

# a new chapter

When life hands you lemons, forget the lemonade.  
Build your dream house instead.



This Mediterranean-inspired home in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque faces a grassy area where geese and sandhill cranes stop to rest during their migrations south and north. Perhaps they're attracted to these lifelike statues?



An old-world fountain (left) and an ornate wrought iron gate (left, top) speak to the home's Spanish and Mexican influences, while an elegant fire pot provides ambience in the evening.



Owner Karen Lovelady (on left) and builder Tom Cardenas each brought unique artistic talents and vision to the home's design.

by Amy Gross  
photographs by Chris Corrie

**K**aren Lovelady is one tough cookie. In a dark, six-year period that included losing her husband, Jim Moore, to cancer, her father a year later, and then dealing with her own cancer diagnosis and treatment, Lovelady not only kicked the Big C to the curb, but also designed and built an extraordinary home for herself in Los Ranchos de Albuquerque.

Her partner in the endeavor was Tom Cardenas, president and owner of TC Building & Realty Inc., who built the majority of the homes in the Los Prados de Guadalupe neighborhood—including Lovelady's first home there. "My late husband and I bought a spec home that Tom had built," Lovelady recalls. "Jim and Tom became golf buddies." A few years after her husband's passing, Lovelady felt it was time to move out of the other environment. She purchased a lot from a friend, one with an interesting, almost infill configuration in this otherwise very park-like setting.

Cardenas—a realtor, a 30-year veteran of the home building industry, and the son of a well-known civil engineer and commercial contractor—brought more than sticks and stones to this project. A talented oil painter, he is gifted with a rare artistic eye, and many of the little details that make this home so charming and fun to look at—nichos, arches, the clever carryovers of stone and bricking from room to room—were his inspirations. He even designed and created all of the landscaping, having considered those details



Despite its size and high ceilings, the living room is cozy, inviting, and sunlit thanks to large windows and a sliding window wall. A painting by Albuquerque artist Betty Sabo hangs above the Cantera stone fireplace.



Lovelady found these funky, fluffy footstools at Exquisite Designs on Osuna. "They were the ugliest things I'd ever seen," she says with a laugh. "Of course, I absolutely love them!"



after working on "the big picture" for a year. "On a canvas, you paint from back to front," Cardenas explains. "It's just like building a house. You start with a roadmap and build on it!"

He adds, "My dad always told my brothers and me, 'If you're not going to do it right, don't do it at all.'" It's a mantra he takes very much to heart, and one shared by his client, who agrees, "I'm more interested in quality than quantity."

Designer Mike Cabber, Cardenas, and Lovelady expanded on the two-bedroom-plus-study concept of Lovelady's previous residence, with some entirely personal preferences: an open floor plan and no fewer than four fireplaces. The style is an elegant intermingling of classic Spanish and Mediterranean elements—arched living room windows and graceful wrought iron gates—with Mexican and Southwestern accents like Cantera stone fireplace surrounds and American Clay walls.

Once the layout was finalized, Lovelady was able to exercise her own keen design eye in working out finishes and furnishings. "I like a real mix—rustic furniture with a crystal chandelier, antiques and reclaimed doors with some new pieces," she says, noting that her decorating style was borrowed heavily from her mother, who collected devotional and folk art and antiques.

While the house was being built, Lovelady and her daughter took a memorable trip to Greece and Turkey. "We went to a rug seller in Istanbul, in this old building three stories high. They had stacks of rugs and would throw them out in this huge flourish for you to see," she recalls with a laugh. "I bought six on the spot and had them shipped back, never considering that something might go wrong. Ignorance is bliss!" Though she hadn't finalized wall or accent colors by that



Although the owner says she's only just now getting back into cooking for herself, her kitchen, designed around a huge island that's topped with an eye-grabbing granite, lends itself well to entertaining. The custom hood matches the island's cabinetry.



Opposite: The dining room shows off the owner's flair for mixing and matching rustic elements and antiques with modern accents. The table set, recently handed down to Lovelady from her great aunt, continued its tradition of seating family for Thanksgiving and Christmas breakfast last year.





The serene master bedroom offers Lovelady and kitty Scooter (hanging out in the window here and opposite) a lovely view of the outdoor spaces. Its calming palette was designed around the sand-colored Turkish rug.



“People tell me they would rather have a root canal than build a house, but to me it was just a godsend when I was diagnosed.”  
—Karen Lovelady

time, the soon-to-be homeowner knew where she needed rugs and simply chose ones she liked. Things were going well, and she was looking forward to starting a new chapter.  
Then the unthinkable happened.  
“Karen came to me one day and told me, ‘I have breast cancer,’” Cardenas recalls. “I couldn’t believe it.” Amazingly, in between visits to doctors and chemo treatments, Lovelady continued to actively participate in the design of her home. “She was just a trouper,” Cardenas says proudly. “Even as she was battling cancer, she was having fun with the house.”  
“I had a ball,” Lovelady admits. “People tell me they would rather have a root canal than build a house, but to me it was just a godsend when I was diagnosed with cancer—a challenge, but a godsend.” Support and love came from unexpected sources. “When he heard I had cancer, Gorky [cabinetmaker Gorky Pacha], made the carved door in the wine room for me as a gift,” says Lovelady. “And my late husband leaves me pennies. I have them hidden throughout the house, even in the walls.” She moved into the house in January



Awash in white marble, the gorgeous, feminine bath is illuminated by another elegant crystal chandelier. Wanting something personal for this space, the owner commissioned the stained glass window in the door.



Pennies from heaven? In the study, a painting by artist B.C. Nowlin (right wall) was gifted to Lovelady by friends of her late husband, Jim Moore, who had once played football at the University of Texas. Unbeknownst to any of them, Nowlin had inscribed a favorite saying of Darrell Royal, the legendary UT coach, into the painting: “Luck is what happens when preparation meets opportunity.”



Builder Tom Cardenas loves the terra-cotta-hued American Clay walls in the powder room (above) and the eclectic study (left), which features reclaimed beams from the Middle East and the most colorful of the rugs Lovelady purchased in Turkey.



Flowers, shrubs, and trees offer just the right amount of color in the backyard and pool area, while water spouts and statuary (right) provide aural and visual interest.

2015—in between chemo treatments. The healing effect of the new home was immediate, and, it can be argued, continues today.

“I spend a lot of time in my living room, and I’m amazed at how cozy it is, even being relatively spacious for one person,” Lovelady says. “I’m also surprised at how much I sit out on the back porch, watching TV or drinking coffee. Except for real extreme cold or hot weather, I use it all year. In the summer it’s phenomenal.”

Proudly cancer-free, Lovelady is keeping busy, getting back to the things she enjoyed pre-illness: golfing, walking, reading, exercising, and cycling. She is also excited to be helping some friends with the interior design of their new home, which is being built by none other than Tom Cardenas. Clearly, hers is a home that was simply meant to be.

“There have been a lot of things that have blended together in the building of this house that I never would have thought of happening,” she says with a smile. “It makes me think I’m being watched over here.”

You’d never know there was another house in close proximity to this one thanks to a privacy wall and a row of tall trees in the backyard.



## resources

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TC Building & Realty Inc.  
tcbuilding.com

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Mike Cabber, Cabber LLC

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Karen Lovelady, Tom Cardenas,  
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