



DOING MORE FOR A DIGNIFIED LIFE

Casita Linda Embraces Ancient Adobe Construction

Following a remarkable visit to San Miguel by a group of talented architecture students from the Rhode Island School of Design (RISD), Casita Linda has adopted a new model for the construction of low cost housing it

provides to the poorest members of our community.

These 14 students, led by their professor Silvia Acosta, volunteered to help Casita Linda investigate new ways of approaching the design. But what they discovered is, in fact, ancient. Adobe brick has been used in Mexico for centuries. According to one of the RISD students, "It is as fundamental to Mexican culture as growing corn." But as "progress" has taken hold, Mexico's rural population has rejected adobe opting for cement and the modernity it represents. Today adobe is rarely seen in the *campo*, often only a crumbling relic of a bygone era, as are the skills to manufacture and use it.



Ironically, it would take a group of privileged young Americans to reintroduce this craft to the people whose forbearers used it to build a nation. But as Prof. Acosta explained, "We did not come here with the intent of using adobe [but] we found an ill fit between the cold, concrete houses that dominate the new construction and the

mesmerizing, richly layered cultural fabric of Mexico."

The students found adobe to be a superior material and Casita Linda agreed. Adobe is widely available – it can be made from the very earth upon which the communities dwell. Unlike concrete and brick, adobe also has excellent thermal qualities, keeping homes cool in the summer and warm in the winter and is non-toxic.

What is most exciting for Casita Linda, however, is the opportunity adobe represents to provide impoverished rural communities with the skills to build and maintain their own home. As one student observed, "We are engaged in an attempt to re-empower Mexicans with the knowledge to fabricate their own dwelling with their own resources."

Construction Update

We have started construction on our “model” adobe house – this will be the 5th house constructed since January, 2008 – in Ejido de Tirado. The model is about 9’ by 24’, and 15’ high with an arched ceiling which allows the construction of loft spaces on either side of the house for sleeping areas (and separation of the boys and girls). All of our casitas are now being equipped with small solar power systems for electricity. “We are excited about the process of going green”, said Charles Cunliffe, Head of Construction for Casita Linda.

Casita Linda is in the fortunate position of being able to hire three Mexican construction workers to work along with our volunteers. This insures continuous building so we can get the casitas to the people who so desperately need them.

One of these new hires is Miguel Cazarez Mendoza, head of the first family to receive an adobe house. This father of 9 was previously unemployed and found it very difficult to support his family. Having worked closely with Arquitecto Pedro Urquiza during the construction of his home, Miguel proved to be an invaluable addition to our crew and we are delighted to have him in our employ. Miguel is working with Florencio Cazares (Lencho), who has been with Casita Linda since its founding, and with Manuel Barcenas de la Vega, a very talented worker who has a terrific sense of humor and a



strong work ethic. They are all so proud to be a part of the Casita Linda organization and they complement an already strong core group.

An emergency team formed by Casita Linda is completing a house in San Miguel Viejo for a family whose house burnt down, leaving them with virtually nothing. Casita Linda was notified of their distress by concerned neighbors and by volunteers from ALMA. Fernando Arriano and his wife, Carmen, have four children, the youngest born prematurely on the evening of the fire. Not only did they lose their home but all the money they had been saving went up in smoke as well. Casita Linda came to their rescue with two construction workers and volunteers including Sr. Arriano and several of his neighbors. We are reconstructing a small brick casita where their previous home was and ALMA is supplying the family with clothing and other household goods. This mobilization is yet another example of San Miguel’s non-profit organizations working together to make a difference.



Social Services

The publicity resulting from Casita Linda's new commitment to adobe has generated great interest from people and we have received several offers of assistance ranging from people who want to help the families send their children to school to those who want to provide them with health care. And though Casita Linda is dedicated to building homes, and our donations are used exclusively to that end, we realize the need to help bring other services to the communities in which we are working. As such, Casita Linda has formed a Social Services group to gather information from non-profit and governmental organizations that are already operating in San Miguel to determine what services are currently available for these people and to counsel them on how to get the help they need. We want to educate and empower the women of the communities to understand what services may be available to them and to share the information in their communities.

