

# SuCasa

Southwestern homes

inspiration ideas resources

on location  
New Mexico  
**LAND**  
for every  
budget



## on location

From a snug city lot to a sweeping ranch, land for your next home comes in a wide array of sizes, shapes, and locations, much of it surprisingly green—sustainably developed, that is.



# room to move

By Jane Mahoney Photography by Kirk Gittings

The nonprofit Commonweal Conservancy eschewed a “business-as-usual” approach to land development that would have subdivided the vast Galisteo Basin Preserve lands into mini-ranchettes. Instead, a village center and conservation neighborhoods will support the preservation of more than 12,000 acres of open space with 50-plus miles of planned hiking, biking, and equestrian trails. The preserve is located approximately 13 miles south of Santa Fe via U.S. Highway 285. It is roughly 45 miles from Albuquerque via Interstate 40 and State Highway 41.

## MORE PHOTOS

Visit [SuCasaMagazine.com](http://SuCasaMagazine.com) to see more photographs of Galisteo Basin Preserve.

For most of their married life, Fred and JJ Milder considered the feasibility of eventually moving away from the beautiful Boston Victorian home they had fixed up over the years while raising their daughters. “You only live once,” Fred says, “so why not experience a different area, a different lifestyle?” The seeds of restlessness began to germinate, the savings started to accumulate, and the couple began looking at possibilities.

“Vancouver or Santa Fe,” considered the pair, he with a career in academia, and she in industry. Both cities were progressive and multicultural, with the added attraction of nearby mountains. But New Mexico had an edge. Thirty-five years ago, Fred, a physicist, worked briefly at Los Alamos National Laboratory, and the Land of Enchantment’s magic never extinguished. Soon, the Milders were shopping for land.

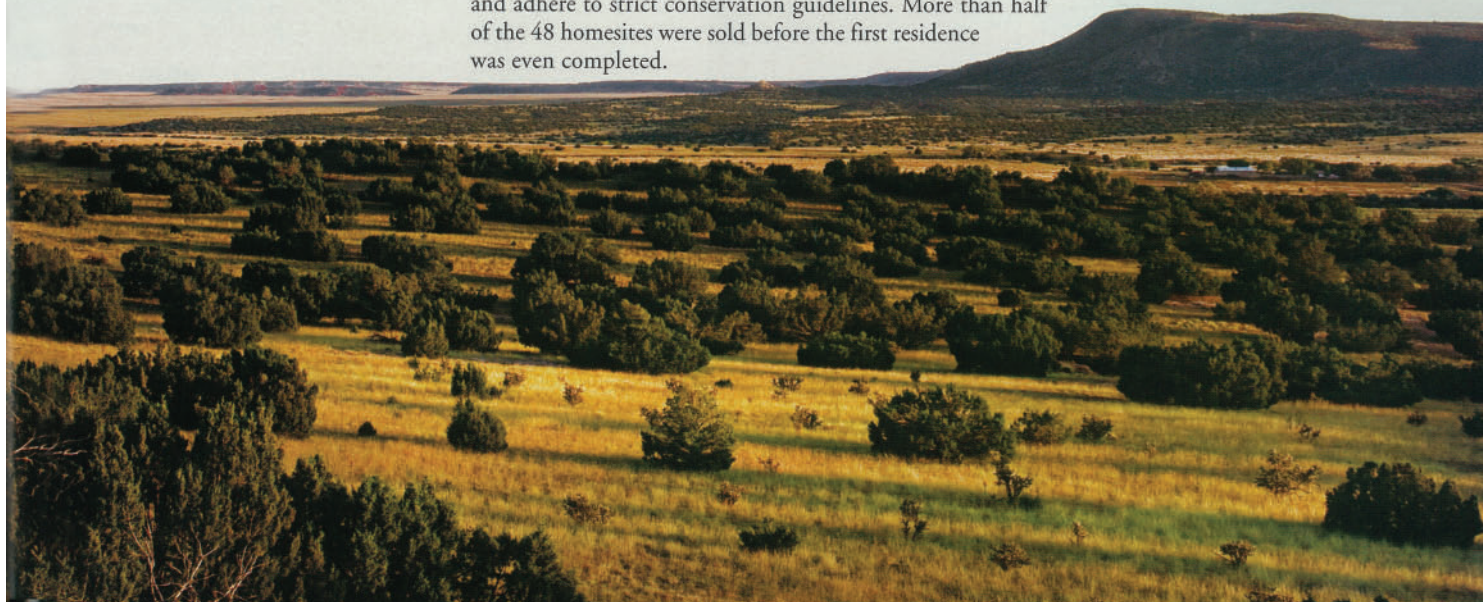
What they found was a wide-open expanse of high desert ringed by peaks and arroyos and dotted with native grasses, piñon, and juniper. Now, four years later, Fred and JJ, both in their 50s, describe themselves “between lives” at their 125-acre property. The off-the-grid hacienda-inspired home is armed with an array of photovoltaic panels to harvest electricity from the sun and solar thermal panels to provide heat and hot water.

