

# SANTA FE NEW MEXICAN

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## Merit award for 'Area 51' home in Las Campanas

Paul Weideman Jan 1, 2017



Area 51, northeast elevation

“The house is a space ship touching down in a Santa Fe planned development with a suburban layout and traditional ‘round and brown’ homes,” architect Thomas Gifford wrote in his entry for the annual AIA-Santa Fe design competition. In a recent interview, he explained that in this Las

Campanas house, the traditional New Mexican courtyard plan “is sort of inverted to cruciform, outward-looking, and there’s also a little bit of play: the owner’s a professional pilot, so it’s kind of a play on the cross you see looking down on an airplane. The address is 51 and he’s a science guy, thus Area 51.”

The contemporary beauty won an American Institute of Architects “Merit Award.” At 3,400 heated square feet, it features a dramatic entry with a cantilevered roof and a wall of walnut to facilitate changing artworks.

Gifford specified AAC (autoclaved aerated concrete) blocks for the walls. “I enjoyed working with it. I’ve used Reward and the other insulated concrete forms, but this is more like traditional block in that it uses a thin-set mortar and they’re stacked together. There are very small areas of vertical reinforcement necessary and obviously horizontal reinforcement in the bond beams. It reminds me of working in block when you don’t have to core-fill the blocks.

“The house has been occupied for the first part of winter here and the owners have really seen a reduction in their utility bill. It’s performing like it should, which is what you want, but you never know when you’re specifying a new material.” There’s also a 10-kilowatt photovoltaic system. Gifford said the house will be net-zero on everything but the commercial kitchen, which has special equipment including double-deck ovens and a 20-quart mixer. “The clients, Len and Barb Rand, and I designed the building around the views and courtyards and the way they like to live, and places for art. He loves to cook, so we put in that commercial kitchen: he likes to bake bread and he likes to donate bread and the only way you can donate to Kitchen Angels is if you can work to commercial standards.”

The living-room floors are rough-sawn white oak “with very little grain, beautifully installed, nice and hard,” he said. “We used Terrazzo everywhere else.” There are custom zebrawood cabinets, Duravit plumbing fixtures, and motorized *portal* sun shades.

The windows and doors were ordered from Reynaers of Belgium. “The Europeans have kind of gotten ahead of us on window manufacture and insulation values,” Gifford said. “These windows are tilt-turn — you turn the handle up and it dips in, and you turn it again and it becomes a casement window. Len and Barb wanted that functionality. — Paul Weideman

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