Irma Rosado, Casita Linda's Director of Social Services, is working closely with four other volunteers who have a keen interest in this area: Laura Stewart (from New Zealand), Melissa Burgess (from Australia), Silvia Trevino (Mexican) and Mauricio Magaña (Mexican). Truly an international group! They recently interviewed a bright, caring young lady, Isabel, who owns the *tiendita* in the back of the last two houses built by Casita Linda. She is a respected leader in the community and has now become part of our volunteer group. Isabel will work with us in the selection of the recipients in Ejido de Tirado where we are currently working, and begin to identify the families who have children who are not in school, have health issues, domestic issues or are in need of legal assistance.



BEYOND CASITA LINDA

Fundraising Update

Casita Linda's primary mission is to build houses in the San Miguel community for the most disadvantaged families living in extreme poverty. While Casita Linda has been in existence since 2001, major steps were taken in 2006 to expand our ability to build more homes. We accomplished this by organizing and recruiting a full complement of board members, expanding fundraising efforts, producing new print and internet marketing material and recruiting a strong base of volunteers to build the houses. With this infrastructure in place over the past twenty-four months volunteers have built fifteen homes and renovated three existing houses. Our 2008 goal is to raise \$60,000 to build twelve new adobe homes at a cost of approximately \$5,000 USD per house. We are excited by the evolution and maturation of Casita Linda A.C. and will be working in earnest to raise the funds needed to keep building...*Carol Jackson, Head of Fundraising.*

Upcoming Events:

Casita Linda is sponsoring a play called "**The Last Ride**" written by local playwright Michael Hager and Directed by Michael Gottlieb. This poignant, highly entertaining two-act drama/musical with seven original songs will premiere in San Miguel de Allende at the Santa Ana Theater, and will run **August 19th-24th, 2008**. Be on the lookout for a separate e-mail on becoming a "producer" and receiving special offerings by making a donation to Casita Linda.

Casita Linda is pleased to have been selected as a beneficiary of an exciting weekend of motor sport events along with CASA and Mujeres en Cambio. Built around the arrival of the Carrera Convoy of cars traveling from the USA to start the Carrera Panamericana race in Chiapas, the events will run from **October 10 through October 19, with the Gala Dinner on Saturday, October 18**. Mary Murrell will be working with the North American coordinator, Gerie Bledsoe to run the weekend events. More information will be forthcoming in the future so keep you calendars open.

We at Casita Linda would like to once again express our sincere appreciation to the community of San Miguel de Allende for opening up their hearts and wallets at our benefit concert on February 12-13 at the Santa Ana Theater. How fortunate we were to have singer/songwriters Steve Eaton and Mike Sanders come to San Miguel (at their own expense!) to put on a show that knocked our socks off...and brought tears to our eyes. They both have hearts as big as the universe and we are hoping they will return in the near future.

There will be more fantastic concerts that you'll be hearing about soon.

Donations World Wide:

We're excited about a substantial recent donation from an "Artists' Group" of over thirty people organized by Leigh Hyams, an internationally known San Miguel painter and teacher. Leigh raised the money in donations large and small, from her artist friends in San Miguel and the United States: From her many devoted students who routinely follow her her yearly stints at Esalen, Mayorca, Portland and San Francisco, and from the art collectors she has taken on tours throughout Mexico and Europe. Contributions came in from as far away as Brazil and Canada. Thank you Leigh!

Special Notices

Thanks:

To the staff of Hotel Casa Linda for donating many sheets and towels.

Wanted:

Bookcases, shelving, small scale furniture, bed frames, mattresses, sheets, towels, and other household goods. Please contact Saul Whyman at 152-2139

Please check out this link for the RISD Newsletter – Projects: Casita Linda.

http://www.risd.edustudent_projects_casitalinda.htm

