

BY LYNNE MARIE ZERANCE  
PHOTOGRAPHY BY CARTER ALLEN

# A WRITER'S RETREAT

OLD WORLD CHARM REIGNS IN A  
HACIENDA-STYLE HOME IN PATAGONIA

An antique chandelier from India tops the cozy living room like a crown, while colorful rugs grace the floors.



One of the home's three fireplaces welcomes guests into the formal dining room.



The courtyards of Durazno promote a harmonious flow between indoors and out.

“I had only one rule when I began planning my dream home,” says acclaimed author Laura Chester: “I had to love everything about the design and everything in it. I wanted to feel good here.”

Mission accomplished. Today it would be virtually impossible not to feel good in the magnificent hacienda-style ranch house and guesthouse that Chester—author and editor of more than 15 books, including *Eros & Equus* and the forthcoming *Heartbeat*

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for *Horses*—and husband Mason Rose affectionately named Durazno (“peach” in Spanish), taking their cue from its vibrant dark peach exterior wash. In fact, it was while researching her novel *Kingdom Come*, which is partly based in Patagonia, Arizona, that Chester fell in love with the area. Now simply stepping onto the property lulls one into a zenlike state of mind—troubles dissipate in the tranquil trickling of the Mexican handcrafted stone jaguar fountain at the entrance.

To the casual eye, Durazno looks like a centuries-old hacienda, settled in between great oaks, a venerable architectural wonder that was meant to preside where it does—embraced by Harshaw Canyon, the Canelo Hills, and the lush cottonwood groves that surround it. But in truth, the home is a mere three years old, constructed over two and a half years beginning in 2003—a period, the crew would tell you, marked by countless modifications, craftsmanship at its finest, and the dogged determination necessary to create a true masterpiece.

“Everything just magically fell into place,” Chester says wistfully as she reflects on the days during which her dream turned to reality. Even the ornate Egyptian-style iron gate that she plucked from an antique shop in Hudson, New York, turned out to be a perfect fit for the courtyard between the main house and the writing studio.



The exterior of Durazno was hand-rubbed with an earthen pigment to give it such a rich color.

But like any enormous endeavor, the project was not without obstacles. From the start, it presented many challenges for the visionary writer and her collaborators—challenges they all rose to embrace. First, the buildings had to be sited properly on several elevations to utilize what initial architect Paul Weiner terms “the palpable relationship between the design decisions and the nature of the exterior space itself. In architecture, there’s a rigidity that can develop if it’s over-designed, and we wanted to avoid that.”

Once the house was sited, the design reins were handed over to architect-of-record William Ford, whose biggest challenge was “working with an artist who expects to have a home entirely reflective of her psyche and spirit—a challenge I fully accepted.” Today, Ford is quite pleased: “The building turned out to be a magnificent example of Southern Arizona vernacular. It’s very beautiful and very detailed.”

Early in the planning stages, landscape designer Jeffrey Trent joined forces with Chester to carefully plot the courtyard gardens, grasses, and trees surrounding the structures. “A garden can really transform a property—it can absolutely take it from



Trumpet vines and roses stretch to embrace the wooden ramada, creating an enchanting outdoor living space.

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being ordinary to extraordinary. And when you’ve got an extraordinary client who has wonderful ideas and is passionate about the garden, you can create an exceptional space like we’ve done here,” says Trent regarding the groupings of indigenous and non-native flora that now surround Durazno, including cacti, agaves, peach and pear trees, pineapple guavas, honeysuckles, and loquats, to name a few.

For construction materials, the couple chose Rastra, partly for its adobe like aesthetic appeal and partly for its innate fire-retardant and bug-resistant properties, as well as the substantial heating and cooling savings. Under the stewardship of general contractor Karl Eggers, a crew of local Arizona-based Mexican craftsman lent their talents to the construction. “The trend toward using Rastra is really growing,” says Eggers. “I’d use it myself for my next home.”



Subway-style ceramic tiles in the bathroom impart fresh color to the room, while heated marble floors maintain comfort underfoot.

