusier. Classic Santa Fe homes, where residents' lives were spent as much in outdoor courtyards as indoors, also blur these delineations. Hoopes draws frequently on floor-to-ceiling windows

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that flood interiors with light and bring the outdoors in, as in Ken and Karen Bunkowski's home on the edge of the Galisteo Basin. The house shelters an interior courtyard that keeps New Mexico winds at bay. Floor-to-ceiling pocket doors provide year-round outdoor views and slide away when the weather is fine to open the home directly to Galisteo Basin views.

This interplay does not compromise the home's energy efficiency. Hoopes's firm followed sustainable design standards before they were buzzwords. Unlike traditional homes, which rely on thick adobe walls for insulation, he uses a less bulky double-insulation technique with eco-consciousness as the motivation. "If we're going to survive as a planet, we have to respect it and let it be a part of our lives," he says. "It's my great hope that we invent electronic walls in the future so we can walk in and out without walls, and that our houses are more like pavilions. People go sailing and mountain climbing to be a part of nature, but we can do that in our own homes. Our houses . . . should be something that take us into the outside."

Like his Modernist models, Hoopes imagines buildings at human scale and has them follow our lifestyles rather than determine them. He also aims for approachability, as in the residence of John Rizzo and Annie Mansfield, still under construction. The unique curved home has two wings wrapping around a central courtyard in a "C." The Northern California residents wanted a second home that welcomed the skies and terrain of Santa Fe. "It's so beautiful, it's a shame to close it off," Rizzo says. "We wanted to live in a home, but feel like we were in the outdoors."

They weren't looking for a showpiece. "Sometimes contemporary homes are there to make a statement, not reflect the personalities of the people who live there," Rizzo says. "We wanted something warm and friendly, which is how we view ourselves as people." Hoopes's circular design creates a cloistered family environment, an oasis within the vacation oasis of Santa Fe. "From a maternal point of view, it feels like it's embracing the family," Mansfield says. Family members have their own separate rooms but are never far apart and may glimpse each other through windows across the central

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This Hoopes-designed home evoked for him the Ancestral Puebloan cliff houses, which nestle into the environment as the house does into the hillside, dropping off to expansive views of the Jemez Mountains. Opposite: Contemporary furniture plays against the softer, earthen architectural references.

Contractor - Prull & Associates
 Interiors - Samuel Design
 Landscape - Cindy Tafoya

courtyard. “The design lent itself to this notion that in the center core, everyone could be together,” Rizzo says. “Then [we all] go to private spaces and still feel connected.”

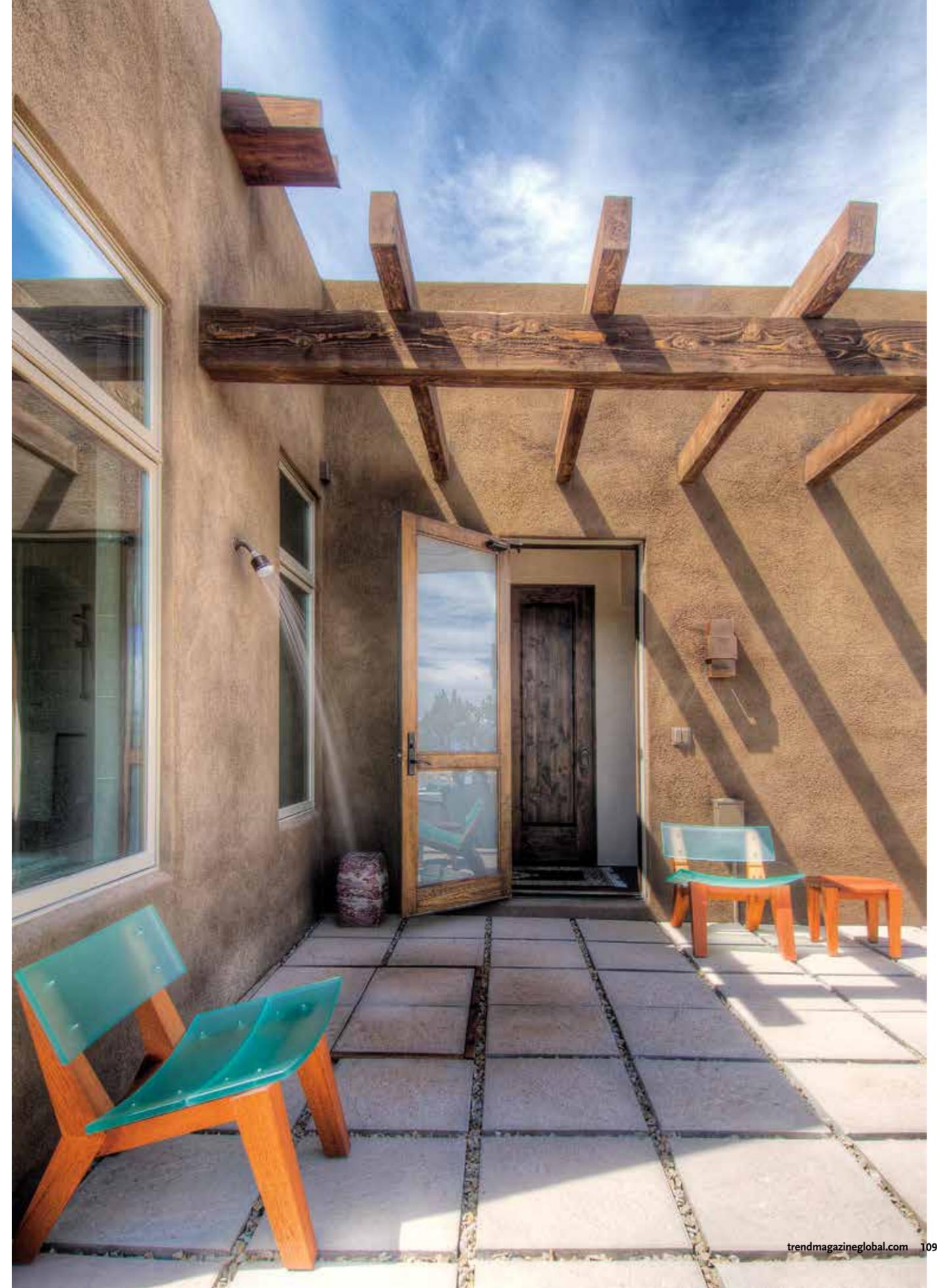
Finishes enhance the sense of intimacy. Hoopes leans away from the ubiquitous concrete of contemporary construction, with the single exception of stucco exteriors, a nod to regional standards. Counteracting the impression of sterility inside, he works with teams of interior designers who favor earthen materials like wood and stone, applied to blend interior and exterior areas. That might mean matching the flooring to the hue of the dirt outside, erasing the boundary.

