

Lawson Residence, Architects Santa Fe Santa Fe, New Mexico

The Lawson project was a two-phase renovation and addition to an existing one bedroom, double adobe house. Built in the 1930s by John Gaw Meem, it is surrounded by two acres of west-sloping wooded mountainside. The entire project took nearly a year and cost about one million dollars.

The first phase consisted of converting a two-car garage into a dining/family room and enclosing the exterior staircase to a guest apartment above. In addition, the adjoining kitchen needed to be enlarged, remodeled and open onto the new family room. This required opening a structural wall and converting a bathroom into a toilet.

The second phase was to add a three bedroom, two bathroom extension to the south of the house. This included a laundry room, mechanical room and hall. As the property slopes down toward the south, the new south wing stepped down to follow the landscape. Matching the original double-adobe architecture style was difficult but crucial. Cost was a factor and many of the original doors and windows of that period were no longer produced. Likewise the original materials were of high quality and showed many years of use, which new materials would not be able to match. An added challenge was blending the new front facade in with the existing one, as they continued the same line.

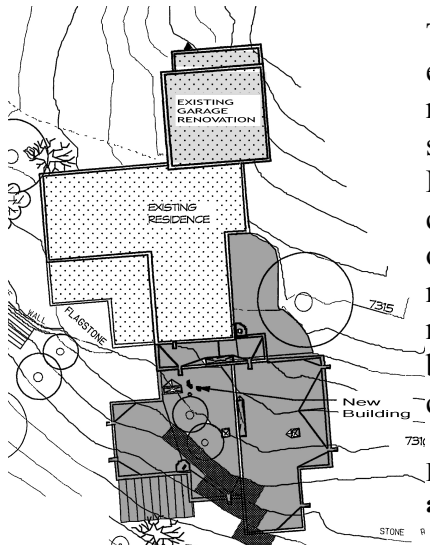


Fig. 1. Site plan showing garage renovation, top, and new wing, bottom.

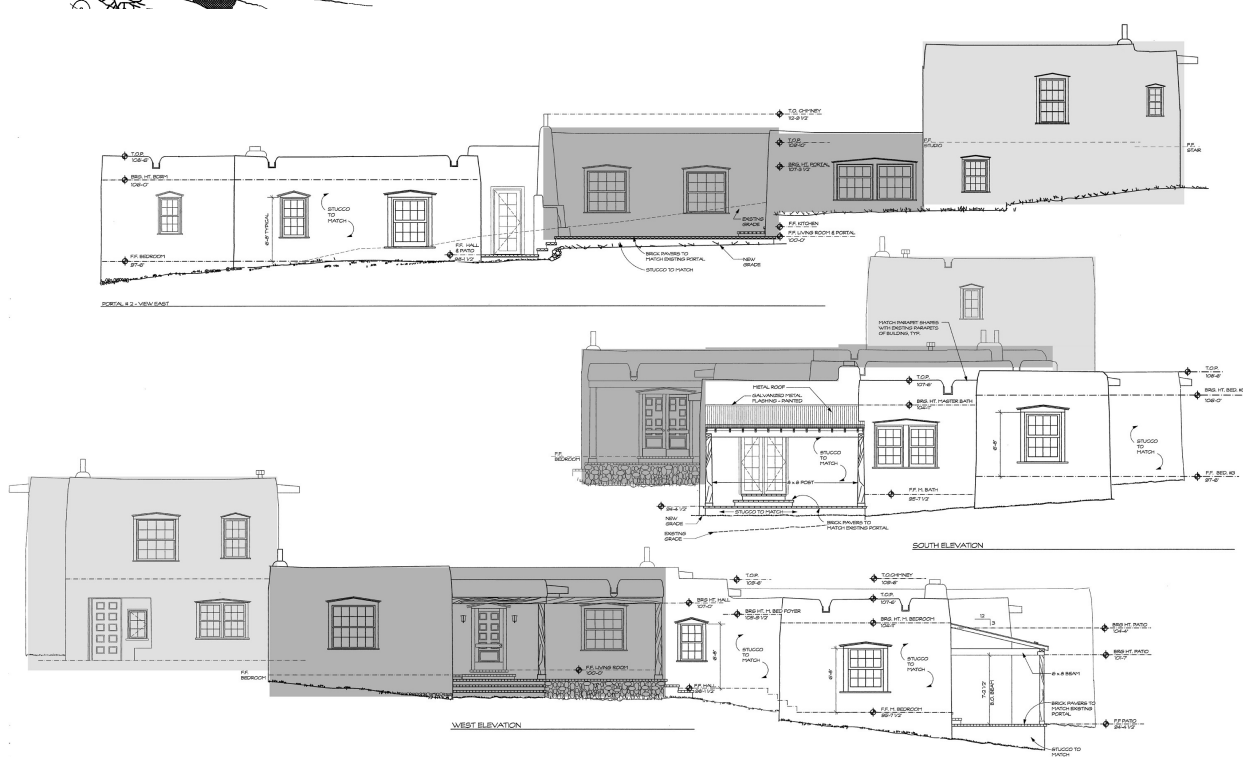


Fig. 2. Elevations showing garage renovation (light grey), existing house (dark grey) and new wing (white).

