

# SuCasa

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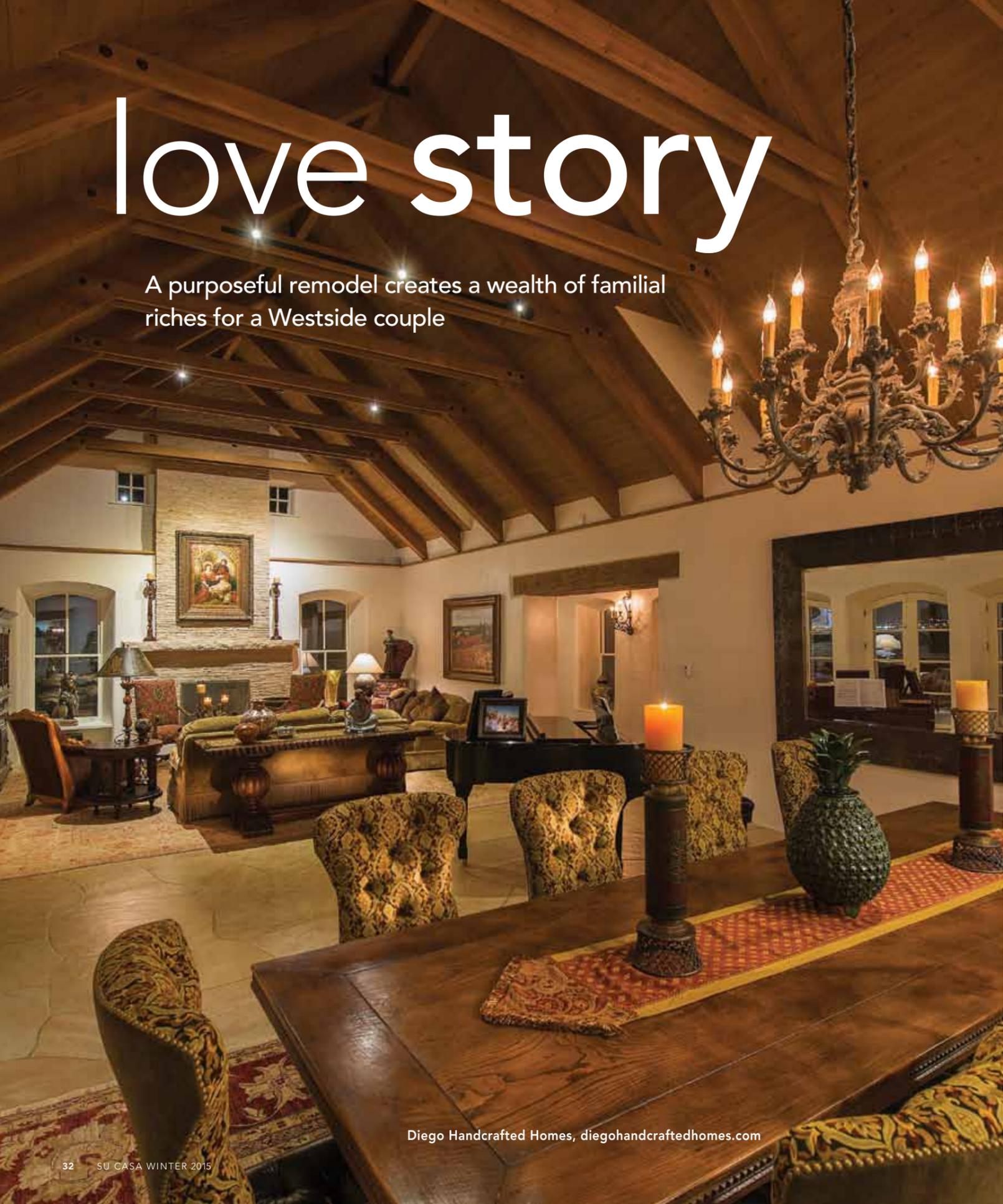
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masterful Westside  
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# love story

A purposeful remodel creates a wealth of familial riches for a Westside couple



Diego Handcrafted Homes, [diegohandcraftedhomes.com](http://diegohandcraftedhomes.com)

