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Rooms With a View

By **Barbara Chavez** *Journal Staff Writer* The glow from one of New Mexico's more colorful sunsets planted a kiss on the mesa surrounding Ava Bowers' country inn near Cañoncito recently.

Bowers looked west from the patio of her Apache Canyon Bed and Breakfast and stopped a visitor's conversation mid-sentence so that neither would miss the moment.

Sunsets on this mesa about 30 miles west of Albuquerque are one of the reasons Bowers got into the B&B business in the first place.

Sunrises are the other reason, Bowers said.

"Why wouldn't I want to share all of this beauty with folks from New York, Chicago or even Downtown Albuquerque?" asks Bowers, whose accent is as Southern as sweet-potato pie, though she has been in New Mexico for more than 28 years.

Recently the inn has received some national exposure.

The Public Broadcasting Service show "Cooking With Gail Greco" filmed an episode at Apache Canyon in May. The show highlighted the inn's Southwestern attributes and featured Bowers cooking lamb posole, one of her favorite New Mexican recipes, and a sweet potato pie from one of her Southern recipes.

The show's host also toured Laguna Pueblo, one of the three Indian reservations bordering the inn.

Most recently, The New York Times featured Bowers and her husband, Theron, in a story about African-American innkeepers. Apache Canyon is one of 11 inns owned by blacks.

And the result?

"From Dec. 27 until Jan. 3, I'm prepared to be Yankee-fied," Bowers said, with a grin that could mean only one thing.

"I'm booked solid after Christmas and into the New Year," she said. The inn will be the venue for a wedding on Christmas Eve, followed by some special events to ring in 1999.

Bowers is accepting reservations for a New Year's Eve Party, which she said will be a tuneup for her millennium party on Jan. 1, 2000.

"We've already filled the inn as far as guests go, but we want many locals to come celebrate with us," she said. "We're going to have oldies, big band and other music, and a champagne breakfast after midnight." **Building a dream**

Apache Canyon, completed in 1993, was originally the Bowers' custom-built home. Friends suggested Bowers open it up as a B&B.

In 1996, she made the necessary modifications to run it as a business — a handicap-accessible shower and a 750-square-foot honeymoon suite, added off the main house.

The inn includes a four-room main house and the one-bedroom honeymoon *casita* that is connected to the big house by a tin-roofed breezeway. A common patio serves as the

inn's centerpiece and provides a great spot for viewing the skies.

The inn is surrounded by several hundred acres of mesas and mountains. The Sandia and Manzano mountain ranges are visible in the distance. The Red Rock Mesa provides the western backdrop.

"We even see the Sangre de Cristo Mountains from the front yard," Bowers said.

The master suite was designed to take in the morning sun, with lots of windows facing east.

"I've been billing Apache Canyon as the gateway to the skies," she said. "Our beauty is in the land and the sky. I think visitors find it intriguing."

Part of 1,600 acres of private land, the ranch is bordered on the north by Cañoncito Navajo lands and on the south and west by the Laguna Indian Reservation.

Bowers said she has been told the canyon got its name because an Apache tribe once wintered in the area in the 1600s.

The one-bedroom house, called Casa Kokopelli, was the weekend getaway for an author who needed precious peace and quiet to finish a book. It has also served as a honeymoon hideaway. **Inner warmth**

Inside Apache Canyon, Bowers' love for Southwestern art and her own Southern touches are everywhere.

The bedrooms are tastefully decorated with Native American art and paintings. In one of the smaller rooms, Bowers proudly showed off a chest that belonged to her great-great-grandfather, who left the South after slavery was abolished.

"I know that I lost all the antique value of the chest because I sanded it and re-stained it," Bowers said. "But, heck, I would never sell it anyway. It'll never lose its sentimental value to me. I just didn't want an old beat-up trunk in my new house. Now I can look at it and enjoy it."

In the grandest of the rooms Egyptian linens and down comforters cover rustic, four-poster and curtained beds.

Dinner with the Bowers can be anything from Theron's famous rack of lamb with green chile salsa to Ava's beef brisket with all the trimmings. For breakfast guests can have anything from waffles and eggs to scrumptious fruit parfaits with any number of breakfast cereals, as well as fresh-squeezed orange juice.

Ava has been known to throw in little extras for her guests, like a wheel-cart full of wine, cheese and fruit at her guests' rooms as a pre-dinner surprise.

"I just want my guests to get the treatment I'd want if I were staying at a B&B," she said.

Bowers said she also hopes her guests will take with them a sense of the intrigue of Native American traditions and the land that the B&B sits on. She hires Native Americans to give workshops and tours for her guests, or anyone who would like to make a day trip to Cañoncito.

Room rates range from \$90 to \$265 a night, which includes dinner upon arrival and breakfast the next morning.

Gambling at the nearby Sky City Casino provides some night life, but it's unlikely guests would come to Apache Canyon solely for that. However, a casino is set to open in Rio Puerco in January.

"Shopping for art or Native American-made crafts is a good tourist draw," Bowers

said. "We had a putting green that we spent a lot of money on. But the jackrabbits ate it all up and that took care of that after just one year."

So if sitting on a patio listening to a coyote howl is your idea of a country inn experience, Apache Canyon is the place for you, she said.

"I used to love watching the old Cowboy Westerns on television," said Bowers, who has been a real estate broker in Albuquerque since 1972.

"I think Apache Canyon is our modern day 'High Chaparral.' "

Besides sharing his wife's passion for the Southwest, Theron does his share of entertaining guests at the inn. He works days for the post office in Albuquerque, and also holds a law degree.

"I've really enjoyed talking with all our guests," Theron said. "The great part of this business is teaching somebody about where we live and hearing about where they live."

The inn is available for corporate retreats, luncheon meetings, weddings and office parties. Guests can take advantage of special services like a hydro therapy bath, massages and facials by appointment.

Bowers has had plenty of help from her sister, Maxine Tripp, and two of her three sons, Mark and Michael, getting the inn started.

Bowers said she has yet to experience one of the high points of owning a B&B.

"I've yet to have a celebrity come stay with us," she said. "So, if Oprah or Gene Hackman wants to be the first, I hope they call me real soon."

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