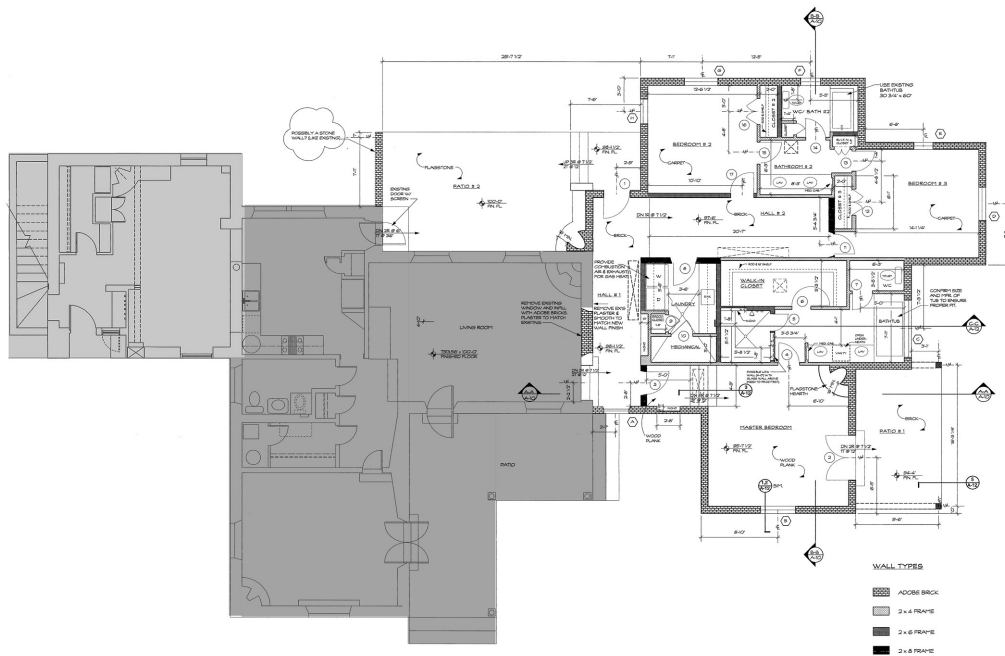


Fig. 3. Floor plan: garage renovation (lt. grey), existing house (dk. grey) and new wing (white).



Fig. 4. Entry portal and existing living room on left. New wing begins where the roofline steps down, where the portico ends.

The new wing was built off the southern end wall of the living room. An arched opening was carved out of the wall, and a picture window was removed and reused for the garage renovation.

The new wing begins with a hallway running parallel to the living room, accessing the new master bedroom area and the children's wing, and ending with a door to the back patio (see fig. 8)



Fig. 5. Shows original wood window of living room (left) and new window in the hall of the new wing.



Fig. 6. Back patio showing new kiva fireplace and view south to new wing.



Fig. 7. View of existing living room with new archway through into new wing.



Fig. 8. View of new hallway back toward front of house and archway on right.

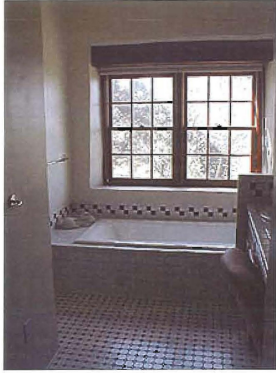


Fig. 9. Stairs to master bedroom, looking back into hall and archway toward existing living room. Note skylight above doorway.

The master bedroom. It was important to step down the roof elevations to follow the land grade and to stay within the height restrictions. This resulted in spaces of low height. For instance at the entry to the master bedroom a skylight was placed to counterbalance the low height in that spot, before one descends into the room itself. Logistically this room could not be placed anywhere else on the site. Though the bedroom door is directly across the hall from the living room, the 4 ft. (1.2 m.) difference in elevation makes the room quiet and secluded. A private patio opens out from the south side of the bedroom, taking in the views of Santa Fe and the valley.



Fig. 10. Master bedroom.



The master bathroom is quite large (fig. 11 and 12), with a separate bathtub and shower, toilet, and two sinks. The large window above the tub looks out over an expansive, but private view and cannot be seen from any other location in the house. The shower has a frameless glass system, where the door swings in either direction. A seat runs the length of both walls and is long enough to lay down on.

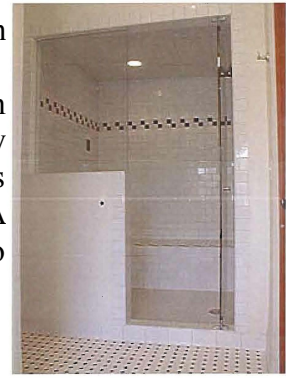


Fig. 11. Master bath

Fig. 12. Master shower

The children's wing consists of two bedrooms connected by a bathroom, with a separate toilet and tub, and an extra wide hall where the children can play. This arrangement creates a loop where the children can run around within their own area, far from the living room and master bedroom. The laundry and mechanical rooms are located in this wing. Long skylights over the vigas provide the halls with natural light during the day. When combined with UV glass, artwork or sculpture can be displayed on the walls. Special care needed to be taken to protect the roof edge from leaking at the skylight. The roof was applied with spray-on foam insulation, which was also applied over the skylight frame. In the unlikely event that the skylight needs to be replaced, it will be less expensive to reapply the foam in that area than to fix the roof after a leak.