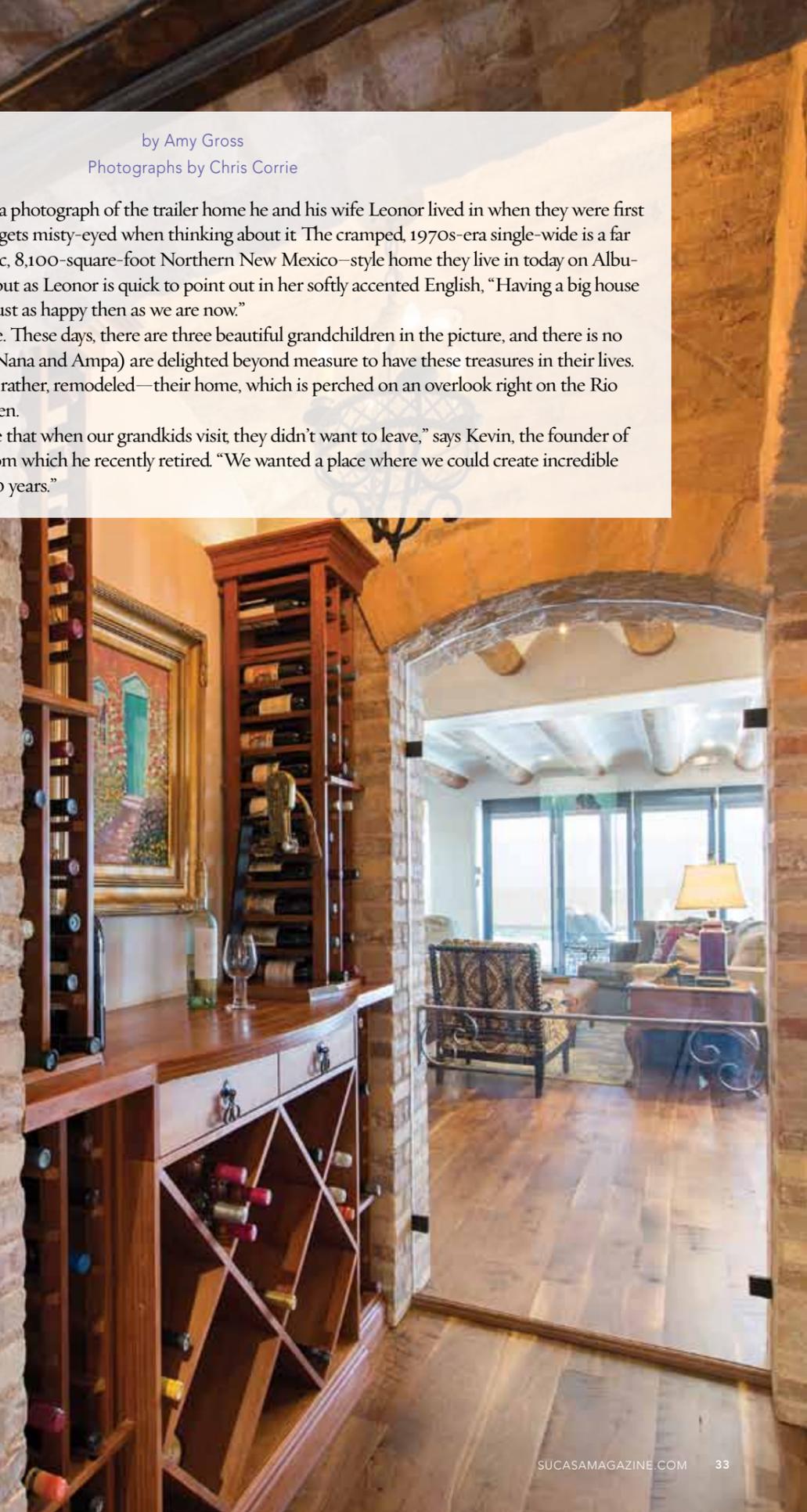
by Amy Gross  
Photographs by Chris Corrie

**K**evin Daniels still has a photograph of the trailer home he and his wife Leonor lived in when they were first married. And he still gets misty-eyed when thinking about it. The cramped, 1970s-era single-wide is a far cry from the romantic, 8,100-square-foot Northern New Mexico-style home they live in today on Albuquerque's Westside, but as Leonor is quick to point out in her softly accented English, "Having a big house doesn't make you happy. We were just as happy then as we are now."

