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# rational refuge

research, planning, and spreadsheets pay off beautifully for an engineering couple



by Keiko Ohnuma

photographs by Chris Corrie and Johnelle Koriath

It's probably no accident that Johnelle Koriath and Chris Musial's home swept the awards at the Fall 2016 Homes of Enchantment Parade, happening when it did. During a tense election season when everyone seemed to be on edge, the elegant simplicity of the warm modern home exuded a calm so pervasive as to be nearly invisible. This was not an effect, signposted by burbling fountains, meditation cushions, or Asian temple references, but the natural outcome of thoughtful planning in every detail.

Johnelle is a physicist, after all, and her husband Chris an engineer. They met in 2013 as career professionals, so you wouldn't expect their first and only home build to be a frivolous fantasy. Still, the way they approached the project—much as you'd design an airplane or launch a study—offers an object lesson in rational problem-solving.

They knew what they wanted, more or less, and began by researching floor plans online, drawing up lists, and creating a spreadsheet with a budget penciled out. Only then did they start looking for builders. In Ted Lowe of Lowe-Bo Homes they found an engineer after their own hearts, who



Chris Corrie



Johnelle Koriath

Above: Like his human parents, German shorthair pointer Flash loves the outdoor areas of his award-winning home. Inside (left), the look is transitional modern, with cool, clean, neutral finishes in the open-concept living area and kitchen.





Chris Corrie



Chris Corrie



Chris Corrie

Opposite, top: The interiors are largely transitional, but the massive, frosted-glass front door, is pure contemporary design and an impressive entry to the home.

Above and opposite, bottom: Would you expect two engineers to create anything other than an efficient, livable floor plan? Open and flowing, the living room, kitchen and dining nook pass easily into one another.



Chris Corrie

not only built the type of home they wanted, but, as Johnelle says with a laugh, didn't freak out when they walked in with their spreadsheet.

"They brought or sent in four pages of stuff in a questionnaire format," recalls Lowe, a veteran, award-winning Albuquerque homebuilder. He rolled up his sleeves and dug right in. The three spoke the same language, and ended up as good friends—a compatibility that can be felt in the easy tranquility of the transitional Southwestern home.

A physicist and an engineer respectively, Johnelle and Chris knew what they wanted in their new home. They researched floor plans and created a budget, and then found Ted Lowe, a builder who spoke their language.

It was Lowe who suggested a lot in Las Leyendas, a newish development in Sedillo that was priced to sell and convenient for Chris's job near Kirtland Air Force Base. With two-acre lots, clear night skies, and mountain views—ideal for Johnelle's 8-inch Newtonian telescope on the patio—the community started making more and more sense. "It came down to bang for the buck," Johnelle explains, and indeed, the affordable lot price meant she and Chris had that much more to spend on line items for the build.

Neither too big nor too small, their "Goldilocks" house would be precisely 2,400 to 2,600 square feet, with clean lines and a harmonious flow, with "every single inch used," says Chris. It would be all one level and designed to let them age in place—"to meet our needs right now and later," Johnelle says—with features designed to fit seamlessly into their daily lives, including two rambunctious dogs who get full run of the rooms.

Given their easy agreement on most everything they wanted in a home—"That's what happens when you're an eHarmony couple," Johnelle winks—the home was move-in ready in seven months. She and

Left: Comfortable, low-maintenance furnishings and just-right accents earned the home—and Koriath, who chose and placed them—an award for Best Interior Design.





The award-winning kitchen features a double Wolf oven and range for heavy-duty culinary adventures. Open shelving helps to create the feeling of more space, while a huge butler's pantry (hidden behind the stove wall) keeps things neat and tidy up front.





Homeowner Johnelle Koriath and builder Ted Lowe happily geeked out together over blueprints and plans.



Chris Corrie



A simple but efficient office is tucked neatly into the hallway, so that no guest bedroom space is wasted.

Chris Corrie



Chris Corrie

Chris researched everything meticulously, from the Morso wood-burning stove that would go in the living room (clean-burn certified, totally flush, with a visible fire) to the quartz Cambria countertops in the kitchen (easier to maintain than granite) and the rolling barn door connecting the butler's pantry to the hallway.

