

ARCHITECTURAL DIGEST

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DESIGNERS' OWN HOMES

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Their
Secrets



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COVER: Thomas Pheasant was first attracted to his Washington, D.C., house by its garden views. He added the tile-roofed pool pavilion. Photography by Durston Saylor. See page 100. ABOVE RIGHT: Linda Warren's living room in the house she and her husband built in Mexico features high ceilings and handmade details. See page 116.

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Linda Warren

OUTSIDE SAN MIGUEL DE ALLENDE, MEXICO, SHE CELEBRATES ARTISTIC TRADITIONS FROM NEAR AND FAR

Architecture by Gabor Goded/Text by Michael Frank/Photography by David O. Marlow



Getting a house right is a little bit like getting a marriage right: Practice may not make perfect, but it certainly does teach you what you're looking for. In order to arrange for themselves just the right kind of retirement, Linda Warren Simon, an interior designer whose firm, Linda Warren Associates, specializes in hotels, and her husband, Martin Simon, a retired banker who often worked in Mexico, drew on a lifetime of experience. It eventually led them to build a Mediterranean-style country house in Atotonilco, a small town about 20 minutes away from San Miguel de Allende, which is itself about four hours by car from Mexico City.

Here's what the Simons learned over the years: After traveling widely and entertaining the possibility of retiring to France or Italy, they kept coming back to the idea of Mexico, where they'd enjoyed many visits for Martin's work. Of all the places

they saw, the one that tugged at them most strongly was San Miguel, with its historic architecture, its vibrant cultural life and its varied community. They liked San Miguel so much, in fact, that they bought first one, then a second home in town and learned from these experiences too. They learned that they needed less space than they originally thought (one of the houses was quite large) and that they preferred to live near a lively town but actually in the country; as New Yorkers, they had spent many happy summers and weekends in the Catskills, and they missed waking up in silence.

In 2003 the Simons found a 12-acre property in Atotonilco with large, centuries-old mesquite trees that captured their imagination. Other than the striking trees, the land was arid, but it was surrounded by mountains, and it sloped down to the river Laja, which flowed in the rainy season. At an elevation of 6,500 feet, winters were cold enough, they knew, to give fruit trees

ABOVE: Linda Warren Simon (above left) and her husband, Martin Simon, chose the town of Atotonilco, Mexico, for their 6,000-square-foot Mediterranean-style house. Architect Gabor Goded used local materials, such as antique roof tiles sourced from nearby farms, whenever possible.

OPPOSITE: The living room. "Scale was important in a space of that size, and also durability," says Warren Simon. Kravet chair paisley, red pillow velvet, pillow stripe and sofa velvet. Donghia cushion fabric on carved chair. Rug from ABC Carpet & Home.

As much as possible, materials were to be local and workmanship was to show the touch of the human hand.



ABOVE: "Naturally, it was important to have several outdoor spaces in which to eat or spend leisure time," says Warren Simon. Because of the elevation, however, it is often cool in the evenings, so she added a wood-burning fireplace to one of the terraces.

OPPOSITE: Local artist Socorro Beltran painted the master bedroom's ceiling. Kravet drapery, chair and ottoman fabrics. Bed linens from Restoration Hardware. Red pillow fabric on chair, Robert Allen. Green pillow print on bed, Cowtan & Tout.

just enough frost to make them flourish; and fruit trees were on their mind because in this desert setting, they envisioned an oasis that would enclose a very special kind of house.

Gabor Goded, a local architect, helped the Simons translate their dream. It was to draw on French, Italian, Spanish and Mexican traditions. It was to sit respectfully in the landscape. Instead of being boxy in volume, it was to break down into several different pieces. And as far as possible, materials were to be local and workmanship was to show the touch of the human hand.

"Gabor had studied in Spain, and he understood immediately what we wanted," Warren Simon recalls. "He also knew, as we did, that San Miguel is rich with artisans who work in the

old ways. It was an ideal combination."

Further drawing on their previous experience, the Simons knew they needed a separate guesthouse, which went up first. The main house was designed so that the couple wouldn't feel like they were rambling around when they were on their own, while still being spacious and welcoming enough for entertaining. On the first floor, they ended up with a large double-height living room that gives onto a cozier dining room, an eat-in kitchen that is attached to a separate prep kitchen, and a media room. The upstairs is divided among a sitting room, gym and guest room. There are several outdoor spaces for meals and a garden that ranges from the dreamed-of fruit orchard to a cactus grove to a manicured area anchored by a reflecting pool flanked by an allée of cypress trees.





“The only mechanized equipment the guys brought was a portable cement mixer. And truly, it shows,” says Martin Simon.



The house is built of plastered adobe brick and stone; all the stone, in fact, was cut and shaped on-site and by hand: “The only mechanized equipment the guys brought,” Martin Simon recalls, “was a portable cement mixer. And truly, it shows.” Exterior walls are 12 inches thick or more; interior ones come in over six. Nearly every room has a fireplace to help burn off the chill of the winter nights and early mornings, and the living room and the dining room feature flooring of *salam*, a Mexican hardwood with a natural red tone. Warmth, actual and in terms of the house’s palette, is a prevailing theme.

When it came to the interiors, Warren Simon drew on her long experience in the field. She knew, for example, that the dramatic living room needed to be humanized, and so she commissioned a

local artist, Socorro Beltran, to paint the vaulted ceiling. Hanging lanterns were made locally of metal and handblown glass. Iron chairs, a dramatic mirror and even some of the upholstery fabrics were made in or near San Miguel. “It is a remarkable town,” she says. “This is not a project that I would have tackled so easily in the States.”

Looking back over the long journey that brought them to Atotonilco, Warren Simon says with palpable contentment, “We couldn’t think of another place in the world we’d rather live. We’re close enough to our family at home; we have found a wonderful community of people here; the climate is unsurpassed. I think it’s probably right to say that, after many years, we’ve found—and made—our almost perfect place.” □

OPPOSITE: To keep the main kitchen “more attractive for family to spend time in,” Warren Simon designed a separate prep and clean-up area where the oven and pantry are located. Cooktop, Viking Range.com. Donghia cushion fabric.

ABOVE: “Basically,” Warren Simon says, “the land was a desert with trees.” They used fruit trees to give the property a more lush feel but kept many native plants. Landscape designer Manrey Silva created the cactus garden along the south side.



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