Well, maybe that's not *entirely* true. These days, there are three beautiful grandchildren in the picture, and there is no doubt that Leonor and Kevin (aka Nana and Ampa) are delighted beyond measure to have these treasures in their lives. In fact, they both say, they built—or rather, remodeled—their home, which is perched on an overlook right on the Río Grande River, for their grandchildren.

"We were looking to build a place that when our grandkids visit, they didn't want to leave," says Kevin, the founder of Daniels Family Funeral Services, from which he recently retired. "We wanted a place where we could create incredible memories for them over the next 10 years."

A single groin arch overlooks the custom-designed wine room, which is enclosed in glass on three sides. Now it can be enjoyed, gallery-style, from the kitchen, the living room, and even the hallway. Opposite: The majestic beams of the great room's cathedral ceiling were sandblasted to remove their whitewashed finish. Now stained a dark wood, they give the great room the gravitas it deserved.

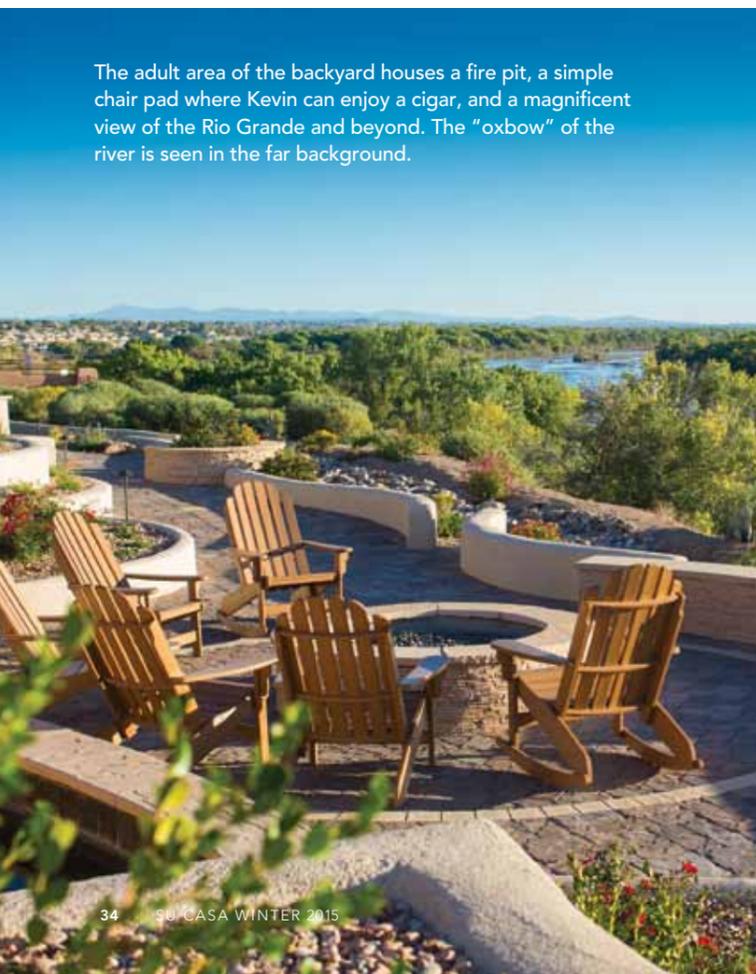




Ruiz converted the thick corner walls into what are essentially butt-glazed windows and added a 21-foot bifold door to create a panoramic view from within the home, not just from the outdoor patio. Windows and doors from Sierra Pacific Windows; flagstone from Rocky Mountain Stone.



Left: Leonor's kitchen was configured so that she can enjoy the views from deep within the home while prepping for a meal. Her guests, meanwhile, can hang around the generous island designed and built by Woodlife Custom Craft. A fully stocked "baking center" (the former kitchen) is located behind the range alcove. The backsplash is a vintage clay Spanish tile from Arizona Tile.