Although the “roughing it” component is lacking in this modern-day pioneer tale, the Milders were the first residents to settle in the Galisteo Basin Preserve, a vast 19-square-mile property located roughly 13 miles south of Santa Fe, originally part of the Thornton Ranch. This savannah grassland is mid-way through a phased land acquisition plan by Commonweal Conservancy, a Santa Fe nonprofit conservation-based community development organization.

Ninety-seven percent of the more than 13,000-acre Galisteo Basin Preserve property will be permanently protected as open space. A comprehensive restoration and stewardship program is part of Commonweal’s plans for these protected lands, which have been impacted by more than a century of cattle ranching and other activity. The remaining three percent of the preserve will be developed in an environmentally responsible manner into “conservation neighborhoods,” like where the Milder home is situated, and a future mixed-use village. Sales within these areas will help support the conservation of the preserve’s vast open space.

With its proximity to Santa Fe, the Galisteo Basin Preserve property has long been considered a high-risk development area, according to Ted Harrison, Commonweal Conservancy’s president and founder, because dividing the land into widely dispersed ranchettes would threaten the Galisteo Basin’s open space, habitat and recreation value, viewsheds, and water resources.

Commonweal Conservancy currently is marketing homesites in three conservation neighborhoods known as the West Basin, Southern Crescent, and New Moon Overlook, as well as one 200-acre homesite called Ananda Valley. Property sizes range from approximately 3 acres to 202 acres and adhere to strict conservation guidelines. More than half of the 48 homesites were sold before the first residence was even completed.



Opposite: Designed by owner Frank Bond with daughter Sara Easterson-Bond and architect son-in-law Tom Easterson-Bond of Wood Metal Concrete Architecture in Santa Fe, this home is constructed of autoclaved aerated concrete and rammed earth.

Below: The Bond spread shares a boundary with the more than 13,000-acre Galisteo Basin Preserve. Bond was one of the first conservation property buyers of the Thornton family ranch. His land purchase helped get the Galisteo Basin Preserve project off the ground.

For the privilege of living on this land ringed with views of the Ortiz, Jemez, and Sangre de Cristo mountains and untouched mesas, buyers agree to constrained building envelopes that maintain the bulk of their property as protected (yet privately owned) open space. West Basin owners like the Milders have bought 100-acre or larger tracts designed to be off the grid—homeowners are required to provide their own electricity with individual solar photovoltaic power systems, heat, private water well, telephone, and cooking fuel. The New Moon Overlook and Southern Crescent neighborhoods offer electricity, fiber-optic cable for telecommunications, and water from a shared well system. The sale of these conservation properties helps fund the phased land acquisition and stewardship efforts.

Where developers might have conducted “business as usual” in dividing the property into several hundred 12- to 40-acre homesites, Commonweal Conservancy envisions a different approach. Tucked among 300 acres of hills and ridges in the northeast portion of the Galisteo Basin Preserve will be a mixed-use village—a tight cluster of 965 diverse homes connected by pathways to the village commercial center, a planned charter high school, and parks. Part of a pilot project for the U.S. Green Building Council’s LEED for Neighborhood Development program, the village is awaiting county approval for the first phase of development and is expected to have its first homes under construction by 2010. The village will be built in various phases over the next decade, leveraging the sale of its homes to underwrite the conservation and restoration of approximately 12,000 acres of open space. It’s a tradeoff the developers think will set well with future residents—a higher-density community lifestyle in exchange for access to more than 50 miles of planned hiking, biking, and equestrian trails that will wind throughout the preserve and connect with other Santa Fe County trail networks, eventually leading into Santa Fe.

As the infrastructure goes in, so too does careful attention to existing drainage patterns and slopes, as well as the yet-to-come low-impact roads, transportation options, and mixed-use neighborhoods where residences will be deliberately placed within a half-mile walk of stores, schools, and cultural activities. Directives are being written into the community guidelines concerning native plantings, dark sky protection, a village-wide clean energy system, and rainwater harvesting. An orchard of heirloom fruit trees has already been planted in the preserve’s Southern Crescent area, and the preserve has plans for a small organic farm and a green burial ground.

This past September, Commonweal Conservancy donated a 320-acre conservation easement to the Santa Fe Conservation Trust, the first in a series of easement donations Commonweal plans to make to protect the property’s native vegetation and fragile soils, as well as its scenic, wildlife, cultural, and recreational values against future development.

Galisteo Basin Preserve’s innovative approach has garnered national attention. The preserve serves as an example of land conservation in the National Building Museum’s Green Community exhibition in Washington, DC, which explores green communities around the world and will be featured at the museum through late October 2009.

The preserve’s early pioneers—and forerunners of the villagers-to-be—unabashedly revel in their commitment to original green building, alternative building materials, solar energy, and healthy homes.

*Continued on page 93*



## room to move

*Continued from page 89*

Making the move to the remote high desert basin preserve has been a lifestyle change for most. But overall, newcomers seem to relish the physical setting—the high cloud banks, the azure sky, the wind, and the seasons.

