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## TORCASSO RESIDENCE

submitted by [Lawrence W. Speck, FAIA, Page Southerland Page, LLP](#)



Margo Sawyer  
Photo: Robert Reck



### Rick Torcasso

Santa Fe, NM

Artwork Budget: \$100,000

Completed July, 2012

More info:

[www.margosawyer.com/](http://www.margosawyer.com/)

### PROJECT TEAM

#### Commissioned Artist

Margo Sawyer, Margo Sawyer Inc.

#### Architect

Lawrence W. Speck, FAIA, PageSouthernlandPage

#### Interior Designer

Wendy Dunnam Tita, AIA, LEED AP, Dunnam Tita Architecture + Interiors

### PROJECT OVERVIEW

The Torcasso Residence is inspired by the spectacular landscape of northern New Mexico and the prospect of living in constant and memorable connection to nature.

At its midsection two rammed earth volumes delimit public spaces and frame 60-foot apertures that link the living, dining, and kitchen area to a broad view to the north and a sunny, intimate courtyard to the south. Large operable glass panels slide away to create complete continuity with both landscapes.

Sustainability features include rainwater harvesting, green roofs, a large photovoltaic array and air-entrained concrete walls that work with the rammed earth to create thermal mass.

### GOALS & COLLABORATION



Margo Sawyer  
Photo: Robert Reck



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## What were the goals for this project?

The commissioned artwork for the Torcasso Residence creates a rich dialogue between art, architecture and landscape using light, color and space. An extraordinary site in the high desert terrain of northern New Mexico was the springboard for the project, helping to generate an architectural solution that hugs the contours of a ridge with commanding views of a valley and mountain range.

The house is built largely of rammed earth walls made of four different colors of soil that were inspired by sedimentary geological layers in the nearby mountains. The central rooms, framed by the rammed earth walls, open generously and dramatically to a contained outdoor space to the south and to the panoramic sweep of the valley to the north.

The artwork volumes parallel the rammed earth walls, subdividing living, dining and kitchen areas. They act spatially in complete harmony with the rest of the house. They take the color inspiration of the rammed earth wall one step further, incorporating colors from the sky, the light, the sunsets and the desert vegetation. The artwork intensifies the qualities of light, color and space in the landscape and the architecture making it a truly site specific work.

## Describe the team collaboration.

The architect, interior designer and artist worked completely collaboratively on the project. After the architect formulated the initial concept and basic framework for the house the interior designer and the artist joined the design team to help generate the artwork volumes. The architect proposed spatial character and volume dimensions with input from the interior designer and artist. The artist proposed articulation pattern and scale with input from the architect and interior designer.



Margo Sawyer  
Photo: Robert Reck

An enormous amount of dialogue ensued among all three parties about color, but, in the end, the artist had final say in all colors selections and special finishes. The architect and interior designer did the lion's share of the drawings and detailing, working closely with both the artist and the primary craftsman who was constructing the bulk of the work. The artist supervised the making and installation of the piece assisted by the architect and interior designer. Some of the special finishes and effects were created and installed completely by the artist.

The architect had worked closely with the artist, the interior designer and the primary craftsman on previous projects, and the pool of talent was assembled explicitly for its collaborative capabilities.

#### Additional comments.

Though the photos are quite stunning and give a pretty good sense of the artwork and the house, they fail completely to communicate the magic of actually being there. As with the very best of site-specific pieces, the real meaning of the artwork is fully evident only when the art can be felt as a part of the room, the house, the site, the valley and the region. The art is inspired by and captures very beautifully the space, light and color of this extraordinary landscape of northern New Mexico.





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Photo: Robert Reck



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