The adult area of the backyard houses a fire pit, a simple chair pad where Kevin can enjoy a cigar, and a magnificent view of the Rio Grande and beyond. The "oxbow" of the river is seen in the far background.

The couple met in 1979 in Bloomfield, New Mexico, where Kevin was a police officer and Leonor a cook in a Mexican restaurant. At the time he spoke no Spanish and she no English, but theirs was a "crazy love story," says Kevin, which has continued over more than three decades. Along the way the couple has been blessed with two children and (so far) three grandchildren—the driving forces behind their remodel.

They considered buying a home, but not one they visited could match the vistas from their own: the river, including its picturesque oxbow, the bosque, and downtown Albuquerque. "I said to Leonor, let's talk about making this house 21st-century new and spend the money here, because the property we have here is one-of-a-kind," says Kevin. Leonor agreed, and after reading the cover story on Chris and Nicole Wasco Bauman's home in the Summer 2012 issue of *Su Casa*, the couple contacted the home's designer and builder, Diego Ruiz of Diego Handcrafted Homes.

The Cuban-born Ruiz came to architecture and home building via a career in graphic design and illustration, which partially explains the artistic vision and painstaking detail he brings to each of his meticulously designed and crafted homes. "I'm a very involved, hands-on builder. I approach each home I design as if I were building it for my own family," says Ruiz, a Certified Green Professional (CGP) designer. He is also a self-described "kid at heart," immediately grasping Kevin and Leonor's imperative to remodel their home for their beloved grandbabies. Albuquerque-based interior designer Laura Myers of Laura Myers Interiors, who had collaborated with



The family room is centered around a stacked stone fireplace Ruiz designed to replace one located behind where the mirror is now. Working with interior designer Myers, the homeowners opted for neutrals and warm browns to complement the stacked stone, the custom woodwork, and the beautiful coved ceiling with vigas from Wholesale Timber & Viga.

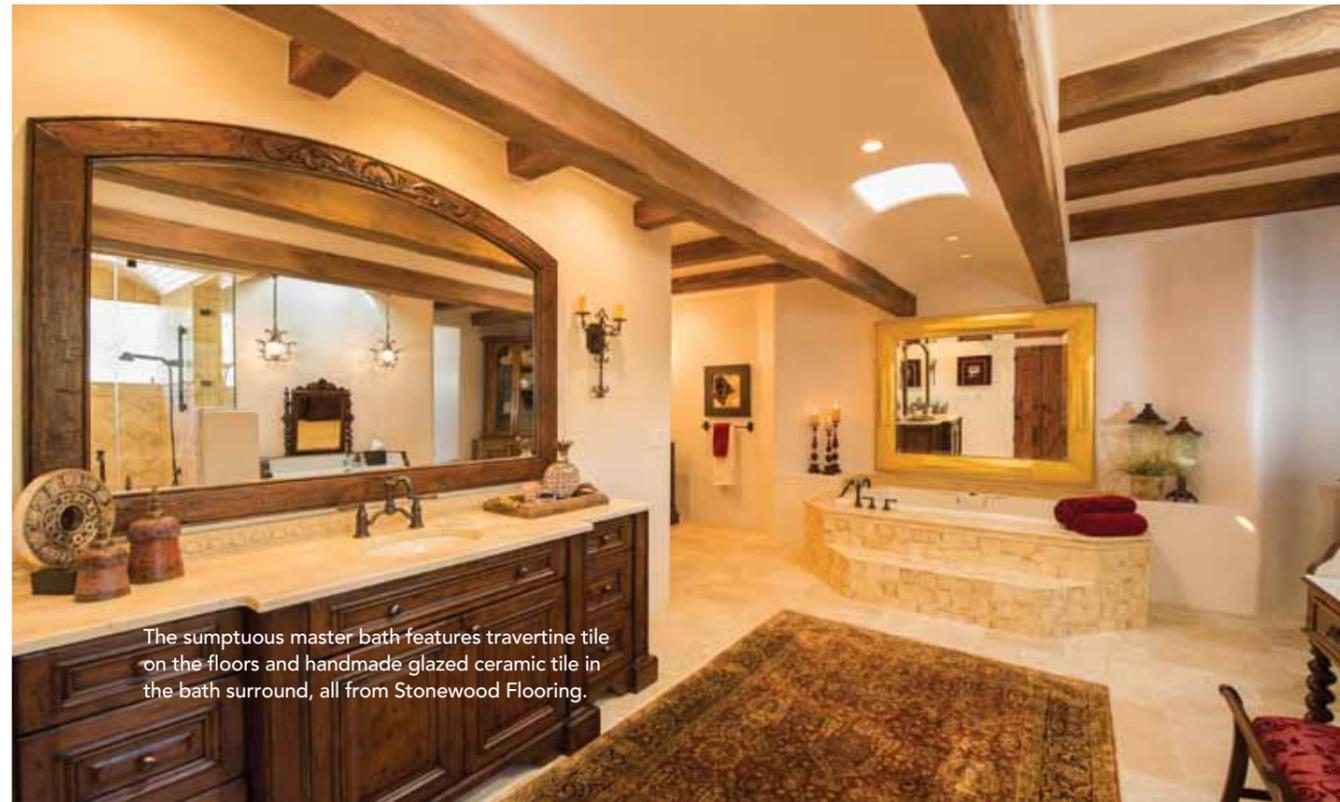
Right: "Understanding how people feel and live, how they enjoy their spaces, and meeting those needs is what makes great architecture," says design-builder Diego Ruiz (on left). His collaborations with interior designer Laura Myers work well, he says, "because we sharpen each other." The feeling is mutual for Myers, who has been a designer for 33 years: "Diego truly cares not only about space but about design. He has a great artistic eye."