“I’ve been outdoors all my life on ranches and working with livestock,” says Frank Bond, one of the first conservation buyers and co-owner of a 600-acre land tract adjoining the preserve. “It’s really the only place I want to be. It’s the way I grew up. I loved every bit of it and still do.”

As an attorney in Santa Fe and former Republican gubernatorial candidate, Bond has been a falconer for decades and still runs cattle periodically on his parcel of the former Thornton Ranch. The fourth-generation New Mexican worked with his architect son-in-law and designer daughter Tom and Sara Easterson-Bond with the firm Wood Metal Concrete Architecture in Santa Fe to design a modernistic northern New Mexican home built in the traditional U-shape of Bond’s childhood home. Constructed of autoclaved aerated concrete and rammed earth, the two-story home has a few features the old family residence lacked, notably a suspended gallery that splits the great room and provides a catwalk-like vantage point to enjoy the wood-burning fireplace that warms the great room.

Outside, the varying rooflines on the main house, garage, and outbuildings are very much a part of the design plan, as is the sensual array of textures including flagstone, moss rock, layers of rammed earth, and rusted steel roofs and accents. A French drain system under wide eaves captures and stores 3,500 gallons of rainwater to be used for landscaping purposes. Here, as with the other early homes in Galisteo Basin Preserve, the outdoor environment is celebrated. While Bond’s home boasts 3,700 square feet of heated space, there is an additional 2,500 square feet of outdoor space under covered *portales*. To go from one wing of the house to the next, residents must detour outside. “This house demands that you live outdoors,” Bond says.

Likewise, the three separate structures composing the Milders’ off-grid home in the West Basin neighborhood demand outdoor living as well. The master suite/library, great room and kitchen, and children’s/guest wing connect by a series of *portales* that provide shelter for the mandatory outdoor walk to get from one building to the next. The Milders’ challenge was to create a new house “with history,” a home that looks as though it has been rooted to this high

desert location for generations. They achieved this goal through the rambling “add-on” nature of the design, a mix of architectural styles, old materials, an English garden, and the random eclecticism demonstrated by the asymmetrical lintel perched over a door. Boston-based Signer Harris Architects designed the home, with Wood Metal Concrete Architecture of Santa Fe.

The outdoors also figures heavily at the first home in the New Moon Overlook neighborhood tucked amid juniper and piñon. The rammed earth house reflects both art and shelter as it wraps around a courtyard the owners call the outdoor living room. Here, a well-disguised Murphy bed drops from the wall for those who prefer to sleep under the moonlight and stars.

With one roof poised like a butterfly taking flight, this home revels in the unconventional materials used within—cork and rubber panels appear on walls and floor, washers from old mining equipment create a cabinet surface; rusted perforated metal from a junked kennel hides the Murphy bed, bare fiberboard appears on some of the interior walls, and lava rock serves as the core of a wire wall outside.

“We’re opportunistic about materials,” the owner says with a grin.

What the family is quite serious about, however, is the new home’s sustainable energy use and water efficiency. A 4-kilowatt photovoltaic system ties back to the electrical grid through a net-metering option, and few things please the residents as much as watching their electrical meter run backward. The home has storage tanks for captured rain runoff, passive solar design orientation, and a treatment program that makes gray and black water safe for landscape irrigation.

Creating a healthy home has been a top priority for another of the early buyers in the New Moon Overlook conservation neighborhood. Accustomed to building for clients with compromised autoimmune systems, sensitivities, or allergies, Santa Fe’s Denman & Associates is nearing completion of a frame home built with a list of specifications for healthy products ranging from wood types to insulation brands. Low- or no-VOC paints and plasters are imperative, and a hospital-grade air handling system filters and cleans all fresh air entering the house.

These early homes and neighborhoods have been indispensable to the development of Galisteo Basin Preserve, says Lauren Whitehurst, Commonweal Conservancy’s marketing director. “Their belief in our work is incredibly encouraging, and their commitment to resource efficiency and living in meaningful relationship with this landscape is inspirational.”



## Galisteo Basin Preserve

[galisteobasinpreserve.com](http://galisteobasinpreserve.com)

Commonwealth Conservancy's Galisteo Basin Preserve project south of Santa Fe includes three conservation neighborhoods of custom homes carefully sited amid the preserve's vast protected open space. A resource-efficient, mixed-use, mixed-income village of clustered homes is planned for the heart of the preserve.

**Homes:** The first of the preserve's 965 village homes are projected to be built in 2010 in a mix of diverse styles and sizes, with projected market-rate prices ranging from approximately \$220,000 to \$900,000. Thirty percent of the homes will be available to income-qualified buyers, with an anticipated price range of approximately \$95,000 to \$270,000. More than half of the 48 homesites (ranging in size from approximately 3 to 202 acres) in the preserve's three conservation neighborhoods have already sold.

**Green scene:** Environmental stewardship is a priority at Galisteo Basin Preserve. The planned village is part of a pilot project for the U.S. Green Building Council's LEED for Neighborhood Development program with careful attention to existing drainage patterns and slopes, low-impact roads, rainwater harvesting, and a village-wide clean energy system. The preserve's thousands of acres of publicly accessible open space is planned to feature more than 50 miles of trails.

