



BY ANN MATESI, CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**B**uilder Diego Ruiz struck gold on his first try with this distinctive courtyard-style home, his first ever spec-built project, which received both the top prize in its price category as well as the "People's Choice Award" at the 2003 Homes of Enchantment Parade of Homes sponsored by the Home Builder's Association of Central New Mexico.

Ruiz designed the 3,405-sq.-ft. Albuquerque, N.M. residence to be an

amalgam of Spanish Colonial and Tuscan architecture accented by contemporary elements. "I wanted to come up with something that was different, something that would make people fall in love with it," he says, "so I combined rustic theme with more restrained modern touches."

Ruiz's passion for detail and design ingenuity shine in the home's compact, but charming kitchen which features a dramatic brick barrel-vaulted ceiling as well as a num-

**Contemporary lighting** and appliances and granite countertops provide subtle contrast to the kitchen's rustic elements which include distressed hand-scraped hickory wood floors, hand-hewn ceiling beams and knotty alder cabinetry. The backsplashes are tumbled travertine "bricks" that complement the ceiling finish. The large island provides additional counter space for meal prep or entertaining needs and includes a low-height microwave oven intended for children to use.



**Ruiz varied the ceiling height** and finish to mark the transition from the home's kitchen to great room. Incorporating humor into his design he created a faux "jailor's" window using hand-forged wrought-iron bars and antique shutters to provide a visual connection between the kitchen's household organization center and great room. This nook includes a built-in desk and a walk-in pantry. On the window wall, sunshine filters through the cabinetry which features glass fronts and actual windows for their rear panels.

ber of subtle, one-of-a-kind details including a mosaic-tile spice niche, an electrically-operated dumbwaiter and cabinetry backlit by natural light. The kitchen also features low-voltage cable lighting, stainless steel appliances and granite countertops.

"I tried to concentrate on bringing a lot of details into the room," he says, "without using ones that slap you in the face. I really wanted the effect to be more subtle, like 'Oh! I just noticed this or that.'"

The quarter-acre home site was "exceptionally tight but offered great opportunities for views of nearby Mt. Taylor and the city lights of Albuquerque," says Ruiz. "These factors played a key role in my design. It was important to maximize privacy and views at the same time." His solution was to build the home as a split level, positioning the three-car garage beneath the combined space of the kitchen, dining and great rooms, which were elevated a half

level. By creating variation in the ceiling heights and treatments in the three rooms, Ruiz says that he was able to give each space its own "sense of place."

"The way the design worked out the single wall in the kitchen that provided the opportunity for windows was also the one that included much of the cabinetry," he says. "But I still wanted to get as much light into the space as possible." Ruiz's solution was to substitute real windows for the rear panels in the upper cabinets. Sunlight filters through translucent "seedy" glass flooding the interior of the kitchen with natural light. From the outside, they appear to be conventional windows.

Although Ruiz's initial target market for this home was a move-up family, it was actually purchased by an empty-nester couple, he says.

"They stopped in for a tour of the home and to see what other properties I had available and ended up buying this one right away," he says.

The home, which was completed in October 2003, was sold one month before it was finished. **CB**

#### SPEC-BUILT LUXURY RESIDENCE

**Style of Home:** Spanish Colonial and Tuscan

**Location:** Albuquerque, N.M.

**Total Square Footage:** 3405 sq. ft.

**Estimated Market Value:** withheld at owner's request

**Builder:** Diego Handcrafted Homes, Albuquerque, NM

**Major Products Used:** APPLIANCES: Thermador; Maytag Corp. (Amana refrigerator); CABINETRY: custom knotty alder; COUNTERTOPS: Arizona Tile (granite); CUSTOM DOORS: custom; PLUMBING FIXTURES: Kohler, Moen; FLOORING: Benchmark Wood Floors; LIGHTING FIXTURES: Tech Lighting; HVAC: Rheem; WINDOWS: Hurd Windows and Doors

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