"We were looking to build a place that when our grandkids visit, they didn't want to leave."—Kevin Daniels



"Anything you can cook in a regular oven, you can cook in a wood-fired oven," notes Kevin. He and Leonor use theirs to cook fish, meats, pizza, breads, cakes, and eggplant parmesan.



The sumptuous master bath features travertine tile on the floors and handmade glazed ceramic tile in the bath surround, all from Stonewood Flooring.

Ruiz on the Bauman home, was brought in to consult on materials, finishes, and colors. With a bevy of skilled craftsman, contractors, and artisans also on the project, it turned out to be a design-build dream team.

"When I design a remodel, I always want to make sure that you can't tell the difference between the old and the new—that you fuse that seam," Ruiz says. Myers agrees: "It's imperative that a remodel integrate with the existing home. We incorporated washed brick in the arched area of the kitchen and wine room for an authentic look, and I felt strongly that the wood floors should look like they'd aged in place." Indeed, the old-growth walnut gives the home warmth, with a patina that makes it look like it's been there for years.

Initially the remodel was to entail a family room addition, a breakfast nook, a kitchen upgrade, and a pool. Kevin was also determined to upgrade the electrical service in the house, the HVAC system, and the alarm system. But as these projects tend to do, the scope of the remodel nearly doubled over the 12 months of the build, with a more elaborate negative-edge pool built within elegantly functional hardscaping (designed by Ruiz) and seasonally appropriate landscaping; a gut of the master suite and the addition of a second-story deck off the master; the creation of a gorgeous, glass-enclosed wine room and a three-sided wet bar off the rear *portal*; and even the conversion of an old pantry into a linen room where Leonor can see, display, and easily access her cherished collection of table linens.

Above: Finishes and textiles were chosen that would evoke the home's Northern New Mexico authenticity. The romantic melding of traditional style and comfort is evident in every single room.