Fig. 13. Hallway seen from the children's room. Note long skylight over vigas, washing the wall in daylight.

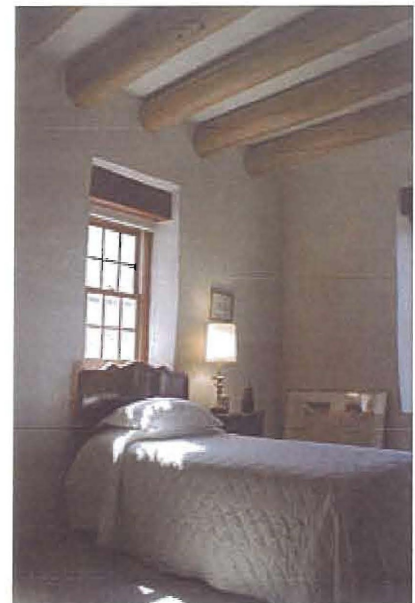


Fig. 14. View of children's room.



Fig. 15. Children's bathroom, connected on both ends to children's bedrooms.



Fig. 16. View toward back of house showing door to new hallway and existing living room window, right.

Garage renovation



Fig. 17. View of renovated garage into family room and apartment above.



Fig. 18. View of new family room and opening into kitchen. The picture window was formerly a two-car garage door.

The garage structure and layout posed a number of difficulties. First, the ceiling was very low, at about 8 ft. (2.5 m) tall above the unfinished concrete floor, and 7 ft. (2.1 m.) to the central structural beam running back to front through the garage space. Another low structural beam ran above the former garage door, so a standard height exterior door could not be used and we had a custom door made (see fig. 17 and 19). In addition, the structural wall between the former garage and kitchen had to be removed. That meant rerouting all the electricity and plumbing from the apartment above. The electrical wiring was not a problem, but the plumbing pipes had to slope within the distance of the ceiling depth (about 12" or 30 cm.) and run a longer distance to get to the corner of the room. The only solution for this was to cut into the floor joists, which the structural engineer was not too happy about. In the end, cross beams were attached to reinforced joists to carry the weight of the compromised joists. The noise from the pipes was reduced using acoustical baffling, though the depth of the ceiling did not allow for much padding toward the corner of the room.



Fig. 19. View of entry to former garage space. The door is extra wide to make up for its low height. The ceiling here is only 7 1/2 ft. high (2.25 m).

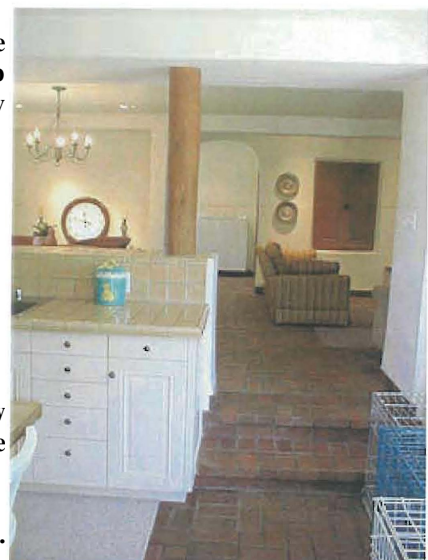


Fig. 20. View from kitchen through new opening into new family room. Note the beam above the far wall. The arch brings one to the entry door or upstairs to the apartment.



Fig. 21. View of newly enclosed stairs. Stairs are the original stone. Note the line of the former external stair railing.



Fig. 22. Former external white window at stairs now internal and looking through repositioned former living room window

The stairs to the apartment were originally outside the garage, so we had to enclose them and match the existing style. The treads were stone, with a poured concrete base and low concrete block wall that served as the railing. An additional stairway stood inside the garage, but this was removed.

We wanted to keep the existing exterior stair railing and build the enclosure on top of it. The original stair structure was poured over bedrock many years ago and we weren't sure it would meet code. In the end we were given approval to use the railing as a stem wall for our enclosure. In fig. 21 you can see the line of the original concrete railing above the new wood railing.

Another concern was what to do with an exterior, rather large and irreplaceable window that looked over the stairs. Removing it would have been costly and seemed unnecessary. Instead a similar but smaller window was removed from the living room and placed in a parallel position on the new stair wall, maintaining the view from the apartment and turning the original window into an interior window (see fig. 22).

In the end, the family and dining room took on an intimate, private feeling. This contrasted with the expansive living room, which was used primarily for entertaining.

The Lawsons then moved into the guest apartment while we proceeded with the three bedroom addition to the south of the house.