The Santa Fe adobe shared by two musicians bears Hoopes’s design hallmark of floor-to-ceiling windows welcoming exterior views and light, but no two walls are parallel, which cuts down on reverberation from the pair practicing or performing. A slanted ceiling enhances the room’s acoustic qualities.

In designing the gallery OTA Contemporary, Hoopes turned his attention to the needs of visual artists. Kiyomi Ota Baird, who had moved to Santa Fe from New Jersey, commissioned him to design both her gallery at Canyon Road and Paseo de Peralta, and a home studio addition. Since the gallery is in a historic district (although the building itself is only 20 years old), Hoopes’s firm worked closely with Baird to make it congruent with its surroundings while also feeling light, airy, and spacious, in accordance with her vision.

The result is “totally in keeping with the Santa Fe Canyon Road architectural feeling,” Baird says. “He immediately understood the traffic pattern to maximize the visual space, inside and out.” Upon entering the space, which opened in May, rooms to the right and left wend around art-viewing cul-de-sacs before siphoning viewers into a high-ceilinged room outfitted with projectors, which can be closed off for multimedia installations, one of Baird’s specialties. Two lofty glass doors rim a final room, providing views and access to the courtyard. “It’s good to hold on to values and history,” Baird says, “but you need to keep alive the human spirit of continuing to grow and evolve. This

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“There are always things that are hidden or revealed. It goes along with the sense that we can never see our lives completely.”

Perched on a hill with magnificent views, this musical Santa Fe home incorporates a slanted roof that further optimizes both the connection to the outdoors and sound quality in the living room-turned-performance space. Opposite: Natural finishes throughout provide a feeling of warmth that is contemporary but not at all austere.

Landscape - Serquis & Associates

building is an example of what is possible in Santa Fe today on this historic street.”

For the 2,000-square-foot studio attached to her adobe home with a pitched metal roof, Hoopes optimized mountain views and created a “contemporary cathedral feeling, because of the vaulted ceiling,” Baird says. Skylights fill the room with natural light while preserving wall space, one of the artist’s requirements. “It’s hard to be creative and not make contemporary homes look cookie-cutter,” she says. “He keeps in mind the lifestyle of the people he’s designing for.”

To enhance his understanding of traditional architecture, Hoopes’s firm has taken on a number of restoration projects over the years. He earned historic preservation awards from the state of New Mexico and the city of Santa Fe in 2006 for his work on the Ortiz Velarde compound, where a property had been subdivided so children could build new homes around their parents’, in a traditional New Mexican configuration. Hoopes restored and updated the three-family compound from the 1890s to meet the needs of modern-day living. “We do it because it gives us ways of understanding how to make our contemporary buildings more authentic in the Southwest,” he says of such projects.