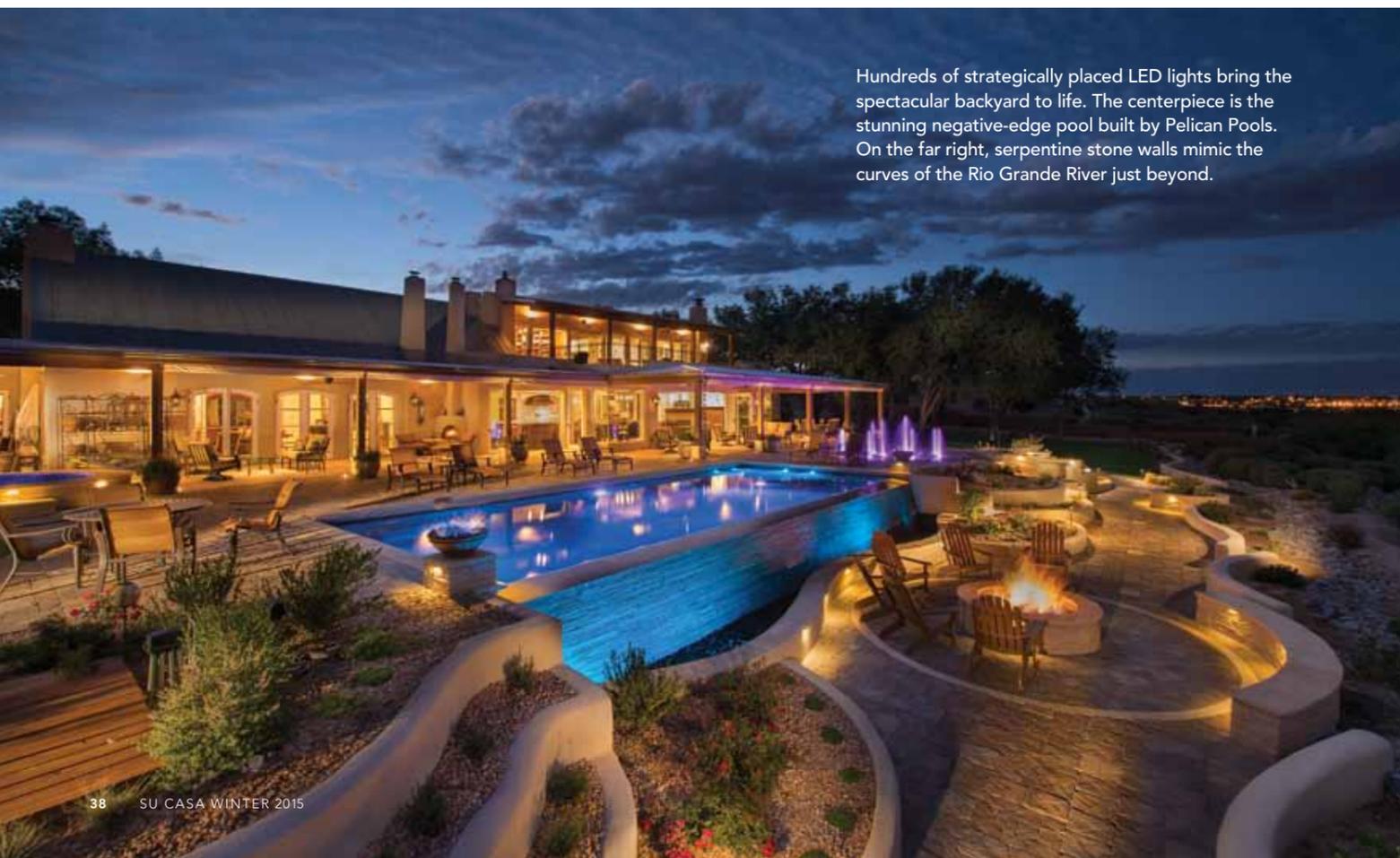
Leonor's favorite room in the entire home is her linen room, with custom shelving, drawers, and hangers that allow her to display, store, and admire her cherished table linens.



"A fire brings a dead house to life," says Leonor. No fewer than eight fireplaces grace the home, including the pizza oven in the kitchen and this romantic kiva in the entry courtyard.



"When I design, I try to appeal to all of the senses," says Diego Ruiz. The Roman splash pad is not only visually striking, but pleasant to listen to. Not surprisingly, it's also a huge hit with the grandchildren.



Hundreds of strategically placed LED lights bring the spectacular backyard to life. The centerpiece is the stunning negative-edge pool built by Pelican Pools. On the far right, serpentine stone walls mimic the curves of the Rio Grande River just beyond.



A sculptural corner niche marks the end of a hallway. To the left is a desk custom-built by Woodlife Custom Craft. Even when the desk is overflowing with papers, clutter disappears simply by pulling the doors shut—an ideal amenity when guests come to visit.