From a design standpoint, Durazno is a standout, with such unique features as a trio of fireplaces (two indoor and one outdoor) all connected to one chimney. “It’s the first home I’ve had with a real working fireplace,” Chester says. “And here I have two fireplaces I can relax in front of, and my husband enjoys cooking on the outdoor one.”

When it came time to add an artist’s touch, Chester called in faux-finishing experts Elizabeth Pettit and Erma Duran of Restoration, Conservation & Design. The talented duo set about applying lithochromic and acid patinas—set in lacquers for the

## THE COUPLE’S MOROCCAN TRAVELS PRODUCED A COLLECTION OF UNIQUE FURNISHINGS.

stone floors and in Venetian plaster for the walls—and hand-rubbing a sponged earthen pigment on the home’s exterior. As a result of a series of collaborative color choices and serendipitous “accidents,” Durazno soon took on a glorious palette of Moroccan- and Tibetan-inspired colors. “Every time I go there now, I feel a pulse of inspiration,” says Pettit, “with its colors, the natural surroundings, and the landscaping... it’s all so completely integrated.”

Throughout the house, the personalities and personal penchants of the couple shine through in the eclectic mix of furnishings, accoutrements, curios, local and modern artwork, and architectural elements—all carefully selected to lend the dwelling



A white palette and gauzy bed curtains draw attention to the striking tin-covered wooden bed.



Two old mesquite doors were combined to create the front door.



Nepalese columns frame the entrance to the library.

a harmonious balance of Old World charm, European and Asian sophistication, and local Mexican spice.

Outfitting the property with such modern amenities as a Wolf stove, a Caribbean Kohler Tub, a steam shower, a state-of-the-art water-filtration system, an exercise pool, radiant floor heating, and rollaway shutters has enabled the couple to enjoy the best of both the Old World and the new.

With so much to look at in Durazno, double and even triple takes are de rigueur. Some of the showstoppers (to pinpoint only a few) include old wood beams rescued from an 1876 Wisconsin barn, an antique chandelier from India that Chester found in Soho, and a pair of Nepalese columns that now flank the entryway into Rose's library. The couple's Moroccan travels produced a collection of unique furnishings, including colorful rugs, an antique cabinet for the dining room, and a built-in curio cabinet from Marrakech that now contains various bones, skulls, fossilized footprints, and other curios.

To preserve the peaceful feeling that permeates the space, Chester had the property officially blessed by Loreto Mendez, who owns a temple in San Rafael Valley, and a Huichol Mexican Indian shaman named Maximino.

Today, who could say who deserves the credit for the wonder that is Durazno? If you ask the crew, they'd say it belongs mainly to Chester herself. But like all great success stories, this one features many guest-starring roles. And the fairytale happy ending to this construction story is greater than any could have imagined at the start. 🏠

*Lynne Marie Zerance is a Patagonia-based freelance writer who dreams of someday creating her own desert oasis much like Durazno.*



A stylish kitchen island, stone floors, granite countertops, built-in computer desk, and stainless-steel appliances provide all the modern amenities without compromising the home's Old World ambiance.

## STEPPING ONTO THE PROPERTY LULLS ONE INTO A ZENLIKE STATE OF MIND.

### RESOURCES

**architects:** William Ford of WLFA Associates LLC, 623-0364; Paul Weiner, 792-0873 • **building contractor:** Karl Eggers of Five Star Construction, 980-5105 • **cabinetry:** John Ryan & Son, 882-9490 • **decorative painting and faux finishing:** Elizabeth Pettit and Erma Duran of Restoration, Conservation & Design, 406-5754 or 406-5753 • **landscape contractor:** Horizon's West,

881-1643 • **landscape design:** Jeffrey Trent, 792-6611 • **pool:** Patio Pools, 458-9291 • **roses:** Susan Engleby, 520-604-7390 • **screens:** Phantom Screens, 591-8758 • **shutters:** Tucson Rolling Shutters, 798-1294 • **plaster work:** Kelly Ott of Superior Plaster, 762-9380 • **water purification system:** Evans Benz of Aqualine, 906-1522 • **windows:** Crittall Steel Windows, 415-468-8448