Acoustic accolades

The most visible of his preservation projects is undoubtedly the 2001 renovation of the Lencic Performing Arts Center, the most noteworthy of at least a dozen performance spaces in his portfolio. Almost as notable is his work on the Head Theater at Center Stage, the state theater of Maryland, which he completed just before he relocated to Santa Fe and which stands as a career highlight for the Baltimore native. “My love of music and performance has played a critical role in my life,” he explains. That design earned him a 1991 award from the American Institute of Architects and a 1993 award from Baltimore Heritage. Hoopes also designed the Weinberg Performing Arts Center in Maryland, a black box where tower seating can be changed quickly and fluidly. A project like that, he says, “gets you excited about not having limits.”

At the Lencic, Hoopes faced considerable limitations, balancing historic restrictions against the wish to make a small performance venue feel much bigger. Constricting as they sometimes were, the restrictions “make you come up with different solutions, which is fun for us,” he says.

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The distinctive round shape of the Rizzo-Mansfield home creates an intimate feel that allows family members to remain in visual contact while having defined spaces of their own.

Contractor - Prull & Associates
 Interiors - Paul Rau Interiors
 Landscape - Serquis & Associates



Opposite: The exterior of OTA Contemporary blends into the historic facades of Canyon Road, while the interiors create the light, airy feel desired for displaying art.

Contractor - Prull & Associates
 Landscape - Surroundings

He considers it a compliment when longtime residents remark that the renovated structure seems unchanged. In fact, myriad subtle and large-scale additions have been subtly incorporated. Walls don't touch the ceiling, allowing more reverb for the orchestras that perform there. The theater was rebuilt from the proscenium stage arch to Palace Avenue behind the building. The reconstructed backstage area allows the 1931 vaudeville stage to accordion from 15 to 55 feet deep to accommodate everything from an elementary school choir to the Russian ballet. For dance recitals, Hoopes re-imagined the theater floor from a straight rake to a subtle bowl shape, giving the audience unobstructed views of toe shoes on stage. These subtle innovations earned a 2001 award from the AIA/Western Mountain Region and a 2001 State of New Mexico Historic Preservation Award for a renovation that also served to revitalize downtown Santa Fe.

Sacred spaces

"I joke with my spiritual clients that what we do with them is just theater of a different kind," says Hoopes. "There's an auditorium, lights, a stage, and all the things that make for good theater, so it's not that different," he laughs.

TOP: ROBERT RECK. BOTTOM: COURTESY OF HOOPES ARCHITECTS

KATE RUSSELL (2)





ROBERT RECK



Restoration of the Lensic Performing Arts Center (left and opposite) required carefully navigating historic preservation standards, including maintaining original plaster. Below: Architect Craig Hoopes has spent 25 of his 40 professional years in Santa Fe.

Contractor - Klinger

He had worked on the Carmelite Monastery in Baltimore while he was with Ziger, Hoopes & Snead, using the architecture to enhance the experience of mysticism. “As you move through the church, you never see the whole thing all at once,” he says. “There are always things that are hidden or revealed. It goes along with the sense that we can never see our lives completely.” The sanctuary is set in the round, with parishioners circling a central altar. Angled windows let in light and a perfectly placed skylight illuminates a box holding the Eucharist at noon on St. Teresa of Avila’s saint day. Bucking the grand scale of the Gothic and Romanesque churches of Europe, Hoopes’s design is more human-scaled. “The awe comes from the internal realization, rather than the outward manifestation of the building,” he says.

In Santa Fe, Hoopes has worked closely with the Rev. Talitha Arnold at the United Church of Santa Fe over the last 20 years through several renovations and expansions, the latest of which broke ground in August. “In a way, churches are very much like houses in that I don’t want to find a barrier,” Hoopes muses. “Our experience of God in the world should be about expanding out into the universe.”

In an early meeting with parishioners, Hoopes asked, “Where does worship start for you?” Seeing the many varied responses, he and the Rev. Arnold sought to infuse every space with a godly presence, from the sanctuary to the children’s rooms. “We consider the whole United Church of Santa Fe building to be sacred space that needs to be filled with God’s light, warmth, and welcome,” the minister says. “The experience of worship begins as one comes down the street and pulls into the parking lot, so the whole journey needs to guide and welcome one into the life of the community and the experience of God’s presence.”

Twenty-five years after arriving in New Mexico, Hoopes hardly sees his architectural journey as complete. In many of his spaces he aims to suggest that there’s always something waiting around the corner. “We as human beings want to feel that there’s more to come,” he says. “That’s what keeps us going and young. When we stop believing there’s anything around the corner, we get old. We try to design all of our buildings so there’s something to pull you in, so you’re not confined.” ❄

LEFT: ROBERT RECK, RIGHT: DANIEL QUAT