The homeowners are heavy-duty entertainers, and they put their remodeled home to the test when they hosted a dinner party for 150 guests. Afterward, Kevin marveled, "We could have fit another 100 here, comfortably."

ARCHITECT: JON ANDERSON

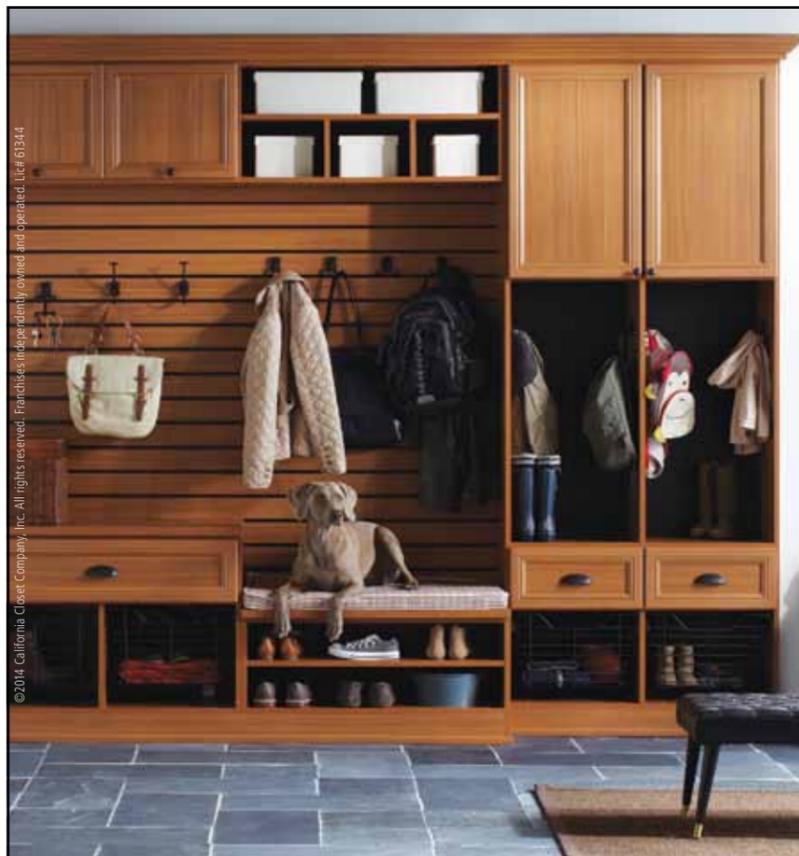
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Meticulous attention to the smallest details, like an exquisitely hand-carved table leg, is what makes this home so unique.

The kitchen was greatly expanded to include a large, granite-clad cooking and prep area, as well as what Leonor calls a “baking center” behind the main kitchen. “It’s where I can make a big mess and not worry about cleaning, because the [guest-facing area] of the kitchen still looks good.” But when she worried that she wouldn’t be able to see the north- and south-facing views of the river from the prep station in her kitchen, Ruiz converted the living room’s thick corner walls, which were on a 45-degree angle to the river, into what are essentially butt-glazed windows, softened with a white mullion to maintain the adobe-style integrity of the home. Adding a 21-foot bifold door from Sierra Pacific Windows blurred the indoor-outdoor lines even further and created a panoramic view from *within* the home, not just from the outdoor patio.

So what was designed for the grandchildren—the special guests for whom the home was remodeled? A Roman fountain splash pad next to the pool, an outdoor playground, and an indoor playroom, among other things. “The first thing they do when they get here is run to that playroom and see what new toys Ampa and Nana have bought for them,” says Kevin with a grandfatherly grin. “And I want to tell you, every penny we spent is paid back in dividends watching our grandkids enjoy their time in our home. It’s priceless.”

Kevin and Leonor entertain regularly, from intimate dinner parties to events of up to 150 guests. But not surprisingly, they say they most enjoy sharing their home with family and close friends. Diego Ruiz, who is proud to be considered among the latter, credits his clients with blessing everyone involved with the project with the genuine warmth, generosity, and hospitality that come naturally to them. With love factored into every detail, this is a home custom-designed for celebrating life and creating priceless family memories.

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