Though modestly sized and priced for a custom build, the four-bedroom, two-and-a-half bath home has features carefully chosen for a life of luxury, like Johnelle's splurge, the six-burner stove in the kitchen, and the beckoning patio that's a de facto second dining room and living room complete with built-in fireplace. Chris, who likes to tinker, got a three-car garage with windows for natural lighting to accommodate his workbenches and motorcycles.

One bedroom serves as Johnelle's work-at-home office, and one is Chris's music room and overflow guest quarters, where he keeps his "harem," as Johnelle calls the rack of electric guitars lined up in the closet

The couple wanted their master suite separate from any guest quarters—a design achieved by a barely noticeable hallway off the kitchen that

Left: Richly patterned granite tops the counters in the kitchen. Right: One of Musial's beloved guitars, part of what he winkingly calls his "harem."

"I don't view it as one of those 'Don't touch anything' houses. It's lived in and loved."  
—Johnelle Koriath



Chris Corrie



Right: An enormous picture window in the master bedroom offers uninterrupted views of the outdoor patio and the scenery beyond it. A serene palette of grays and beiges extends into the master bath (below), adding to the suite's air of refined minimalism.



Chris Corrie



Chris Corrie

Light, bright, and airy, the master bath (above) relies on finishes that, while beautiful and elegant, are also durable, like the Silestone countertops and porcelain, wood-look tile flooring. A Southwest-style area rug adds just the right amount of color to the monochromatic spaces.


opens into a spacious, light-filled apartment where Johnelle loves to linger among the 360 views. The clever master bath design arranges bathtub, sinks, walk-in shower, and W.C. in a radiating pattern that connects the bedroom to the walk-in dressing room and exercise room.

Green features were a given for the couple, from efficient furnaces and a tankless water heater to dual-flush toilets and recycled-content tiles. But what stands out about the home on closer inspection is the attention to detail found in every drawer and closet. Johnelle, who hates clutter, says, "I thought long and hard about everything." She is therefore justifiably proud that her own interior design earned one of the home's four awards, the others being Best Kitchen, Best Outdoor Living Space, and Premier.

"Every single thing we chose together," notes Chris, "and 80 percent of it, either one of us would have chosen alone." His wife quips, "This is what happens when you have two engineers make a house." For every added feature, they would go back to Lowe with their spreadsheet to learn the exact cost, and see where else they might trim. "We could have built a million-dollar home, but why? We wanted to retire early," Johnelle reasons.



“I don’t view it as one of those ‘Don’t touch anything’ houses,” she adds. “It’s lived in and loved.” Lowe agrees, saying he immediately recognized it as a winner. “I like most homes I build, but this house, I could see myself living in very easily.”

Fitting their needs elegantly and exactly, a daily payoff on thoughtful planning, the couple’s Goldilocks home turned out to be just right. 

## resources

### Builder

Lowe-Bo Homes  
lowe-bohomes.com

### Appliances

Builders Source Appliance Gallery  
builderssource.com

### Beams

ProBuild

### Blinds

Budget Blinds

### Cabinetry

Albuquerque Cabinet Brokers

### Community

Las Leyendas

### Designer

Ron Montoya Designs

### Fireplaces

Mountain West Sales  
mountainwestsales.net

### Front & Interior Doors

Pat’s Doors

### Gates & Metalwork

MetalScapes  
metalscapesnm.wixsite.com/metal

### Landscaping

Territorial Landscape Company

### Lighting

Turn On Lighting

### Sinks & Fixtures

Morrison Supply

### Tile & Tile Flooring

Ray’s Flooring

### Granite & Solid-Surface Counters

United Stoneworks

### Windows

Andersen from Western Building Supply  
westernbuildingsupply.com

In the community of Las Leyendas, the East Mountains are a magnificent backdrop. The home’s adobe coloring, unfussy contemporary lines, and simple landscaping allow it to blend seamlessly into its environment.



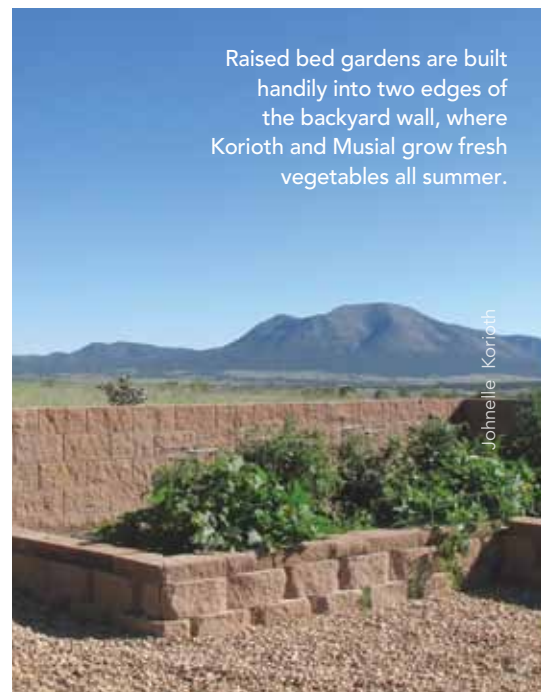
Chris Corrie



Johanne Koriath

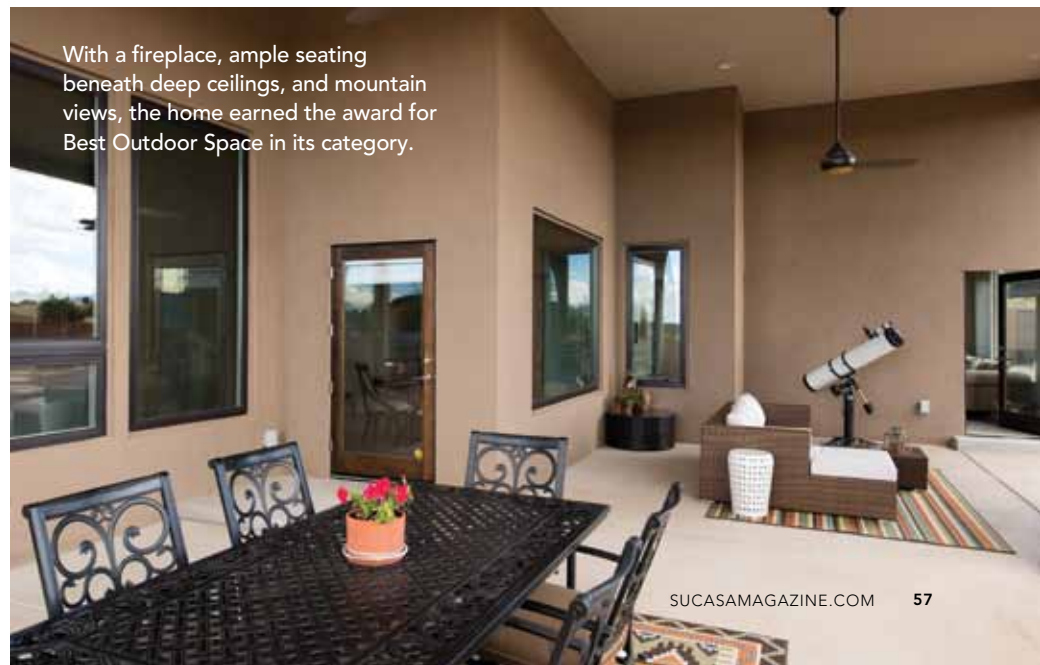
Above: Waiting for Mom and Dad to join him for some enjoyment of their outdoor spaces, Flash peeps over the wall to check out the birds and other wildlife beyond.

Raised bed gardens are built handily into two edges of the backyard wall, where Koriath and Musial grow fresh vegetables all summer.



Johanne Koriath

With a fireplace, ample seating beneath deep ceilings, and mountain views, the home earned the award for Best Outdoor Space in its category.



Chris Corrie